Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption | Mabwysiadu yn y Fro, y Cymoedd a Chaerdydd

VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE

REVIEW OF SERVICE AND

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

For Period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption | Mabwysiadu yn y Fro, y Cymoedd a Chaerdydd

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VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC)
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1st APRIL 2025 to 31st March 2026

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 **1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.** 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.
Appendices 4a & 4b detail our service user engagement activity
Appendix 5 provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 There have been no changes to the organisational structure of the Collaborative during the year. The Collaborative has continued to be delivered via three functional teams, each one managed by a Team Manager, and a Business Support Team managed by a Business Support Manager.

2.2 The pattern of service delivery has continued via a combination of in person meetings, office working and use of Microsoft Teams. Members of the Business Support Team continue to provide office cover for core tasks. Managers have continued to meet with their individual teams on a regular basis and monthly Placement Meetings have been held involving the Recruitment and Assessment and Family Finding Teams. Whole service in person Team Meetings have taken place on a bi-monthly basis. VVC Manager Meetings have been held monthly.

2.3 There have been no changes to the membership of the Joint Committee during the period. Meetings of the Joint Committee were held in May 2025 and December 2025. A further meeting of the Joint Committee was held in February 2026.

2.4 Quarterly meetings of VVC's Management Board have continued to be held.

2.5 The Operational Group which is comprised of senior officers from VVC partner authorities and VVC Managers has continued to meet on a quarterly basis.

2.6 The agendas for Joint Committee and Management Board meetings during this period considered the budget and the need to identify future savings with a target of £18.7k to be saved during 2025-26 following higher savings to be achieved in previous years resulting in a permanent loss of posts. The target for savings wasn't achieved and has been carried forward to 2026-27. A Future Savings Group was established to consider longer-term proposals to address future costs whilst also endeavouring to reduce the impact upon service delivery.

2.7 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. The Joint Committee and Management Board have continued to monitor the performance of the region on a quarterly basis and at year end, and to consider the range of matters referred from the national agenda to regional Management Boards. The Annual Improvement Plan was approved by Joint Committee in May 2026 focussing upon recommendations from the CIW Inspection. Agendas for the Operational Group have also focused upon performance and the range of new performance measures and practice initiatives emanating from the National Adoption Service.

2.8 The Collaborative Agreement remained in place during this period but a decision on extension is due in 2026-27 and the legal consultation process for this has commenced.

2.9 The 2025-26 accounts were externally audited although the final report of Audit Wales has yet to be published. The external audit cost increased significantly from 2024-25 onwards with the service exceeding the £2.5million threshold, resulting in costs of £18.2k per year which were not previously factored into the budget. Members have agreed to share this additional cost in line with the existing funding formula. however efforts are being made to bring the accounts below this threshold which is predominantly caused by the grant monies allocated to the local authorities transferring through VVC's account. Discussions are ongoing with the National Adoption Service for an alternative means of processing these payments. An internal audit was completed for the year 2025-26 which gave the service Substantial Assurance once again with two minor recommendations which have been actioned.

2.10 VVC's Information Sharing Protocol (Wales Accord of Sharing Personal Information (WASPI)), Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and Privacy Statement remain in place.

2.11 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. This requires a significant staff resource to ensure compliance with the requirements and in adapting systems to ensure new data measures can be captured.

2.12 The Regional Manager and individual Team Managers have continued to participate in all required national meetings and subgroups. The Regional Adoption Manager chaired the national Performance Management Subgroup and the Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services Subgroup. The Regional Manager attends monthly meetings for Regional Adoption Managers facilitated by NAS and monthly meetings which involve representatives from the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. In addition, the Head of Service for the Vale of Glamorgan, as host authority, and the Regional Manager attend bi-monthly meetings with other regional and national leads to plan the business delivery of the national service from a regional local authority perspective. The Head of Service also sits on the NAS Governance Board.

3. Staffing

3.1 The reporting period has seen some staff turnover. In June 2025, a full-time Social Worker within the Recruitment and Assessment Team left creating a vacancy which was added to by the retirement of a part-time Social Worker within the same team in December 2025. Due to budget pressures, a decision was taken to pause recruitment to both posts until the end of the financial year. Management Board have since agreed to recruit to the full-time vacancy whilst the part-time vacancy remains on hold. A part-time Social Worker in the Post-Adoption Support Team took retirement at the end of March 2026 and their post has now been filled. Moving into 2026-27, the Regional Adoption Manager took retirement in April 2026, and this post was successfully recruited to quickly, with the new manager in post in May 2026.

3.2 In terms of the specialist posts funded from the 2019 Welsh Government grant in adoption services, the service is required to complete six monthly returns to the

Central Team of the National Adoption Service monitoring any movement of staff within these posts to ensure that gaps are covered quickly, and performance is maintained. The Regional Adoption Manager has continued to complete six monthly returns during the year, which report upon the deployment of these posts, alongside those located within our partner authorities, to ensure continuation of the funding.

3.3 The investment currently funds five posts within the Collaborative and 10.5 posts within the local authorities. One post, a part-time Life Journey Co-ordinator within the region became vacant during the year and was covered by temporary increase in hours for 6 months, with the decision on long-term funding being taken in 2026-27. The turnover of posts within the local authorities has been monitored and any vacancies and cover arrangements have been reported to the Central Team. The grant investment amount has remained static since 2019 which has resulted in a significant deficit between the funding and the rising costs for these permanent posts. This funding gap has been raised with the National Adoption Service who are in discussions with Welsh Government. Should the gap continue, there are difficult decisions to be made about maintaining posts at their full capacity as vacancies arise.

3.4 Sickness absence is monitored closely by managers within the Collaborative in accordance with the host authority's absence management policy.

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 **180** children were referred to the service during the year. Referrals to VVC have been steadily rising in recent years and reached their highest figure since pre-Covid this year. Although not all children referred will ultimately have a plan for adoption, higher referral rates tend to equate to higher Should Be Adopted (SBA) decisions and Placement Order rates.

4.3 **50%** of referrals made in 2025-26 were later withdrawn due to alternative care plans being determined for those children. Withdrawn referrals in many instances do not equate to a decrease in workload for the Collaborative as considerable resource is required to progress the referral until a decision to proceed with an adoption plan or change a Care Plan is made.

4.4 **90** SBA decisions were made during the year which reflects around a 10% rise from the previous year.

4.5 **78** Placement Orders have been granted during the year. In addition, there were 3 children during the year whose plan of adoption was made by being relinquished by birth parents rather than via a Placement Order. This is unusually high with the region usually having less than one relinquished child a year. 84% of new children with plans of adoption were aged 1 or under.

4.6 **64** children have been placed for adoption since April 2025 which is a third higher than the number placed during the previous reporting year. The rise in Placement Orders and the decrease in adopter recruitment has continued the reliance upon external placements as a way of meeting demand.

4.7 All the children placed during the period have a plan for direct contact with their foster carer unless specifically adopted by their foster carer. Despite detailed discussions at the SBA decision regarding post adoption contact the majority relate to contact with siblings and plans for direct contact with birth parents are more limited. There remain challenges in terms of planning post adoption contact arrangements and the resourcing of such plans which was highlighted within the inspection report.

4.8 A total of **13** meetings between prospective adopters and birth parents were held during the year which represents around **20%** of children placed, slightly lower than the proportion during previous years. There are examples of such meetings being arranged during the year and then birth parents feeling unable to take these up.

4.9 **64** children were matched with adopters during the year and **56%** waited longer than six months from their SBA decision to Matching. This performance measure doesn't account for the time elapsing between SBA decision and Placement Order. **58%** of children have been placed with VVC adopters which reflects the reduction in the pool of available adopters in- house although does show an increase from the mid-year position.

4.10 **59** Adoption Orders were granted during the year to date which reflects a similar number to previous years.

4.11 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 for the capacity of Social Workers within the local authorities to finalise the later life letters for children which affects the second adoption review performance. The specialist funded Life Journey Workers in the 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

The measures in terms of the completion of a Life Journey Work Quality Assurance checklist at the SBA stage and a further one by the time of the second adoption review continues to be discussed at different levels within the region. The checklist at the SBA is completed by the Family Finding Manager and at second review two of the local authorities have established mechanisms for recording this with work still needed in the other two areas.

4.12 The Life Journey Work 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 which is being well received. Although a strategy had been developed to focus upon this role assisting with other good practice guide aims such as Understanding the Child Days and Trauma Nurture Timelines, this has not yet been implemented due to the current uncertainty about continued sufficient Welsh Government grant funding for this post. Currently these elements of the good practice guides are only possible to be achieved for children aged 3+ and are led by the Family Finding Manager.

4.13 The Transitions Social Worker has continued to provide direct work sessions, support and consultation for adopters and guidance and support for professional colleagues which is proving to be an invaluable addition to our service.

4.14 Understanding the Child Days are held for children being matched with adopters with the priority being for these for children aged 3+ and their siblings, a slight difference from the National Adoption Service target of all children aged 2+ due to capacity. The Family Finding Manager leads these days, and they are co-ordinated by the Family Finders. These meetings were held for 22 children during 25-26 including the provision for each of those children of a Trauma Nurture Timeline.

4.15 Due to the range of needs being identified VVC has continued to deploy a range of family finding methods in an effort to meet these needs and reduce waiting times. Children with complex needs represent a third of children waiting which includes children with medical/genetic needs and complex trauma/attachment needs. All those

with additional needs are profiled externally via Adoption Register Wales (ARW/ LinkMaker) and many have been referred to the Adopting Together Service. VVC was able to utilise Activity Days in June 2025 and March 2026 which each generated links for our children and for which we were able to secure double the offered places to support our children waiting.

4.16 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 utilised places available at a play day run by Adopting Together in November 2025 which was the first event of its kind in Wales.

4.17 Two children were placed in Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) placements during the year (RCT and Vale) which have now concluded with Adoption Orders. **Welsh Early Permanence** is a care planning approach in Wales where children removed from their birth family are placed with approved foster carers who are also approved as prospective adoptive parents. A further child in Cardiff remains in a WEP placement however this has been complex as the child was initially to be relinquished but parents have changed their position so the child is likely to be reunified with birth parents. This has been a challenging situation for all and a learning event will be held after the conclusion of this child's plan. VVC continues to advocate for Welsh Early Permanence and has continued to pursue links with partners to identify children where this might be a suitable option.

5. Disruptions and Placement Breakdown

5.1 Sadly, there were 3 adoptive placement disruptions for 6 children (3 sibling groups of two) during the year, one group from Cardiff and two from the Vale of Glamorgan. Formal disruption meetings have been held for all which identified complex factors affecting disruption which predominantly focussed upon the expectations of adopters compared to the realities of parenting. All three placements were with external adopters not approved by VVC. During the year the Family Finding Manager produced a ten-year thematic review of pre-order disruptions within the region. The learning has been circulated widely in the region and nationally.

6. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT (APPENDIX 2)

Marketing

6.1 The Marketing and Recruitment Officer continues to provide a timely and consistent response to enquiries ensuring they are tracked responded to and followed up within timescales. We have a requirement to respond to enquiries within 5 working days; however, we consistently respond within 1 working day.

6.2 VVC's website continues to be vital resource in terms of information for those seeking to obtain information about adoption and the services we provide. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer has completed a review of its content to ensure accuracy and to maximise useability. A wider redesign to achieve a refresh is currently being explored.

6.3 VVC has maintained a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram which are useful in raising public awareness of the service and we also have continued to make use of pay-per-click advertising to specifically target people who live in the region. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer has completed a review of our pay-per-click advertising, which has concluded a high level of reach is achieved with a relatively low level of cost. We plan to continue to utilise pay-per-click advertising in the coming reporting year.

6.4 Following a declining trend over the past few years, we decided to limit our use of advertisements inside residents' council tax notifications. This has committed a sizeable proportion of our marketing budget in previous years. This past year we decided to only do this for residents of RCT and the Vale of Glamorgan. An analysis of its effectiveness in terms of generating enquiries was completed. Whilst we recognised this approach provides yet another opportunity to raise the profile and public awareness of adoption and who we are as a service, we found only 2 direct enquiries came from this form of advertising. As such, we have decided to rest this

approach for the coming year, to reconsider how best to deploy the limited marketing budget available.

6.5 VVC has continued to maintain a presence at community events including those facilitated nationally and the Marketing Officer continues to look for new opportunities to raise the profile of the region and engagement from the public. During 2025/26 this has included attendance at Pride Cymru, Barry Pride, the Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show, Pontyclun's Harvest Festival as well as working jointly with partners in Foster Wales to engage with members of the public at St David's shopping centre and Trago Mills, Merthyr Tydfil.

6.5 VVC has continued to embrace Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) as a permanency option where appropriate and VVC's performance in respect of WEP since its' inception is one of the highest in Wales. However, despite this, we have seen a reduction in the number of new applicants wishing to move forward with WEP. This has meant we do not approve any new WEP carers during the second half of 2025/26. We anticipate some positive movement with this in the months ahead as there have been some small recent uptake in the level of interest with 3 new families attending the recent WEP training.

7. Recruitment of Adopters

7.1 The region has continued to receive a significant number of enquiries during the period which indicates that the current marketing and recruitment plan is producing results. VVC received a total of 198 enquiries in 2025/26 compared with 205 the previous year (a reduction of 7). Whilst it is disappointing that fewer people enquired, enquiry numbers have remained broadly stable year on year.

7.2 VVC has continued to focus efforts on training opportunities for prospective adopters by way of the one-day post approval training, Life Journey Workshops all of which have been consistently well received by participants. A two-day virtual therapeutic parenting course introduced in the previous reporting year in conjunction with Western Bay has continued to be provided. Following a review of this enhanced offer, changes have been introduced to enhance the service user experience. This includes a much

more proactive approach to including input from experienced adoptive parents and adoptees sharing their experiences. Participants tell us they value this input greatly as they find it useful hearing from people who have lived experience of adoption. With regards to the therapeutic parenting course, we found uptake of this to be generally poor. Therefore, we have changed our overall approach to promoting this and are leaning in more to being upfront with participants at an earlier stage highlighting this as a requirement as opposed to something they may wish to consider. We will keep this approach under close review, however to date, we have not received any negative feedback regarding this change of approach.

7.4 The Recruitment and Assessment Manager and Marketing Officer has continued to facilitate information evenings, which offer participants an opportunity to learn more about the adoption process and about the backgrounds of the children who need adoptive families.

7.5 During 2025/26, a total of 9 virtual information evenings were held with 63 households attending. (4 information evenings were held during quarters 3 and 4, with a total of 32 households attending). This compares to 58 households attending 9 events we hosted during 2024/25). This is interesting as whilst we received slightly fewer overall enquiries, 5 more households attended information events during 2025/26 compared to the previous year.

7.6 The information shared with participants aims to provides information in respect of the process, the needs of children requiring adoptive placements and the importance of embracing child centred post adoption contact arrangements and Welsh Early Permanence. Generally, feedback received has been positive and has been reflected in the service user returns which form part of our QA Framework. Looking ahead, we will be taking a more proactive approach to requesting feedback from those who attend during 2026/27. Each individual attending will be asked to complete a short anonymous online, voluntary survey inviting constructive feedback.

7.7 A total of **51** initial visits were completed during the year (24 in the latter two quarters) which again is just slightly lower on previous years (56 in total for 2025/26 – 27 in quarters 3 and 4).

7.8 The region has continued to provide Preparation to Adopt training jointly with Western Bay delivered by an experienced VVC Social Worker and a Western Bay Adoption Support Therapist. Again, positive feedback has been received from participants as to the benefits of the training.

7.9 During the reporting period **4** courses were delivered with **15** households attending. This has continued the downward trend in respect of the number of potential applicants wishing to progress their interest in adopting. In addition to the preparation to adopt training, VVC also hosted 1 'second time+' training days which hosted 10 families who were seeking to adopt for either a second or third time. At the end of the year **30** Registrations of Interest (ROIs) had been received (24 during Q3 and Q4) which has slightly increased from the mid-year position but remains noticeably down on previous years.

7.10 Adopter approvals have also seen a downturn during the year with **29** households approved in the year reflecting a reduction in around one third from the previous year which is concerning in view of the number of children being referred for adoption. The breakdown of approvals is as follows:

Cardiff	11
Merthyr Tydfil	2
RCT	8
Vale of Glamorgan	8

7.11 Fast-track applications continue to make up a substantial proportion of adopter assessments with **9** of the **29** households approved coming from second time+ applicants (27.6%) received during the year (6 of the 15 approved in the latter half), reflecting either returning adopters or foster carers applying to adopt a child in their care. However, only 1 of the 9 fast track were of foster carers adopting specific children already in their care. The remaining 8 were either of applicants wishing to adopt subsequent siblings or of families who felt ready to expand their family.

8. ADOPTION SUPPORT (APPENDIX 3)

8.1 A total of **98** referrals for adoption support have been received during the year which shows a continued rise in service demand.

8.2 **88** referrals for access to birth to records and intermediary services have been received in the year to date comprising of **52** for access to records and **36** for requests for intermediary services. This is comparable with the high volume of work observed in recent years.

8.3 The pressures within adoption support have been well documented in previous reports as the overall demand for the service continues to rise and as the need for adoption support services continues to be promoted nationwide. At the end of the year, there were **41** assessments of adoption support need to be completed.

8.4 The shared post which was put in place between the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Adoption Support Team has largely focused upon adoption support due to the demand in this area of the service.

8.5 The weekly family hub which operates during term has continued to offer prospective and approved adopters and opportunity to form connection and peer support with one another, whilst also having trained staff on hand to provide advice and guidance.

8.6 The Social Care Officers also facilitate sports activities with young people between term times to support holiday activities and socialising. This is also coupled with individual activities as needs arise which continue to be an invaluable resource for young people and their families.

8.7 The service has developed close working links with therapeutic support services, ENFYS covering Cardiff and the Vale and also the Children Looked After Specialist Support (CLASS) service which covers Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. Referrals in respect of post adoption support continue to be screened by both these

services with a view to therapeutic interventions being directly provided or recommended to the responsible Local Authority. As part of the Future Savings work being undertaken to plan for the 2026-27 budget partners are developing an Early Help Offer of support which will provide a more immediate, accessible offer of support services which will longer term reduce reliance upon more expensive packages of support.

8.8 In addition to the success of the Summer Fun Day for adoptive families in July 2025 reported on during the mid-year report, a further event was held in November 2025 which was well supported again attended by 87 families (123 children). Positively a member of the inspection team was able to attend this event and meet with families.

8.9 The grant funded posts have continued to enhance the overall support provided to birth parents and families. The Birth Parent Adviser supported by the Post Adoption Contact Officer, both part-time positions, provide a vital support and point of contact for a range of birth families. During the year **142** new referrals for support were received with some relatives accessing services on multiple occasions during the year.

8.10 The region currently supports letterbox contact for around **1100** children. This number does not reflect the individual number of exchanges which might take place for one child with multiple relatives but represents a significant are of work. During the summer VVC Management Board agreed to sign up to a national pilot of LetterSwap, a digital programme aimed at assisting the exchange of different means of communication between adopters and birth families. The pilot began on 1st June 2026 for 9 months.

8.11 The group for birth parents, Bloom established during the previous reporting year has continued to meet on a quarterly basis and although it supports a relatively small number of birth families it continues to be well received and members of the group met with the inspection team.

8.12 The PATHways Co-ordinator (PATH is a Psychology and therapy hub provided by Adoption UK) and Children and Young People Co-ordinator are both well-established parts of the service and continue to fully meet the requirements of the Welsh Investment Grant in terms of referrals to PATH and servicing the Connected groups. In addition, both postholders provide individual support to the wider service in terms of assessing post adoption support needs, servicing group activities and providing individual support to families.

8.13 The provision of a check-in service post Adoption Order at the annual and 3-year anniversary point has continued. The Vale of Glamorgan Quality Assurance Department now coordinates the return of the service user surveys and the outcomes will form part of the annual report for the service prepared by this Department. In April 2025 a check in service for birth parents six months post Adoption Order has been put in place. This check in has started to allow concerns to be addressed early on and for support such as for indirect contact to be picked up as needed. However, it is too early to assess its' impact upon the service.

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. Due to the alternative mechanisms of support in place, the number of children receiving externally commissioned services has continued to decrease from previous years thus reducing the overall spend.

8.15 The region has continued to utilise the service provided by the St David's and Adoption UK Pilot Service for adoptees and birth parents pre 1975 **4** access to birth records cases and a referral for intermediary services during the year which are kept under review. Additionally, Adoption UK provides through PATH the offer of counselling support to those who need it as Part of this pilot scheme and can be referred to alongside of separately from the work St Davids is doing. This has allowed for pre 1975 Adoptees to have counselling support and although complex has been found valuable by those who have accessed the service.

Policies and Procedures

9.1 At the beginning of 2025, Care Inspectorate Wales began inspections of all regional services in Wales. VVC's inspection took place during the first week of December 2025 with the full report published in January 2026. The report highlights significant areas of good practice as well as identified areas for improvement and further recommendations. As with all regions, these areas are to be addressed via an improvement plan which is due to be prepared by May 2026.

9.2 The Regional Manager has been involved with developing a Safeguarding Guide for adopters in conjunction with NAS. The Family Finding Manager was involved in a piece of national work looking at disruptions over a three-year period which has utilised the framework developed by VVC. During the year the National Adoption Service introduced their Finding and Building Adoptive Families for Children in Wales good practice guide. Positively, this is built around areas of good practice already delivered by the region and so there are only minor areas for implementation.

10. Consultation, Engagement and Quality Assurance (Appendix 4a/4b)

10.1 VVC's strong link with the Vale of Glamorgan's Quality Assurance Team has continued to support a robust system of gaining service user feedback and the production of annual reports that analyse the key messages and areas for development. Key areas of engagement for the service are on the adopter experience through their assessment process and adopters' experience of support. Feedback is also sought from others who access support services through VVC.

11. Complaints and Compliments.

11.1 No complaints were received during 2025-26

11.2 VVC staff continue to receive a variety of compliments in respect of the services they provide which are captured in individual supervision but not always reported centrally.

11 compliments were recorded on the central system for the year from all three service areas.

ADOPTION PANEL (APPENDIX 5)

12.1 VVC has continued to maintain a joint Adoption Panel which covers the four partner areas. Panel sittings are scheduled four times per month and are held virtually, alternating between Tuesday and Wednesday meetings.

12.2 The workload of the Panel is outlined in **Appendix 5** and has reflected the level of regional performance during the year.

12.3 Panel membership has remained stable over the last year with one new member being added to panel membership. 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 The process for reviewing panel members is established, the chairs have a formal review meeting, and Panel members receive a self-evaluation to complete and an opportunity to request a 1-1 meeting with the Agency Advisor if so desired. Following the recommendation within the CIW report panel business meetings have been established for the year ahead (2026-27).

12.5 Panel chairs have raised the lack of change in panel member fees for many years. This will require review moving forward and a comparison with equivalent rates paid by other regions and local fostering panels.

CONCLUSION, FUTURE PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

13.1 Referrals in respect of children requiring adoptive placements continue to rise and with them follows continued a continued high volume of children requiring plans of adoption.

12.2 In contrast, the number of adopters approved during the year has decreased from previous years and despite similar levels of enquiries, converting these into Registrations of Interest remains challenging. The shortage of adopters is part of a national trend and this impact upon the availability of inhouse placements and result in more reliance upon external placements.

12.3 The level of demand in respect of Adoption Support services has been well documented and continues to pose significant challenges for the region in terms of resourcing especially within the context of the modern adoption agenda with the emphasis upon more direct post adoption contact arrangements. The rising waiting list presents a challenge to the service although positive progress has been made on keeping waiting times within the benchmark of 4 months.

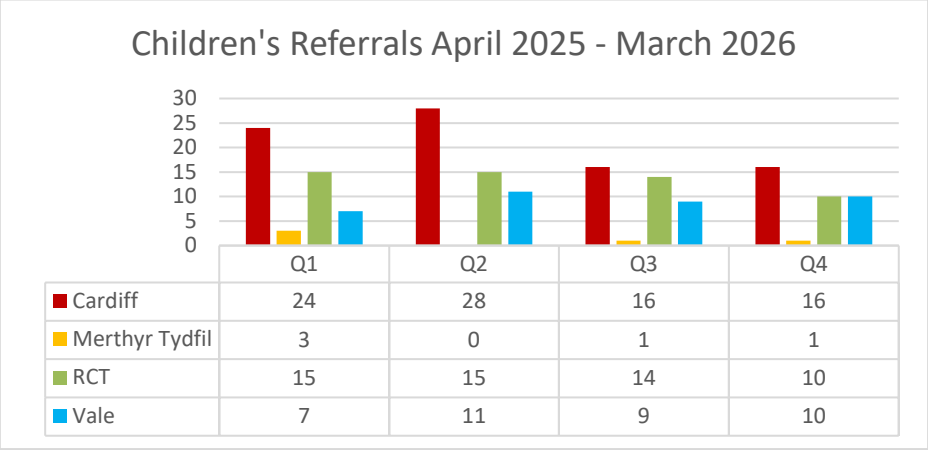
12.4 The challenges for capacity particularly in relation to post-adoption contact are highlighted within the inspection report. These are set across a backdrop of financial pressures and savings being sought across all local authorities with VVC no exception within those cost savings to be found. The service however represents an opportunity for wider savings to local authorities from long-term placement costs if adopters for children can be secured and if children can be supported to remain within those families. During 2026-27 partners will be asked to consider not only where savings can be made within the service but where invest to save opportunities exist.

