

Inspection Report

Western Bay Adoption Service

This document is also available in Welsh.
Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Cymraeg.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS)¹ between 1 September and 5 September 2025.
- 1.2 CIW reviews local authority social services functions, including functions in relation to adoption, on behalf of Welsh Ministers in accordance with Section 149B of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- 1.3 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 places statutory duties on local authorities to work collaboratively with each other. The primary purpose of these directions is to ensure that effective joint arrangements are in place between local authorities, to ensure consistent and effective adoption services across Wales. Regional Adoption Services across Wales form part of a three-tier structure to provide adoption services across Wales. The three-tier structure forms the National Adoption Services (NAS). Whilst the focus of this inspection is on WBAS, it is clear they benefit from support provided by other structures in the national service.
- 1.4 The WBAS Regional Adoption Collaborative comprises of the following local authorities, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend. Swansea local authority is the host local authority for this region.
- 1.5 The focus of the inspection was on how the service promotes the well-being and safety of children through the provision of permanency with adoptive families, who can safely meet their needs and improve the likelihood of them achieving the best possible outcomes. We evaluated the leadership and governance arrangements that support service delivery, and how effective it is in achieving quality outcomes for children.
- 1.6 We considered the following key questions under relevant headings.

Well-being

- Are children's well-being needs appropriately safeguarded in achieving permanence?
- Is the service provided accessible, safe and responsive to people's needs?

Care and Support

- Do children, birth and adoptive families achieve good outcomes through the provision of support which promotes their overall well-being?

¹ The Western Bay Regional Adoption Collaborative refers to itself as Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) This term will therefore also be used throughout the report.

Leadership and Governance

- Do the leadership and governance arrangements ensure the provision of high-quality services for people?

1.7 Glossary of Terminology and Quantity Definitions See Appendix 2 and 3.

2. Summary of Inspection Findings

- 2.1 WBAS is a regional collaborative formed by Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, and Bridgend local authorities. The service has a central management structure, pooled budget, and shared IT systems enabling coordinated decision-making and consistent delivery of adoption services. Senior leaders from each authority participate in regular management board meetings to oversee strategic direction, resource allocation, and service development, underpinned by a formal partnership agreement.
- 2.2 WBAS applies NAS policies and procedures consistently. The Statement of Purpose (SOP) is reviewed annually and is accessible. Some governance documents require minor updates to ensure alignment with current requirements.
- 2.3 Assessments for prospective adopters are comprehensive, with safeguarding and trauma-informed practice embedded throughout. Adopters feel supported and informed, and quality assurance processes help maintain standards.
- 2.4 Family finding and matching processes prioritise children's needs. Collaborative planning and trauma nurture timelines support positive outcomes. Transition arrangements (the planned process of moving a child from their present carers into their adoptive family) are managed with input from foster carers and adopters.
- 2.5 Adoption support services for children, adopters, and birth families include therapeutic interventions, peer groups, and practical assistance. The adoption support team provides advice and regular check-ins. Families report positive experiences, and there are no waiting lists for support.
- 2.6 Leadership is visible, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The workforce benefits from supervision and professional development. Managers monitor performance and service delivery, with ongoing work to strengthen quality assurance and learning from audits.

- 2.7 Recruitment of prospective adopters is supported by targeted marketing and flexible budgeting, with campaigns delivered in English and Welsh. Recruitment campaigns are shaped by input from the Adopters Marketing Group.
- 2.8 WBAS securely manages and safely stores records, with clear arrangements for access and retention. Embedded systems facilitate efficient file retrieval, and the premises are suitable and meet the needs of the service.
- 2.9 Strengths include therapeutic support, robust assessment and matching, and a skilled workforce. Areas identified for improvement are updating governance documents and improving communication about adoption support services and entitlements.

3. Findings



Well-being

- 3.1 WBAS adopts and implements NAS policies and guidance across its work. Practitioners regularly review these frameworks to ensure consistent practice. The service reviews its SOP annually, setting out the aims, objectives, and standards of WBAS. The SOP supports transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.
- 3.2 The service demonstrates a clear commitment to the Welsh language and accessibility. Practitioners promote the active offer in line with the ²'More Than Just Words' framework and ensures people can access services in their preferred language. Practitioners routinely provide information in Welsh and English, and they offer translation support where needed. Adopters confirm they receive information in their language of choice, and marketing materials are produced bilingually.
- 3.3 Advocacy is embedded in practice. Practitioners actively support children, young people and birth parents to express their views, and ensure these are considered in planning and decision-making. People are engaged in assessing and improving the service through youth groups, support forums and feedback channels. Practitioners gather feedback and use it to shape service delivery, demonstrating a clear commitment to meaningful and inclusive participation.

