

Adoption services in Wales

What we found out



How to use this document



This is an Easy Read version of: **National Thematic Review of Adoption Services.**



You might need help to read it. You can ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue** may be hard to understand. You can check what they mean on **page 35**.



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Contents

About this report	4
How we did this work	7
What we found out	8
1. Well-being	8
2. Care and support	16
3. Leadership and management.....	28
What happens next.....	34
Hard words	35

About this report



We are **Care Inspectorate Wales**. We check care services in Wales.



We reviewed adoption services across all parts of Wales.



Adoption services help children who cannot live with their birth families. They help children find safe long-lasting homes.

Organisations involved in adoption



Many organisations work together to provide adoption services. The National Adoption Service brings these organisations together.



They include:

- Regional Adoption Collaboratives
- Local councils
- Health services
- Education services
- Voluntary agencies
- A national central team

What this report is about



This is our review of adoption services across Wales.



We looked at what works well.



We also looked at what needs to get better.



We looked at 3 main themes:

1. Wellbeing.
2. Care and support.
3. Leadership and management.



This report tells you what we found out.

How we did this work



We did this work between April and December 2025.



All 5 Regional Adoption Collaboratives in Wales took part.



Staff and organisations filled in surveys. We did interviews and focus groups.



We watched adoption panels and support groups.



We looked at social care records and adoption records. We looked at 21 children's cases and 83 adoption records.

What we found out

1. Wellbeing

Providing information about adoption



Adoption services give information and support at an early stage.



There are websites which tell you how the adoption process works.



Some places have online tools. These tools help people know more about adoption and what to do next.



Online support is different across Wales.



Services should improve their information on websites and online.

Putting children first



Services work to put children's needs first and respect children's rights.

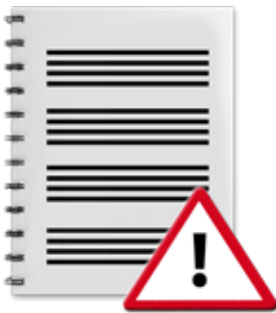


Staff listen to children whenever they can. They help make sure children's views are heard.

Information about support



Information about support is different across Wales. Some details about adoption support are missing or unclear.



Some documents are old or missing.



Services should offer clearer information about adoption support.

Keeping children safe



Staff across Wales work to keep children safe. Most services use **trauma-informed practice**.

Trauma-informed practice means knowing that children may have had difficult experiences. And helping them in a safe, kind, and respectful way.



Staff think carefully about children's:

- Past experiences.
- Identity - This means who a person is and how they see themselves.
- Feelings.
- Needs.



Staff have meetings about **safeguarding**.

Safeguarding means keeping children safe and protecting them from harm. Staff respond quickly when concerns are raised.



But **safeguarding** records are different across Wales. Some **safeguarding** work is not written down clearly.



Unannounced visits are not always recorded.

An **unannounced visit** is when a worker visits without telling people in advance. It helps staff see how a child is doing

Welsh Early Permanence



Welsh Early Permanence is a way of helping children have a stable home as early as possible.



It places children quickly with parents who are also **foster carers**.

A **foster carer** is an adult who looks after a child for the local council.



This helps reduce the number of times children move homes. Fewer moves can help children's wellbeing.



Welsh Early Permanence is not used all across Wales.



Services should use Welsh Early Permanence more to help children.

Identity, culture and Welsh language



Services work to support children's identity and needs.



Services try to match children with families who support:

- Their culture
- Their language
- Their religion



Children are matched with families who share their background when possible.



Services provide Welsh language support when needed. Interpreters are used when help is needed.

2. Care and support

Checking people who want to adopt



Services complete all legal checks that are needed.



Staff use national guidance and agreed ways of working. This helps make checks fair.



Staff work to know children's needs. They think about children's past experiences. They also think about future support needs.



Children are matched with parents who can give them a safe home.

Planning for children to move to their new family



Staff help children move to the families adopting them. The move is usually carefully planned.



Staff focus on children's feelings and wellbeing. They work closely with children's social workers.

Trauma Nurture Timelines



Some services use a tool called **Trauma Nurture Timelines**. This helps staff know more about a child's life story.



It also helps them plan the right support for the child.

Learning about children's needs



Staff help children and their new families get to know each other.



They do this before the child moves to their new home.

Delays in moving children to their new family



Some children move quickly into new families.
Other children wait much longer.



Delays can happen after adoption decisions are made. Long waits can affect children's wellbeing.



Services should make sure children move to their permanent family as quickly as possible.

Adoption support and contacting birth families



Adoption support is help for adopted children, new families and birth families.



Support can include:

- Help with feelings and experiences.
- Meeting with other families.
- Helping children know their past.



Some areas give more support than others. Most areas have waiting lists for support.



Many families have an Adoption Support Plan. This shows what support a child and family needs.



Some plans are not updated when needs change. Services should review and update support plans regularly.