Liz Dickinson
Regional Adoption Manager

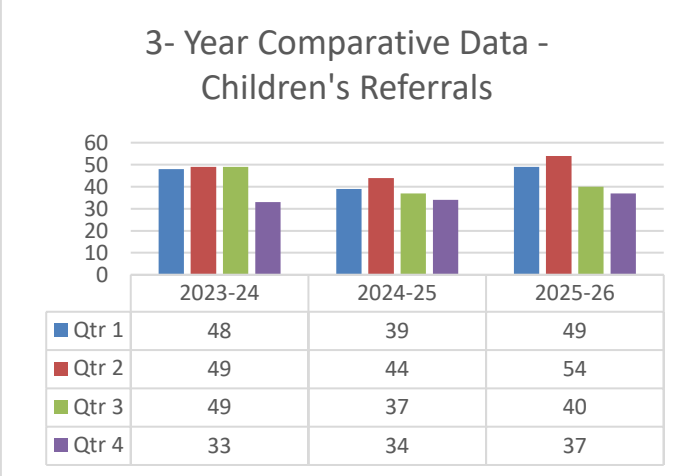
Children

Referrals

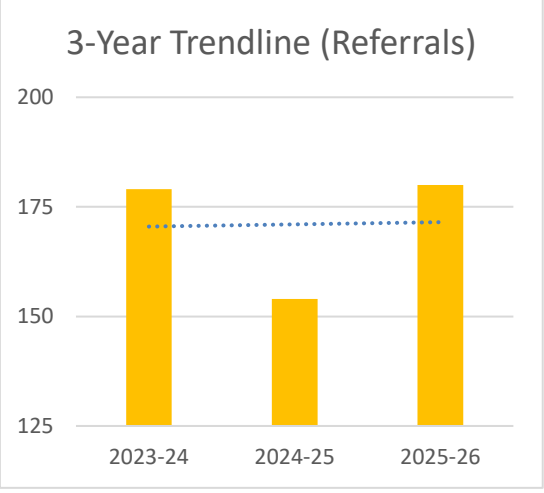
180 children have been referred to the service during the year to date (37 in Quarter 4). Referrals are at their highest point since pre-Covid.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	24	28	16	16
Merthyr Tydfil	3	0	1	1
RCT	15	15	14	10
Vale	7	11	9	10

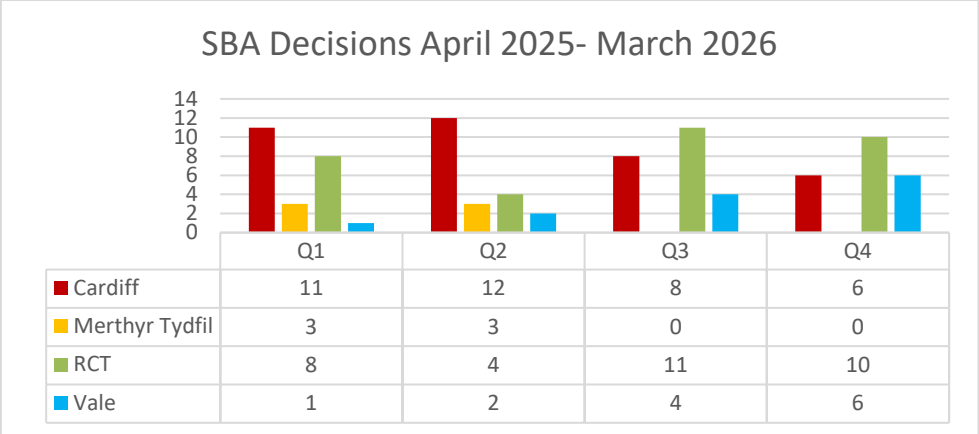


	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	48	39	49
Qtr 2	49	44	54
Qtr 3	49	37	40
Qtr 4	33	34	37

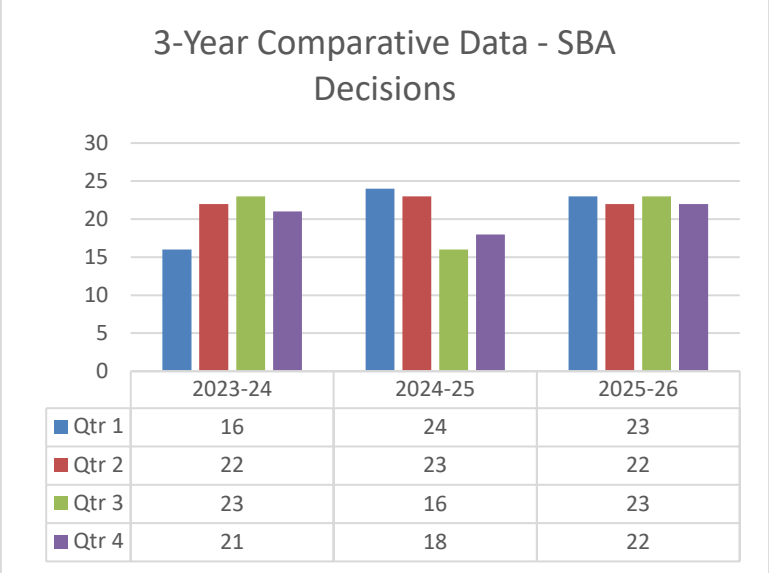


Should be placed for adoption (SBA) Decisions

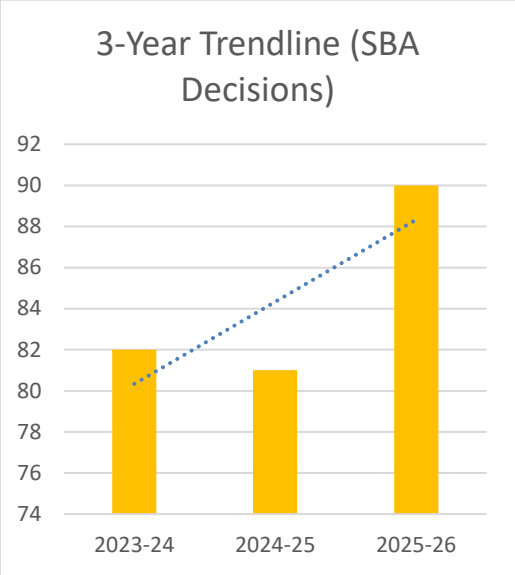
90 SBA decisions have been made in the year-to-date (22 in Quarter 4). Again, this reflects the highest rate since Covid.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	11	12	8	6
Merthyr Tydfil	3	3	0	0
RCT	8	4	11	10
Vale	1	2	4	6

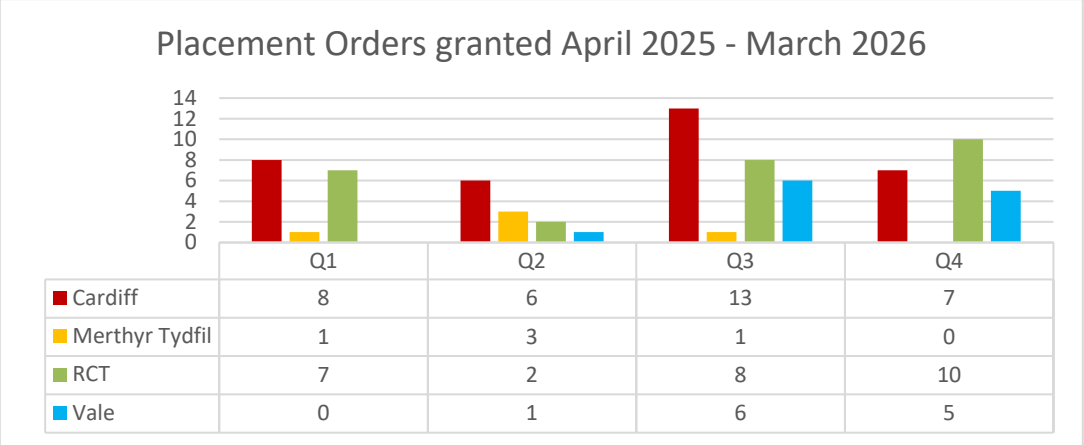


	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	16	24	23
Qtr 2	22	23	22
Qtr 3	23	16	23
Qtr 4	21	18	22

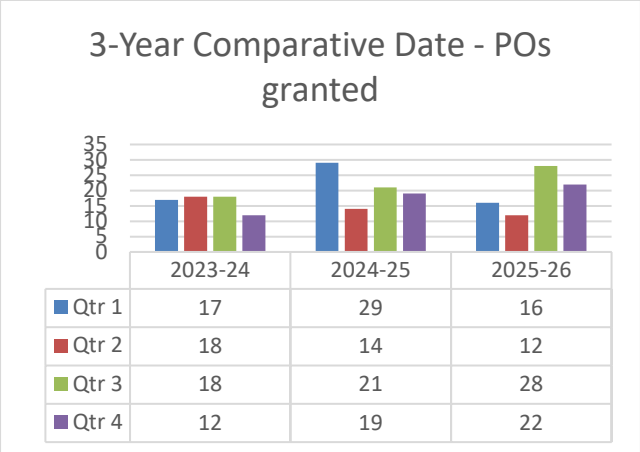


Placement Orders

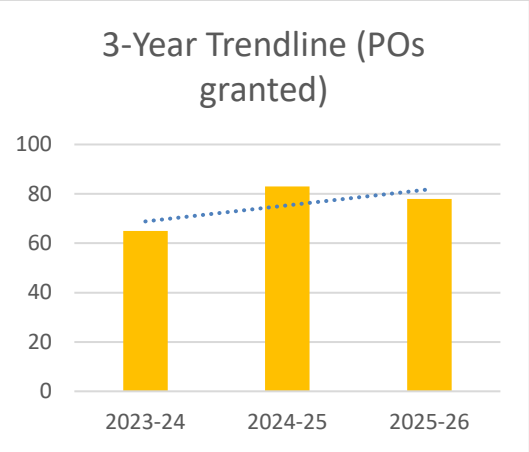
78 Placement Orders have been granted so far in 2025-26 (22 in Quarter 4) and in addition there have been 3 children who have been relinquished for adoption during the year, therefore 81 new children requiring an adoptive family. This retains a consistently high number of children with plans of adoption as in the previous year.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	8	6	13	7
Merthyr Tydfil	1	3	1	0
RCT	7	2	8	10
Vale	0	1	6	5



	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	17	29	16
Qtr 2	18	14	12
Qtr 3	18	21	28
Qtr 4	12	19	22



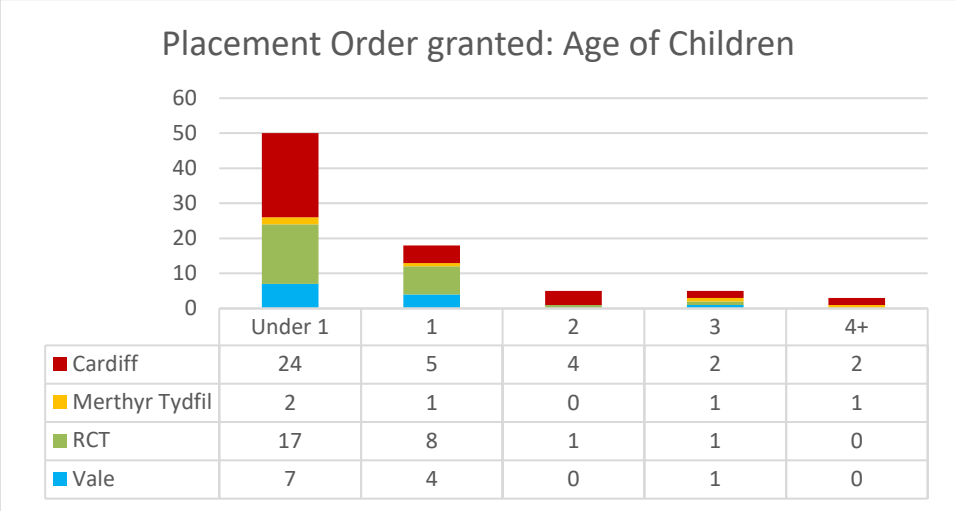
Demographics

The following details the demographics for new children with a plan of adoption during the year:

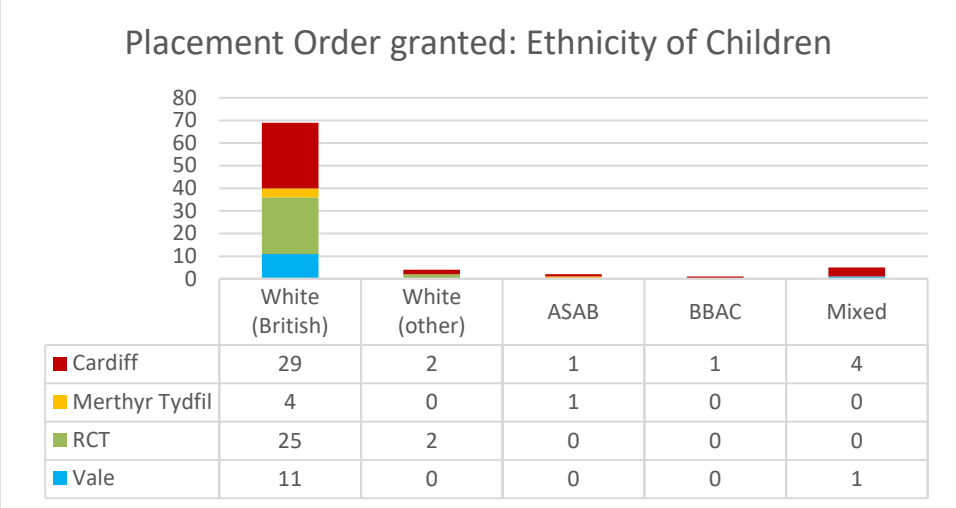
84% of children with Placement Orders granted (or relinquished) this year to date are infants aged 1 or under. Just **4%** are considered 'older' children aged 4+ (this equates to 3 children).

85% of children made subject to a Placement Order this year (or relinquished) are of White British heritage. 4 children are of another white heritage (white European) with eight children of a global majority heritage.

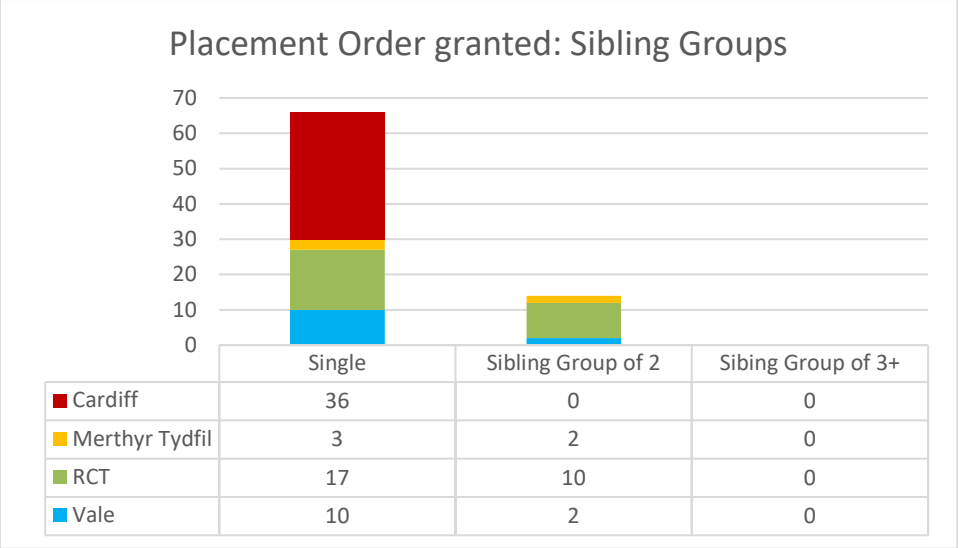
81% of children with Placement Orders granted in the year to date (or relinquished) are to be placed as single children. 14 children are to be placed within a sibling group of two. No children are specifically to be placed as a sibling group of 3, we have one family where we are asked to explore either 3 together or two together and one separately. Nationwide there have been virtually no adopters available and approved for a sibling group of 3 or more during the year.



	Under 1	1	2	3	4+
Cardiff	24	5	4	2	2
Merthyr Tydfil	2	1	0	1	1
RCT	17	8	1	1	0
Vale	7	4	0	1	0



	White (British)	White (other)	ASAB	BBAC	Mixed
Cardiff	29	2	1	1	4
Merthyr Tydfil	4	0	1	0	0
RCT	25	2	0	0	0
Vale	11	0	0	0	1

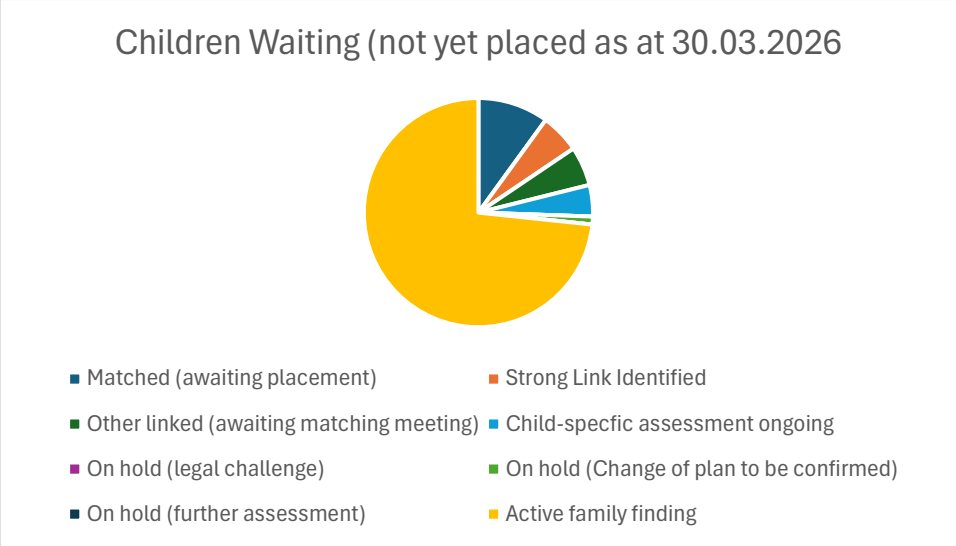


	Single	Sibling Group of 2	Sibing Group of 3+
Cardiff	36	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	3	2	0
RCT	17	10	0
Vale	10	2	0

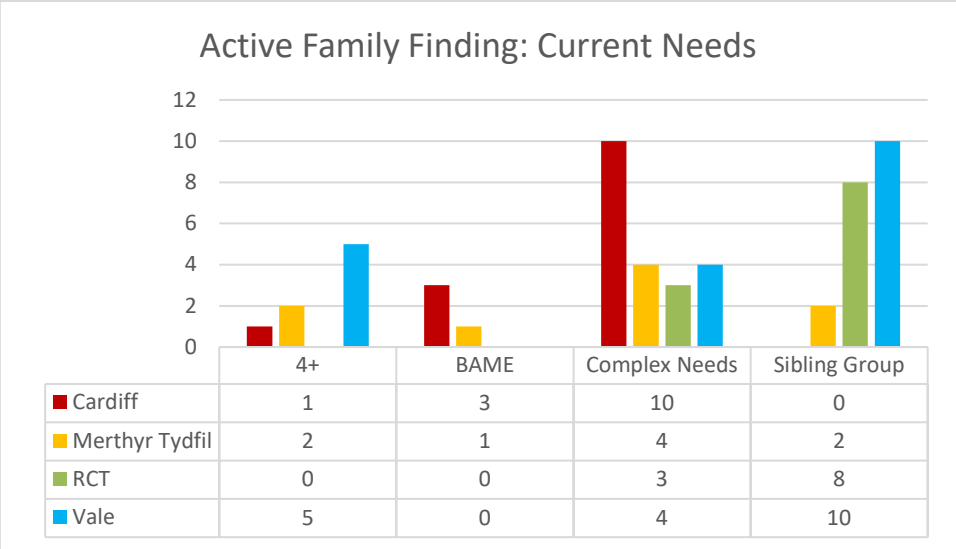
Children Waiting:

The following graphic outlines the current position for children with a Placement Order (or relinquished) awaiting an adoptive placement and represents a total of **90 children** as at 31.03.2026. The number of children waiting as at the end of the year has been increasing each quarter due to the continual rise in children with plans of adoption and the nationwide shortage of adopters.

9 children are already matched with placements anticipated in 2026-27, however 7 of these are currently on hold due to a legal challenge. Another 5 have a strong link identified where the matching meeting has been held and panel is booked and a further 5 have their matching meeting scheduled in Q1. 4 have a child-specific assessment ongoing (either with siblings' adopters or with their foster carers). 1 child is on hold pending a formal change of care plan. The total number of children with active family finding and no identified links is **66.**



Additional Children Waiting Data:



	4+	BAME	Complex Needs	Sibling Group
Cardiff	1	3	10	0
Merthyr Tydfil	2	1	4	2
RCT	0	0	3	8
Vale	5	0	4	10

Some children will be represented within multiple categories. Children with complex needs represent one-third of children waiting, this includes children with medical/genetic needs and complex trauma/attachment needs. needs. All those with additional complex needs are being profiled externally via LinkMaker and profiling to other agencies and many are on referral to the Adopting Together Service.

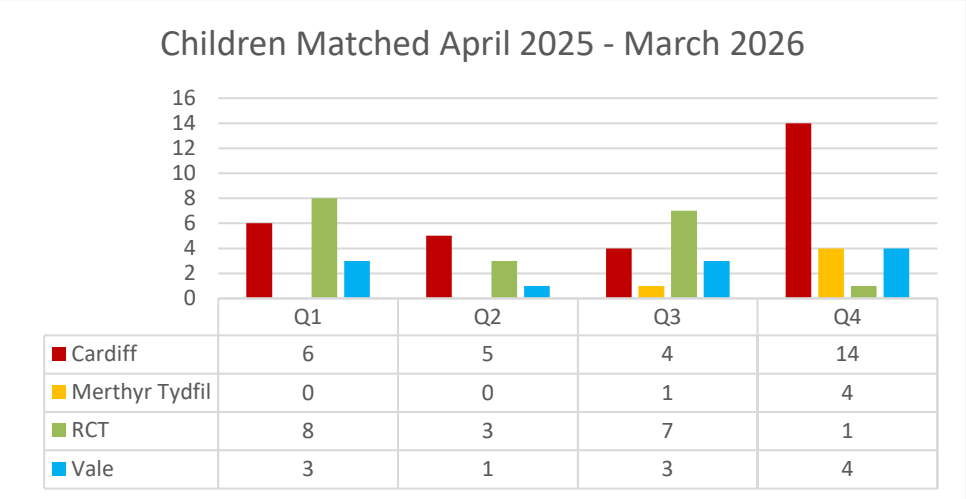
During 2025-26 we have utilised two Activity Days, one in June and one in March both of which have resulted in links for our children and for which we were fortunate to secure double the offered places on each occasion due to the number of children waiting in our region. We also utilised the Adopting Together Service Play Day in November 2025 from which a link was also made. For other children on a case-by-

case basis agreement has been given for them to be funded a place by their respective local authority at an Activity Day in England.

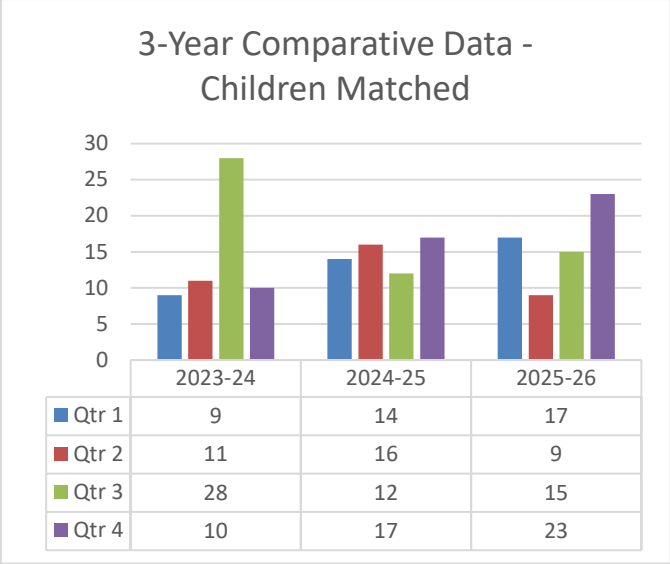
VVC continues to utilise all available avenues for family finding and continue to identify matches for children, however the workload pressures on the team are increasing with more children to family find for and more difficulty securing placements, often resulting in matches external to the region which generate additional work in terms of logistics and working with partner agencies with different processes and expectations. Currently there are concerns about capacity within the family finding team and the pressure on this area of the service.