² More than just words is Welsh Government's strategic framework for promoting the Welsh language in health and social care. A link to the document can be found here: [More than just words \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/more-than-just-words).

- 3.4 The service embeds safeguarding as a shared priority. Practitioners understand their responsibilities, identify and respond to risk confidently, and escalate significant events appropriately. They use accessible policies and procedures, and routinely address safeguarding in supervision, planning, and panel discussions. Disruption meetings are held when needed and share learning across the service. Practitioners maintain a person-centred focus on well-being and safety, applying trauma-informed practice to reflect peoples lived experience.
- 3.5 Assessment of prospective adopters is robust and comprehensive, delivered by an experienced workforce. WBAS follows NAS guidance and uses structured templates to ensure consistency across the region. Practitioners complete assessments in a timely and thorough manner, providing clear analysis of strengths, vulnerabilities and support networks. Quality assurance mechanisms are in place, and managers provide feedback to improve documentation. Adopters report feeling well supported and informed during the process. One adopter commented, *“our experience of WBAS has been nothing but positive, professional, supportive and wonderful. We were kept up to date throughout the process.”*
- 3.6 Training for prospective adopters is reflective of modern adoption practice. Sessions cover key topics including trauma, sibling adoption, contact arrangements and the realities of parenting children with complex needs. A range of professionals deliver training, including psychologists, legal advisors and birth parent support workers. Observed workshops were well-paced and facilitated open discussion. Adopters value the opportunity to reflect on their parenting and understand the impact of early life experiences. While most feedback is positive, a small number of adopters suggested training could include more practical content.
- 3.7 WBAS works in partnership with birth parents through sensitive and flexible approaches. Practitioners demonstrate persistence in engaging birth families and ensuring their views are heard. Birth parents are supported to contribute to life journey materials and are offered facilitated meetings with adopters where appropriate. Birth parents report feeling informed and supported, with one noting, *“the service helps me write to my son... they understand my disabilities and difficulties and help me the best they can.”* A dedicated birth parent support group is in place, and practitioners provide practical assistance such as transport and signposting to other services. **This is good practice.**
- 3.8 WBAS is embedding the Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) framework³ with support from the fostering service. At the time of inspection, two children had

³ [Welsh Early Permanency Framework.pdf](#)

been placed under WEP, with additional prospective adopters progressing through the scheme. Practitioners introduce WEP early in adopter training, and information materials have been developed in collaboration with the Adopters Marketing Group. Panel members have received training on the framework. The framework is not yet fully embedded, and there is a need for more consistent understanding and application among practitioners. **WBAS should continue to embed the WEP framework and ensure a coherent and systematic approach to recording decisions and rationale in care plans, Child's Assessment Reports for Adoption, and Prospective Adopter Reports, in line with the NAS Good Practice Guide.**



Care and Support

- 3.9 The family finding team is proactive and knowledgeable. Practitioners work closely with local authority colleagues, to ensure children's needs are central to decision making. Delegated budget arrangements enable timely decisions about external placements, helping to avoid unnecessary delay. Practitioners remain attentive to children's identity and cultural background and gather information from birth families to inform profiles.
- 3.10 Most matching decisions are thorough, trauma-informed, and child-centred. Practitioners use trauma nurture timelines for every child. For children over three, sibling groups, or those with complex needs, an 'Understanding the Child's Day' session to explore the child's history and experiences is prioritised. Where this is not held, practitioners work with prospective adopters and their social workers to clarify the child's background. Matching is described by practitioners and adopters as collaborative and well explained, with careful analysis and professional advice embedded in practice. Managers chair matching meetings to provide leadership, and regular review by the Regional Adoption Manager (RAM) promotes consistency. Most children are placed without avoidable delay, though a few adopting families report delays or gaps in communication, particularly during practitioner changes or absences.
- 3.11 Practitioners manage transitions by working closely with foster carers, adopters, and other professionals to ensure each move is well prepared and paced according to the child's individual needs. Adopters receive key information about the child's background and daily life, enabling them to provide informed care. Regular reviews track progress and address emerging needs. Both foster carers and adopters report feeling included and supported.