Staff also help families stay in touch with birth families. This is called '**letterbox contact**'.



Most areas use letters or messages to do this. This is not always reviewed to make sure it still meets children's needs.



Services should make sure support and contact arrangements are checked and updated regularly.



If you are on a waiting list, the service should:

- Tell you how long you may have to wait.
- Ask if anything has changed.
- Check your support plan regularly. Update it if your needs change.

Checking care and support plans



Some Independent Reviewing Officers do strong checks. An Independent Reviewing Officer is someone who reviews children's plans and support.



They also check on people who want to adopt before **Adoption Orders**.



An **Adoption Order** is an official decision that makes parents who want to adopt the child's legal parents.



Having one reviewer for the whole process is helpful. This gives steady support over time.

Life Journey Work



Life Journey Work helps children know their past. For example, it includes a Life Story Book and Later Life Letter.



Later life letters are written by a social worker to talk about a child's early life. Children can read them when they are older to know their past.



We found good examples of life journey work. But later life letters are not always done on time.



Services should improve the quality and timing of life journey work.

When adoption ends early



We only found a small number of adoptions ending early. This shows most children stay with adoptive families.

Children's views



Children's adoption reports are documents used for planning adoptions. They often include children's views and feelings.



The reports are not done in the same way across Wales. Some reports say children are too young to share views.



The best reports show every child has experiences and views. Staff can add these by observing and describing them.

Adoption panels



The adoption panel is a group of people who look at adoption information. They give advice about what should happen next. The panels manage the adoption process and review cases.



There are decision makers who make the final decisions on adoptions.



These decisions are usually made on time. They are generally explained well. But written records do not always include enough detail.

Getting people who want to adopt



Finding people who want to adopt is a big challenge. Not enough people are adopting children in Wales.



Some children wait longer than others. This includes:

- Brothers and sisters.
- Children who need extra help. This might be due to disabilities.



Information for people who want to adopt is different across Wales.



Services should give clearer information about the support for people who want to adopt.

3. Leadership and management

Leadership



Leadership means guiding and managing services well.



Staff say leaders are helpful and easy to talk to. Many staff feel valued and supported.



Leadership is different across Wales. Areas with Regional Adoption Managers often work better. Staff said they help give clearer information and better decisions.



All areas should have strong leadership.



A national team helps organisations across Wales work together. They share ideas and learn from each other.



Working together can help make adoption services better across Wales.

Regional Management Boards



Regional Management Boards help plan and manage services. They help make sure staff, money and support are used well.



Strong boards have skilled leaders from different organisations.



Some Regional Partnership Boards bring organisations together well. They also look for ways to improve services.

Adoption staff



Adoption staff across Wales are skilled and experienced. They focus on children's needs.



Staff get support from managers. They also get training.



It helps when the same staff stay in their jobs. Children and families can get to know them and trust them.



Some services do not have enough staff. Some jobs rely on short-term funding.



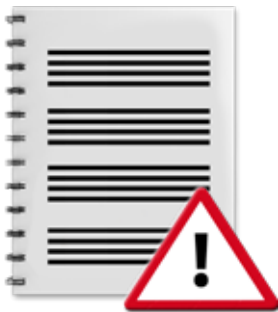
Some local councils have a lot of staff leaving and new staff joining. These changes can affect children and families. Adoptions might be delayed. Families might have to repeat the same information many times.

Information for people using services



Adoption services provide Statements of Purpose and information guides. These explain:

- How services work.
- What rights people have.
- Support available.



Some documents are old or not complete. Important information is sometimes missing.



Services should keep documents correct and updated.

Checking services are good



Ways of checking services are different across Wales.



Regional Adoption Collaboratives use different review systems. Some systems work better than others.



Services should regularly check their work, results and records.



Some services regularly collect views from children and families. They use this information to improve services and planning.



This does not happen everywhere. Services should make better use of feedback from children and families.



Most Regional Adoption Collaboratives do not regularly check **safeguarding** information. Local councils often keep **safeguarding** information. Stronger checking is needed.



Regional Adoption Collaboratives should keep a record of **safeguarding** concerns in the same way.

What happens next



We will follow up with each Regional Adoption Collaborative. We will check how they are improving services.



We will check what they have done following their own inspection reports.



We will work with people involved in adoption services and use the findings from this report to help improve adoption services across Wales.



People will share their views, ideas, and learning from all over Wales.



We will keep checking if services are getting better through inspections.

Hard words

Adoption Order

An Adoption Order is an official decision that makes parents who want to adopt the child's legal parents.

Foster carer

A foster carer is an adult who looks after a child for the local council.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding means keeping children safe and protecting them from harm. Staff respond quickly when concerns are raised.

Trauma-informed practice

Trauma-informed practice means knowing that children may have had difficult experiences. And helping them in a safe, kind, and respectful way.

Unannounced visit

An unannounced visit is when a worker visits without telling people in advance. It helps staff see how a child is doing