Children Matched

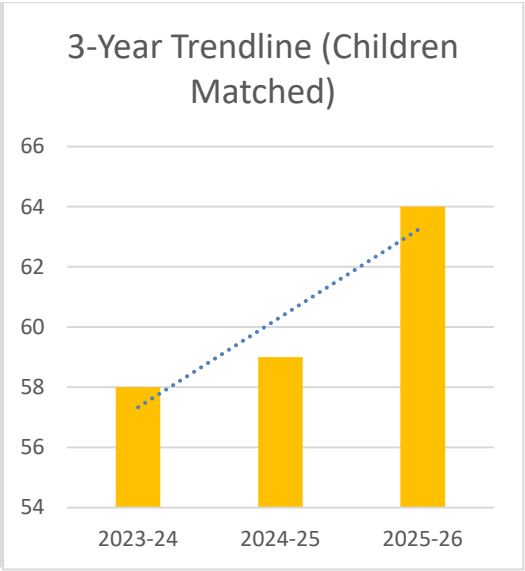
64 children have been matched with adopters this year, the majority of which have now already been placed with their adopters with some on hold as outlined above. Matching activity has picked up slightly from recent years although reliant on more external placements.



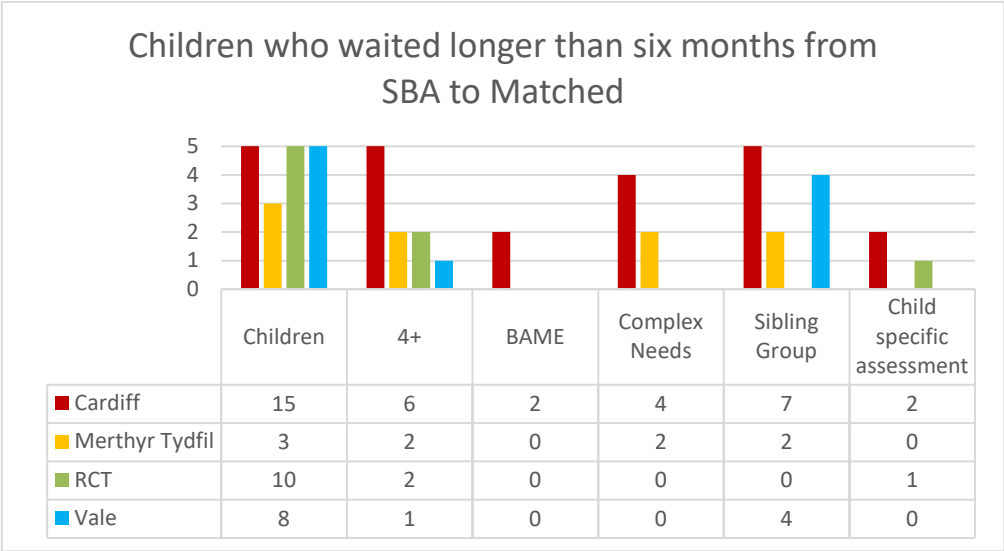
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	6	5	4	14
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	1	4
RCT	8	3	7	1
Vale	3	1	3	4



	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	9	14	17
Qtr 2	11	16	9
Qtr 3	28	12	15
Qtr 4	10	17	23



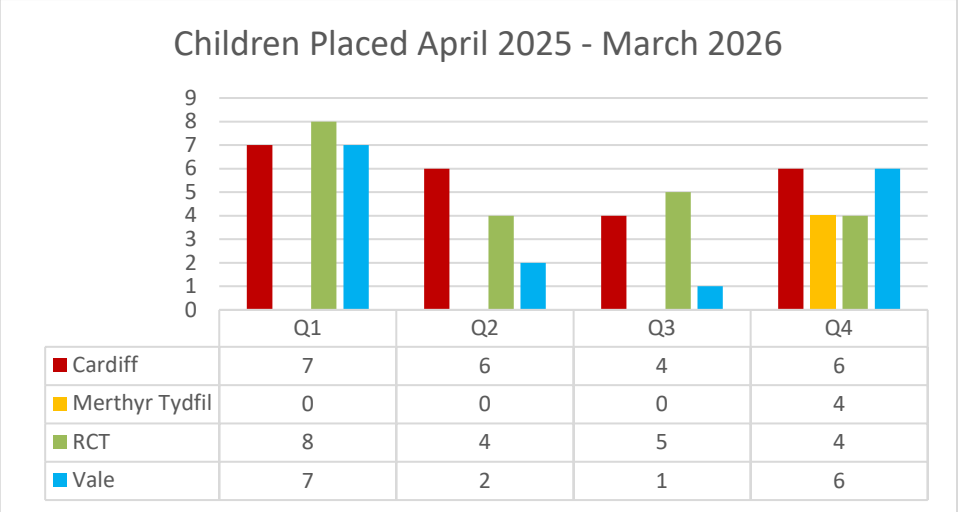
56% waited longer than 6 months from their Should be Adopted (SBA) decision to Matching, a higher figure than seen in recent years. This performance measure doesn't however account for the time elapsing between SBA decision and Placement Order which has been notable for some children.



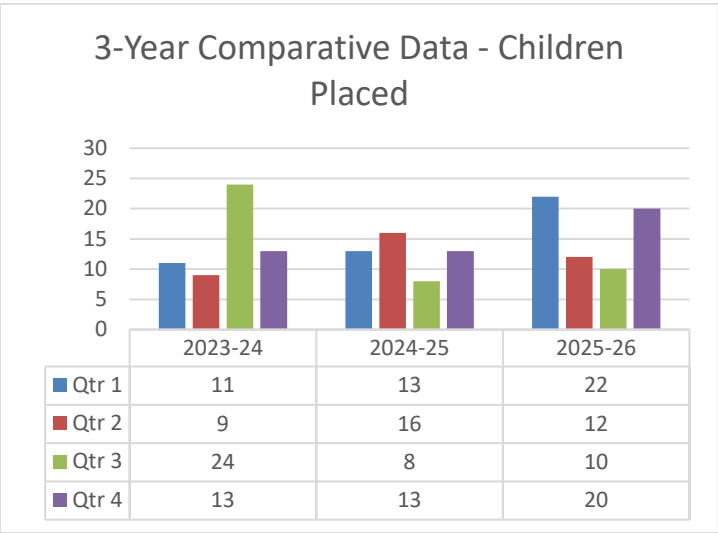
	Children	4+	BAME	Complex Needs	Sibling Group	Child specific assessment
Cardiff	15	6	2	4	7	2
Merthyr Tydfil	3	2	0	2	2	0
RCT	10	2	0	0	0	1
Vale	8	1	0	0	4	0

Children Placed

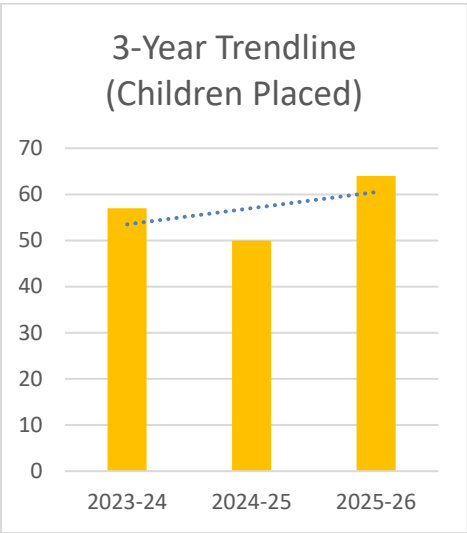
64 children have been placed for adoption since April 2025 (20 in Quarter 4) which is almost 1/3 higher than the placement rate for 2024-25.



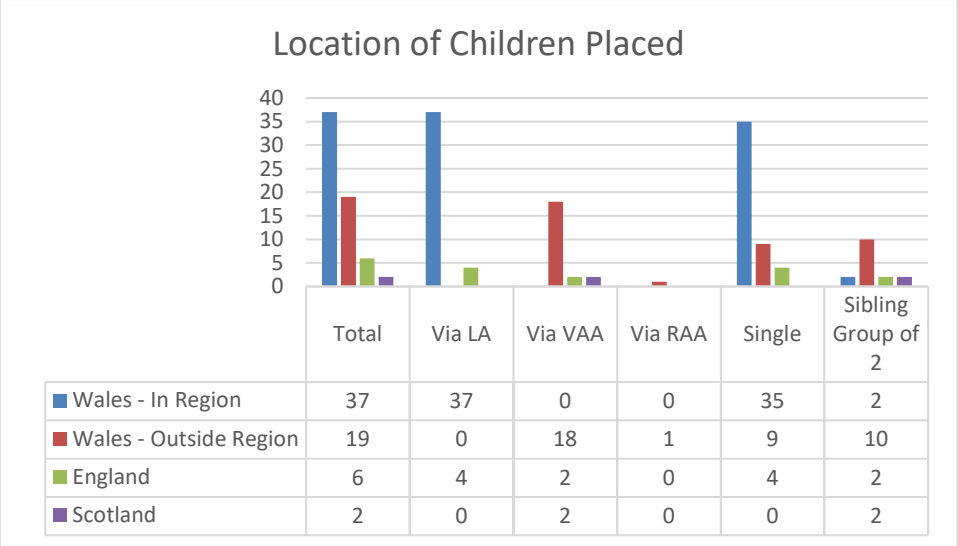
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	7	6	4	6
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	0	4
RCT	8	4	5	4
Vale	7	2	1	6



	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	11	13	22
Qtr 2	9	16	12
Qtr 3	24	8	10
Qtr 4	13	13	20



As the following graphic shows, **58%** of placements were made with in-house adopters, reflecting the declining shift over the past year from previous rates of 70-75% although this rate has been increasing through the year. The overall decline is due to the reduction in the number of available in-house adopters. Whilst figures nationwide are dropping, Vale Valleys and Cardiff appear to be having some success in achieving permanence for children via external placements, although this comes with added financial costs to the local authority with the interagency fee.



	Total	Via LA	Via VAA	Via RAA	Single	Sibling Group of 2
Wales - In Region	37	37	0	0	35	2
Wales - Outside Region	19	0	18	1	9	10
England	6	4	2	0	4	2
Scotland	2	0	2	0	0	2

Disruption

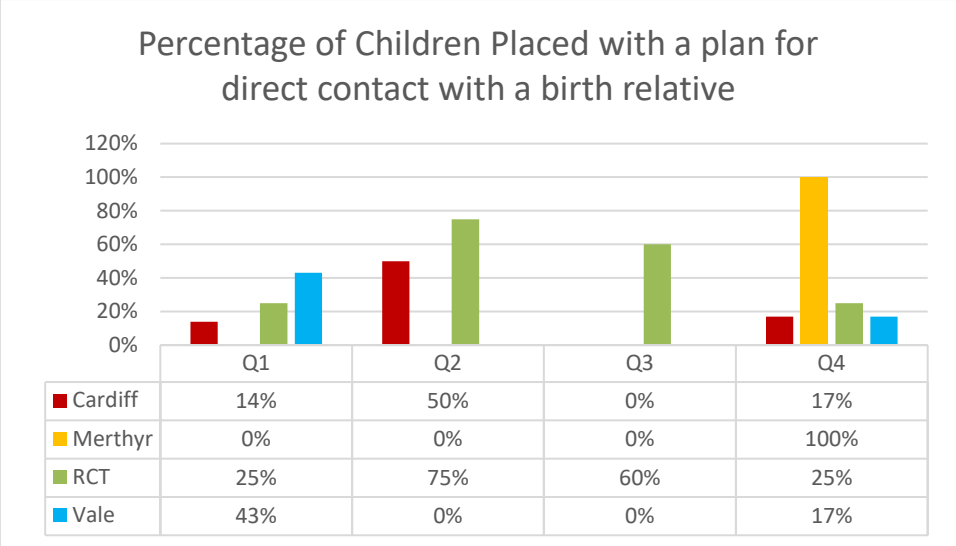
Sadly, six children (three sibling groups of two, one Cardiff, two Vale) have been placed since April 2025 and their placements have disrupted. Formal disruption meetings have been held for two of these sibling groups with the third due to take place in April 2026. The factors associated with their disruption have been complex.

Vale Valleys and Cardiff have produced a 10-year thematic review of pre-order adoption disruption which has been circulated nationally in September 2025 and are contributing to a current national piece of work on learning from disruption.

'Modern Adoption' Considerations in the placement of children

Contact:

All children placed have a plan of direct contact with their foster carer (except those children being adopted by their foster carers). All children presented for their Should be Adopted decision have a detailed discussion about post-adoption contact although currently there are limited plans made for direct contact with birth parents. Of the figures below the majority relate to direct contact with siblings, although there are some with plans for direct contact with birth parents. The number of children with plans for direct contact with a birth relative does appear at present to be rising.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	14%	50%	0%	17%
Merthyr	0%	0%	0%	100%
RCT	25%	75%	60%	25%
Vale	43%	0%	0%	17%

There remain challenges in terms of planning post-adoption contact arrangements due to the level of support, supervision and co-ordination required and the limited resources available to facilitate this, particularly with an increase in the number of these arrangements.

Birth Relative Meetings:

A total of 13 meetings have taken place between adopters and birth parents during the year which represents around 20% of children placed, similar to the previous year.

Life Journey:

Consistently with previous figures **100%** compliance in providing draft life journey materials was achieved at matching and also in the completion of a life journey checklist at the time of the Should be Adopted decision.

Historically the more challenging aspect of this has been the completion of finalised materials being with adopters by the 2nd adoption review and the more recent inclusion of a checklist at this stage also. There are well-established processes in place in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil for the completion of these checklists. Within the Vale of Glamorgan this was previously reliant upon one specific person who has now left post and a new process needs to be developed. Cardiff were unable to submit data returns for Q2 and Q3 due to a significant change in their IT system.

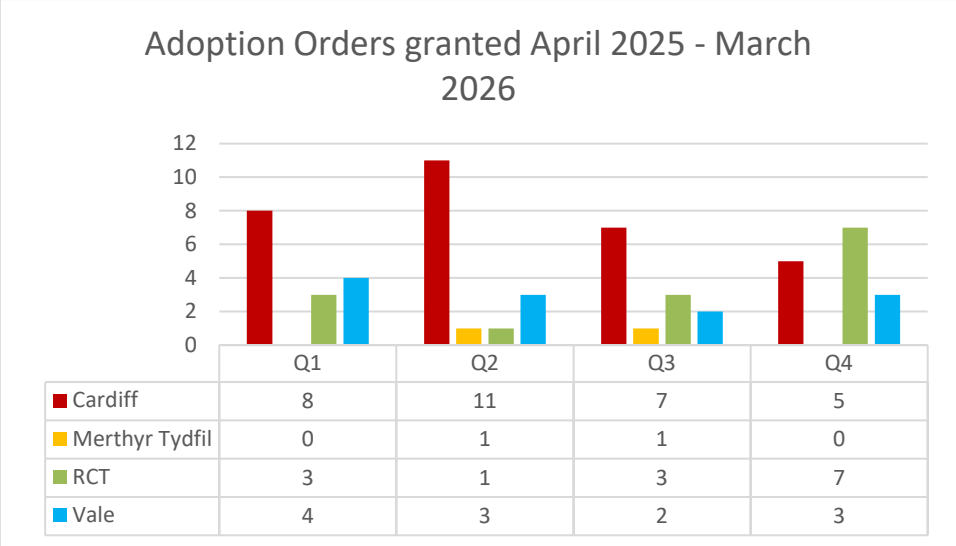
M53 - The number of children with a Should Be Adopted (SBA) decision for whom the Life Journey Work planning checklist has been completed and reviewed at the SBA decision.
This figure is 100% for children with SBA decisions. This is managed by the Family Finding Manager

M20a – Children where life journey material is provided at matching panel					
	Matches	**Life Journey Book**	**Later Life Letter**	**% Life Journey Book**	**% Later Life Letter**
Cardiff	29	29	29	100%	100%
Merthyr	5	5	5	100%	100%
RCT	19	19	19	100%	100%
Vale	11	11	11	100%	100%
TOTAL	64	64	64	100%	100%

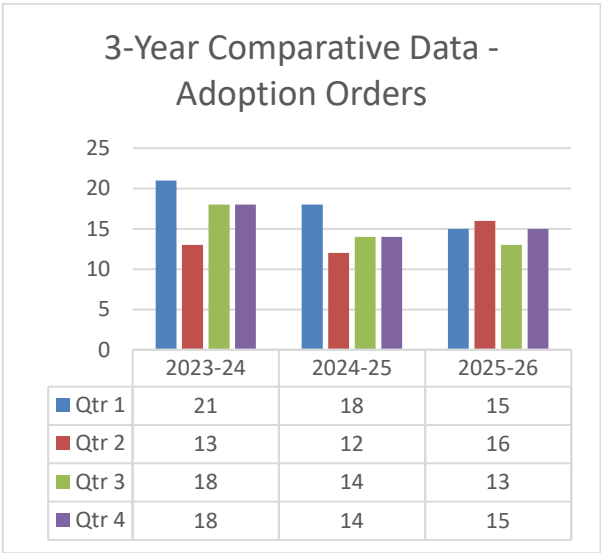
M20 - Children who had their 2nd review in the quarter		**M21 - Children who had their 2nd review and life journey materials were available.**				**M54 – Life journey QA checklist completed**		**M55 – Quality of Life journey materials reaches acceptable standard as defined in the QA Checklist**	
	2nd Reviews Held	**Life Journey Book at 2nd review**	**Later Life Letter at 2nd review**	**% Life Journey Book**	**% Later Life Letter**	**QA checklist completed at 2nd review**	**% QA checklist completed**	**Acceptable standard**	**% Acceptable standard**
Cardiff	10	10	5	100%	50%	0	0%	0	0%
Merthyr	2	2	2	100%	100%	2	100%	2	100%
RCT	19	19	17	100%	89%	17	89%	17	89%
Vale	9	9	2	100%	22%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	40	40	26	100%	65%	19	46.5	19	46.5%

Adoption Orders

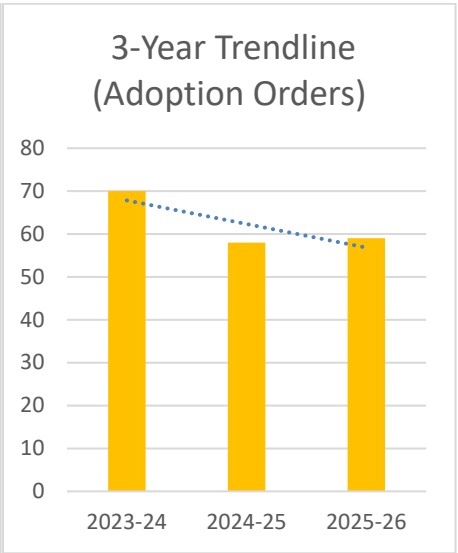
59 Adoption Orders have been granted during the year. Adoption Order trends tend to relate to placements in the previous year or two rather than the current placement rate and so we would anticipate seeing an increase in Adoption Orders in 2026-27 in line with the increase in placements this year.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	8	11	7	5
Merthyr Tydfil	0	1	1	0
RCT	3	1	3	7
Vale	4	3	2	3

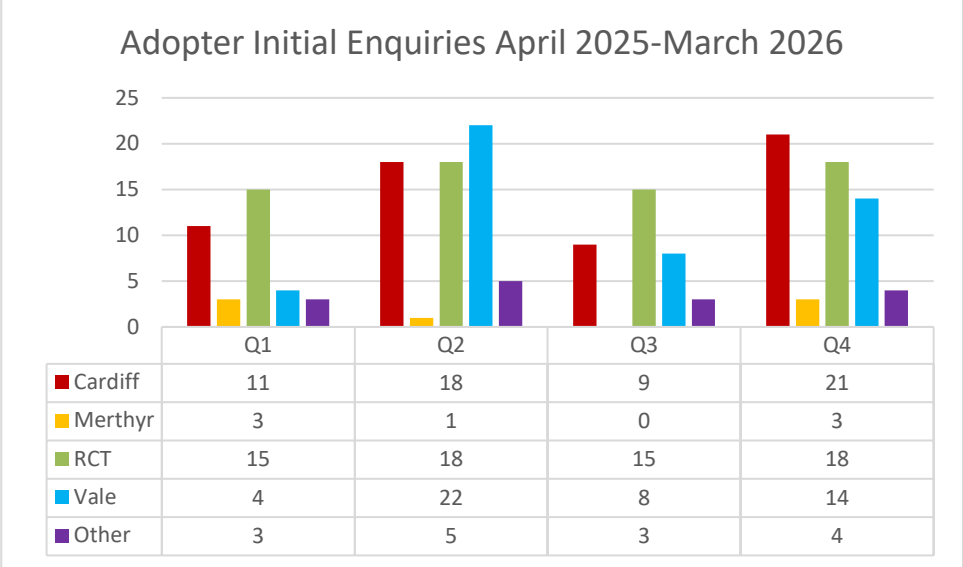


	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Qtr 1	21	18	15
Qtr 2	13	12	16
Qtr 3	18	14	13
Qtr 4	18	14	15

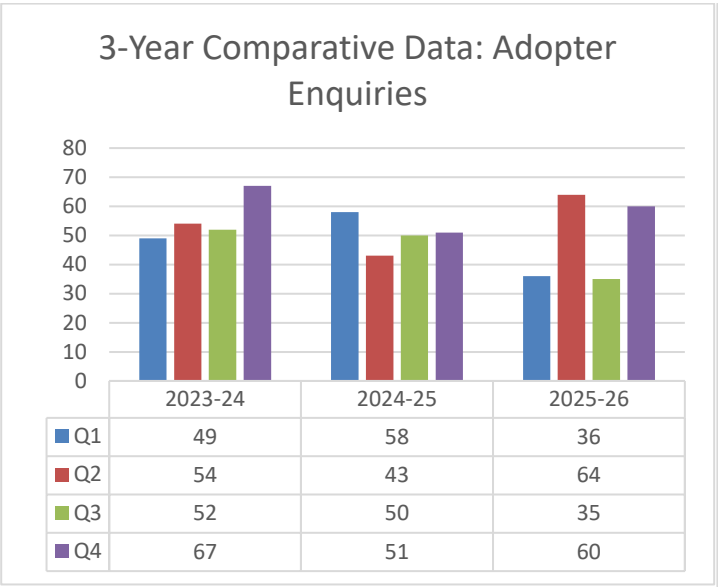


Adopters

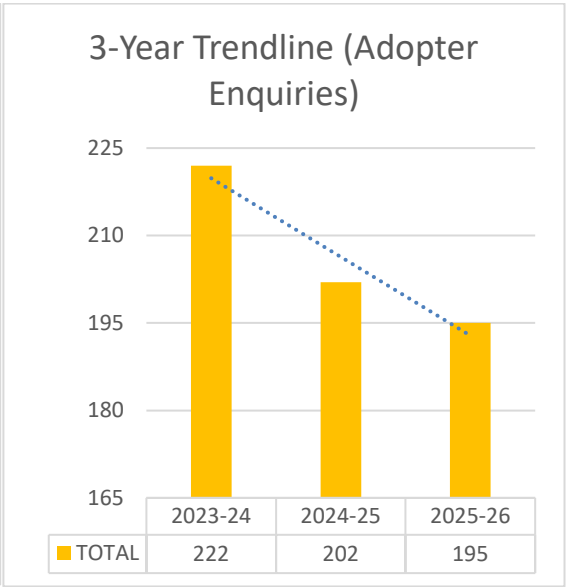
195 enquiries were received during the year. This brings enquiries to a similar rate as the previous few years although latter activity such as Registrations of Interest and Approvals to Adopt have not kept the same pace. Following a national piece of work undertaken in 2024, the Marketing and Recruitment Officer for Vale Valleys and Cardiff is engaged in a further piece of work to understand the challenges of the conversion rate from enquiry to assessment/approval.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	11	18	9	21
Merthyr	3	1	0	3
RCT	15	18	15	18
Vale	4	22	8	14
Other	3	5	3	4



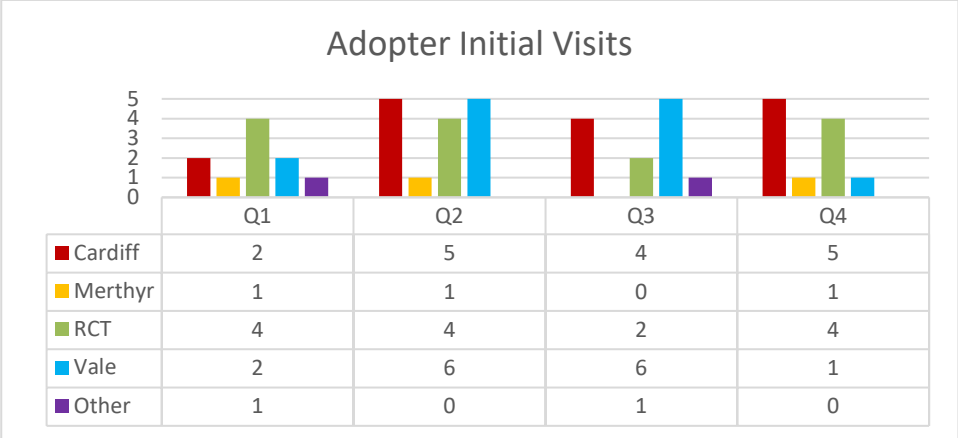
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Q1	49	58	36
Q2	54	43	64
Q3	52	50	35
Q4	67	51	60



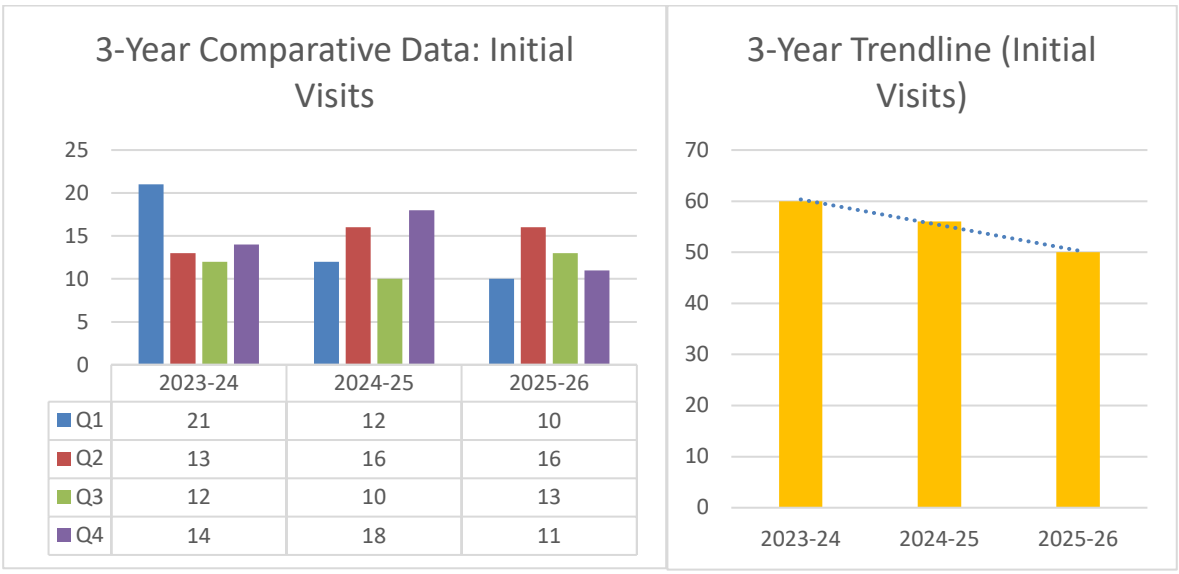
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
TOTAL	222	202	195

Initial Visits

50 initial visits were completed reflecting a slight downturn from previous years and suggesting that one of the drop-off points for adopters is progressing beyond their initial expression of interest in adopting.