- 3.12 Adoption support plans are developed collaboratively with adopters and relevant professionals, tailored to individual circumstances, and include input from specialists where appropriate. Practitioners review and update support plans regularly.
- 3.13 Life journey work is embedded in planning for children and aligns with the NAS Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide. Practitioners co-produce life journey materials in collaboration with foster carers, birth families, and adopters. Specialist life story workers support practitioners to improve quality and consistency of this work. All life journey work undergoes a robust quality assurance process, with practitioners, managers, and the adoption panel reviewing materials. The WBAS Therapy and Psychology Team also delivers life journey work as part of its multi-disciplinary offer, supporting children's understanding of their backgrounds and identity. **This is good practice.**
- 3.14 Adoption support services are a key strength. The team provides responsive, accessible, and tailored support to meet the needs of children, adopters, and birth families. WBAS has developed a virtual hub and a dedicated life journey/contact hub, enabling families to access advice and support promptly, with clear signposting to appropriate interventions and workshops. A wide range of support groups are available for adopters, birth parents, and young people. Regular check-ins at 12 months and three years' post-adoption help identify emerging needs at an early stage. The youth group and Leaplets sensory playgroup are well regarded by young people and their families, supporting well-being and ensuring their voices are heard. **This is good practice.** However, not all adopters are aware of the full range of adoption support services available, including their entitlement to lifelong support. **WBAS should strengthen communication and written materials to ensure all adopters understand what support is available and how to access it at any stage post-adoption.**
- 3.15 The Psychological and Therapeutic Service delivers a robust, multi-disciplinary model that is proactive, accessible, and responsive. **This is good practice.** Early identification of needs and a flexible approach to support ensures timely interventions, with no waiting lists. Families benefit from a wide range of therapeutic interventions. The service is funded by Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, enabling a substantial and experienced team to deliver support. While all families can access group activities, consultations, and core support, WBAS provides individual therapeutic input directly for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot families. For Bridgend families, this is managed externally, resulting in some variation in access and approach. WBAS works closely with Bridgend to minimise any impact from these differences and ensure all families receive support.

- 3.16 Practitioners focus on the emotional significance of contact for adopted children, birth parents, siblings, and significant others. Training is provided for adopters, and conversations with birth parents address the complexities of contact. Creative and flexible approaches are standard in care planning and reflect current adoption expectations. Practitioners revisit and review contact arrangements to ensure they remain in the child's best interests. Practitioners maintain a focus on the child's experience and emotional safety. **This is good practice.**
- 3.17 WBAS delivers timely and accessible intermediary services that support adopted adults and birth relatives to understand their histories and access information. Practitioners sensitively provide clear explanations, emotional support, and practical assistance, including counselling, accessing adoption records and making contact. Practitioners demonstrate skill and sensitivity in managing complex histories, and managers oversee the quality and responsiveness of the service. There is no waiting list for access to records or intermediary support. **This is good practice.**
- 3.18 Panel arrangements are robust. Members demonstrate strong professional scrutiny and receive induction, annual appraisal, and ongoing training. They bring diverse expertise, including lived experience in adoption and fostering, as well as backgrounds in health and education. Effective business support and professional advisors, including medical and legal input, strengthen the panel's work. However, attendance by the Bridgend Medical Adviser is inconsistent. **WBAS should continue to finalise arrangements to ensure equitable medical advice for all children across the region.**
- 3.19 Weekly panel meetings support timely decision-making. Panel members apply a welfare checklist to ensure recommendations are child-centred and evidence-based. Panel members take their responsibilities seriously, recognising the life-changing impact of their recommendations. They also provide constructive scrutiny to ensure robust oversight of assessments and matching decisions. Any shortfalls in the quality of materials are addressed by the panel advisor before meetings.
- 3.20 Prospective adopters are encouraged to express their views, with adoption social workers offering support through both face-to-face and virtual meetings. Panel members have identified the need to diversify membership to better reflect the community served. A recruitment drive is underway, and **WBAS should continue prioritising diversity in panel members to ensure the panel represents the population it serves.**
- 3.21 Panel minutes are mostly of a good standard, and regular business meetings address operational matters. **WBAS should ensure that the Agency**

Decision Maker (ADM) decisions are clearly recorded in the minutes, including analysis and rationale, to strengthen transparency and accountability in line with best practice.