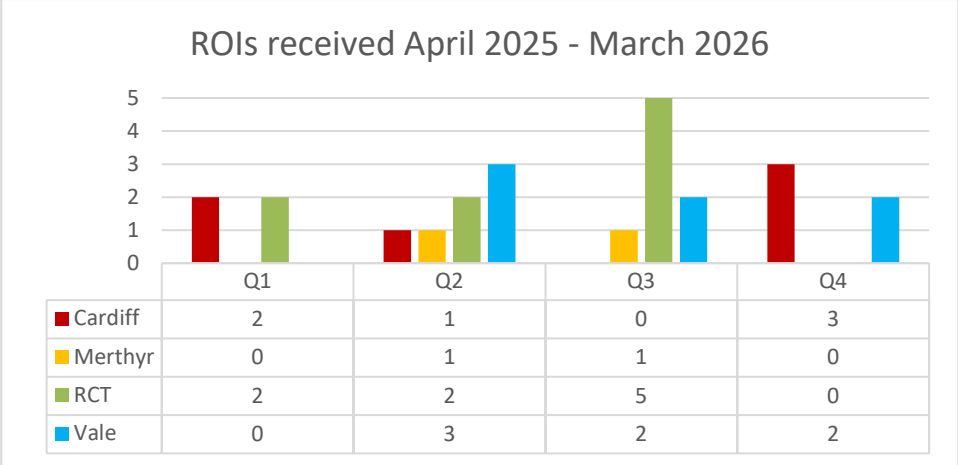
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	2	5	4	5
Merthyr	1	1	0	1
RCT	4	4	2	4
Vale	2	6	6	1
Other	1	0	1	0

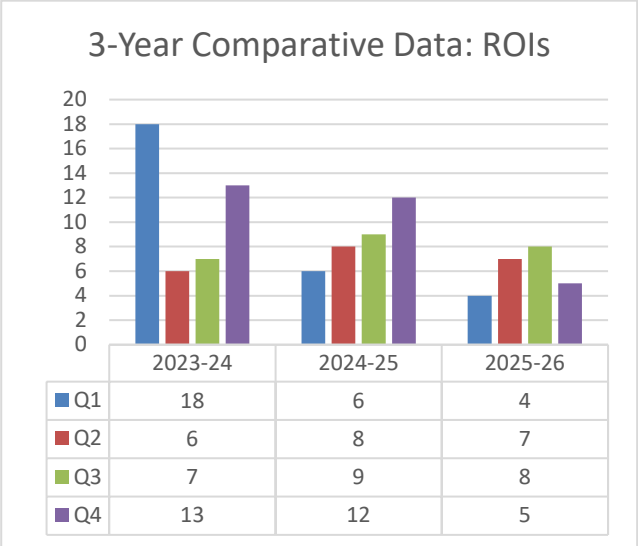


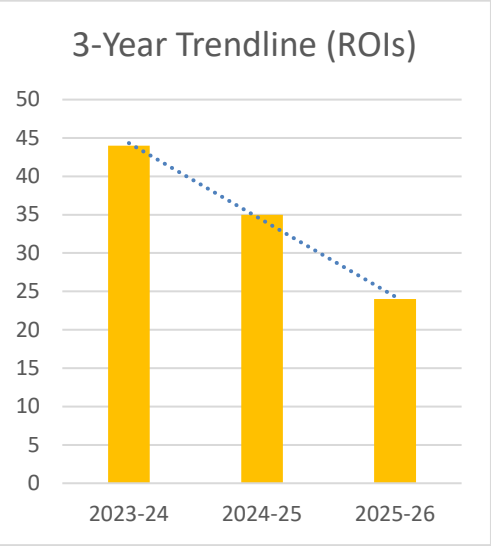
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Q1	21	12	10
Q2	13	16	16
Q3	12	10	13
Q4	14	18	11

2-Stage Model

Adoption assessments are commenced following receipt of adopters' Registration of Interest (ROI), of which 24 were received during the year. This is significantly lower than in previous years and reflects another greater drop in adopters seeking to progress to assessment.

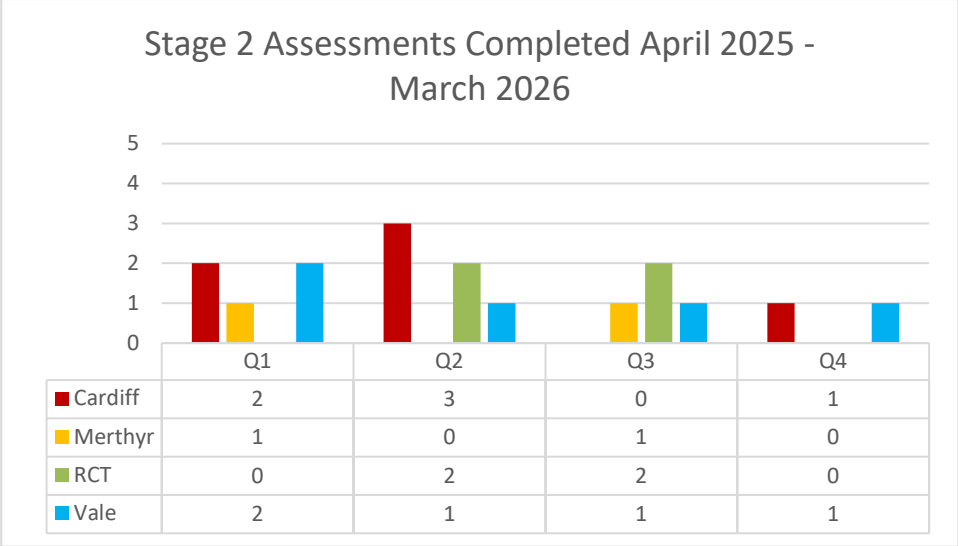




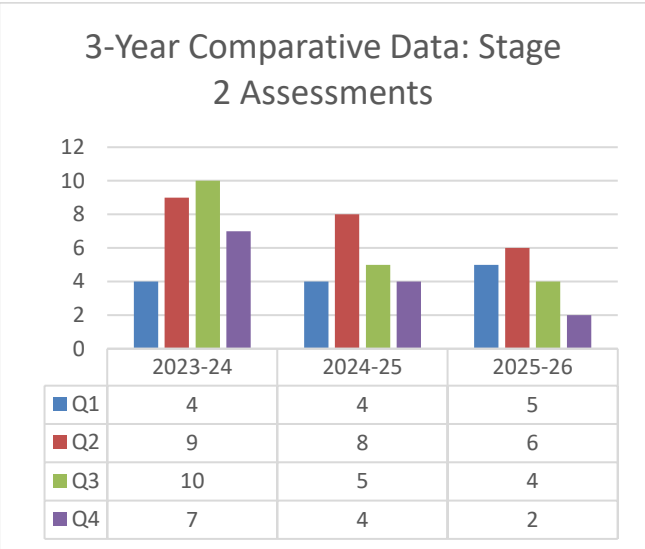


Stage 2 Assessments

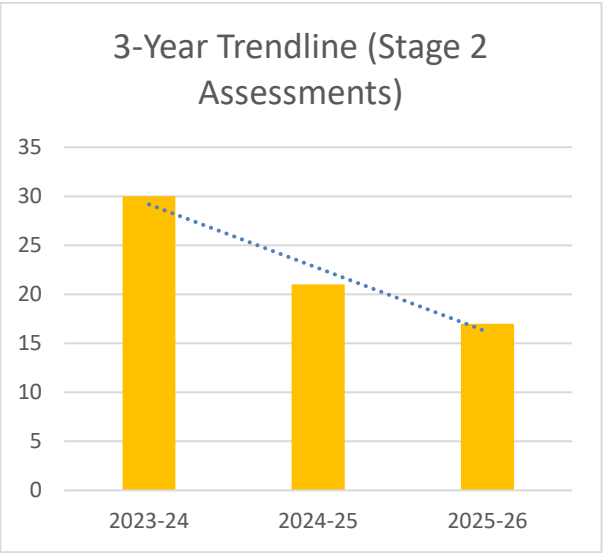
Stage 2 applications reflect those adopters who have progressed through quarter checks into a full assessment. **17** Stage 2 Assessments were completed, slightly down on the previous year but not as significantly as the drop at the earlier stages, suggesting that once applicants have chosen to progress to the assessment most stay within this process.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	2	3	0	1
Merthyr	1	0	1	0
RCT	0	2	2	0
Vale	2	1	1	1

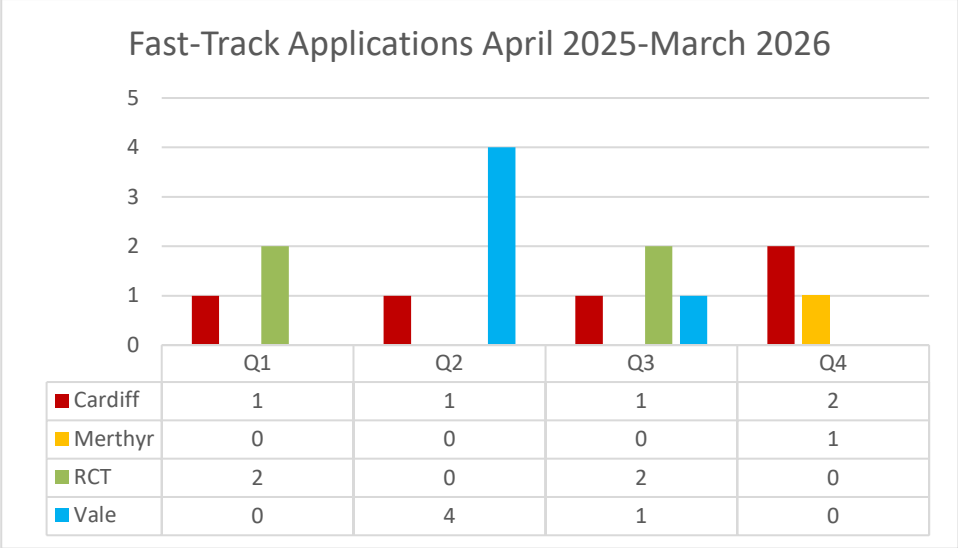


	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Q1	4	4	5
Q2	9	8	6
Q3	10	5	4
Q4	7	4	2

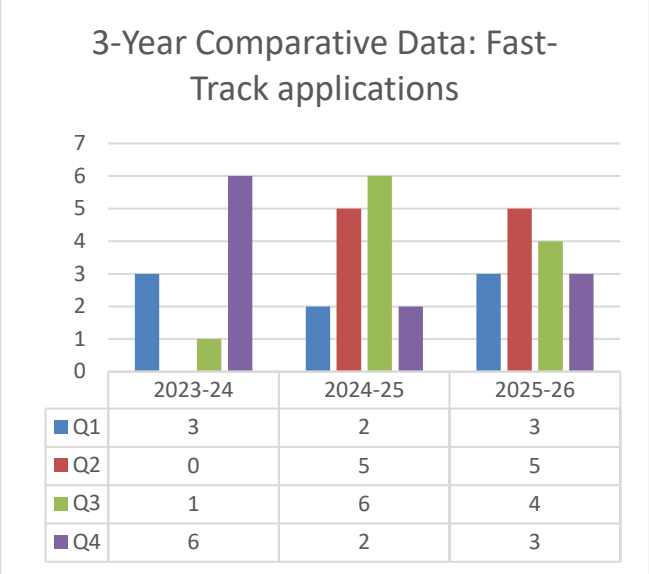


Fast-track applications.

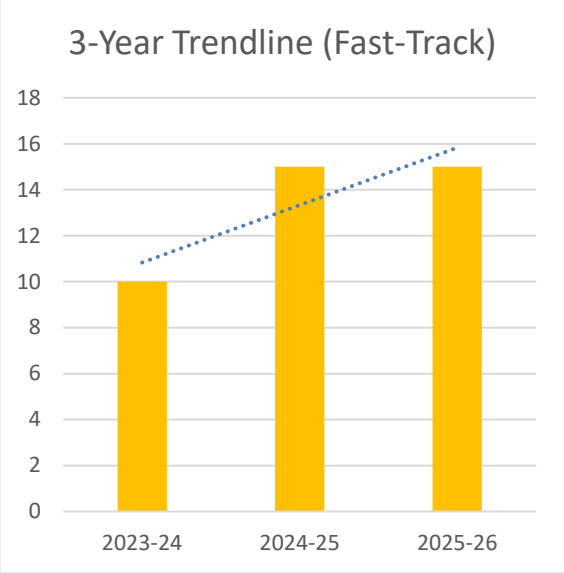
Fast-track applications (second-time adopters and foster carers applying to adopt a child in their care) have remained steady with a further **15** this year and continue to make up a significant proportion of adopter assessments. Positively many who have adopted with us in recent years have chosen to come back to adopt with us again.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	1	1	1	2
Merthyr	0	0	0	1
RCT	2	0	2	0
Vale	0	4	1	0



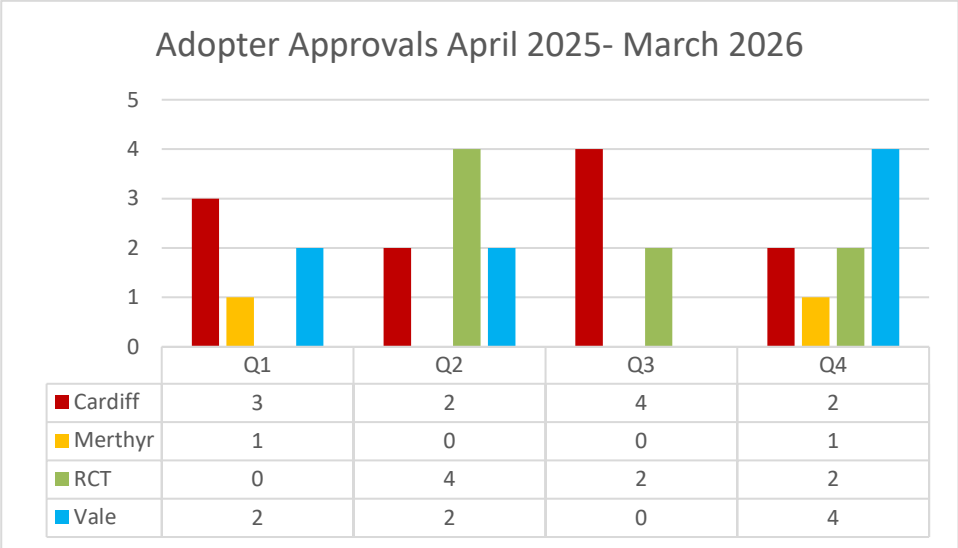
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Q1	3	2	3
Q2	0	5	5
Q3	1	6	4
Q4	6	2	3



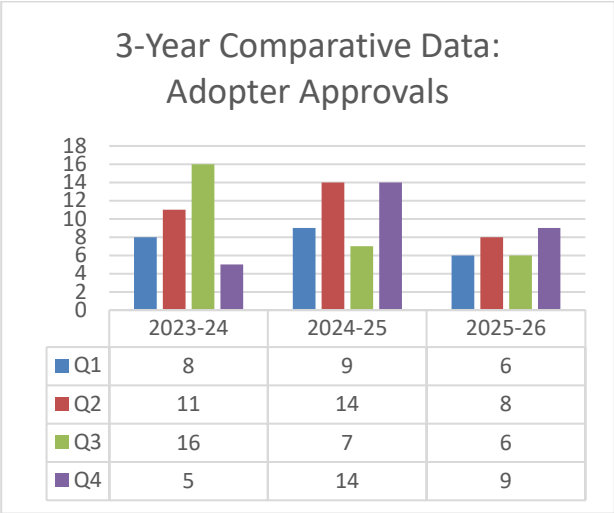
It had been agreed during the previous year that workers based within the Family Finding team would undertake the majority of these due to the loss of permanent staffing equating to 1.5 posts based within Recruitment and Assessment. This staffing reduction formed part of cost saving requirements agreed by management board and were achieved by deleting 1.5 posts when they became vacant. Whilst a number of these assessments have been absorbed, the continued rise in the number of Placement Orders has meant that this is no longer sustainable given the observable decrease in other adopter assessments and so this work has been reabsorbed by the Recruitment and Assessment team.

Adopter Approvals

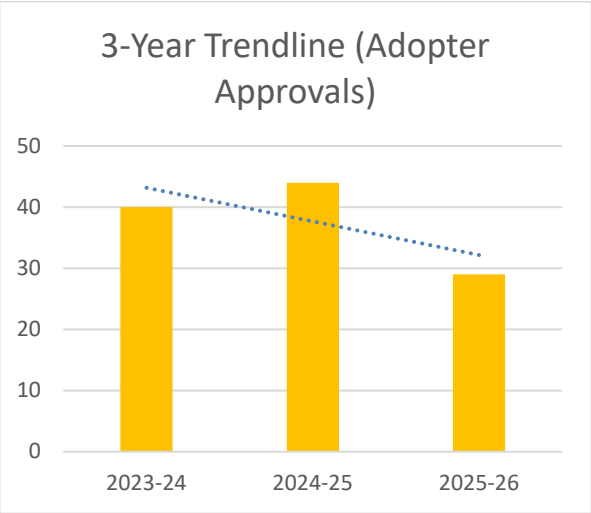
29 adopter households were approved during the year which is around 1/3 down from the previous years' approval. The decline is expected due to the lower conversions to initial visits and to progressing to the assessment stages. Many adopters approved are in a position to be matched quickly with VVC children.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	3	2	4	2
Merthyr	1	0	0	1
RCT	0	4	2	2
Vale	2	2	0	4



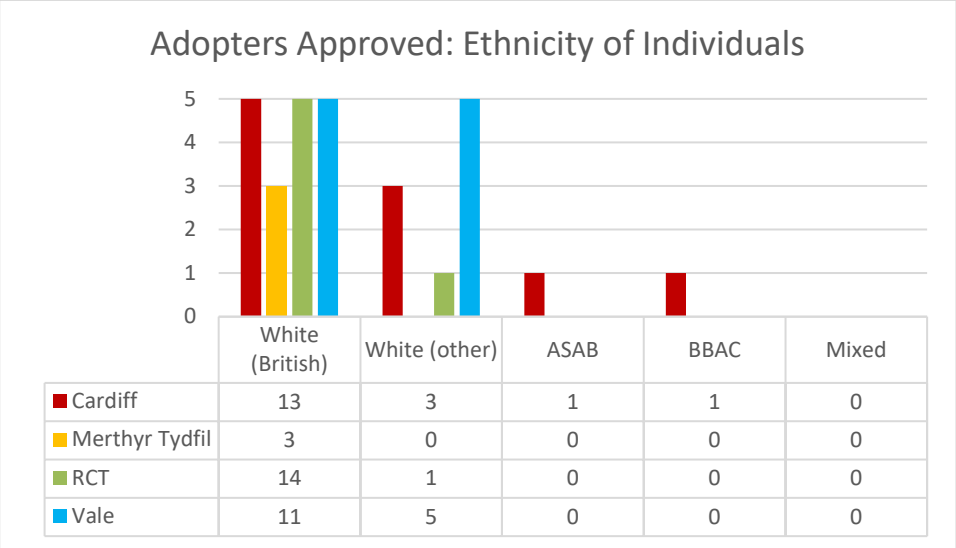
	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Q1	8	9	6
Q2	11	14	8
Q3	16	7	6
Q4	5	14	9



Demographics:

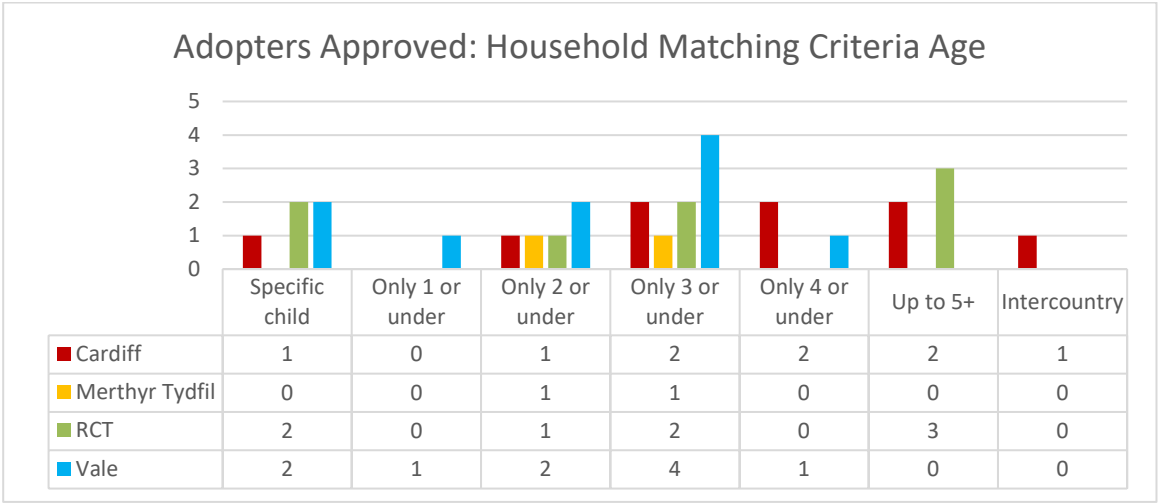
As observed below, of individual adopters approved **79%** are of White British heritage and therefore reflect a similar proportion of the children for whom we have placement orders. Just 2 individual adopters are of a global majority heritage and others are of another White background. Notably the adopters approved who are of a global majority heritage reside in

the same local authority areas, Cardiff as the majority of those children of similar heritage for whom we are seeking an adoptive family. This is one of the ongoing challenges in terms of family finding for these children in achieving permanence within our own resources and often having to look externally.