Leadership & Management

- 3.22 Leaders demonstrate a clear vision and ambition for the service. Practitioners report that roles and responsibilities are well defined, with 100% of practitioners in the CIW survey confirming this. The Management Board meets regularly, maintaining oversight of collaboration, performance, budget, and safeguarding. Action logs support follow-through on decisions, and practitioners describe leaders as visible, approachable, and supportive.
- 3.23 Leaders model a strong commitment to partnership working, with clearly defined relationships with education departments, health boards, and voluntary adoption agencies. Practitioners and managers describe effective collaboration with partners and a shared understanding of how whole systems contribute to and promote well-being and permanence for children.
- 3.24 The pooled budget arrangement is a strength, enabling timely and regionally consistent decisions about resources and support. The Management Board receives detailed reports and collaborates closely with local authority finance teams to ensure transparency and accountability. The Management Board is currently reviewing the contribution formula to promote equity across local authorities.
- 3.25 Strategic plans are informed by regular analysis of need, with performance data and referral trends reviewed by the Management Board to shape operational priorities. The business plan aligns with national adoption objectives and is updated quarterly. However, the regional partnership agreement has not been substantively reviewed or updated since it was developed and does not fully reflect current legislation. Leaders have recognised this and have begun work to update the agreement, with plans to formally review and revise it following current budget and service structure work. **WBAS should ensure the partnership agreement is updated as a priority to support effective governance and compliance.**
- 3.26 Quality assurance arrangements are established, with regular Quality-of-Service Reviews and performance reports providing a clear overview of service activity and achievements. Managers and the Management Board maintain effective oversight, supporting a strong culture of learning and continuous

improvement. While a range of audit tools and processes are in place, not all audits are fully embedded or consistently used to inform service development. **WBAS must strengthen the systematic analysis of feedback, incidents, and audits within Quality-of-Service Reviews to ensure learning and improvement actions are clearly identified and documented.**

- 3.27 WBAS promotes a strong, supportive culture where practitioners feel well-supported by colleagues and managers. Leaders ensure regular supervision, peer support, and a focus on well-being. The team ethos is described as positive, inclusive, and outcome focused. Practitioners value the visible presence and clear communication of the RAM and team managers, who maintain robust oversight of practice. **This is good practice.**
- 3.28 WBAS demonstrates a strong commitment to delivering adoption services through a suitably qualified, experienced and competent workforce. Practitioners benefit from regular supervision and annual appraisal, with a strong emphasis on ongoing professional development and access to mandatory and specialist training. The workforce is stable and sufficient to meet current service demands, with practitioners reporting manageable caseloads and access to additional support when needed.
- 3.29 Practitioners are employed by different local authorities within the region, which can lead to differences in employment practices and access to certain resources. Despite this, practitioners describe a strong sense of shared purpose and collaboration.
- 3.30 WBAS delivers a proactive and well-resourced marketing approach, supported by a dedicated marketing officer and a predetermined budget. Campaigns are routinely delivered in English and Welsh, and the website includes an interactive adoption checker to support early engagement. The Adopters Marketing Group contributes to shaping communications by ensuring that materials reflect lived experience and promotes inclusive messaging. **This is good practice.** The service maintains regular contact with potential applicants and adapts its marketing activity to maximise interest. Despite these strengths, WBAS continues to face the national challenge of a limited pool of adopters. **WBAS should continue to strengthen its marketing strategy and ensure it remains dynamic, inclusive and aligned to national priorities to support the recruitment of sufficient adopters.**
- 3.31 Practitioners securely store records, with clear arrangements for ownership, access, and retention. Information is saved within a central IT system, and file retrieval is straightforward. The premises are suitable for secure storage, and systems are in place to maintain the adoption register. Practitioners demonstrate a clear understanding of data protection requirements. While local

authority retention policies are in use and broadly align with legislative expectations, the service lacks a records management policy that sets out the purpose, format, confidentiality, secure storage, and access arrangements for adoption records set out in the Code of Practice for Adoption Services. **WBAS must ensure its records management arrangements fully meet all statutory and practice requirements for adoption services.**

4. Priority Areas for Improvement

- 4.1 WBAS **must** ensure that quality-of-service reviews fully comply with Regulation 39(1) of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019, with effective arrangements in place for monitoring, reviewing, and improving the quality of the service, including the evaluation of engagement, incidents, complaints, and audits to inform future service development.
- 4.2 WBAS **must** ensure that its records management arrangements fully comply with the requirements of Regulation 28(1) and Schedule 3 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 WBAS **should** continue to strengthen its use of WEP to ensure consistent and timely permanence planning.
- 5.2 WBAS **should** strengthen communication and written materials so that all adopters are fully informed about the range of adoption support services and entitlements available to them at every stage.
- 5.3 WBAS **should** continue to finalise arrangements to ensure equitable medical advice for all children across the region.
- 5.4 WBAS **should** continue prioritising diversity in panel members to ensure the panel represents the population it serves.
- 5.5 WBAS **should** ensure that ADM decisions are clearly recorded in the minutes, including analysis and rationale, to strengthen transparency and accountability in line with best practice.
- 5.6 WBAS **should** continue to strengthen its marketing strategy and ensure it remains dynamic, inclusive and aligned to national priorities to support the recruitment of sufficient adopters.

- 5.7 WBAS **should** ensure the partnership agreement is updated as a priority to support effective governance and compliance.

6. Next Steps

CIW requires that WBAS compile an improvement plan and share this with CIW by 30 December 2025.

CIW will review the improvement plan and seek further assurance of progress. This will be through a meeting with the Head of Children's Services of the host local authority as well as the RAM within 18-24 months of publication of the report.

CIW will consider further activity to be assured of continued improvement and will consider bespoke engagement activity to support its ongoing monitoring.

7. Acknowledgements

CIW would like to thank staff, partners and people who gave their time and contributed to this inspection.

Yours sincerely,



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Appendix 1

Methodology

Self-Evaluation

- WBAS was requested to complete a Self-Evaluation to reflect on their own performance in specific areas of service.

Fieldwork

We reviewed the experiences of 20 people through the review and tracking of their records. We reviewed 17 records and tracked three.

- Tracking a person's record may include having conversations with the person in receipt of services, their family or carers, adoption social worker, childcare social worker, manager, and where appropriate, other professionals involved.
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups, with 25 people receiving services and/or their carers (This included adoptive parents, foster carers and birth parents).
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups, with 52 practitioners and managers (This included childcare social workers, adoption social workers, team managers, Independent Reviewing Officers, fostering managers, the Regional Adoption Manager, and the Head of Children's Services for WBAS host local authority).
- We engaged, through focus groups, with 15 representatives from partner agencies.
- We spoke with one Panel Chair and nine panel members.
- We spoke with eight children with their adopted parents present.
- We reviewed a sample of staff supervision files.
- We observed an adoption panel, Adopters Marketing Group, adopters workshop training session, birth mum's support group and play group with adopters and their children.
- We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purpose of the inspection.
- We administered surveys to WBAS practitioners and managers, partner organisations and people. We received responses from 49 practitioners/managers from WBAS, 84 from people and nine from relevant stakeholders. Six responses were received from birth families.

Our Privacy Notice can be found at <https://careinspectorate.wales/how-we-use-your-information>.

Welsh Language

CIW is committed to providing an active offer of the Welsh language during its activity with local authorities.

The active offer was not required on this occasion.

Appendix 2

Glossary of Terminology

Term	What we mean in our reports and letters
Must	Improvement is deemed necessary in order for the RAC to meet a duty outlined in legislation, regulation or code of practice. The RAC is not currently meeting its statutory duty/duties and must take action.
Should	Improvement will enhance service provision and/or outcomes for people. It does not constitute a failure to meet a legal duty at this time; but without suitable action, there is a risk the RAC may fail to meet its legal duty/duties in future.
Good practice	Identified areas of strength within the RAC. This relates to practice considered innovative and/or which consistently results in positive outcomes for people receiving statutory services.
Well-being	A principle of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 which aims for people to have well-being in every part of their lives. Well-being is more than being healthy. It is about being safe and happy, having choice and getting the right support, being part of a strong community, having friends and relationships that are good for you, and having hobbies, work or learning. It is about supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.

Appendix 3

Quantity Definitions Table

Terminology	Definition
Nearly all	With very few exceptions
Most	90% or more
Many	70% or more

A majority	Over 60%
Half	50%
Around half	Close to 50%
A minority	Below 40%
Few	Below 20%
Very few	Less than 10%