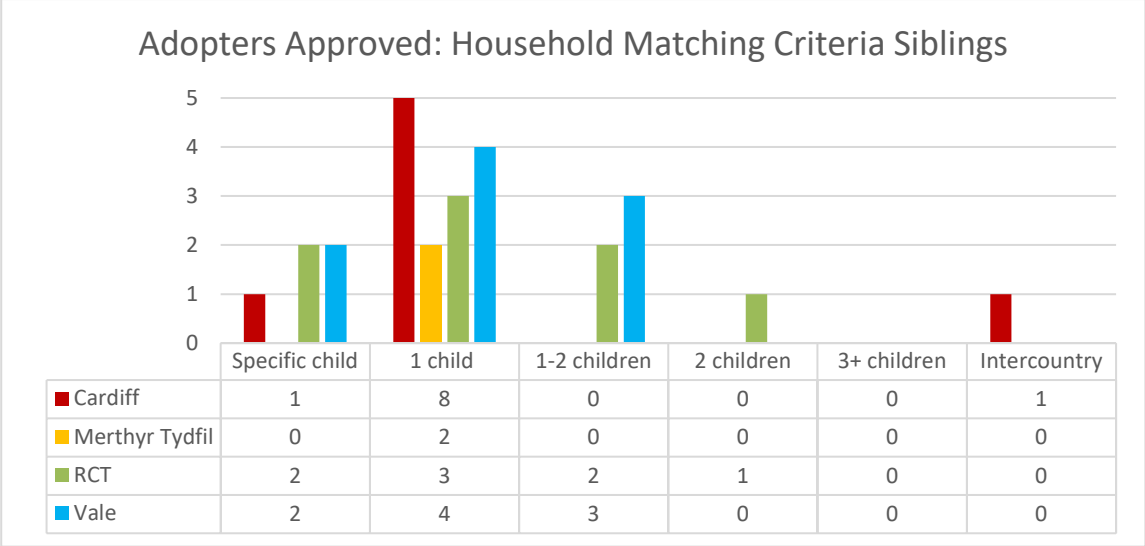


	White (British)	White (other)	ASAB	BBAC	Mixed
Cardiff	13	3	1	1	0
Merthyr Tydfil	3	0	0	0	0
RCT	14	1	0	0	0
Vale	11	5	0	0	0

We have also included the age-range and number of children adopters are being recommended for at approval. This can be compared with the children currently waiting and does identify a gap specifically for sibling groups at present in the needs that our adopters are able to consider.



	Specific child	Only 1 or under	Only 2 or under	Only 3 or under	Only 4 or under	Up to 5+	Intercountry
Cardiff	1	0	1	2	2	2	1
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
RCT	2	0	1	2	0	3	0
Vale	2	1	2	4	1	0	0



	Specific child	1 child	1-2 children	2 children	3+ children	Intercountry
Cardiff	1	8	0	0	0	1
Merthyr Tydfil	0	2	0	0	0	0
RCT	2	3	2	1	0	0
Vale	2	4	3	0	0	0

Welsh Early Permanence (WEP)

1 WEP carer has been approved in the year to date and this carer was approved by the Vale of Glamorgan although is currently on hold due to a change in personal circumstances.

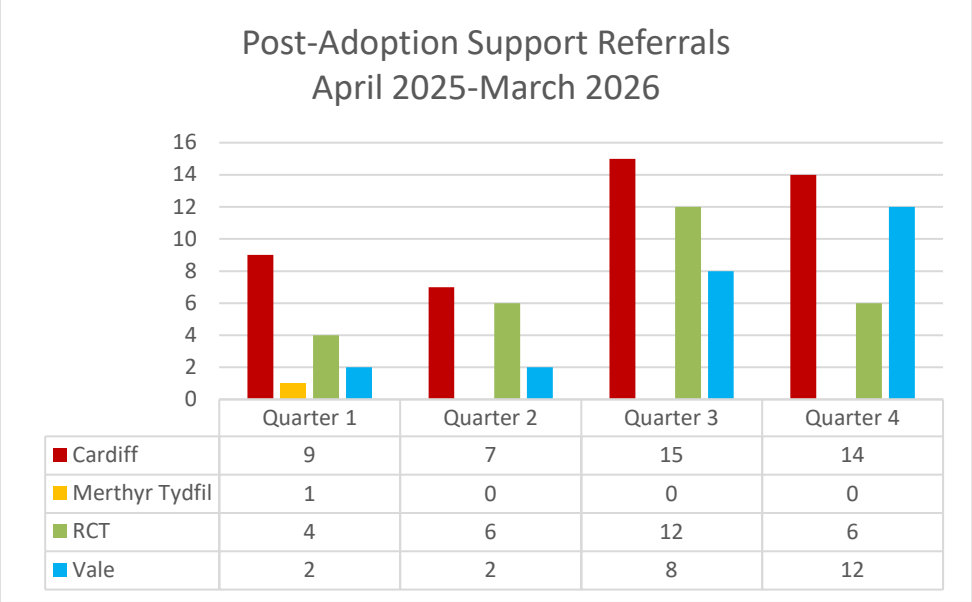
2 children were placed in WEP placements during the year (RCT and Vale) which have now concluded with Adoption Orders. A further child in Cardiff remains in a WEP placement however this has been complex as the child was initially to be relinquished but parents have changed their position so the child is likely to be reunifed with birth parents. This has been a challenging situation for all and a learning event will be held after the conclusion of this child's plan. The National Adoption Service are also running individual learning events for 1 WEP placement per region to reflect with all involved on the experience and learning gained.

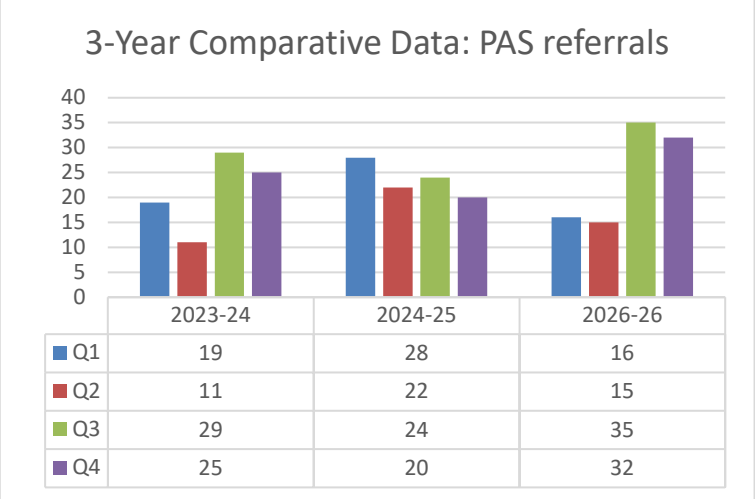
Our pool of available WEP carers depleted from the previos year and whilst we continue to receive WEP referrals we may not have any available WEP placements.

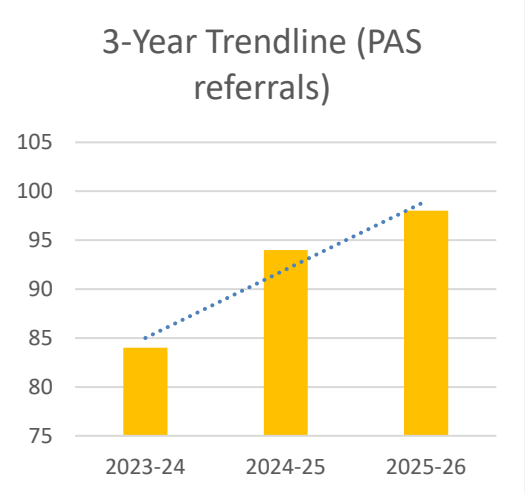
Adoption Support

Referrals

98 referrals for adoption support for children were received during the year showing a continual rise in service demand.





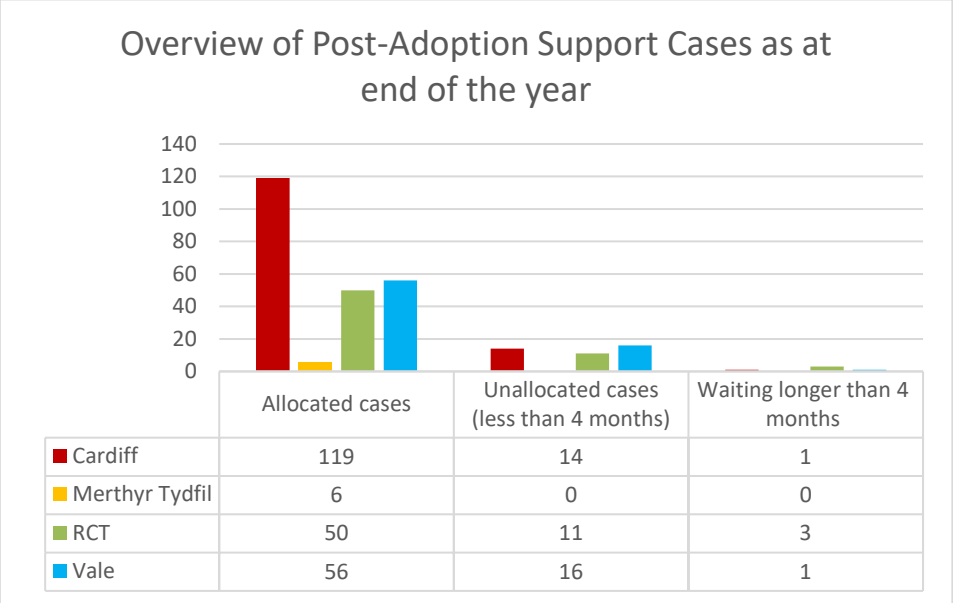


Current Snapshot:

The overview shows the current volume of work in supporting adoptive families (excluding supporting with contact arrangements). There are currently **41** unallocated children awaiting an assessment of their adoption support needs, just **5** of which have been waiting for over the benchmark of 4 months for assessment. 2 of these are currently receiving support services via the Adoption Support Fund in England. The number of unallocated

cases had been reducing, however with continually rising referrals, staff sickness and a member of the team retiring this number has conitnued to rise in recent months.

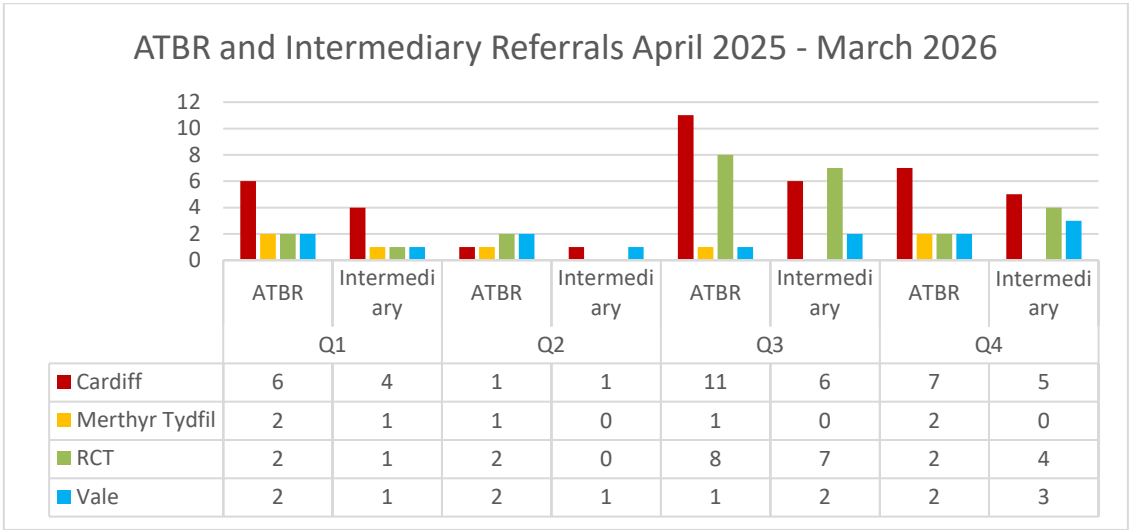
The pressures within the adoption support team have been well documented now over several years as the overall demand for services continues to rise.



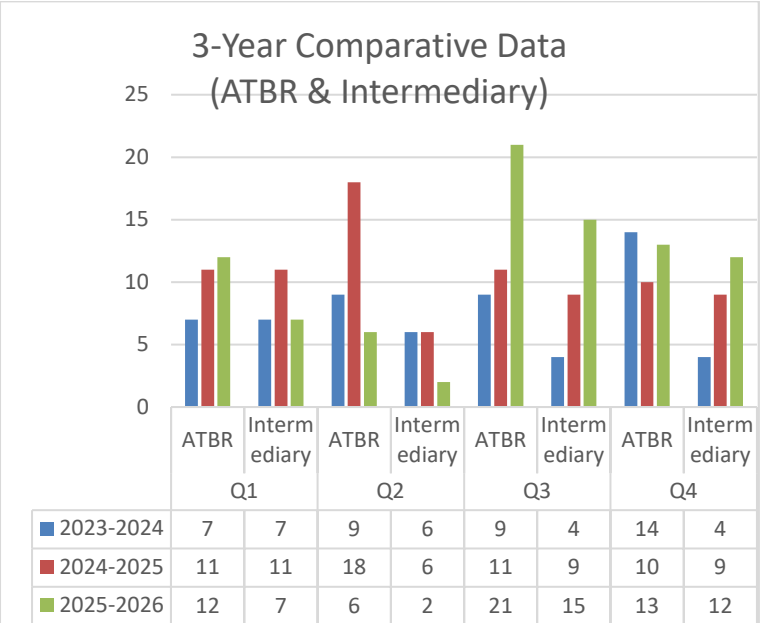
	Allocated cases	Unallocated cases (less than 4 months)	Waiting longer than 4 months
Cardiff	119	14	1
Merthyr Tydfil	6	0	0
RCT	50	11	3
Vale	56	16	1

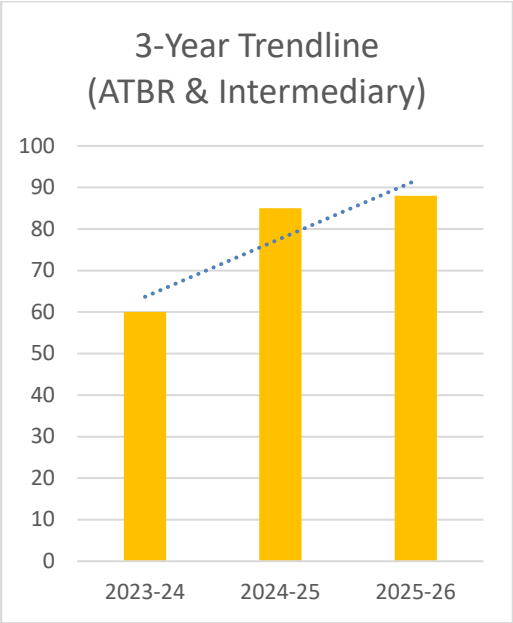
Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services

88 referrals have been received during the year comprising of 52 requests for access to birth records and 36 requests for an intermediary service. This is comparable with the continued high volume of this work observed in recent years.



	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	ATBR	Intermediary	ATBR	Intermediary	ATBR	Intermediary	ATBR	Intermediary
Cardiff	6	4	1	1	11	6	7	5
Merthyr Tydfil	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	0
RCT	2	1	2	0	8	7	2	4
Vale	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	3

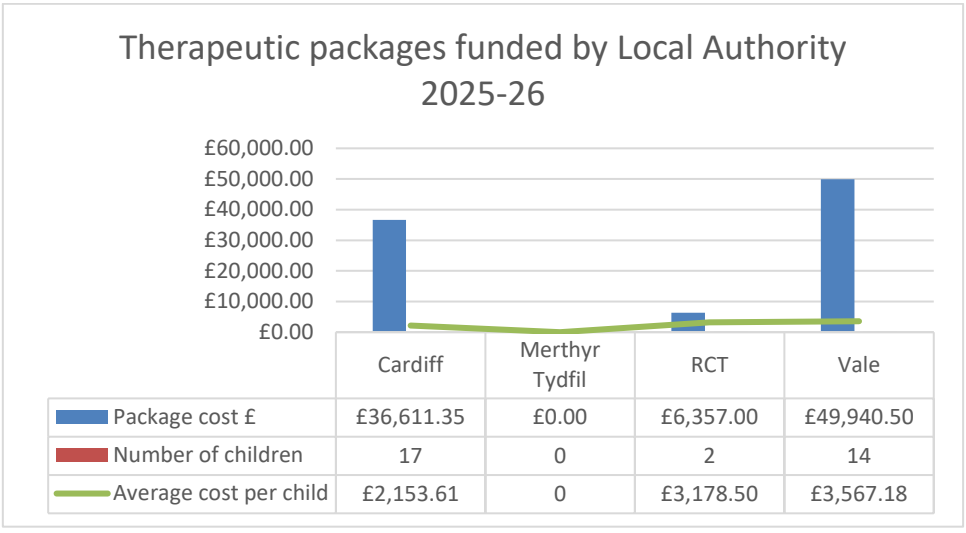


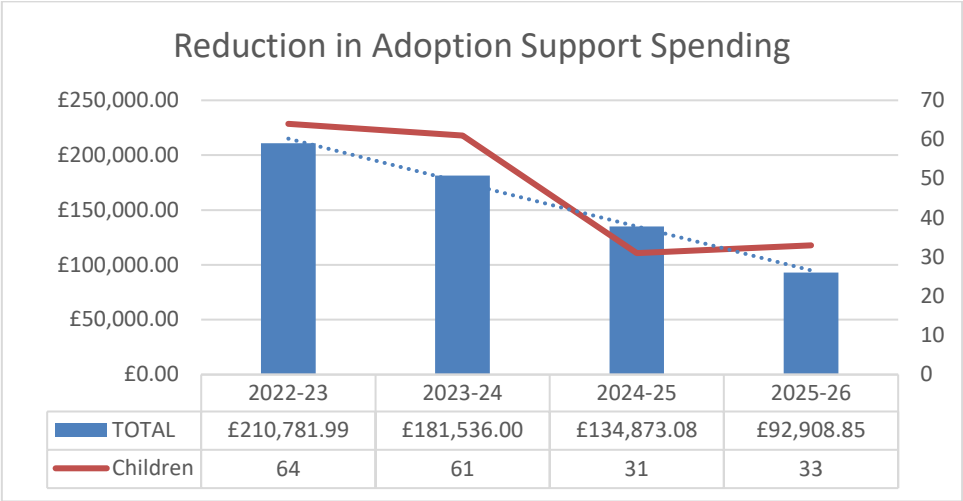


Post Adoption Support Therapeutic Packages

In recent years there has been a significant reduction both in spending on therapeutic packages of support and in the number of children receiving these. Whilst the assessment of need is completed by the post-adoption support team, the financial decision-making remains with the individual local authorities who have established their own processes around this.

The current spend is showing a continued decline from previous years and the number of children receiving externally commissioned services has been declining.

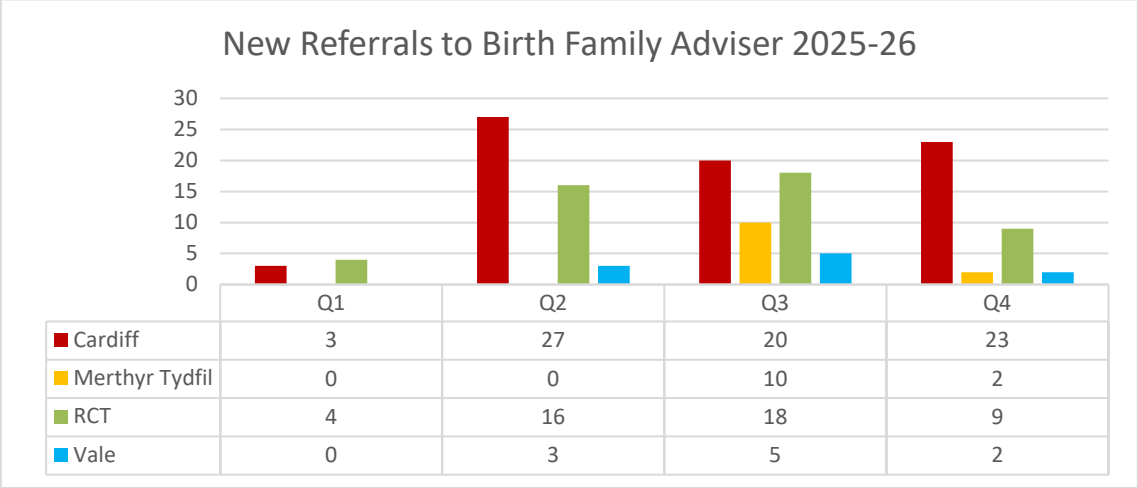




Birth Family Adviser and Letterbox:

Our birth family adviser supports birth relatives post-Adoption Order in relation to adoption issues and support with contact. This is not a therapeutic service for birth parents sadly but does offer vital support and a point of contact to those who need it in addition to our letterbox service. Our birth parent adviser is a 0.5 FTE post working alongside a 0.5 letterbox co-ordinator and 0.5 letterbox social care officer.

Below outlines the current volume of referrals to the birth family adviser during the year, this includes support for birth parents, siblings and other relatives. In future years comparative figures will be able to be provided.



The region currently supports letterbox contact for just under **1100 children**. This does not reflect the individual number of exchanges which may take place for one child with multiple relatives. A pilot of the LetterSwap system is being launched by NAS this year although recognised that there will still be administrative support and emotional and practical support required for individuals within the post-adoption contact system.

Vale of Glamorgan Council
Social Services

Recruitment & Assessment Engagement Report

Published: 2026

Report Approval	
Report Approved By:	
Date Approved By:	
Responsible Officer(s)	Erin Edbrooke

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1

Introduction

The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), as part of the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales, provides a regional adoption service across the Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Recruitment and Assessment Team plays a key role in supporting prospective adopters throughout the early stages of their adoption journey, including initial enquiry, preparation, training and assessment.

This report presents a combined overview of engagement activity undertaken across the Recruitment and Assessment Team during the reporting period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It brings together feedback from a range of engagement opportunities, including information events, training evaluations, adopter questionnaires and second-time adopter engagement, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of adopter experiences.

In contrast to previous reporting approaches, where engagement activities were reported on separately, this report adopts a more integrated methodology. By combining all engagement data into a single annual report, it enables a more holistic analysis of the adopter journey, supports identification of cross-cutting themes, and strengthens the ability to track improvements and emerging trends over time.

The report reflects both quantitative data (such as response rates and participation levels) and qualitative feedback from prospective and approved adopters. This approach ensures that the voices and experiences of those engaging with the service are central to evaluating quality, identifying strengths and informing service development.

This report has been produced in line with the requirements of the National Adoption Service Good Practice Guide and Regulation 39 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019, ensuring that the service is regularly reviewed and continues to deliver high-quality, safe and effective support to adopters and their families.

About the Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Recruitment and Assessment Team forms a key part of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative and is responsible for recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective adopters across the region. The team works with individuals and families throughout the early stages of their adoption journey, providing information, guidance and support from initial enquiry through to approval as adopters.

The team delivers a range of services designed to ensure prospective adopters are well informed, prepared and supported to meet the needs of children who require adoptive families. This includes responding to initial enquiries, facilitating Information Evenings, delivering Preparation to Adopt Training, undertaking Stage One and Stage Two assessments, completing Prospective Adopters Reports (PARs), and supporting applicants through the Adoption Panel process.
Alongside assessing suitability to adopt, the team seeks to equip prospective adopters with the knowledge, skills and understanding required to provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for children. Particular emphasis is placed on developing understanding of attachment, trauma, loss, identity and therapeutic parenting approaches, ensuring families are prepared for both the rewards and complexities of adoption.

The team adopts a relationship-based approach throughout the assessment process, recognising that open communication, trust and reflection are fundamental to enabling prospective adopters to fully engage in the journey. The service also works closely with colleagues across the wider Adoption Collaborative to ensure adopters receive consistent information, high-quality preparation and ongoing support as they progress towards approval and matching.

Central to the team's work is a commitment to providing a transparent, inclusive and supportive assessment process, whilst ensuring that the needs, safety and long-term outcomes of children remain at the heart of all decision making.

2 Engagement Overview

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, the Recruitment and Assessment Team utilised a range of engagement methods to capture the experiences and views of prospective adopters at key stages of their adoption journey. Engagement activity focused on understanding experiences from initial enquiry through to approval, ensuring that feedback could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment, training and assessment processes, and to inform ongoing service development.

A total of 67 responses were received across the three principal engagement activities undertaken by the team during the reporting period.

Engagement activity included the following:

Activity	Responses	Participants	Response Rate
Preparation to Adopt Training	44	49	90%
Adopter Questionnaire	12	35	34%
Second-Time Adopter Training	11	16	69%
Information Evening Feedback*	3	-	-
Total	**67**	**100**	**67%**

**Information Evening feedback will be acknowledged but not formally analysed due to the very small sample size.*

The highest level of engagement was achieved through the **Preparation to Adopt Training Evaluations**, which accounted for **66% (44/67)** of all responses received. This is unsurprising given that evaluations are completed immediately following training and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their learning and preparedness for the next stages of the adoption process.

The Adopter Questionnaire generated 12 responses (18%) and provided valuable insight into experiences across the wider recruitment and assessment journey, including initial enquiry, training, Stage One and Stage Two assessments, social worker support, completion of the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and Adoption Panel.

In addition to the three principal engagement activities undertaken, three responses were also received following the Information Evening. Although response numbers were low, the feedback was consistently positive and provided useful insight into prospective adopters' initial experiences of the service.

Collectively, the feedback received represents experiences across the entirety of the recruitment and assessment pathway and provides a valuable evidence base from which to identify strengths, understand prospective adopters' experiences and highlight areas for continued development.

A notable feature of the engagement activity is the consistency of feedback received across all three engagement streams. Whilst each consultation focused on a different stage of the adoption journey, similar themes emerged throughout, particularly in relation to the quality of information provided, the value of preparation and training, the support offered by assessing social workers, and the overall experience of progressing through the assessment process.

The findings also demonstrate that the team is engaging with prospective adopters at multiple points within their journey, enabling both immediate feedback on specific activities and broader reflection on the adoption assessment process as a whole. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of service effectiveness than relying on a single consultation method and supports the service's commitment to continuous improvement.

Overall, the engagement profile presents a highly positive picture of the Recruitment and Assessment Team, with respondents consistently describing experiences that were informative, supportive and well managed, whilst also identifying opportunities for further enhancement of training delivery, accessibility of documentation and the inclusion of a wider range of lived experiences within learning opportunities.

3 Comparison with 24-25 Engagement

This section compares engagement findings from the current reporting period (2025–2026) with those identified within the Recruitment and Assessment Team engagement reports produced during 2024–2025, including the Adopter Questionnaire, Preparation to Adopt Training Evaluation and Second-Time Adopter Training Evaluation.

Whilst the reporting format has changed during 2025–2026, bringing together engagement activity into a single report, a number of consistent strengths and themes can be identified across both reporting periods.

A total of 67 responses were received across Recruitment and Assessment engagement activities during 2025–2026, representing an overall response rate of 67%.

Engagement Activity	2024-2025	2025-2026	Change
Preparation to Adopt Training Evaluations	85 responses from 102 participants (83%)	44 responses from 49 participants (90%)	+ 7%
Adopter Questionnaire	12 responses from 41 adopters (29%)	12 responses from 35 adopters (34%)	+ 5%
Second Time Adopter Training	5 responses from 16 participants (31%)	11 responses from 16 participants (69%)	+ 38%

The most significant increase was seen within the **Second-Time Adopter Training**, where the response rate increased from **31% to 69%**, providing a richer evidence base regarding the experiences of families returning to adoption.

Similarly, participation in **Preparation to Adopt Training** evaluations remained strong, increasing from **83% to 90%**, demonstrating continued engagement with feedback opportunities and providing confidence that the findings are representative of participants' experiences.

The Adopter Questionnaire maintained the same number of responses as the previous year, however the response rate increased from **29% to 34%**, indicating a modest improvement in engagement despite a smaller cohort of adopters progressing through the process.

Consistent Strengths Across Both Reporting Periods

High-Quality Information and Communication

Across both reporting periods, prospective adopters consistently reported receiving clear, timely and informative communication throughout their adoption journey.

This suggests that the service continues to provide prospective adopters with the information and reassurance required to navigate what can be a complex and emotional process.

Peer Learning and Shared Experiences

Across both reporting periods, adopters consistently identified the opportunity to connect with others as one of the most valuable aspects of their engagement with the service. Feedback highlighted the benefits of networking, group discussions, sharing experiences and learning from the perspectives of other adopters. These findings reinforce the importance of incorporating opportunities for connection, reflection and peer support throughout adopter preparation and training activities.

Preparation and Training

Preparation to Adopt Training remains one of the service's strongest areas of practice. Feedback regarding the Preparation to Adopt Training has remained consistently positive across both reporting periods with respondents confirming that the aims of the course were clear. The vast majority of participants also rated the training either 9 or 10 out of 10, indicating that the programme continues to be well received and highly valued by prospective adopters.

The consistency of these findings demonstrates that training continues to provide adopters with valuable knowledge and confidence as they progress through their adoption journey.

Understanding Trauma and Therapeutic Parenting

One of the most consistent themes across both reporting periods was the value participants placed on developing their understanding of trauma, attachment, child development, therapeutic parenting and PACE. Respondents regularly identified these topics as some of the most useful aspects of the training programme, highlighting their importance in preparing prospective adopters for the realities of adoption. These findings closely mirror those identified within the 2024–2025 training evaluation, suggesting that this continues to be a highly valued and effective element of adopter preparation.

Emerging Areas for Development

Although feedback remains overwhelmingly positive, several themes have emerged more prominently during 2025–2026.

Stronger Evidence of Relationship-Based Practice

Whilst positive relationships with social workers were evident within the 2024–2025 feedback, the 2025–2026 findings provide even stronger evidence of the impact of relationship-based practice. Respondents consistently described social workers as supportive, knowledgeable, empathetic and professional, with many highlighting the positive influence their allocated social worker had on their overall experience of the assessment process. The consistency of this feedback suggests that relationship-based social work practice remains a significant strength of the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Lived Experience Contributions

Both Preparation to Adopt Training and Second-Time Adopter Training feedback highlighted the value of hearing from people with lived experience.

Participants particularly valued hearing from experienced adopters and consistently requested:

- More adopters sharing their experiences
- Contributions from adopted adults
- Wider lived experience perspectives

Comments included:
"The chance to meet an adoptive parent."

"Having a speaker who is an adoptee."

"I would have liked to hear from someone with adult adopted children."

This indicates an opportunity to further enhance training through lived experience involvement.

Training Structure and Duplication

Several respondents suggested there was some overlap between the Information Evening and Preparation Training.

Comments included:
"Day 1 was a little repetitive to the Information Evening."

"There was significant overlap with the Information Evening we attended."

Whilst these comments were limited in number, they suggest an opportunity to review how information is delivered across different stages of the adopter journey to reduce repetition whilst maintaining sufficient preparation.

Documentation and Accessibility

As in 2024–2025, some adopters identified challenges relating to forms, templates and electronic documentation.

Themes included:

- Mobile phone compatibility
- Accessibility of documents
- Homework templates
- Consolidation of paperwork

Although not raised by the majority of respondents, this remains an area where relatively small changes could improve the user experience.

Summary

Comparison of engagement activity across 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 demonstrates a high level of consistency in the quality of service provided by the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Feedback across both reporting periods highlights:

- Strong communication and information sharing
- High-quality training provision
- Effective preparation for adoption
- Valuable opportunities for peer learning
- Increasing evidence of excellent relationship-based social work practice

Engagement rates have improved across all major consultation activities, particularly within Second-Time Adopter Training and Preparation to Adopt Training, providing a stronger evidence base from which to evaluate service quality and impact.

Whilst opportunities for development remain, particularly around lived experience input, document accessibility and reducing duplication of information, the findings present a consistently positive picture of a service that continues to support and prepare prospective adopters effectively throughout their adoption journey.

4 Key Themes Across Engagement

Analysis of feedback received through the Adopter Questionnaire, Preparation to Adopt Training Evaluations and Second-Time Adopter Training Evaluations identified several consistent themes across the recruitment and assessment journey. These themes provide insight into the experiences of prospective adopters and highlight both the strengths of the service and opportunities for ongoing development.

4.1 Feeling Informed, Prepared and Supported

A consistent theme across all engagement activities was the value of receiving clear information and guidance throughout the adoption journey. Respondents frequently described feeling well informed from their initial enquiry onwards, with information provided in a manner that was accessible, honest and supportive.

Prospective adopters valued receiving realistic information about both the rewards and challenges associated with adoption and felt the service enabled them to make informed decisions about progressing through the process.

Comments included:
"Everything was explained thoroughly and set out clearly to know what to expect."

"We knew at all times what was happening."

"The information evening was refreshingly open and informative."

Many respondents described the journey as comprehensive and sometimes challenging, but recognised that this was necessary in preparing them for the realities of adoption.

4.2 The Importance of Relationship-Based Practice

The strongest theme emerging from the Adopter Questionnaire was the positive impact of relationships built with assessing social workers.

Across all stages of assessment, respondents consistently described social workers as:

- Supportive
- Knowledgeable
- Professional
- Empathetic
- Approachable

Prospective adopters spoke positively about having a social worker who took time to understand them, guide them through the process and provide reassurance when required.

Comments included:
"She was fantastic, gave me a shoulder to cry on or made me laugh when I needed it."

"Our social worker was amazing."

"She has gone above and beyond."

"We felt we struck gold."

Feedback suggests that relationship-based practice plays a significant role in helping prospective adopters navigate what can be an emotionally demanding and reflective process.

4.3 Understanding Trauma and Therapeutic Parenting

Preparation to Adopt Training feedback demonstrated that learning about trauma, attachment and therapeutic parenting continues to be one of the most valued aspects of adopter preparation.

Respondents frequently identified the following topics as particularly useful:

- Trauma-informed parenting
- PACE
- Brain development
- Attachment
- Understanding children's experiences
- Loss and grief

Comments included:
"The explanations behind loss and trauma were very good and insightful."

"I definitely feel more equipped to parent a child with trauma."

"Understanding trauma, PACE."

Many prospective adopters reported that the training challenged their thinking, increased their understanding and provided a stronger foundation for future parenting.

4.4 Learning Through Shared Experiences

The value of peer learning emerged consistently throughout all engagement activities.

Many participants highlighted opportunities to:

- Meet other prospective adopters
- Share experiences
- Discuss concerns
- Learn from different perspectives

This was particularly evident within both Preparation to Adopt Training and Second-Time Adopter Training.

Comments included:
"Group work was great and a good opportunity to meet other adopters."

"Speaking to other people going through the same thing."

"Meeting people."

Prospective adopters frequently described the reassurance gained through hearing that others had similar questions, concerns and experiences.

4.5 The Impact of Lived Experience

A recurring theme across both training activities was the positive impact of hearing directly from adopters with lived experience.

Within the Second-Time Adopter Training, many participants identified the guest speaker as one of the most valuable aspects of the course.

Comments included:
"Listening to a second-time adopter and their journey through it."

"Hearing lived experiences."

"There were so many complexities which are just not obvious."

Similarly, participants attending Preparation to Adopt Training requested additional opportunities to hear from:

- Adoptive parents
- Experienced adopters
- Adopted adults
- Siblings within adoptive families

This suggests that lived experience input is highly valued and enhances understanding in a way that complements formal training content.

4.6 Reflection and Personal Growth

Many respondents described the recruitment and assessment process as an opportunity for significant personal reflection.

Several participants commented that the process had:

- Increased self-awareness
- Challenged assumptions
- Encouraged deeper reflection on childhood experiences
- Improved understanding of parenting approaches

Comments included:
"I think it's made me understand myself better."

"It has changed my perspective."

"It helped me see more about myself."

This demonstrates that the assessment process is not simply viewed as an assessment of suitability but also as an opportunity for personal development and preparation.

4.7 Confidence in the Assessment and Approval Process

Feedback suggests that prospective adopters generally felt confident and supported throughout the assessment and approval process.

Particular strengths identified included:

- Clear explanations of Stage One and Stage Two
- Preparation for Adoption Panel
- Opportunities to discuss panel questions beforehand
- Detailed and accurate Prospective Adopters Reports (PARs)

Comments included:
"The PAR captured our discussions well and accurately."

"I felt the panel process worked well and wasn't as scary as I thought."

"Receiving the questions ahead of time was incredibly helpful."

These findings indicate that prospective adopters felt well prepared for key milestones within their adoption journey.

4.8 Opportunities for Development

Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, respondents identified several areas that could further enhance the service.

Lived Experience Opportunities
As noted above, participants would welcome more opportunities to hear from:

- Adopted adults
- Adoptive parents
- Families further along in their adoption journey

Training Structure and Content
A number of respondents suggested:

- Reducing repetition between Information Evenings and Preparation Training
- Providing more case studies and real-life examples
- Increasing opportunities for discussion and reflection

Comments included:
"There was significant overlap with the Information Evening we attended."

"More real-life experiences with children would be beneficial."

Documentation and Accessibility
Some prospective adopters identified challenges relating to:

- Mobile phone compatibility
- Document templates
- Accessibility of forms

Comments included:
"The documents were not accessible for use on a mobile phone."

"The templates were difficult to work from."

Venues and Learning Environment
A small number of participants suggested improvements relating to:

- Seating comfort
- Room temperature
- Timing of breaks
- Course pacing

Whilst these issues were relatively minor, they were raised consistently enough to merit consideration.

5

Preparation to Adopt Training Evaluation

(2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

Preparation to Adopt Training forms a key component of the adopter journey, providing prospective adopters with information, knowledge and practical tools to prepare them for the realities and responsibilities of adoption.

During the 2025–2026 reporting period:
44 responses were received out of the **49 participants,** giving a **response rate of 90%.**

Key Findings

1. Clarity of Training Objectives

Feedback demonstrates that participants had a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the training.

Of the 44 respondents:

- 43 respondents (98%) confirmed that the aims of the training were clearly explained.
- 1 respondent (2%) reported that they were unclear about the objectives of the session.

Comments included:
"Crystal clear."

"Yes, outlined before the session and then on the session day."

"Yes very clear. We had an email before with material to read which informed us of what was expected."

This compares favourably to 2024–2025, where 100% of respondents reported that course aims were clear.

2. Overall Usefulness of Training

The training was consistently rated highly by participants.

Of the 44 responses:

- 31 respondents (70%) rated the training 10 out of 10
- 6 respondents (14%) rated the training 9 out of 10
- 5 respondents (11%) rated the training 8 out of 10
- 1 respondent (2%) rated the training 7 out of 10
- 1 respondent (2%) rated the training 6 out of 10

This equates to:

- 42 out of 44 respondents (95%) rating the training 8/10 or above
- An average score of approximately 9.5 out of 10

Comments included:
"I feel a lot more prepared for the journey now."

"Very useful, the experience will stay with me."

"I feel prepared to take the next step."

"It has changed my perspective."

These findings indicate that the training is highly valued and viewed as an effective component of adopter preparation.

3. Understanding Trauma & Therapeutic Parenting

The most frequently referenced theme throughout the evaluations was the value of learning about:

- Trauma
- Attachment
- Brain development
- Therapeutic parenting
- PACE

Participants repeatedly identified these areas as some of the most useful aspects of the training.

Comments included:
"The explanations behind loss and trauma were very good and insightful."

"Understanding trauma, PACE."

"Learning how parenting is different with a child through trauma."

"Definitely feel more equipped to parent a child with trauma."

"The stress of importance placed on PACE parenting."

This mirrors findings from 2024–2025, where trauma, therapeutic parenting and PACE were also identified as some of the most valuable areas of learning.

4. Peer Learning & Group Discussion

A significant strength of the training was the opportunity for participants to engage with other prospective adopters.

Many respondents reported valuing:

- Group discussions
- Shared experiences
- Reflection exercises
- Building relationships with others on a similar journey

Comments included:
"It was really good to see other adopters' perspectives."

"Speaking to other people going through the same thing."

"Group work was great and a good opportunity to meet other adopters and create a support network."

"Meeting other adopters, growing my understanding."

The findings suggest that participants gain reassurance and confidence through hearing a range of perspectives and experiences.

5. Quality of Facilitation

Facilitators were consistently praised throughout the feedback.
Respondents described trainers as:

- Knowledgeable
- Engaging
- Supportive
- Approachable

Comments included:
"They were absolutely amazing."

"Amazing people."

"They were incredible at giving the information factually, without it feeling daunting."

"They were fantastic in their knowledge and bringing the day together."

The quality of facilitation emerged as one of the strongest themes within the dataset.

6. Learning Through Lived Experience

A recurring theme was the value of hearing real-life experiences and practical examples.

Participants particularly valued:

- Adoption stories
- Case studies
- Real-life examples
- Different perspectives

Comments included:
"Discussion about real-life experiences."

"Hearing the stories."

"Interactions and real-life stories."

Several participants indicated they would welcome even more opportunities to hear from:

- Adoptive parents
- Adoptees
- Families further along their adoption journey

Areas for Development

Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, several recurring suggestions emerged.

Training Environment
A number of participants commented on the physical environment, including:

- Room temperature
- Seating comfort
- Venue suitability

Comments included:
"Comfier chairs."

"The room and seats were uncomfortable."

"The civic centre I felt was a nicer venue."

Pacing and Volume of Information

Some respondents felt there was a significant amount of information delivered within the three-day programme.

Comments included:
"Not so rushed."

"Some of the parts could have been condensed."

"An overwhelming amount of information squeezed into a three-day course."

Overlap With Information Evening Content

A small number of participants identified duplication between the Information Evening and Preparation to Adopt Training.

Comments included:
"Day 1 was a little repetitive to the introduction evening."

"There was significant overlap with content on day 1 and the information evening we attended."

This suggests an opportunity to review content across the adopter journey to ensure that information is complementary rather than repetitive.

Additional Lived Experience Input

Participants expressed interest in hearing from a wider range of people with lived experience.

Suggestions included:

- Adopters
- Adopted adults
- Families further along in their adoption journey

Comments included:
"The chance to meet an adoptive parent."

"The use of more real-life scenarios of adoption journeys."

6 Adopter Questionnaire (2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

The Adopter Questionnaire was designed to capture feedback from prospective adopters across their recruitment and assessment journey, including:

- Initial enquiry
- Information and training
- Stage One and Stage Two assessments
- Social worker support
- Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)
- Adoption Panel
- Overall experience of the adoption journey

During the 2025–2026 reporting period:

- **12 responses** were received from **35 prospective adopters**. Giving a **response rate of 34%**

Key Findings

1. Initial Enquiry & Information Provision

Feedback regarding the initial stages of the adoption journey was overwhelmingly positive.

Respondents consistently described:

- Quick response times
- Friendly and supportive staff
- Informative Information Evenings
- Clear explanations of the process

Comments included:
"The initial information evening was fantastic, gave me all the information I needed and answered any questions I had."

"I got straight through when I first rang up to get information about adopting."

"The information evening was refreshingly open and informative."

"The first phone call was helpful just to get a feel for things."

Several adopters specifically noted that the information provided enabled them to make informed decisions about proceeding with adoption.

2. Understanding the Assessment Process

Feedback indicates that prospective adopters felt well informed about both Stage One and Stage Two of the assessment process.

Of the 12 respondents:

- 12 (100%) described the assessment stages as clearly explained.
- No respondents reported significant confusion regarding the overall assessment pathway.

Comments included:
"Everything was explained really clearly."

"The two-stage process was explained clearly and how we were doing at each stage."

"We knew at all times what was happening."

"The process was pretty clear and the stages made sense."

Although the assessment process was acknowledged as intensive and reflective, respondents generally understood the purpose of each stage and the information being gathered.

3. The Impact of Social Worker Support

The most significant theme emerging from the questionnaire was the positive experience of working with assessing social workers.

All respondents who commented on their social worker described their experience positively.

Common themes included:

- Consistency
- Professionalism
- Empathy
- Accessibility
- Emotional support
- Effective communication

Comments included:
"She was fantastic, helped me through the highs and lows."

"She made me realise I didn't need to be perfect, I just needed to be me."

One respondent summarised their experience by commenting:
"I honestly do not feel that my social worker needs to improve on anything."

The consistency and strength of this feedback suggest that relationship-based practice remains one of the Recruitment and Assessment Team's greatest strengths.

4. Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)

Feedback regarding the PAR was highly positive.

Of the 12 respondents:

- 10 respondents (83%) explicitly stated the PAR accurately reflected their circumstances.
- The remaining responses were also largely positive, identifying only minor factual amendments or formatting suggestions.

Comments included:
"The PAR captured our discussions well and accurately."

"It was an accurate reflection of me."

"It was a fair and true reflection of our journey."

"The Prospective Adopters Report was a very accurate reflection of my circumstances."

Many respondents described reading their PAR as emotional but also reassuring, reflecting the depth of understanding developed throughout the assessment process.

Preparation for Adoption Panel

Feedback regarding Adoption Panel preparation was particularly positive.
All respondents reported finding it helpful to receive panel questions in advance.

Comments included:
"It was very helpful having the questions before panel."

"Receiving the questions ahead of time was incredibly helpful."

"It helped put us at ease."

"The panel process worked well and wasn't as scary as I thought it would be."

Respondents appreciated opportunities to discuss questions with their social worker beforehand and felt well prepared for panel discussions.

Overall Experience

Overall experiences of the recruitment and assessment journey were extremely positive.

Respondents frequently described the process as:

- Supportive
- Informative
- Thorough
- Reflective
- Well organised

Comments included:
"I have had a wonderful experience so far."

"I have had a really positive experience from beginning to end."

"We felt comfortable and supported throughout."

"It was lovely and I can't wait for the next stage of my journey."

Several respondents recognised that parts of the process were challenging and emotionally demanding but also acknowledged the importance and necessity of the assessment process.

Areas for Development

Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, several constructive themes emerged.

Digital Accessibility and Documentation

Several respondents identified challenges relating to:

- Mobile phone compatibility
- Templates provided for homework
- Electronic forms and documentation

Comments included:
"The format of the documents were not accessible for use on a mobile phone."

"The templates were difficult to work from."

"It would be good to update both."

This theme is consistent with feedback received during 2024–2025 and may benefit from further review.

Reducing Duplication and Enhancing Lived Experience Input

Some respondents identified overlap between different stages of preparation and suggested greater use of lived experience.

Suggestions included:
"Having a speaker who is an adoptee."

"More real-life experiences with children would be beneficial."

"A hint of some positives of adoption could be included."

Several prospective adopters highlighted the value of hearing directly from those with lived experience and suggested this could be expanded further.

Waiting and Communication During Delays

Although feedback regarding communication was generally positive, a small number of respondents referenced:

- Delays relating to DBS checks
- Medical checks
- Waiting between stages

Comments included:
"The waiting after Stage 2 is hard."

"We did have some delays with our DBS."

"I felt frustrated during Stage 1 as there was a delay with my medical documentation."

Whilst these delays were often outside the direct control of the service, they highlight the anxiety that uncertainty can create for prospective adopters.

7 | Second-Time Adopter Training Evaluation (2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

The Second-Time Adopter Training is designed to support families who have previously adopted and are considering expanding their family through adoption. The training provides an opportunity for adopters to reflect on their previous experiences, consider the impact of a further adoption on existing family dynamics and explore the practical and emotional complexities associated with adopting again.

During the 2025–2026 reporting period:

- **11 responses** were received
- From **16 participants**
- Giving a **response rate of 69%**

This represents a significant increase in engagement compared to 2024–2025, when 5 responses were received from 16 participants (31%).

The increase in response rates provides greater insight into the experiences of second-time adopters and improves the service's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the training.

Key Findings

1. Clear Training Objectives

The majority of respondents felt the purpose and objectives of the training were clearly explained and achieved.

Of the 11 responses:

- **10 respondents (91%)** reported that the objectives were clear.
- **1 respondent (9%)** reported uncertainty regarding the purpose and intended learning outcomes of the session.

Comments included:
"Yes."
"Everything was answered."
"It was a great day, really appreciate the training."

The high proportion of positive responses suggests the training is generally successful in meeting participants' expectations, although the feedback received also indicates scope to strengthen communication regarding learning objectives before attendance.

2. Value of Lived Experience

The strongest theme emerging from the evaluation was the value of hearing directly from someone with lived experience of second-time adoption.

Participants repeatedly identified the guest speaker's contribution as one of the most beneficial aspects of the training.

Comments included:
"Listening to a second-time adopter and their journey through it."
"Learning from the speaker who walked through his experience."
"Hearing lived experiences."
"There are so many complexities which are just not obvious."

Respondents particularly valued hearing honest reflections on:

- Introducing another child into the family
- The impact on existing children
- Managing expectations
- Navigating family relationships

This mirrors findings from both the Preparation to Adopt Training and previous Second-Time Adopter Training evaluations, which highlighted the value of learning from real-life experiences.

3. Understanding the Impact on Existing Children

Many respondents reflected positively on discussions around family dynamics and the practical realities of adopting for a second time.

Participants highlighted the value of exploring:

- How existing children may respond
- Managing introductions and transitions
- Changes in family relationships
- Adapting parenting approaches

Comments included:
"How to manage changes and introductions."
"Reminder of what to expect and how the process will need to be adapted to include my existing child."
"Will an existing child feel replaced? What do they get jealous about?"

The feedback demonstrates that adopters value opportunities to explore the unique considerations associated with expanding an adoptive family.

4. Peer Support and Shared Learning

As with the Preparation to Adopt Training, participants highly valued opportunities to connect with others in similar circumstances.
Respondents identified benefits including:

- Sharing experiences
- Learning from other families
- Feeling reassured by common experiences

Comments included:
"Meeting people."
"It was nice to meet other second-time adopters."
"That we are human, parents in the same boat as us."

This reinforces the value of creating opportunities for adopters to learn from, and support, one another throughout their journey.

5. Refreshing and Revisiting Learning

Several respondents highlighted the value of revisiting information they had learned during their first adoption journey.

Participants reported benefiting from:

- Refreshing knowledge
- Revisiting life journey work
- Reflecting on changes in expectations since their first adoption
- Understanding the differences between first and second-time adoption

Comments included:
"Hearing the process again was very useful."
"Refreshing the information and particularly the life journey and second-time adopters Q&A."
"Even as third-time adopters we found it useful."

This suggests the training successfully provides an opportunity to revisit important themes whilst considering the additional factors associated with adopting again.

Areas for Development

Whilst feedback was largely positive, several important suggestions were identified.

Clarifying Learning Objectives
One respondent reported uncertainty regarding the expectations and purpose of the course.

Comments included:
"I wasn't really sure what was expected to be covered before attending."
"I don't think I really understand now what I was expected to learn."
This suggests there may be benefit in providing clearer information regarding:

- Learning objectives
- Intended outcomes
- Course content before the session takes place.

Additional Lived Experience Perspectives

Although participants highly valued hearing from an experienced adopter, some respondents suggested broadening the range of lived experiences represented.

Suggestions included:

- Hearing from adopters further along in their journey
- Hearing from adults who were adopted themselves
- Hearing from adults who grew up within adoptive families

One participant commented:
"I would have liked to hear from someone with adult children, or from adults who grew up as adopted siblings themselves."

This reflects a wider theme identified across Recruitment and Assessment engagement activity regarding the value of diverse lived experience perspectives.

Time Allocation and Pacing

A small number of respondents felt that certain sections of the training were rushed.

Comments included:
"The second section was a little rushed."
"Maybe a little more time allocated would be useful."

Specific reference was made to:

- Life journey work
- Discussion opportunities
- Reflection on lived experience

This suggests a review of session timings may further enhance the learning experience.

Ensuring Content Remains Distinctive

One respondent questioned whether the training provided sufficient additional value beyond previous learning.

Whilst this was not a widely shared view, it highlights the importance of ensuring that Second-Time Adopter Training remains clearly differentiated from initial adopter preparation training and addresses the specific needs of experienced adopters.

8 | Compliments & Complaints (2025–2026)

Overview

Formal compliments and complaints provide an additional source of feedback regarding service quality, responsiveness and the experiences of those accessing services. They can provide valuable insight into both areas of good practice and opportunities for service improvement.

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, the Recruitment and Assessment Team received:

Feedback Type	Number
Compliments	0
Complaints	0

Whilst no formal compliments were submitted during 2025–2026, engagement activity generated **65 complimentary comments** about the Recruitment and Assessment Team, particularly regarding the quality of social worker support, preparation provided and training delivery.

Context and Analysis

The Recruitment and Assessment Team supports prospective adopters during the earliest stages of their adoption journey, from initial enquiry through to approval. At this stage, adopters are often focused on progressing through assessment, training and panel processes, with many not yet having experienced family finding, matching or placement.

As a result, feedback about the Recruitment and Assessment Team is more commonly provided through engagement and evaluation activities than through formal compliments or complaints procedures. This is reflected within the high level of participation across the team's engagement activity during 2025–2026, where **67 responses were received across three consultation activities**, providing a substantial evidence base regarding adopter experiences.

It is also recognised that compliments submitted later in the adoption journey may reflect the contributions of multiple teams and individuals across the Adoption Collaborative. Positive experiences of recruitment, preparation and assessment may therefore be captured within broader compliments about the adoption journey rather than being attributed solely to the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Similarly, the absence of formal complaints should not be interpreted as indicating that citizens have experienced no challenges. Rather, it may suggest that concerns raised during the process were addressed through ongoing communication, support and relationship-based practice before escalating to the formal complaints process.

Supporting Evidence from Engagement Activity

Although no formal compliments were received, feedback gathered through engagement activity provides strong evidence of positive experiences and high levels of satisfaction.

Across the Adopter Questionnaire and training evaluations, respondents consistently described:

- Positive and supportive relationships with social workers;
- High-quality training and preparation;
- Clear communication and information sharing;
- Feeling informed, prepared and supported throughout the process.

Comments included:
"She has gone above and beyond."

"We felt we struck gold."

"The content was really spot on and delivery was second to none."

"I have had a really positive experience from beginning to end."

Summary

These findings demonstrate that many of the strengths that might otherwise be reflected within a formal compliment have been captured through engagement activity.

Although no formal compliments or complaints were received in relation to the Recruitment and Assessment Team during the 2025–2026 reporting period.

However, feedback gathered through the team's engagement activities provides strong evidence of positive experiences across recruitment, preparation and assessment services. The absence of complaints, alongside consistently positive engagement findings, suggests prospective adopters generally experienced the service as supportive, informative and professionally delivered.

The team will continue to encourage feedback through both formal and informal routes to ensure service users have opportunities to share positive experiences, raise concerns and contribute to ongoing service development.

9 Continuous Improvement: You Said, We Did

A key strength identified throughout the 2025–2026 reporting period is the Recruitment and Assessment Team's commitment to listening to feedback and using learning to inform practice. Feedback gathered through engagement activity demonstrates that many aspects of the service are highly valued by prospective adopters. Equally, the findings provide opportunities to refine and strengthen specific areas of service delivery.

Whilst engagement activity for this team did not include individual action tracking in the same way as the Adoption Support Team's check-in processes, the feedback received provides clear evidence of how the service can continue to evolve in response to the experiences of prospective adopters.

What Prospective Adopters Told Us

Prospective adopters valued hearing from people with lived experience

Feedback from both the Preparation to Adopt Training and Second-Time Adopter Training highlighted the significant impact of hearing directly from adopters sharing their experiences.

Comments included:
"Listening to a second-time adopter and their journey through it."
"The chance to meet an adoptive parent."
"I would have liked to hear from someone with adult adopted children."

What We Will Do

- Continue to incorporate lived experience within training programmes.
- Explore opportunities to broaden the range of lived experience speakers included within training and preparation activities.
- Consider additional opportunities for adopters and adopted adults to contribute to learning and development sessions where appropriate.

Prospective adopters valued peer learning and networking opportunities

Many respondents highlighted the benefits of meeting others who were at a similar stage of the adoption journey.

Comments included:
"Speaking to other people going through the same thing."
"I also made some friends along the way."
"Group work was great and a good opportunity to meet other adopters."

What We Will Do

- Continue to incorporate group discussion and reflection exercises within training programmes.
- Maintain opportunities for peer interaction and shared learning.
- Explore additional opportunities for prospective adopters to build supportive connections throughout their adoption journey.

Some adopters experienced duplication between Information Evenings and training

A small number of respondents felt there was some overlap between information provided during the Information Evening and Preparation to Adopt Training.

Comments included:
"Day 1 was a little repetitive to the introduction evening."
"There was significant overlap with content on day 1 and the information evening we attended."

What We Will Do

- Review content delivered across Information Evenings and Preparation to Adopt Training.
- Ensure information remains complementary whilst avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- Continue to provide prospective adopters with sufficient information at each stage without compromising preparation.

Some adopters identified challenges with documentation and accessibility

Several respondents highlighted difficulties with:

- Mobile phone compatibility
- Electronic templates
- Completing documentation on different devices

Comments included:
"The documents were not accessible for use on a mobile phone."
"The templates were difficult to work from."

What We Will Do

- Review applicant documentation and templates.
- Consider opportunities to improve accessibility and usability across different devices.
- Explore options for streamlining documentation where possible.

Training venues and learning environments could be improved

A small number of participants raised comments regarding:

- Seating comfort
- Room temperature
- Break arrangements
- Timing of sessions

Comments included:
"Comfier chairs."
"The room and seats are so uncomfortable."
"Maybe add an hour with an extra break."

What We Will Do

- Continue to review venue suitability and participant feedback following each training programme.
- Consider environmental factors when planning future training events.
- Maintain a balance between delivering comprehensive content and ensuring participant wellbeing throughout sessions.

Maintaining What Works Well

Whilst engagement activity has identified opportunities for improvement, the findings also demonstrate several areas of consistently strong practice that should continue to be maintained and developed.

These include:

- High-quality, relationship-based social work practice.
- Clear communication throughout the adopter journey.
- Strong preparation for Adoption Panel.
- Effective delivery of trauma-informed and therapeutic parenting training.
- Opportunities for peer learning and reflection.
- High levels of participant satisfaction with training provision.

Feedback from prospective adopters consistently highlights the positive impact of these aspects of the service and reinforces the importance of maintaining these strengths.

10

Engagement Opportunities and Future Development

The Recruitment and Assessment Team has achieved strong levels of engagement during the 2025–2026 reporting period, with an overall response rate of 67% across the three core engagement activities. The findings provide a rich source of feedback and demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with the support, training and assessment processes delivered by the service.
Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, analysis of engagement activity has identified several opportunities to further enhance the experience of prospective adopters and strengthen service delivery.

Expanding Lived Experience Opportunities

A consistent theme across the Preparation to Adopt Training, Adopter Questionnaire and Second-Time Adopter Training was the value participants placed on hearing from individuals with lived experience of adoption.
Prospective adopters described these contributions as informative, insightful and reassuring, particularly when exploring the realities of family life following adoption.

Comments included:
"Listening to a second-time adopter and their journey through it."
"The chance to meet an adoptive parent."
"Having a speaker who is an adoptee."

Participants expressed an interest in hearing from a wider range of lived experience perspectives, including:

- Adoptive parents at different stages of their journey
- Adopted adults
- Siblings within adoptive families
- Families who have adopted more than one child

This presents an opportunity to further enrich training programmes and provide prospective adopters with a broader understanding of adoption experiences.

Reviewing Learning Across the Adopter Journey

Feedback indicates that adopters generally found the information provided throughout the process useful and informative. However, a small number of respondents highlighted similarities between content delivered during Information Evenings and Preparation to Adopt Training.

Comments included:
"Day 1 was a little repetitive to the Information Evening we attended."
"There was significant overlap with content on day 1 and the Information Evening."

These comments suggest an opportunity to review how information is delivered across different stages of the adopter journey to ensure that each stage builds upon previous learning whilst minimising unnecessary repetition.

Any review should maintain the balance between reinforcing key concepts and introducing new learning at appropriate stages.

Improving Accessibility of Documentation

Feedback from the Adopter Questionnaire highlighted some challenges relating to the accessibility and usability of documents and templates used throughout the assessment process.

Examples included:

- Difficulty completing documents on mobile devices
- Challenges navigating templates
- Variations in compatibility between different operating systems

Comments included:
"The documents were not accessible for use on a mobile phone."
"The templates were difficult to work from."

Although these issues were raised by a minority of respondents, similar themes have emerged across consecutive reporting periods, suggesting an opportunity to review documentation formats and consider whether improvements could enhance the user experience for prospective adopters.

Maintaining Opportunities for Peer Learning

One of the most consistently positive themes across engagement activity was the value of peer interaction.

Participants highlighted the benefits of:

- Group discussions
- Shared experiences
- Learning from different perspectives
- Developing informal support networks

Comments included:
"Speaking to other people going through the same thing."
"Group work was great and a good opportunity to meet other adopters."
"Meeting people."

These findings reinforce the importance of continuing to create opportunities for prospective adopters to connect and learn from one another throughout the recruitment and assessment process.

Training Environment and Delivery

Training evaluations identified a small number of practical suggestions relating to the learning environment and course delivery.
Areas highlighted included:

- Seating comfort
- Venue suitability
- Timing of breaks
- Session pacing

Comments included:
"Comfier chairs."
"The room and seats were uncomfortable."
"Maybe add an hour with an extra break."

While these comments were relatively minor in comparison to the overwhelmingly positive feedback received, they present opportunities to enhance participant comfort and engagement during training events.

Continuing to Strengthen Engagement

The strong response rates achieved during 2025–2026 provide confidence that the views of prospective adopters are being captured effectively. However, there remains an opportunity to continue strengthening engagement by:

- Maintaining high response rates across all evaluation activities
- Encouraging feedback from a wider range of adopters
- Continuing to embed feedback into service development
- Demonstrating how engagement activity informs improvements over time

The adoption journey is often highly personal and reflective, and ensuring that adopters continue to feel heard throughout the process will remain an important aspect of the team's quality assurance and service development approach.

11

Conclusion

This report provides a comprehensive overview of engagement activity undertaken by the Recruitment and Assessment Team during the 2025–2026 reporting period, bringing together feedback from prospective adopters at key stages of their adoption journey.

A total of **67 responses** were received across three core engagement activities, representing an overall response rate of **67%**. Engagement was particularly strong within the Preparation to Adopt Training, where a response rate of **90%** was achieved, alongside a significant increase in participation within the Second-Time Adopter Training evaluation when compared to the previous reporting period.

The findings present a consistently positive picture of a service that is supporting prospective adopters effectively throughout the recruitment and assessment process. Across all engagement activities, respondents described experiences that were informative, supportive and professionally delivered. Prospective adopters consistently reported feeling well prepared for each stage of the process and valued the quality of information, guidance and training provided.
One of the strongest themes emerging from the feedback was the impact of relationship-based practice. Assessing social workers were frequently described as supportive, knowledgeable, approachable and empathetic, with many respondents identifying these relationships as a key factor in helping them navigate what is often a deeply reflective and emotionally demanding journey.

Training continues to be a significant strength of the service. Participants consistently highlighted the value of learning about trauma, attachment, therapeutic parenting and PACE, as well as the opportunity to learn alongside other prospective adopters. The findings demonstrate that training not only increases knowledge and understanding but also helps adopters develop confidence and preparedness for future parenting.

The report also highlights the importance of lived experience contributions. Feedback from both first-time and second-time adopters reinforced the value of hearing directly from people who have experienced adoption, with many participants identifying this as one of the most impactful aspects of training. This presents a valuable opportunity for further development as the service continues to evolve.

Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, several areas for continued improvement were identified, including:

- Reviewing opportunities to reduce duplication of information across different stages of the adopter journey.
- Improving the accessibility and usability of electronic documents and templates.
- Considering venue and environmental factors within training delivery.
- Expanding opportunities to incorporate a wider range of lived experience perspectives.

The absence of formal complaints during the reporting period, alongside the positive feedback gathered through engagement activity, suggests that prospective adopters generally experienced the service as supportive, responsive and effective. Equally, the feedback received demonstrates a service that remains open to reflection and committed to learning from the experiences of those it supports.

Overall, the findings evidence a Recruitment and Assessment Team that is delivering a high-quality service, successfully preparing prospective adopters for the realities of adoption and maintaining a strong commitment to continuous improvement. Through ongoing engagement, reflection and service development, the team is well placed to continue supporting prospective adopters to provide stable, nurturing and lifelong homes for children who require adoption.

Vale of Glamorgan Council
Social Services

Adoption Support Engagement Report

Published: 2026

Report Approval	
Report Approved By:	
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1

Introduction

The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative provides a regional adoption service across partner local authorities, delivering a range of adoption support services to children, adoptive families and birth families.

This report presents a single, consolidated overview of engagement activity undertaken by the Adoption Support Team between April 2025 and March 2026. It brings together findings from multiple sources of feedback, including adopters, birth families, children and parents, to provide a holistic assessment of service delivery, experiences and outcomes.

Unlike previous years, where engagement activity was reported separately, this report adopts an integrated approach. This enables a clearer understanding of cross-cutting themes, improves analysis of service strengths and areas for development, and supports identification of patterns, trends and overall impact across the service.

Where appropriate, findings from this reporting period have been considered alongside data from 2024–2025 in order to understand changes in engagement, identify emerging or continuing themes, and assess evidence of service development over time.

The purpose of this report is to understand the experiences of those accessing adoption support services, identify areas of effective practice and positive outcomes, highlight areas for development, and demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning and service improvement. It reflects the service's ongoing commitment to listening to the voices of children, families and individuals, embedding their feedback into practice and service delivery to ensure a responsive, strengths-based and person-centred approach.

About the Adoption Support Team

The Adoption Support Team forms a key part of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative, providing post-adoption support to children, adoptive families and birth families across the region.

The team delivers a wide range of services designed to promote stability, wellbeing and positive outcomes for adopted children and their families. This includes therapeutic and emotional support, life story work, support with contact arrangements such as Letterbox, training and group-based interventions, and access to specialist services where required. The team also undertakes intermediary work, including supporting individuals seeking information about their adoption and facilitating reconnection with birth relatives where appropriate. Support is tailored to the individual needs of families and is delivered through a combination of direct work, group activities and multi-agency collaboration. The team works closely with partners, including education, health and specialist therapeutic providers, to ensure a coordinated and effective response to the often complex and evolving needs of those individuals and families involved in adoption.

Central to the team's approach is a commitment to relationship-based practice, early identification of need and ongoing support, recognising that adoption is a lifelong journey and that support requirements may change over time.

2 Engagement Overview

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, the Adoption Support Team utilised a range of engagement methods to capture the experiences and views of those accessing services. This included adopters, birth families, children and young people, and parents at different stages of their support journey. The approach reflects a commitment to gathering both quantitative and qualitative feedback to inform service development and continuous improvement.

A total of 46 evaluative responses were received across core engagement activities during the reporting period. An additional one response from a young person aged 12–18 was received outside of the reporting period and has been included for contextual reference where appropriate.

Engagement activity included the following:

Engagement Activity	Number of Responses
Adopters Check-in	19
Birth Family Check-in	6
Adoption Support Evaluation	16
Children's Evaluation (Ages 7-11)	2
Children's Evaluation (Ages 12-18)	1*
Parent Evaluation (Beginning of Support)	1
Parent Evaluation (Following Support)	2

** The single response for children aged 12–18 relates to the previous reporting period (2024–2025) and is included for contextual reference only.*

The data highlights that engagement was strongest with adopters and individuals accessing direct support services during 2025–2026, where feedback mechanisms are embedded within service delivery. These methods produced a richer dataset, including both outcome-focused and experience-based information.

Lower levels of engagement were evident among children and young people. Engagement with birth families was also comparatively lower; however, this is likely reflective of the sensitive and often complex nature of gathering feedback from this group, rather than an indication of limited need or involvement.

The range of engagement activity undertaken this year demonstrates a continued shift towards a more continuous and multi-method approach compared to 2024–2025. This has enabled the service to capture feedback at different points in the support journey, although it has also resulted in smaller response volumes across individual engagement streams.

Overall, the engagement profile provides a meaningful evidence base from which to identify key themes, understand the impact of support services, and highlight areas for further development, particularly in relation to increasing participation and ensuring that all voices are consistently represented.

3 Comparison with 24-25 Engagement

This section compares engagement activity and feedback from the current reporting period (2025–2026) with available data from the previous reporting period (2024–2025), in order to identify changes in engagement patterns, themes and areas of development.

3.1 Engagement Levels and Approach

In 2024–2025, engagement activity was more heavily centred on **individual consultation exercises**, such as the Adopter Check-In, which achieved:

- **40 responses from 129 surveys issued**
- An overall **31% response rate**

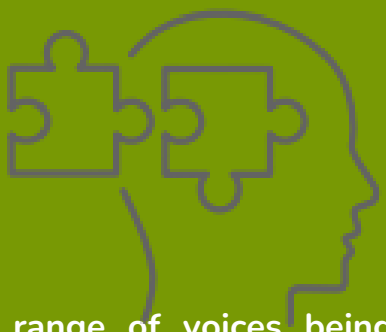
In contrast, the 2025–2026 reporting period reflects a **broader and more integrated approach to engagement**, with feedback gathered across multiple touchpoints, including:

- Check-ins
- Evaluations following support
- Children and parent feedback
- Ongoing service-based engagement

A total of **46 evaluative responses** were received during 2025–2026.

Key Observations

- Engagement is now **more distributed across different activities**, rather than concentrated in a single survey
- This reflects a move towards **continuous engagement embedded within service delivery**
- While this approach provides **richer, more varied insight**, it can result in:
  - Lower response numbers within individual engagement tools
  - Greater complexity when comparing overall response rates year-on-year



3.2 Engagement Profile

The current reporting period demonstrates a **wider range of voices being captured**, including:

- Adopters
- Birth families
- Children and young people
- Parents at different stages of support

In comparison, 2024–2025 engagement was more heavily weighted towards adopter feedback, with less evidence of feedback from other groups.

Key Observations

- There has been a clear shift towards a more **inclusive and diverse engagement model**

- Despite this, engagement remains:
  - **Strongest among adopters and individuals receiving direct support**
  - More limited among:
    - Children and young people
    - Birth families (noting sensitivity)

3.3 Feedback Themes and Service Experience

Comparison of qualitative feedback across both reporting periods highlights a number of **consistent themes**, including:

Positive Experiences

- Families continue to report:
  - Children are **settled, thriving and integrated into family life**
  - Adoption as a **positive and rewarding experience**

Ongoing Challenges

- Both years highlight:
  - Behavioural, emotional and developmental challenges
  - The long-term impact of trauma

Need for Continued Support

- Across both periods, there is consistent evidence that:
  - Families value support
  - Many require **ongoing or additional input at different stages**

Developments in 2025–2026

The current reporting period provides **stronger evidence of outcomes and impact**, particularly through:

- Adoption Support Evaluations
- Parent evaluations (before and after support)

These demonstrate:

- **Improved emotional wellbeing**
- Increased confidence in parenting
- Strengthened family relationships
- Positive impact of:
  - Therapeutic services
  - Life story work
  - Specialist interventions

This represents a development from 2024–2025, where feedback was more focused on **experience rather than measurable outcomes.**

3.4 Responsiveness and Service Learning

A key development in 2025–2026 is the **clearer recording of actions taken in response to feedback**, particularly within:

- Adopter Check-In
- Birth Family Check-In

This demonstrates:

- A more structured approach to:
  - **Responding to concerns**
  - **Following up with service users**

- Stronger evidence of:
  - **Continuous improvement and learning**

In comparison, while 2024–2025 feedback identified strengths and challenges, there was **less explicit evidence of follow-up actions linked to individual responses.**

3.5 Areas for Continued Development

Across both reporting periods, some consistent challenges remain:

- Engagement with:
  - Children and young people
  - Harder-to-reach groups

- Ensuring:
  - Consistency in communication
  - Early access to support

In addition, the 2025–2026 data highlights new areas for improvement, including:

- Strengthening evaluation of:
  - Group-based services

- Addressing gaps in:
  - Student engagement

- Ensuring:
  - Feedback is captured across all service areas

Summary

Comparison between 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 demonstrates a clear progression towards a more **integrated, inclusive and outcome-focused approach to engagement.**

Key improvements include:

- A broader range of voices being captured
- Stronger evidence of **service impact and outcomes**
- Clearer demonstration of **responsive practice and follow-up actions**

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of:

- Continuing to strengthen engagement with underrepresented groups
- Embedding consistent evaluation across all service areas
- Maintaining a proactive approach to support and continuous improvement

4 Key Themes Across Engagement

Analysis of feedback across all engagement activity undertaken during 2025–2026 identifies a number of consistent and cross-cutting themes. These themes reflect both the strengths of the Adoption Support Service and areas for ongoing development, and are echoed across adopters, parents, children and birth families.

4.1 Positive Outcomes and Family Stability

Across all engagement streams, there is strong evidence that adoption is providing:

- **Stable, nurturing family environments**
- Children who are:
  - Settling well
  - Developing emotionally and socially
  - Building secure attachments

Adopters and parents consistently described:

- Children as **thriving and integrated into family life**
- A strong sense of:
  - Belonging
  - Security
  - Emotional connection

Children's feedback further supports this, with responses indicating:

- They feel **safe**
- They are able to **talk to trusted adults**
- They feel **understood by parents and peers**

This represents a significant strength of the service and reflects the positive long-term impact of adoption and post-adoption support.

4.2 The Complex and Ongoing Nature of Support Needs

Despite many positive experiences, feedback consistently highlights that:

- Adoption journeys are often **complex and evolving**
- Families may experience:
  - Emotional and behavioural challenges
  - Trauma-related needs
  - Neurodevelopmental differences

- Needs can:
  - **Change over time**
  - Require **different types and levels of intervention**

Both adopters and parents described:

- Periods of stability alongside periods of difficulty
- The need for:
  - Ongoing guidance
  - Specialist and therapeutic input

Birth family feedback also reflects complexity, particularly in relation to:

- Emotional impact of adoption
- Concerns about children's wellbeing
- The need for understanding and support around contact

This highlights that adoption support is not time-limited, but requires a **flexible, responsive and long-term approach.**

4.3 The Value of Relationship-Based Practice

A strong and consistent theme across all feedback is the importance of:

- **Skilled, compassionate and consistent practitioners**

Individuals described staff as:

- Supportive
- Understanding
- Professional
- Knowledgeable

Feedback emphasised the value of:

- Building **trusted relationships**
- Having access to:
  - Clear guidance
  - Reassurance
  - Continuity of support

This is evident across:

- Adoption Support Evaluations
- Parent feedback
- Contact and intermediary work

The quality of practitioner relationships is a key strength and is central to the positive experiences reported. This theme was further reinforced through compliments received during the reporting period, with individuals and professionals consistently describing staff as supportive, compassionate, knowledgeable and responsive.

4.4 Positive Impact of Targeted and Specialist Support

There is clear evidence that **targeted interventions make a meaningful difference**, including:

- Therapeutic services
- Life story work
- Training and group-based support
- Support with contact and intermediary services

Parents and adopters reported improvements in:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Behaviour and regulation
- Understanding of their child's needs
- Family relationships

Children's feedback also highlights the importance of:

- Activities and groups (e.g. Connected)
- Opportunities for:
  - Peer interaction
  - Social development

This demonstrates that:

- Structured, targeted support is effective in achieving **positive outcomes**

4.5 Importance of Early and Proactive Support

A key learning theme across multiple engagement streams is the importance of:

- **Early intervention**
- Moving from **reactive to proactive support**

Some parents reported:

- Delays in accessing support
- Significant stress prior to receiving intervention

Feedback highlights that earlier support could:

- Prevent escalation of difficulties
- Reduce family stress
- Improve long-term outcomes

This is one of the most significant areas for service development and is consistently evidenced across feedback.

4.6 Communication and Clarity

Communication is a recurring theme, with both strengths and areas for development identified.

Strengths:

- Many individuals reported:
  - Clear explanations
  - Accessible staff
  - Good ongoing communication

Areas for Development:

- Inconsistent communication experiences, particularly reported by:
  - Birth families (e.g. delays, lack of updates)

- Need for clearer guidance around:
  - Processes (e.g. Letterbox arrangements)
  - Expectations and timelines

This highlights the importance of:

- Consistency
- Transparency
- Accessible information

4.7 Engagement and Inclusion of All Voices

The data highlights variation in engagement across different groups.
Stronger engagement observed with:

- Adopters
- Parents receiving support

Lower engagement observed with:

- Children and young people
- Birth families (noting sensitivity)
- Students (no responses recorded)

This reflects:

- Practical and emotional barriers to engagement
- Limitations of traditional feedback methods for some groups

There is a clear opportunity to:

- Develop more **inclusive and flexible engagement approaches**
- Ensure all voices are:
  - Heard
  - Represented in service development

4.8 Responsiveness and Commitment to Improvement

A key strength identified within this reporting period is the service's **demonstrated responsiveness to feedback.**

This is particularly evident through:

- Actions recorded within:
  - Adopter Check-Ins
  - Birth Family Check-Ins

Examples include:

- Follow-up contact
- Referrals to appropriate services
- Signposting to support and training

This demonstrates:

- A commitment to:
  - Listening
  - Acting on feedback
  - Continuous service improvement

This represents a notable development in comparison to previous reporting approaches and strengthens the service's quality assurance framework.

5

Adopter Check-In

(2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

- 19 responses received

Key Findings

1. Overall Experiences Since Adoption

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

- **15/19 responses (79%)** described experiences as:
  - Positive
  - Thriving
  - Settled

- **4/19 responses** (21%) reflected:
  - Ongoing challenges
  - More complex journeys

Illustrative feedback:
"They are an absolute joy and we couldn't be happier... they have made the family complete."
"Amazing, we are a thriving young family."
"Things have been going really well... thriving every day."

This demonstrates strong evidence of:

- Stable placements
- Positive attachment
- Integration into family life

2. Challenges and Complexity

Despite positivity, **a minority of adopters (approx. 20%)** reported:

- Periods of:
  - Emotional difficulty
  - Uncertainty
  - High support needs

Illustrative feedback:
"A rollercoaster but gradually settling."
"The whole process was awful... no communication at all."

One response highlighted **significant complexity**, including:

- Neurodevelopmental needs (ADHD and ASD)
- Multi-agency involvement
- Long-term therapeutic requirements

This reinforces:

- Adoption support is **ongoing and evolving**
- Some families require **specialist input over time**

3. Need for Further Support

Responses indicate:

- **10/19 (53%)** did **not require support at this time**
- **9/19 (47%)** either:
  - Wanted support
  - Were unsure but open to support

Requests included:

- Life Story Work guidance
- Emotional and therapeutic support
- General check-ins

Quotes:
"Support on introducing life story work."
"Sometimes it would be useful to check in with someone..."
"Possible emotional support... very up and down."

4. Preparation and Life Journey Materials

- 17/19 (89%) reported preparation was sufficient
- 18/19 (95%) received both:
  - Life story book
  - Later life letter

However:
- 1 response reported incomplete materials

5. Contact Arrangements

- 100% of respondents confirmed contact arrangements in place
- Predominantly:
  - Letterbox contact

- A small number reported:
  - Direct contact with siblings/birth family

6. Mailing List and Communication

- Majority reported being on the mailing list
- 3–4 adopters requested inclusion, suggesting:
  - A gap in communication reach

7. Actions and Responsiveness (Key Strength)

All responses were reviewed and actioned where required.
Examples of actions:

- Referral to duty team
  - Emotional support needs identified

- Signposting
  - Life Story Work workshops

- Recording dissatisfaction
  - Feedback escalated for service learning

Impact

This demonstrates:

- Immediate response to need
- No concerns left unaddressed
- Feedback informing practice

6 Birth Family Check-In (2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

- 6 responses received

Key Findings

1. Understanding of Contact Arrangements

- **4/6 (67%)** reported understanding contact arrangements
- **2/6 (33%)** were unsure or lacked clarity

2. Communication and Delivery Issues

- **3/6 (50%)** reported issues with:
  - Receiving letters
  - Updates about their child

Quotes:
"I didn't receive a letter last year..."
"They don't give updates on my children much..."
"I email... but do not hear back."

3. Need for Clearer Guidance

- **4/6 (67%)** requested clearer information about:
  - What they can include in letters
  - Frequency of contact
  - Process expectations

Quotes:
"Explanation in detail how the process works."
"Clarification on what I can and can't say..."
"How often can I write to them?"

4. Support Needs

- **5/6 (83%)** reported **no formal support received**
- Several described unmet expectations

Quotes:
"Was told I'd get grief counselling... but that never happened."
"Been chasing up for support... no response."

5. Actions Taken

- **4/6 responses (67%)** required referral to Letterbox team

Actions included:
- Follow-up contact
- Process clarification
- Support signposting

Summary

Feedback highlights:
- Strong need for:
  - Clear communication
  - Reliable processes
- Importance of:
  - Trauma-informed support

7 | Adoption Support Evaluation (2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

- 16 responses received

Key Findings

1. Satisfaction with Support

- 14/16 (88%) reported support fully met expectations
- 2/16 (12%):
  - Partly met or unsure

2. Satisfaction with Information

- 13/16 (81%) fully satisfied
- 3/16 (19%) partly satisfied

3. Practitioner Quality (Major Strength)

Consistently highlighted across nearly all responses (90%+)

Quotes:
"Kind, understanding, practical and sympathetic."
"Explained everything fully… always there."
"Very supportive and professional."

4. Outcomes and Impact

- 100% of respondents reported at least some positive outcome

Including:
- Improved wellbeing
- Better understanding
- Successful contact or reconnection

Quotes:
"The support was far greater than I expected."
"Helped us move forward with confidence."

5. Group-Based Support (Mixed Feedback)

- Approx. 3/16 (19%) highlighted:
  - Low attendance
  - Accessibility issues

Quote:
"Often just the same people... could be promoted more."

Summary

Strong evidence of:
- High-quality practice
- Positive outcomes
- Excellent practitioner relationships

8 | Children's Evaluation (7–11)

(2025–2026)

Engagement Overview

- 2 responses

Key Findings

1. Experience of Support

- 2/2 (100%):
  - Receive support
  - Found it helpful

2. Safety and Relationships

- 2/2 (100%):
  - Feel safe
  - Feel understood
  - Can talk to parents

3. Group Engagement

- 2/2 (100%) attend Connected

Quotes:
"I enjoy going… to meet my friends."
"I like to do the activities and have fun."

4. Barriers

- 1/2 (50%) unable to access desired activity

Quote:
“I would have liked to go to the sports group but there wasn’t space.”

Summary

Small sample but:

- Strongly positive experiences
- Clear value of group provision

9 Parent Evaluation

(Beginning of Support)

Engagement Overview

- 1 response

Key Findings

Baseline shows:

- Strength in:
  - Relationships
  - Trust

- Challenges in:
  - Future concerns
  - managing family life

Desired Outcomes

- Behaviour regulation
- Emotional wellbeing
- Social interaction

Summary

Provides useful baseline context for comparison with post-support outcomes

10 Parent Evaluation

(Following Support)

Engagement Overview

- **2 responses**

Key Findings

1. Satisfaction

- **2/2 (100%) very satisfied**

2. Outcomes

- **2/2 reported significant improvements**

Including:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Trust
- Behaviour

3. Impact of Support

Quotes:
"Helped our child to truly trust us."
"Really helped them understand their situation."

4. Key Development Theme

- **1/2 (50%) strongly highlighted need for earlier support**

Quote:
"We went through horrendous stress before we received support."

Summary

Clear evidence of:

- Impact and effectiveness
- Importance of early intervention

11

Compliments & Complaints

Overview

Compliments and complaints provide an additional source of feedback about the quality and impact of services. Unlike surveys and evaluations, these are submitted voluntarily and often reflect experiences that have had a particularly significant impact on those involved.

During the 2025–2026 reporting period, the Adoption Support Team received:

Feedback Type	Number
Compliments	3
Complaints	1
Total	4

Whilst the volume of feedback is small, the compliments and complaint received reflect themes that are consistent with those identified elsewhere within this report.

Compliments

Three compliments were received relating to Adoption Support Team services.

Relationship-Based Practice

A recurring theme across compliments was the positive impact of supportive, compassionate and relationship-based practice.

One individual commented:

"You really helped give me clarity of the situation... I can never thank you enough for all your help and kindness towards me."

This reflects findings from the Adoption Support Evaluation, where individuals consistently highlighted the value of practitioners who were approachable, empathetic and knowledgeable.

Training and Support Provision

Positive feedback was also received regarding training delivery.

One professional described a training session as:

"The best training they have had to date... succinct, to the point and full of empathy."

This demonstrates the value and impact of specialist training and reinforces the importance of continuing to provide learning opportunities for adoptive families and professionals.

Letterbox Support

Positive feedback was also received regarding support provided through the Letterbox service.

One individual stated:

"Thank you again for all your help and support... You have been a fantastic addition to the letterbox team."

This reflects the importance of responsive support within what can often be an emotionally complex area of adoption practice.

Complaint

The Adoption Support Team received one formal complaint during the reporting period.

The complaint related to the management of direct contact arrangements following an adoptive placement. The family reported concerns regarding:

- Delays in progressing agreed actions
- Communication between services
- Clarity regarding responsibilities
- Timeliness of support around direct contact arrangements

The complaint highlighted the challenges experienced by adopters when managing complex relationships with members of a child's birth family and the impact this can have on family life.

Whilst the complaint identified areas where the family felt unsupported, it also acknowledged positive support received from individual practitioners during the process.

Learning Identified

The issues raised within the complaint mirror themes identified elsewhere within this report, particularly:

- The importance of timely communication
- The need for clarity regarding processes and responsibilities
- The value of proactive support, particularly where direct contact arrangements are complex

The complaint has provided an opportunity for reflection and learning and has reinforced the importance of ensuring families receive timely support and clear communication when navigating ongoing contact arrangements.

Summary

The compliments and complaint received during 2025–2026 support the wider findings of this report.

Compliments reinforce key strengths already identified through engagement activity, particularly:

- Relationship-based practice
- Professional expertise
- Training and support provision
- Responsive support for families

The complaint highlights opportunities to strengthen communication and coordination in complex cases and provides further evidence of the importance of proactive support and clear expectations.

Taken together, this feedback demonstrates a service that values learning from both positive and negative experiences and remains committed to continuous improvement.

11

Continuous Improvement: You Said, We Did

A key strength identified within the 2025–2026 reporting period is the service's clear commitment to listening to feedback and responding in a meaningful and timely way. Across multiple engagement activities, there is strong evidence that the Adoption Support Team is not only gathering feedback, but actively using it to inform practice, provide support and drive service improvement.

11.1 Acting on Individual Feedback

The inclusion of an **'actions' column** within engagement tools, particularly the Adopter Check-In and Birth Family Check-In, demonstrates a structured and proactive approach to ensuring that feedback results in tangible outcomes.

Actions taken in response to feedback included:

- **Direct follow-up with families**
  - Contacting individuals where support needs or concerns were identified
  - Offering reassurance, guidance or further discussion

- **Referrals and internal escalation**
  - Individuals forwarded to appropriate teams (e.g. duty, Letterbox service)
  - Ensuring that emerging needs were responded to promptly

- **Targeted support and signposting**
  - Referrals to:
    - Life Story Work workshops
    - Therapeutic services
    - Additional support pathways

- **Monitoring dissatisfaction and concerns**
  - Feedback highlighting negative experiences or unmet needs was recorded and acknowledged
  - Used to inform service reflection and improvement

Where no further support was required, responses were appropriately reviewed and closed, ensuring resources were focused where most needed.

11.2 Strengths in Responsive Practice

Feedback across all engagement activity demonstrates several key strengths in how the service responds to need:

- A **person-centred approach**, with support tailored to individual circumstances
- Evidence of **timely intervention**, particularly where needs are identified through feedback
- Strong use of **professional judgement and multi-agency working**
- A clear culture of:
  - Listening
  - Reflecting
  - Acting

This responsiveness is particularly important given the complexity of adoption, where needs can emerge unexpectedly and change over time.

11.3 Learning from Feedback

In addition to responding to individual need, the service is demonstrating an ability to **identify and respond to wider themes emerging from feedback.** Examples include:

- Recognition of the need to:
  - Strengthen **early support and intervention**
  - Improve **communication and clarity**, particularly for birth families
  - Increase **accessibility of services and engagement opportunities**

- Increased awareness of:
  - The importance of **consistent support pathways**
  - The value of **ongoing, rather than time-limited support**

This demonstrates that feedback is being used not only operationally, but also strategically to inform service development.

11.4 Evidence of Impact

The impact of this responsive approach is reflected in:

- High levels of **satisfaction within Adoption Support Evaluation feedback**
- Positive outcomes reported within:
  - Parent evaluations (before and after support)
  - Adopter feedback

- Improved:
  - Emotional wellbeing
  - Confidence of parents and adopters
  - Stability within families

This provides evidence that:

- Feedback is not only being heard but is contributing to **meaningful improvements in outcomes**

11.5 Areas for Continued Development

While there is strong evidence of responsive practice, feedback also highlights opportunities to strengthen consistency in how learning is embedded across the service.

These include:

- Ensuring all engagement activity includes:
  - **Clear mechanisms for capturing and recording actions**
- Strengthening consistency in:
  - **Follow-up communication**
- Expanding the use of feedback to:
  - **Inform wider service planning and evaluation**

There is also an opportunity to further evidence:

- **The longer-term impact of actions taken**, beyond initial response

12 Engagement Gaps & Opportunities for Development

Overview

While the Adoption Support Team has demonstrated a strong commitment to engagement across a range of service areas, analysis of the 2025–2026 data highlights some gaps where feedback was either not captured or participation was limited. These gaps do not reflect a lack of service activity, but rather opportunities to strengthen how engagement is embedded, particularly across group-based provision and with harder-to-reach groups.

12.1 Games Group – Absence of Evaluative Feedback

The Games Group continues to demonstrate clear demand, as evidenced by registration data. However, no evaluative feedback was captured during the reporting period.

This means that:

- The experiences of children and families attending are not currently evidenced
- The impact of the group on outcomes such as wellbeing, social development and engagement cannot be fully assessed

This represents a missed opportunity to:

- Capture the voice of children and young people within a more informal setting
- Evidence the value of group-based provision

Opportunities for development include:

- Embedding simple, accessible feedback mechanisms within sessions (e.g. quick surveys, child-friendly tools)
- Incorporating feedback into routine practice (e.g. end-of-session check-ins)
- Ensuring both qualitative and quantitative data is captured

12.2 Student Check-In – No Responses Recorded

No responses were received for the Student Check-In during the reporting period. This suggests that:

- The current method of engagement may not be effective for this group
- Alternative approaches may be required to capture their experiences

It is important to recognise that students and young people may be:

- Less likely to engage with survey-based approaches
- More responsive to:
  - Informal, relationship-based engagement
  - Flexible and accessible methods

Opportunities for development include:

- Reviewing engagement methods to include:
  - Informal discussions
  - Digital tools or quick-response formats
- Embedding feedback collection within:
  - Ongoing support
  - Existing contact points
- Strengthening practitioner-led engagement

12.3 Engagement with Children and Young People

Although some feedback was received from children aged 7–11, overall engagement remains low.
This reflects:

- Practical challenges related to age and accessibility
- The need for more:
  - Child-friendly
  - Creative
  - Interactive engagement methods

Opportunities include:

- Expanding use of:
  - Visual tools
  - Activity-based feedback
- Building feedback into:
  - Groups and direct work

12.4 Engagement with Birth Families

Engagement with birth families was limited, with 6 responses received.
This must be understood within the context of:

- The sensitive and often emotional nature of adoption for birth families
- Potential barriers to engagement, including:
  - Trauma
  - loss and grief
  - Confidence in services

Despite this, the feedback received was rich and valuable, highlighting the importance of:

- Continuing to seek out and prioritise these voices

12.5 Embedding Consistency in Evaluation

Across the service, there are variations in how feedback is:

- Collected
- Recorded
- Evaluated

While some areas demonstrate strong practice (e.g. use of actions within check-ins), others lack structured evaluation.

Opportunities for development include:

- Ensuring all services include:
  - Built-in evaluation methods
- Strengthening consistency in:
  - Data collection and reporting
- Linking feedback more clearly to:
  - Outcomes and service improvement

13 | Conclusion

This report provides a comprehensive overview of engagement activity undertaken by the Adoption Support Team during the 2025–2026 reporting period, bringing together feedback from a wide range of individuals affected by adoption.

The findings present a consistently positive picture of a service that is:

- Supporting stable and nurturing adoptive families
- Delivering high-quality, relationship-based practice
- Providing meaningful and effective support across a range of needs

Feedback highlights strong outcomes for children and families, including:

- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Increased confidence and understanding
- Strengthened relationships and stability

The report also demonstrates clear evidence of a service that is:

- Listening to feedback
- Responding to individual needs
- Using learning to inform practice and improvement

This is particularly evident through the structured use of follow-up actions and the integration of feedback into service delivery.
At the same time, the findings highlight important areas for continued development. These include:

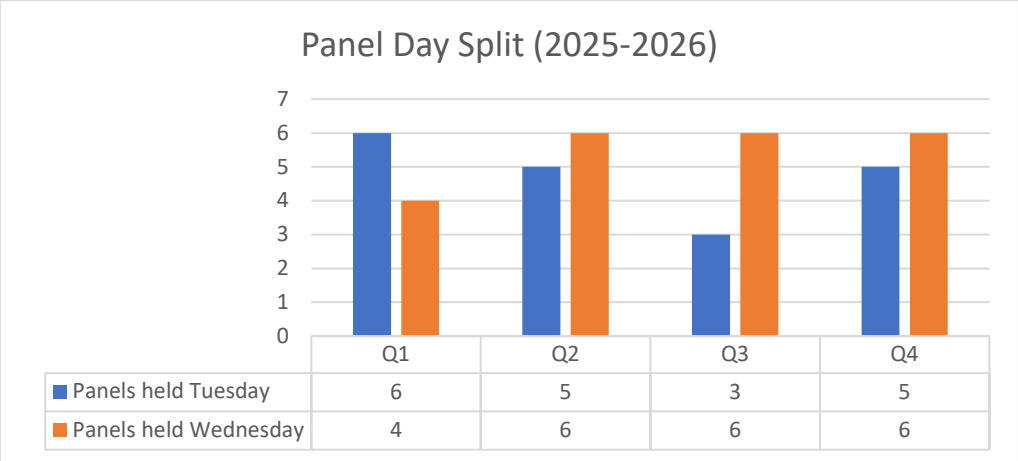
- Strengthening early and proactive support
- Improving consistency in communication and guidance
- Increasing engagement with underrepresented groups
- Embedding evaluation across all areas of provision

Overall, the Adoption Support Team is shown to be delivering a valued, responsive and impactful service, with a clear commitment to continuous improvement and to achieving positive outcomes for children, families and individuals affected by adoption.

Adoption Panel

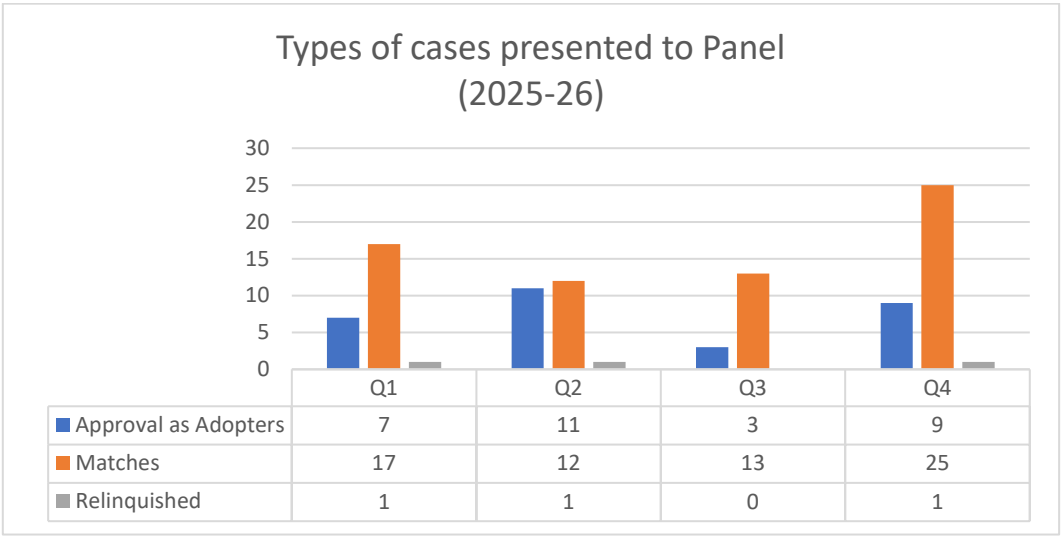
The cases outlined relate to the number presented to the Adoption Panel during 2025-26. These figures will differ slightly from the final approved/matched decisions for the year due to ratifications which may take place as the next financial year commences.

47 Panels were scheduled for the period April 2025 to March 2026 with 41 proceeding. Panels were cancelled where there were no cases scheduled to proceed or where cases were rescheduled to another date.

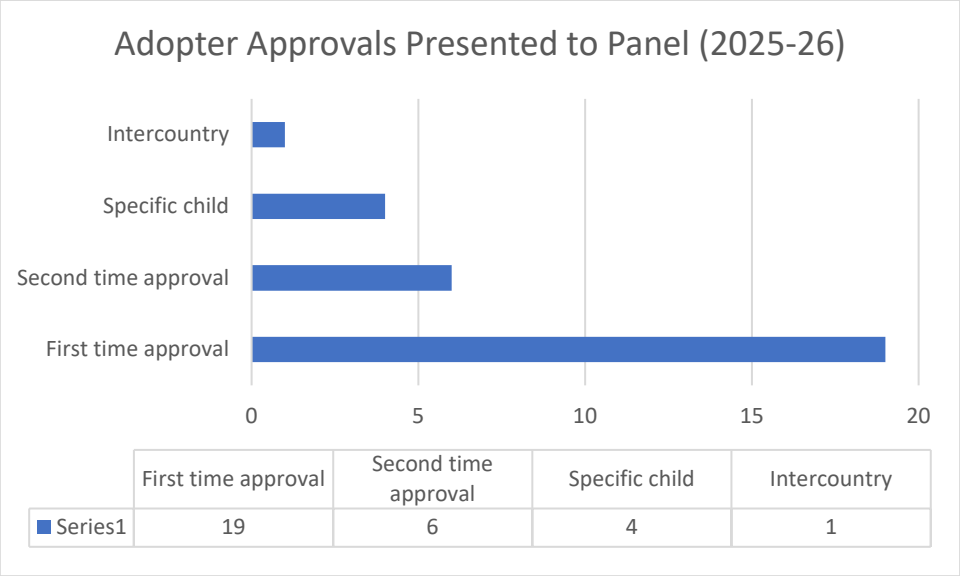


	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Panels held Tuesday	6	5	3	5
Panels held Wednesday	4	6	6	6

100 cases were presented to panel, **30** were for adopter approvals, **67** cases were for matching and there were **3** relinquished cases which require panel recommendation for a should be adopted decision. A breakdown of the matches ratified by local authority is contained within Appendix 1 and a breakdown of adopters approved by local authority is included within Appendix 2.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Approval as Adopters	7	11	3	9
Matches	17	12	13	25
Relinquished	1	1	0	1

Adopters

Of the **30** households which were presented to panel for adopter approval, the below chart reflects the type of approval: