

Meeting of:	Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 05 November 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative Annual Report 2023 - 2024
Purpose of Report:	To provide Scrutiny Committee with the Annual Report and review of the Collaborative
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Children and Young People Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report will be presented to the respective Cabinets of the Partner Authorities
Policy Framework:	This report is consistent with the Policy Framework and Budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) is one of five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service (NAS). It provides an adoption service on behalf of the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. The Vale of Glamorgan hosts the Collaborative. • The report covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It incorporates the reporting requirements set out in the Collaborative Agreement underpinning the Collaborative and the requirement to review the service every six months as set out in regulation. • The report provides information in respect of the governance and scrutiny of the regional arrangements at a local level, staff changes and areas for development. • Key performance information relating to the placement of children for adoption, recruitment and assessment of adopters and the provision of adoption support services is outlined. • The report highlights some of the key challenges and future priorities for the Collaborative in terms of managing the impact upon service delivery within the context of a decreasing budget. • The Appendices to the report provide data in respect of key performance measures in respect of Family Finding activity, Marketing, Adopter Recruitment, Adoption support and the Adoption Panel. This information is broken down by local authority. 	

Recommendations

1. That Committee reviews the report and the work of the Collaborative undertaken to date.
2. That Committee continues to receive annual reports in line with the requirements of the Collaborative Agreement which underpins the Collaborative

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To enable Committee to exercise scrutiny of this key statutory function.
2. To ensure that Committee maintains close scrutiny of this regional service on a regular basis.

1. Background

- 1.1 On 28th November 2014, Cabinet approved the business case, service delivery model and implementation plan for creating the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative. The recommendations in the report were resolved also by the Cabinets in Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil during December 2014. The Vale of Glamorgan Council acts as host authority for the Collaborative, which became fully operational on 1st June 2015.
- 1.2 The governance structure of the Collaborative involves a Joint Committee and a regional Management Board. The Joint Committee involves the lead Cabinet Member from each of the four Local Authorities and Heads of Service; it meets twice a year. The Management Board meets quarterly. It is comprised of the Heads of Service from the four Local Authorities which make up the Collaborative and representatives from Health, Education, a Voluntary Adoption Agency, and the National Adoption Service (NAS). The Management Board is chaired by a Director from one of the partner authorities. In line with the Collaborative Agreement, the Chair transferred to the Director of Social Services for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in November 2023. The Regional Adoption Manager reports to the Management Board and Joint Committee.
- 1.3 The VVC Operational Group, which is comprised of a senior lead officer with responsibility for adoption from each of the partner authorities alongside the Regional Adoption Manager and VVC Team Managers, meets quarterly and considers a range of practice and service development matters.
- 1.4 In addition, Regulation 39 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019 require the Collaborative to create and maintain a system to monitor, review and improve the quality of its' service. Paragraph 15 2 (c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 also requires each regional Collaborative to provide an Annual Report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service. It is envisaged the Annual Report attached at Appendix I will meet all these requirements. The performance of the Collaborative continues to be regularly reviewed by the Management Board and the Joint Committee.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The report outlines the performance and work of the Collaborative for the period, 1st April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It provides an overview of performance, progress and areas for development against regional and national priorities. The report includes information relating to:
- Governance, staffing and service development
 - Performance in respect of children and family finding activity
 - Adopter marketing and recruitment of adopters
 - Adoption Support Services
 - Adoption Panel
 - Complaints and Compliments
 - Consultation, Engagement and Quality Assurance
 - Policies and Procedures
 - Future Priorities and Challenges
- 2.2** The report provides information in respect of children against key performance indicators set by the National Adoption Service Performance Framework. The region experienced an increase in referrals of children for adoption during the reporting period and an increase in the number of children with a SBA (Should Be Adopted decision). The number of children subject to a Placement Order also increased which coupled with the increase in children with an SBA decision is likely to impact the number of children requiring a placement in the new reporting period. The report provides information in respect of the number of children waiting over six months to be matched, the breakdown of the children and the number adopted. VVC saw a reduction in the number of children waiting at year end and again over 80% of the children placed were with VVC adopters enabling those children to remain in the region. Improvement in the provision of life journey work has continued as a result of the creation of dedicated posts within VVC and partner authorities. New measures to capture the quality-of-life journey work have been introduced as part of the National Adoption Service (NAS) Performance Framework although more time is needed to fully embed these into practice. As part of the modern adoption agenda NAS have also introduced a requirement to capture the number of indirect and direct contact arrangements for each child placed for adoption which are detailed in Appendix I.
- 2.3** The report outlines performance in respect of the recruitment and assessment of adopters. The service saw a slight increase in adopter enquiries during the period returning to the level of enquiries received pre-pandemic. Enquiries are monitored very closely both regionally and nationally and the low conversion rate has led to NAS commissioning their marketing company to undertake a piece of research to best understand the reasons behind this.

- 2.4 The report provides information regarding the numbers of adopters approved and their location. VVC experienced a reduction in the number approved at year end bringing it in line with other parts of Wales. The region has however benefitted during the period of having a number of adopters waiting which has resulted in a significant number of children being placed within the region.
- 2.5 The report provides information in respect of post adoption support services including Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services. It also details the pressures upon the service in terms of the number of unallocated post adoption support cases and those waiting longer than four months which regions are now required to report on.
- 2.6 The report highlights the continued benefits to service delivery brought about by the grant funded posts but also some of the difficulties in sustaining the ongoing funding for these posts which has remained at the same level since 2019.
- 2.7 The report outlines the requirement to report upon a range of performance measures to the National Adoption Service (NAS) on a quarterly basis and the new performance measures around life journey work, contact arrangements and requests for adoption support services introduced during the year.
- 2.8 Information in respect of the activity of the Adoption Panel, complaints and compliments and measures taken to evaluate the service in line with regulation are outlined in the report.
- 2.9 The report highlights the priorities and challenges going forward in terms of core business activity relating to the placement of children, the recruitment of adopters and the provision of adoption support services and the need to reduce any impact upon service delivery as a result of cost savings agreed for the forthcoming year.

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

- 3.1 The legal framework for the establishment of the regional Collaboratives is set in the Part 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 as amended by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- 3.2 The governance of the Collaborative is delivered in partnership with Health, Education, and the voluntary sector.
- 3.3 The principles upon which the Collaborative is based are aligned closely with the Five Ways of Working and the Council's Well-being objectives. The provision of an adoption service is a statutory function which serves to ensure that all children requiring adoptive placements are provided with this opportunity and that adoptive families and adopted adults are provided with support services.
- 3.4 The ability to work together with partner authorities in a collaborative way has opened opportunities for children in the Vale of Glamorgan to be placed with

adoptive parents in other parts of the region. Collaborative working has enabled resources to be pooled creating efficiencies and providing a more efficient, standardised adoption service for children, prospective adopters and others affected by adoption.

- 3.5 Feedback from prospective adopters and adoptive families on the service provided is used to identify gaps and shape future service development.
- 3.6 The Collaborative engages directly with adoptive families via a range of mechanisms, individually and via group support and training. maintained wherever appropriate VVC has supported families to contribute to national consultation exercises where required to ensure their views are considered.
- 3.7 Two posts created as part of the Welsh Government investment work directly with the voluntary sector in delivering a service to adopted children and young people and adoptive families.
- 3.8 The three Voluntary Agencies for adoption in Wales are part of the National Adoption Service alongside regional Collaboratives. A representative from one of the voluntary agencies is a member of VVC Management Board.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 There are no Climate Change and Nature Implications as a direct result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1 The budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan and is monitored and approved by the Management Board and Joint Committee. The end of year position reported an underspend in the budget for 2023-24. The Management Board and Joint Committee agreed to the retention of this underspend by the Collaborative which could be used within 2024-25 for a number of reasons including any pay award inflation over and above the 3% built into the budget, to fund any unrealised savings in year.
- 5.2 Towards the end of the reporting period and as part of budget planning, VVC Joint Committee agreed that a 5% saving needed to be identified for 2024-25. This amounts in monetary terms to £98,701 or 1.7 FTE Social Worker posts. Part of the reserves have been held to contribute to these savings if they cannot be fully identified within budget, but a key priority is how best to secure these savings whilst also reducing the impact on service delivery.
- 5.3 The Collaborative was subject to the annual audit of finance and governance by the Regional Internal Audit Department and a finding of Substantial Assurance was made. The 2023-24 Minor Joint Committees Annual Return was audited by the Wales Audit Office during the second quarter of the year and the final report has yet to be published.

Employment

5.4 There are no employment issues as a direct result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.5 The requirement to review the work of the Collaborative and report on an annual basis to the respective Cabinets of each of the partner agencies is set out in the Collaborative Agreement.

5.6 The Collaborative Agreement underpinning the Collaborative ended on 31 May 2023. A revised Agreement was drawn up in collaboration with regional partners. This was agreed by the Vale of Glamorgan Cabinet on 6th July 2023 and was sealed by partners in January 2024.

5.7 The requirement to review the quality of the service provided by the adoption service is set out in regulation as outlined under the Background section of this report.

6. Background Papers

Reports to Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 7th November 2023; 8th November 2022; 9th November 2021 and 8th December 2020.

Appendices to the Annual Report:

Appendix 1 – Family Finding

Appendix 2 – Recruitment and Assessment

Appendix 3 – Adoption Support

Appendix 4 – Panel



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

APPENDIX I

VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE

REVIEW OF SERVICE AND

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

For Period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu | National
Cenedlaethol | **Adoption**
Service

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

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VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1st APRIL 2023 to 31st March 2024

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 **1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024**. 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.

Appendix 4 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 mixture 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 on a regular basis and the frequency increased to monthly in January 2024 to meet the needs of the Collaborative.

- 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 2023 and December 2023. A joint meeting of the Joint Committee and Management Board was held in January 2024. A further meeting of the Joint Committee was held in February 2024.
- 2.4** Quarterly meetings of VVC's Management Board have continued to be held. As part of the requirements set down in the Collaborative Agreement, the Chair of the Management Board transferred to the Director of Social Services for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in November 2023.
- 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 savings required during the year which amounted to 3% to be identified during 2023-24. Discussions during the third quarter of the year focused on the savings to be identified during 2023-24. Various options were considered alongside the potential impact that each of these would have upon the Collaborative. In February 2024, Joint Committee agreed a savings of 5% which in budgetary terms amounts to a savings of £98,701 or the equivalent of 1.7 FTE Social Workers. Since this decision was made, the Collaborative has considered various means of achieving these savings 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 during the coming year. 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 End of Year Plan and Annual Improvement Plan was approved by Joint Committee in May 2023. 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 which has been in place since 2015 and underpins the governance structure of the region ended on 31 May 2023. The revised Agreement agreed by all partners was presented to the Vale of Glamorgan Cabinet on 6 July 2023. The Agreement was sealed by all partners in January 2024.
- 2.9** As outlined in the previous report, the 2022 -23 accounts were due to be audited by external audit during the year. The audit plan for 2022-23 was presented to the Management Board in November 2023 and the final report of the external audit was presented to the Joint Committee in February 2024 by representatives from the Wales Audit Office. The annual financial and governance audit undertaken by the Regional Internal Audit Department was concluded in June 2024 and a finding of Substantial Assurance was made. The 2023-24 Minor Joint Committee Annual Return was due to be audited by the external auditor (Wales Audit Office) and this

took place in the second quarter of 2024-25. The final report of Audit Wales has yet to be published.

- 2.10** VVC's Information Sharing Protocol (WASPI) was revised during the year and agreed by all partner authorities. This was presented to the WASPI Board in October 2023 by the Vale Information Governance lawyer and signed in June 2024. An updated DPIA and Privacy Statement has also been prepared and agreed by partners. The updated Privacy Statement has been uploaded to VVC's website.
- 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. New measures in respect of the collation of different types of contact arrangements, unallocated and allocated adoption support assessments with waiting times have been introduced which has necessitated further adaptation. Quality assurance checklists to record the quality of Life Journey Work have been introduced but still require embedding into practice to ensure the data is captured effectively.
- 2.12** The Regional Manager and individual Team Managers have continued to participate in all required national meetings and subgroups. The Regional Adoption Manager chairs 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. A part time Social Worker obtained a full time vacancy in the service in May 2023 creating a vacancy. A part time Social Worker within the Family Finding Team also left the Collaborative in July 2023 but this post was filled by external recruitment in October 2023. A full time Social Worker within the Recruitment and Assessment Team left the Collaborative in February 2024 and the part time Post Adoption Contact Social Worker also left her employment in March 2024. In addition, a full time Social Worker within Recruitment and Assessment also applied for flexible retirement resulting in a part time Social Worker vacancy. A part time Business Support Assistant post was recruited to in September 2023. The overall vacancy position at year end equates to 2 FTE posts within the Recruitment and Assessment Team and a part time Social Worker vacancy responsible for Post Adoption Contact within the Adoption Support Team. Discussions as to how these vacancies can contribute to the cost savings with the least impact upon service delivery will be taken forward into the new financial year.

- 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. The posts within VVC have remained stable. The turnover of posts within the local authorities has been monitored and any vacancies and cover arrangements have been reported to the Central Team.
- 3.4** Overall sickness levels have remained low during the period. Two members of staff have experienced extended periods of sickness absence during the year although both members have successfully returned to work. Sickness absence is monitored closely by managers within the Collaborative.

4. SERVICE FUNCTIONS

- 4.1** Performance against each of the service functions is outlined under the following sections of the report alongside areas of development.

5. FAMILY FINDING (APPENDIX 1)

- 5.1** 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.
- 5.2** **179** children were referred with a possible Care Plan of adoption during 2023-24. This is a 10% increase on the previous year and continues the rising trend over the past 3 years of an increase in referrals.
- 5.3** Around **40%** of referrals made in 2023-24 were withdrawn. 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.
- 5.4** There have been **82** 'Should be Placed for Adoption' (SBA) decisions made in 2023-24. This shows a marked increase from the previous year and is in line with the pattern in recent years. This may impact upon the number of children where adoptive families are being sought and placements being made in 2024-25.
- 5.5** The region has recorded **65** Placement Orders granted during the period, which is line with previous years. Given the increase in 'SBA' decisions it is expected that there may be a higher number of Placement Orders subsequently in the start of 2024-25.

- 5.6** 57 children were placed for adoption during 2023-24. This is a slight reduction from previous years, which is related to a couple of factors. Primarily, this is due to the reduced SBA decisions in the previous year (2022-23) and therefore less children with a plan for adoption. Given the increase in SBA decisions this year, we would anticipate the number of placements to rise again in 2024-25. We have also had the transitions for a sibling group of 2 and one single child which commenced during 2023-24, but which did not progress to placement. We have 2 further children whose match was presented to Panel but is now on hold due to a legal challenge to the Placement Order by the parents.
- 5.7** As part of the new reporting requirements, data in respect of the arrangements for indirect and direct contact together with introductory meetings has been collated for children placed within the reporting period. The figures are contained in the Quarter 4 and end of year performance report 2023-24.
- 5.8** 60% of children were placed within the benchmark of 6 months. Those who took longer were for expected reasons i.e. older children with more complex needs and requiring longer transitions support prior to placement and foster carers adopting a child in their care. In these instances, an adoption assessment is required to be completed prior to being matched although these children experienced no delay due to remaining with their current carers throughout. Positively 82% of children have been placed with VVC adopters which continues the trend of previous years. 7% of children were placed within Wales but external to VVC and 11% were placed outside of Wales. The children placed outside of Wales include 4 older children and 2 children who were placed alongside their older siblings who are already adopted.
- 5.9** There were 70 Adoption Orders granted during 2023-24, which is on par with previous years and in line with the number of children placed in the previous year.
- 5.10** 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 2nd review performance being around 89%. The specialist funded Life Journey Workers in the local authorities are consistently meeting the 2nd 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.
- 5.11** The new 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 2nd Adoption review has been discussed at different levels within the region. The checklist at the SBA is currently being completed by the Family Finding Manager. The Operational Group has considered ways of improving compliance, and a decision was taken in the latter part of the year for Team Managers in the local authority teams to complete the checklist for the 2nd adoption review. Performance in this area is low for 2023-24 as this process will require time to embed.

- 5.12** The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators have developed resources to address the quality of work being produced, as this is part of the new performance framework, and guidance to assist in the completion of later life letters. The 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. The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators support the allocation process within each authority and monitor performance across the region. The Co-ordinators are developing an Improvement Plan to support both improvement in measurable performance and in qualitative feedback on the materials themselves. They have been developing a range of training tools and guidance documents for the different parties involved in delivering life journey work.
- 5.13** The Transitions Social Worker has continued to support 12 children already placed for adoption and a further 12 new children being placed since April 2023 through direct work sessions, support and consultation for adopters and guidance and support for professional colleagues. Our Transitions Worker has undertaken some additional specialist pieces of work above and beyond their usual role in providing support for children at risk of disruption, supporting a child through an adoption disruption and another through a very sudden bereavement.
- 5.14** Understanding the Child Days are now being held for children being matched with adopters with the priority being for these for children aged 3+ and their siblings. The Family Finding Manager leads these days, and they are co-ordinated by the Family Finders. These meetings were held for 10 children during 23-24. Ideally these would be arranged for all children if capacity allowed.
- 5.15** VVC has continued to engage with various family finding methods. The team liaises with the Adoption Register Wales (ARW)/LinkMaker team to ensure information is updated and monitored in a timely manner. Performance data produced by ARW continues to be scrutinised by managers within the service. A number of Social Workers within the Family Finding and Recruitment and Assessment Team attended ARW refresher training. A number of children and adopters were referred to an ARW Profiling event held in July 2023 and in March 2024 and children attended an Activity Day held in 2023.
- 5.16** Referrals to the Adopting Together Service have continued to be made although no placements have been made during this period. VVC has entered into an Early Alert system with St David's and Barnardo's which enables early consideration of adopters approved by these agencies.
- 5.17** Two children were placed under a Welsh Early Permanence arrangement, both as siblings of adopted children. VVC continues to be at the forefront of advocating for Welsh Early Permanence and are working with local authority partners to identify children where this might be a suitable option.

Disruptions and Placement Breakdown

- 5.18** Sadly, this year has seen an unusual increase in placement breakdowns prior to an Adoption Order. 4 placements for a total of 6 children have disrupted during 2023-24.
- 5.19** One child aged 15 months disrupted within a few days of placement. A Disruption Meeting was held in July 2023 which concluded that it was difficult to pinpoint particular reasons for the breakdown except there appeared to have been a mismatch between the expectations of the adopters and the reality of the child being placed in their care. This child has gone on to be successfully placed.
- 5.20** The second disruption concerned a five-year-old child. This followed a lengthy period of support and intervention to try and sustain the placement, which sadly could no longer continue. A Disruption Meeting took place in November 2023 and acknowledged the significant support provided to prepare the child for placement to attempt to stabilise the placement. Sadly, there were a number of complexities in the adopters' relationship with the child which resulted in the placement breaking down.
- 5.21** Placements for two sibling groups of two broke down in November 2023 and disruption meetings have now been held for both of these. In the first, there was again evidence of significant support being offered and mismatching of the adopters' expectations with the reality of the children's needs. The second placement disrupted following an allegation made against the adopters and the decision made not to continue with the placement. There was again evidence of support although significant challenges weren't evident throughout the placement. The adopters' agency (external) reflected in the disruption meeting some deficits in their original assessment of the adopters.

6. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT (APPENDIX 2)

Marketing

- 6.1** The region continues to benefit from having a Recruitment and Marketing Officer. This role ensures that VVC maintains a consistent response to enquiries and that they are tracked and responded to within timescale.
- 6.2** In terms of general recruitment activities, the Recruitment and Marketing Officer has continued to ensure that information available through VVC's website is regularly updated and there is a useful bank of resources people can access when they wish to explore adoption. The website has also been updated to provide information in respect of non-agency applications to adopt.
- 6.3** VVC has continued to maintain a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. These platforms are useful in raising public awareness of our service and we also make use of pay-per-click advertising to specifically target people who live in the region.

- 6.4** VVC continues to explore opportunities for in person marketing events and had a stand at Pride Cymru, the Vale of Glamorgan Show and a large craft event in St Donats Castle in December 2023. VVC also utilised Council Tax inserts for the Vale of Glamorgan, RCT and Merthyr Tydfil CBC in order to target those areas with a lower number of enquirers.
- 6.5** VVC has continued to embrace Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) as a permanency option where appropriate. Two further WEP placements were made during the period. The Recruitment and Assessment Manager in conjunction with the national Welsh Early Permanence lead presented a session on WEP to the National Adoption Service Conference in October 2023. A set of VVC early permanency carers have been filmed being interviewed by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager in order for a resource to be made available to others considering early permanency.

Recruitment of Adopters

- 6.6** The Collaborative has continued to receive a significant number of enquiries, although, in keeping with the national trend, the numbers of enquiries have decreased overall.
- 6.7** From April 2023 to March 2024, VVC received a total of **222** enquiries. The numbers of enquiries we have received during this period are similar to our pre-pandemic performance and indicates our enquiry numbers have remained broadly stable for the past two years.
- 6.8** The Collaborative continues to facilitate information evenings, which offer participants an opportunity to learn more about the adoption process and about the backgrounds of the children who are in need of adoptive families. These events are typically held every six weeks and are co-facilitated by the Recruitment Manager and VVC's Marketing Officer.
- 6.9** A total of **9** information evenings were held during the year and a total of **70** households attended.
- 6.10** The information shared with participants has continued to be reviewed and updated to reflect the modern adoption agenda, specifically the promotion of Welsh Early Permanency, alongside highlighting changes in research, understanding and practice. Participants have reported that they found these events informative, interesting, and thought provoking.
- 6.11** Initial visits have been undertaken at enquirers' homes predominantly by the Marketing and Recruitment Officer, or on occasion by Social Workers within the Team when there are known complexities.
- 6.12** A total of **60** initial visits were completed during reporting period. This was a particularly high number of initial visits and from reviewing the origins of the requests, it would appear there was an unusually higher number of specific child visits taking place during the period. These concerned current foster carers wishing to adopt a

child in their care or second time applicants who were being approached to consider siblings of older adopted children.

- 6.13** Preparation to Adopt training has continued to be delivered jointly with Western Bay. This 3-day training course is delivered in-person by an experienced VVC Social Worker and a Western Bay Adoption Support Therapist. Participants are asked to complete an evaluation at the end of each course and VVC has continued to receive positive feedback.
- 6.14** During the reporting period, **10** courses were delivered with **43** households attending (applicants who are part of a couple or solo applicants). Attendance figures have remained broadly stable for the past 2 years.
- 6.15** During the year, a total of **40** households were approved. A further seven were awaiting ratification at year end. The overall number represents a decrease when compared to the same period in the previous year and mirrors the national reduction in adopter recruitment. The breakdown of approvals is as follows:

Cardiff	23
Merthyr Tydfil	2
RCT	7
Vale of Glamorgan	8

- 6.16** An area of development the Recruitment and Assessment Team has driven forward this past year is the training and support package we provide to approved prospective adopters. We now encourage all families to attend our post approval training, which focuses on giving adopters an understanding of the matching process, early transitions, contact and the promotion of bonding with their child. These training days are held every other month, are well attended and we receive very positive feedback from participants.
- 6.17** A further development moving forward is the additional training workshop planned from April 2024 which will focus specifically on upskilling adopters in their responsibilities towards life journey work with children.

7. ADOPTION SUPPORT (APPENDIX 3)

- 7.1** Referrals for Post Adoption Support services and requests for assessment of post adoption support needs have increased from the previous year with **84** referrals having been received. The three-year trend line indicates a steady increase in referrals being received and increased demands on the Team.
- 7.2** Referrals for Access to Birth Records and Intermediary services for adopted adults have also seen a steady increase on the previous year. A total of **60** referrals have been received and broken down as **39** Access to Birth Records referrals and **21** Intermediary requests.

- 7.3** Due to the increasing demands upon the Collaborative, our unallocated waiting list has increased. As at the end of the reporting period, **30** remained unallocated but those waiting longer than four months had reduced to **7**. This data is now reported to the Central Team on a quarterly basis as part of the new performance measures for Adoption Support.
- 7.4** The Team has maintained alternative ways of supporting families and the weekly hub meetings are now well established. In addition, the weekly sports group has increased its numbers to reach more young people, which has been well received.
- 7.5** The Collaborative has maintained links with the ENFYS service covering Cardiff and the Vale and also the Multi Agency Permanence Support Service (MAPSS) 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.
- 7.6** The region also facilitated a Summer and Christmas Fun Day for adoptive families in July and December 2023 attended on each occasion by over ninety families.
- 7.7** The grant funded posts have continued to enhance the overall support provided to birth parents and families. The Birth Parent Adviser and Post Adoption Contact Social Care Officer have established a quarterly support group which is growing in strength. **76** new referrals have been received during this period for different types of support, which could relate to letterbox queries or more in-depth involvement.
- 7.8** VVC's PATHways Co-ordinator has continued to have a positive impact in assessing and supporting lower priority needs. **30** new referrals have been made to PATHways from across the region.
- 7.9** The Children and Young People Co-ordinator (CYPC) has continued to support the Connected Groups which are held on a monthly basis and are well attended by children and young people from the region. **20** new children and young people were referred.
- 7.10** The provision of a check-in service for families post Adoption Order as recommended by the NAS Good Practice Guide has now been put in place for families at the one year and three year point following the making of an Adoption Order. This is currently being managed by our PATHways Co-ordinator. Due to resource constraints, it has not been possible to put this in place for birth parents.
- 7.11** 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.
- 7.12** During the year, VVC has participated in a national trial regarding the effectiveness of DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) as a therapeutic intervention for families. This trial is being led by University of Glasgow and supported by NHS. VVC is one of two regions in Wales to participate in the trial and it is anticipated a maximum

of 20 families will be referred. Four families have been referred which have all been successfully randomised. The trial team facilitate regular meetings to update participants on developments with the trial on a local and national basis.

8. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 8.1** The NAS All Wales Policies and Procedures were finalised in the Summer of 2023 were formally launched at the NAS Conference in October 2023. These have been widely disseminated across the region along with details of how to access the policies via an APP.
- 8.2** VVC managers and VVC Independent Reviewing Officers amended the Adoption Review forms to incorporate the new performance measures and Safeguarding Guidance. These were submitted to NAS Policy and Practice Subgroup with a view to the forms being used nationally.
- 8.3** In September 2023, the National Adoption Service produced an Action Plan in respect of four safeguarding reviews undertaken in respect of adopted children. This plan was presented to Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Cardiff and Vale Safeguarding Boards by the Regional Manager in December 2023. The Regional Manager also prepared a report in respect of the completion of PNC (Police National Computer checks) on prospective adopters to enhance the DBS. This report was also presented to the Safeguarding Boards and NAS Local Authority Business Planning Meeting with a view to the practice being adopted as part of the routine checks undertaken on prospective adopters.

9. CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 9.1** VVC continues to gain the views of service users at various stages of the process. Meetings have been held with the Vale of Glamorgan Quality Assurance Officer to review our questionnaires and the best mechanism for collating the returns. This work is ongoing.
- 9.2** The Regional Manager was a member of a national working group developing a NAS All Wales Quality Assurance Framework. This Framework was agreed during the year, setting the expectations for regular reporting of the quality of care being provided. A sample of files from across all teams in the Collaborative were audited by Managers within VVC during the last quarter of the year and the findings fed back to the members of staff involved.

10. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

- 10.1** One complaint was received during the reporting period from adoptive applicants in respect of the Stage 1 assessment process and checks undertaken. This was resolved at Stage 1 of the Complaint Process.
- 10.2** VVC staff have continued to receive a variety of compliments in respect of the service they provide. These are collated regionally and fed into a central Vale of Glamorgan recording system.

11. ADOPTION PANEL (APPENDIX 4)

- 11.1** 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.
- 11.2** The workload of the Panel is outlined in **Appendix 4** and has reflected the level of regional performance during the year.
- 11.3** There have been a number of changes to the membership of the Panel, with the recruitment of seven new independent members from a variety of backgrounds and the resignation of two members. There continues to be an ongoing need to increase Social Worker membership from partner authorities to support the Social Worker membership from within VVC.
- 11.4** Reviews of Adoption Panel Chairs have been undertaken and all eligible members of Panel have completed a self-declaration. DBS checks for Panel members have continued to be updated. An in-person training day was held for all Panel members in March 2024 facilitated by AFKA Cymru.

12. CONCLUSION, FUTURE PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGE

- 12.1** Regional performance during the year has been maintained with a positive return at year end in respect of the number of children placed, the number being placed within region and in the provision of life journey work. The number of adopters approved at year end has dipped on the previous year which may pose challenges going forward in terms of being able to place children locally. There are also ongoing challenges of being able to place children with more complex needs in a timely manner
- 12.2** The region saw a small increase in adopter enquiries representing a return to pre-pandemic levels despite national and local efforts to attract more enquirers. VVC has developed a robust mechanism for recording those enquiries and why potential applicants do not proceed. The overall conversion rate from enquiry to applicants pursuing a Registration of Interest has been the focus of national research and discussion. It has now been agreed that VVC's Marketing Officer, utilising the systems developed within VVC, will lead an analysis of conversion rates with other regions to better understand the reasons for such low rates of conversion. This will hopefully inform national and local marketing strategies in the coming year.

- 12.3** Ongoing priorities for VVC are to continue to explore all placement options for children waiting, to secure suitable matches for adopters and to embrace the modern adoption agenda which promotes direct contact arrangements for all children where appropriate. VVC has continued to take the lead in promoting Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) as a placement opportunity and this will continue to be developed and embedded within the region.
- 12.4** The provision of a robust Adoption Support service continues to present a significant challenge for the service. The increased focus upon adoption support services at a national level has resulted in expectations at delivery level which are placing strain upon the resources available within the Collaborative and partner authorities to meet these needs. These issues are likely to remain high on the agenda for Management Board and Operational Group going forward especially as the workload increases. The Collaborative needs to be able to screen referrals at an early point to be able to focus resources upon those most in need. The level of unallocated assessments for post adoption support services, however, is impacting upon this process and will continue to require careful monitoring
- 12.5** The new ways of working developed in the Adoption Support Team and the check-in process at the twelve-month point following the making of an Adoption Order, will need to be sustained and it is hoped these mechanisms will go some way to meet need at an early point and avoid escalation of difficulties.
- 12.6** As indicated, Adoption Support matters have been a key area of discussion at a local level, especially the increased demand for funding therapeutic support packages which are funded by local authority partners. It is proposed this will need to be addressed at a national level in view of the budgetary constraints likely to be experienced in the coming year.
- 12.7** For VVC, a pressing concern during the coming year is to agree the best mechanism for achieving the cost savings agreed for the 2024-25 budget. This plan will require finalisation and careful monitoring throughout the year to minimise the impact upon service delivery and overall regional performance.

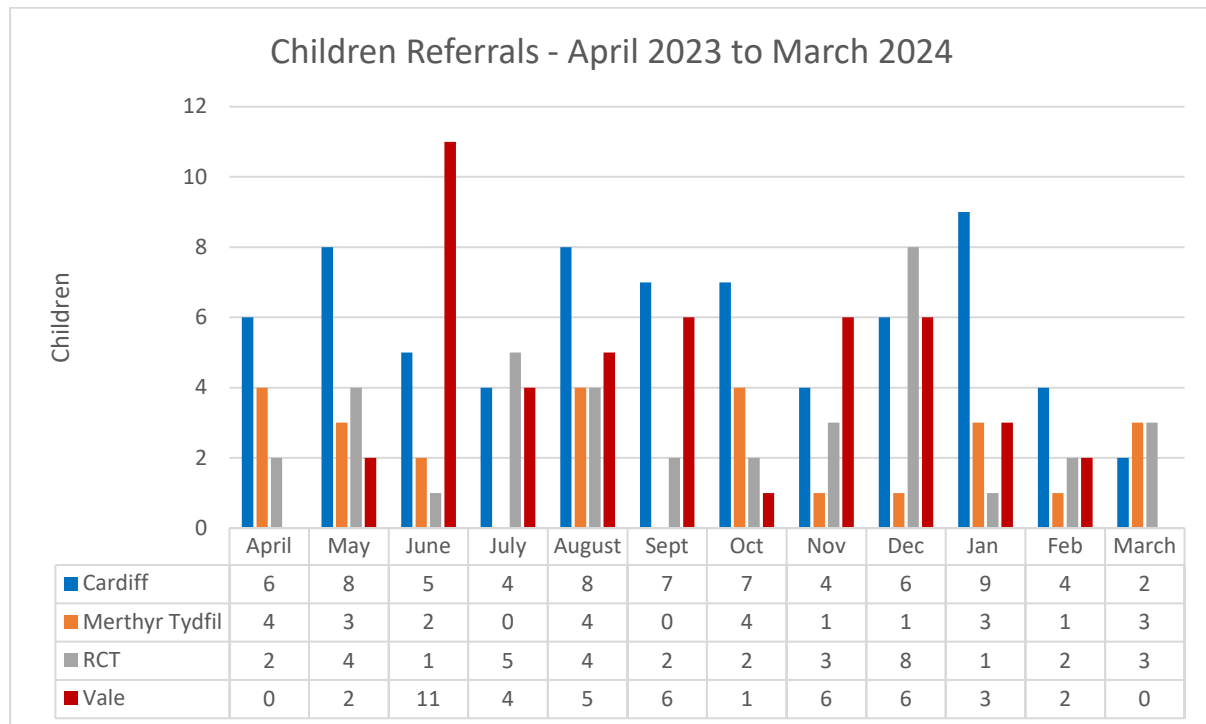
Angela Harris

Regional Adoption Manager

Appendix 1 – Children

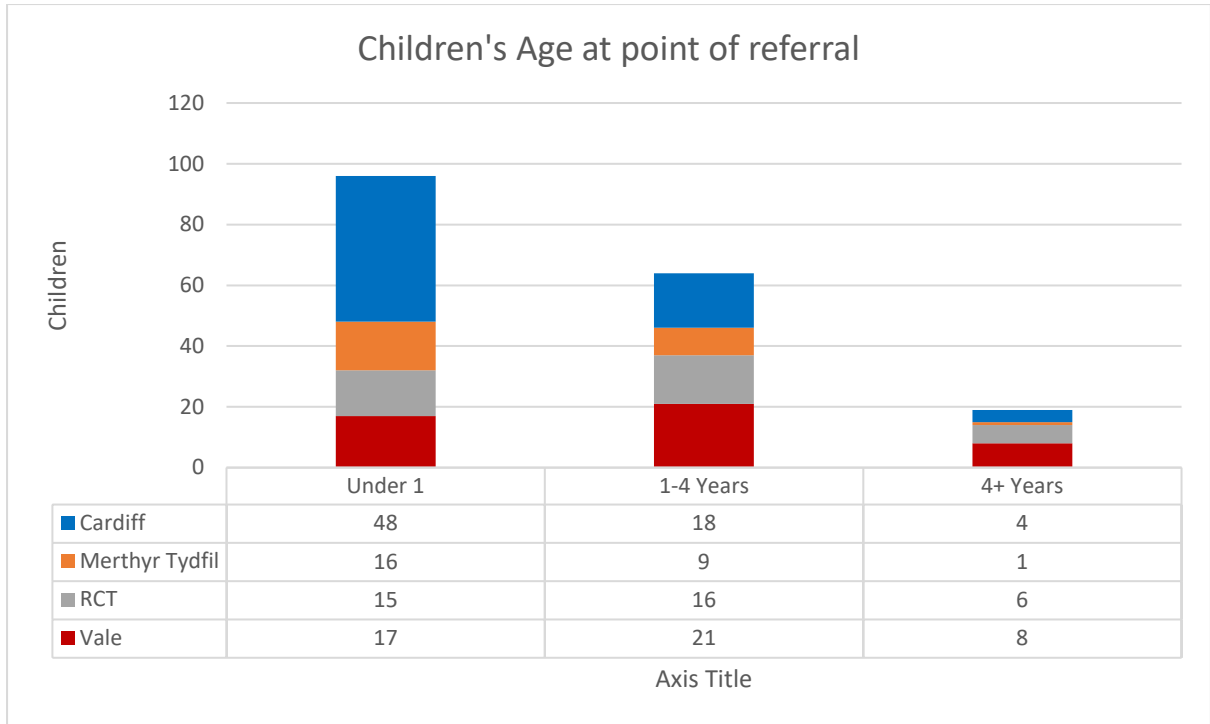
Referrals

179 children were referred to the Collaborative during the year, of which **33** children were referred in Quarter 4. This reflects a 10% increase in referrals from the previous year. When compared to data for the same period in the previous year, this demonstrates a **19.7%** increase in referrals. **66** children referred to the Collaborative were referred as part of a sibling group. 19 children were aged **4+** at the time of referral.

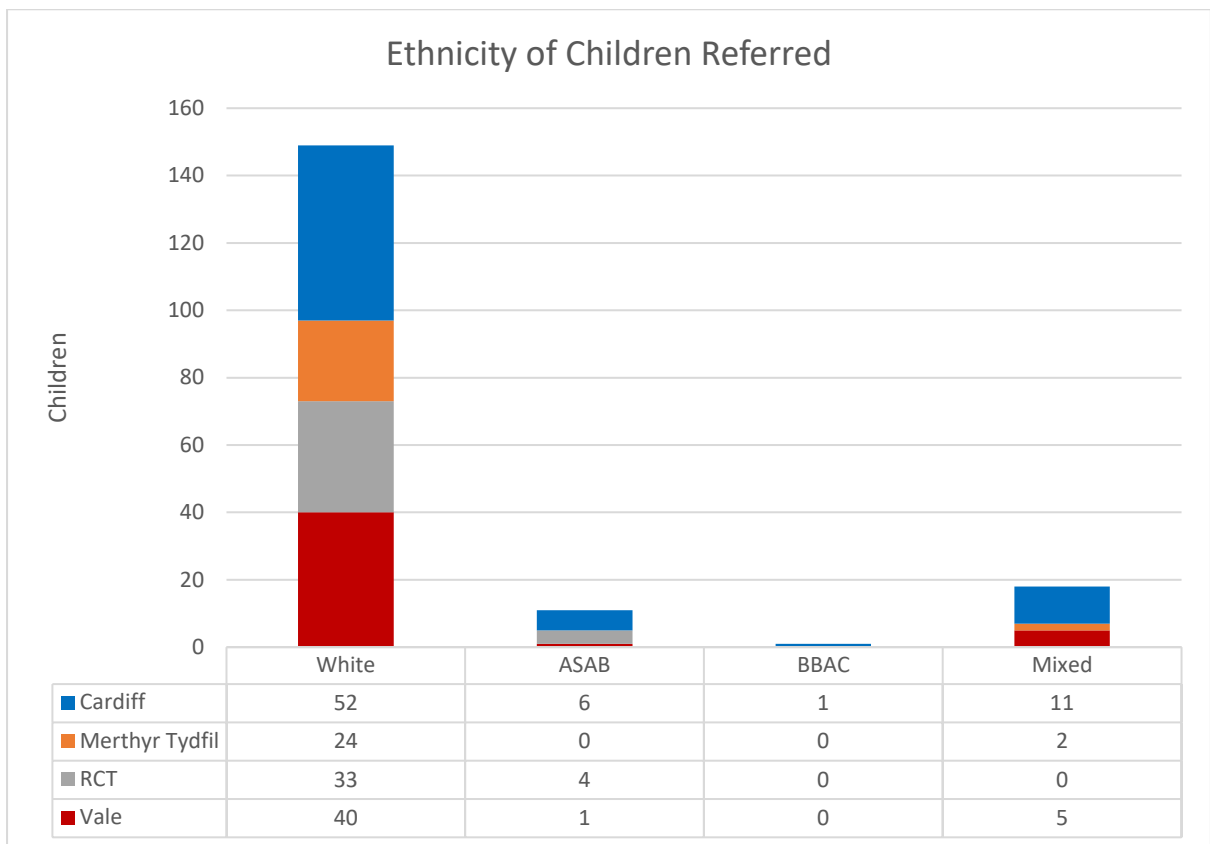


Demographics

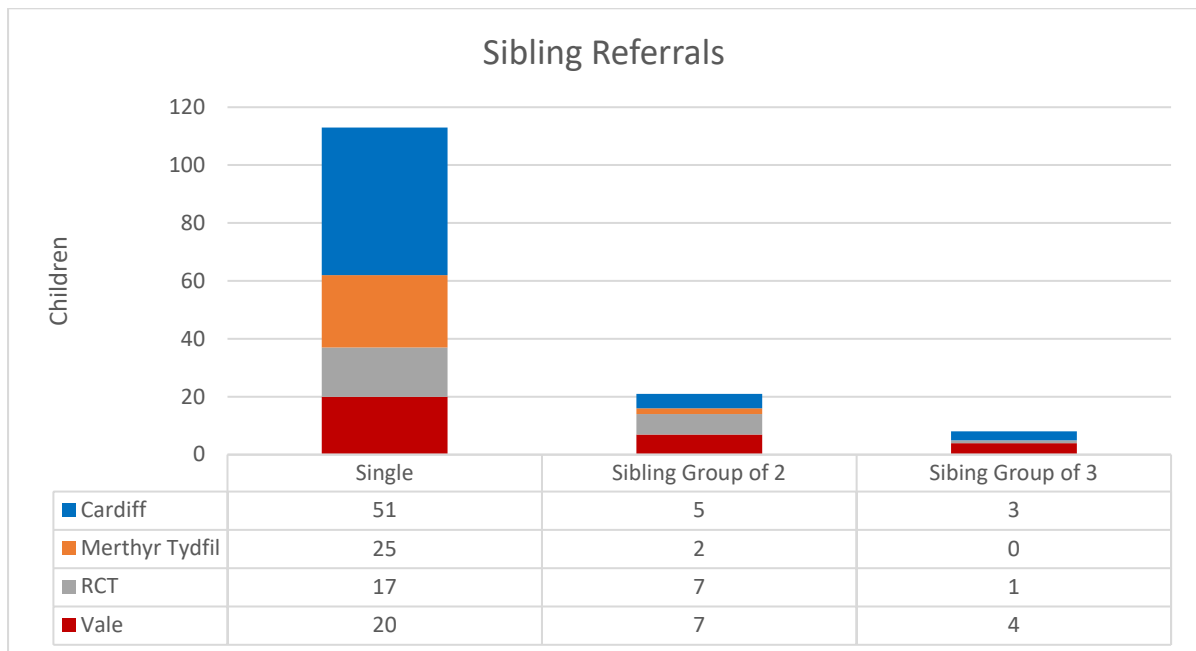
Of the **179** children referred to the service since April 2023, **54%** were under the age of 1, **35.5%** of children were aged between 1 and 4, and **10.5%** were above the age of 4.



Of the children referred to the Collaborative, **83%** of identify as White, **10%** as Mixed, **6%** as ASAB and **1%** identify as BBAC (rounded to integer).

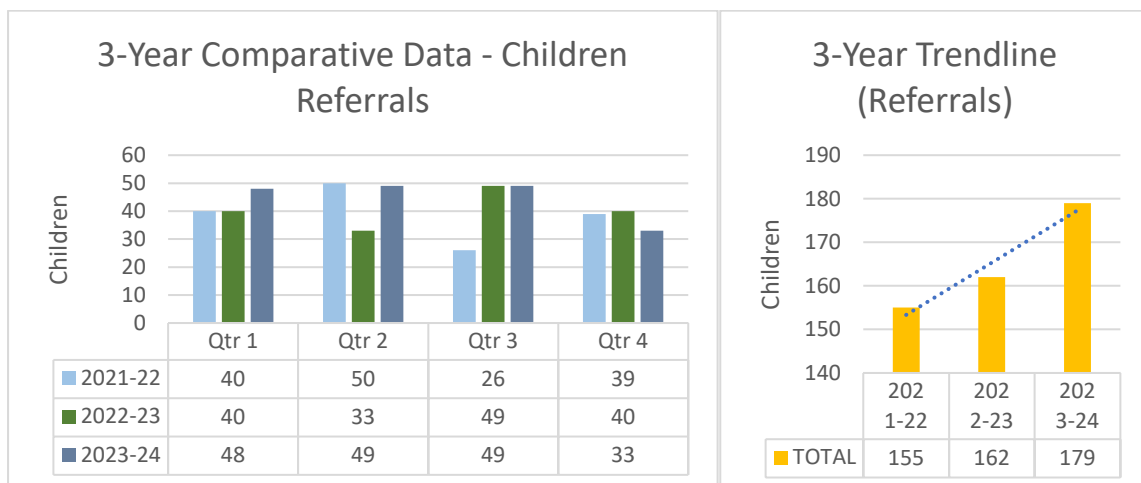


66 (37%) children were referred to the Collaborative as a sibling group.



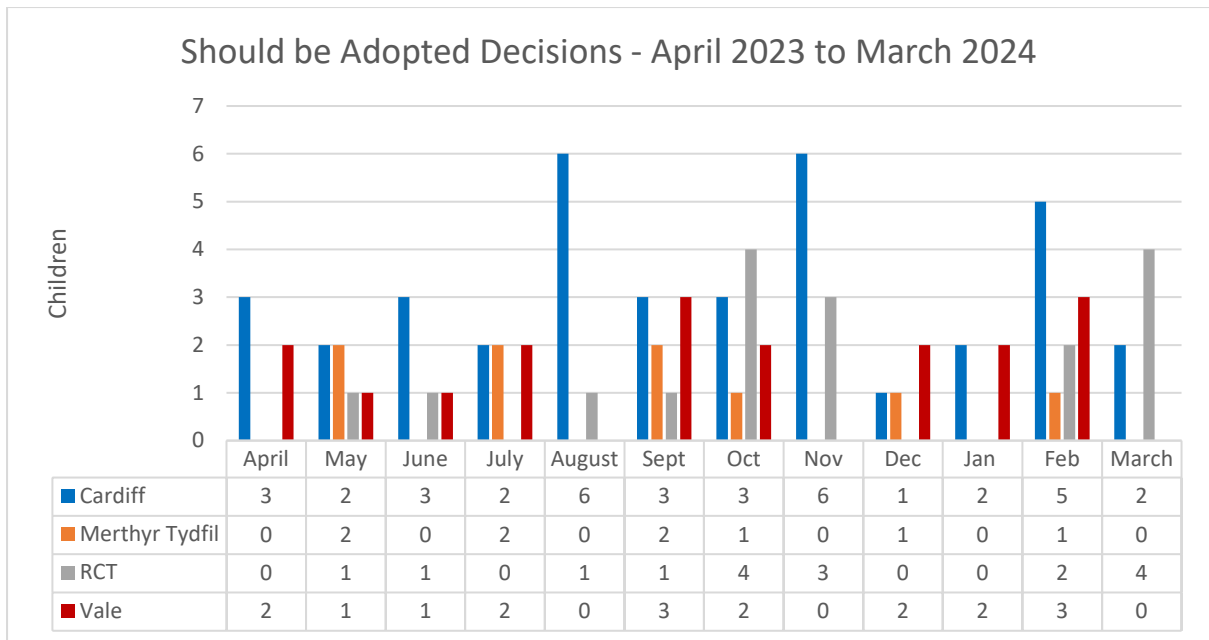
Comparative Data

Over the past three years, referrals to VVC have continued to rise.



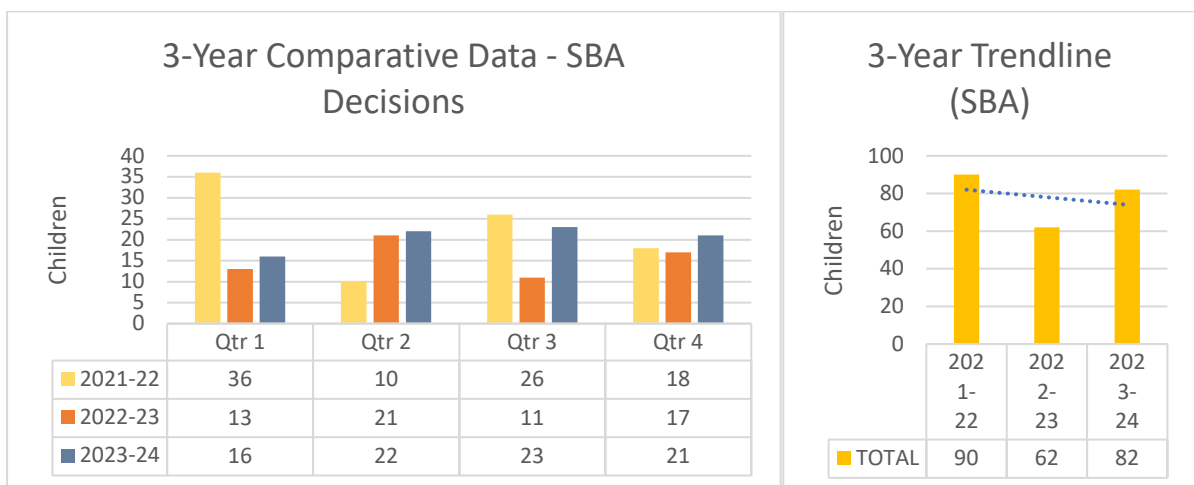
Should be Adopted Decisions

The previous year saw a reduced number of SBA decisions made compared with previous years, but this trend has not been maintained. During 2023-24 **82** SBA decisions were made during the year, which is a **32%** increase when compared to the previous year.



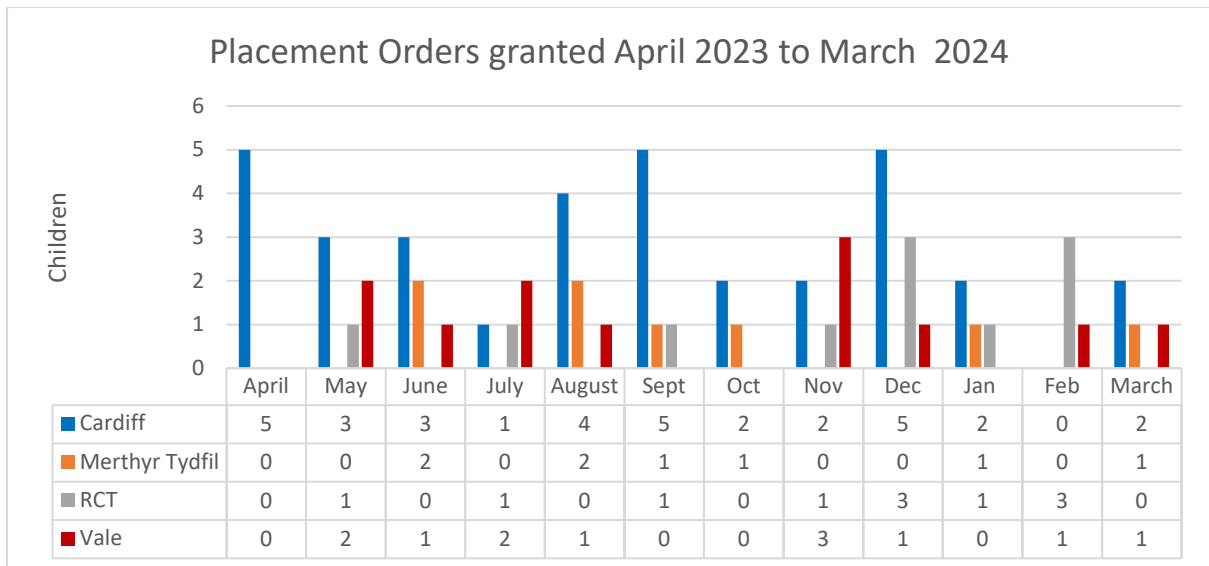
Comparative Data

SBA decisions in 2023-24 have risen to similar levels observed in previous years and significantly so since 2022-23.



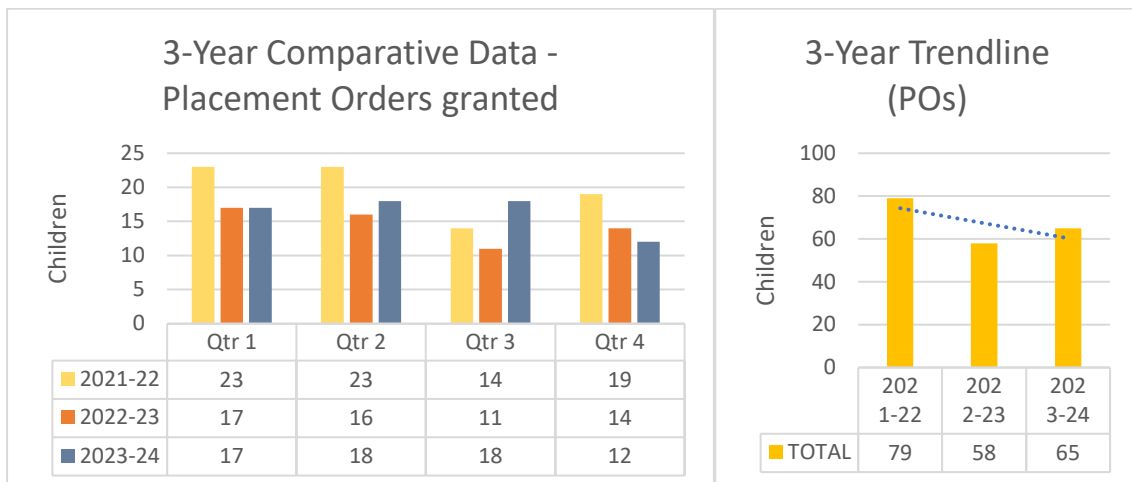
Placement Orders

65 Placement Orders were granted during the year, demonstrating a **12%** increase when compared to the previous year,



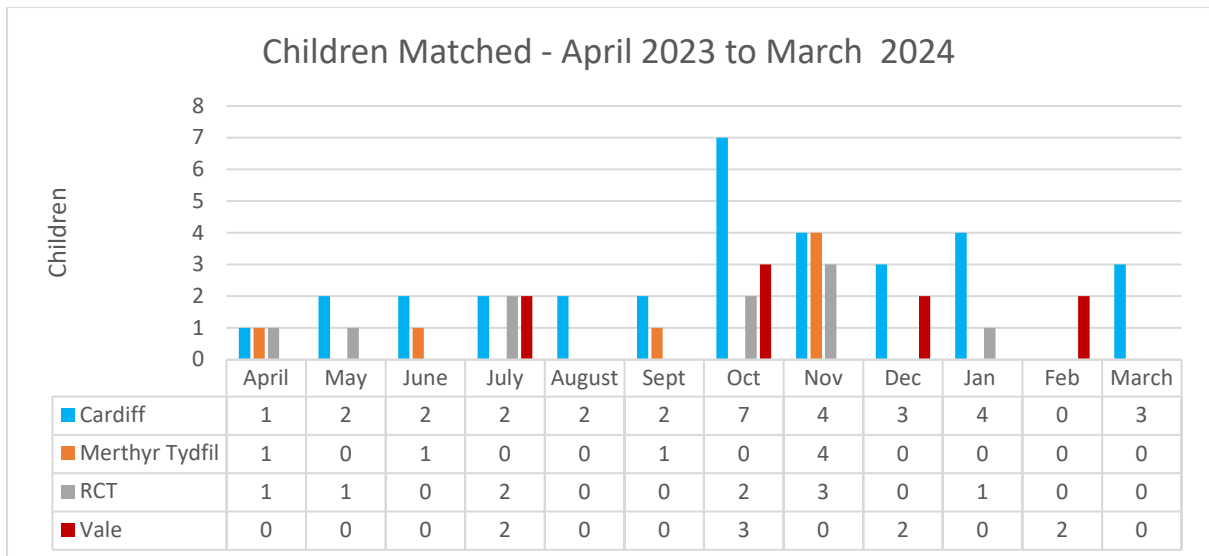
Comparative Data

Placement Orders are stabilising when compared to previous year and from the decrease noted in 2022-23 when compared to 2021-22. The rise this year is to be expected in line with an increase in referrals and SBA decisions and it should be anticipated that Q1 of 2024-25 will see an increase in Placement Orders.



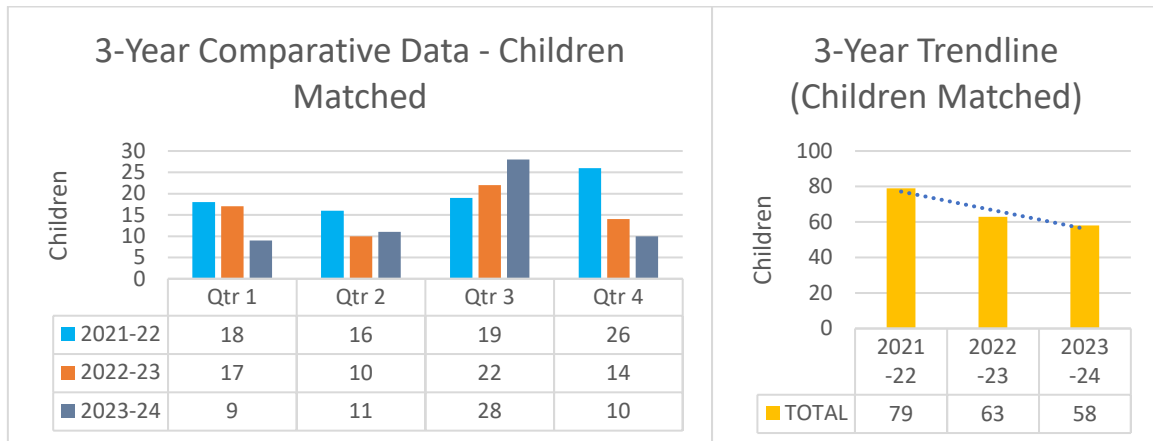
Children matched

58 children were matched during the year with 3 matches which did not proceed to placement following a breakdown in introductions. These breakdowns were for 1 single child and a sibling group of 2 and in both cases the adopters expectations and reality of children's needs were the key factors in the introductions not proceeding. The children remained in the care of their foster carers and family finding has recommenced.



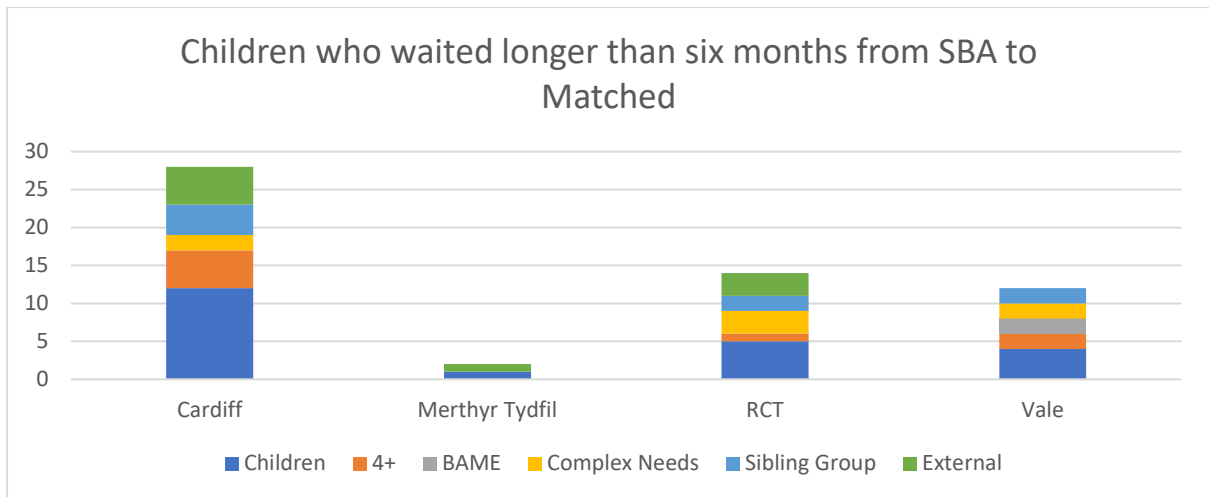
Comparative Data

The number of children matched has remained fairly consistent to the previous year and is in line with the reduced number of children with plans for adoption prior to 2023-24.



Number of children Matched since April 2022 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from “Should be placed for Adoption” decision to approve to “Match”.

Those who took longer were for expected reasons i.e. older children with more complex needs and requiring longer transitions support prior to placement and foster carers adopting a child in their care. In these instances an adoption assessment is required to be completed prior to being matched although these children experienced no delay due to remaining with their current carers throughout.



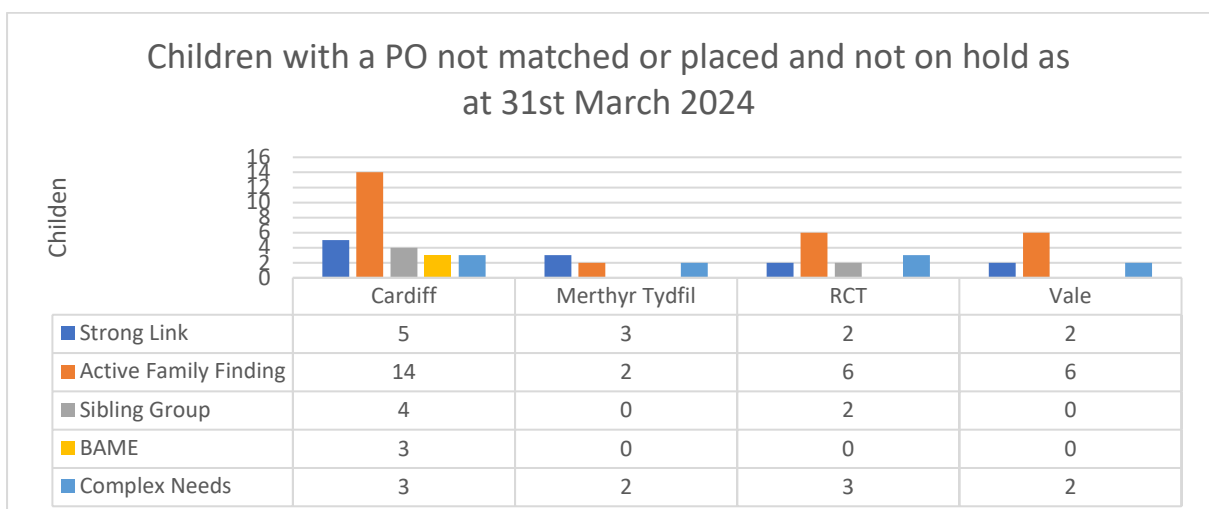
Children waiting

The Performance Measure for children waiting (M7) has been changed to capture a more realistic picture of children waiting.

This measure is now split into two parts;

M7a	Children with a PO who have not be matched or placed and includes children on hold
M7b	Children with a PO who have been matched but not placed or are on hold.

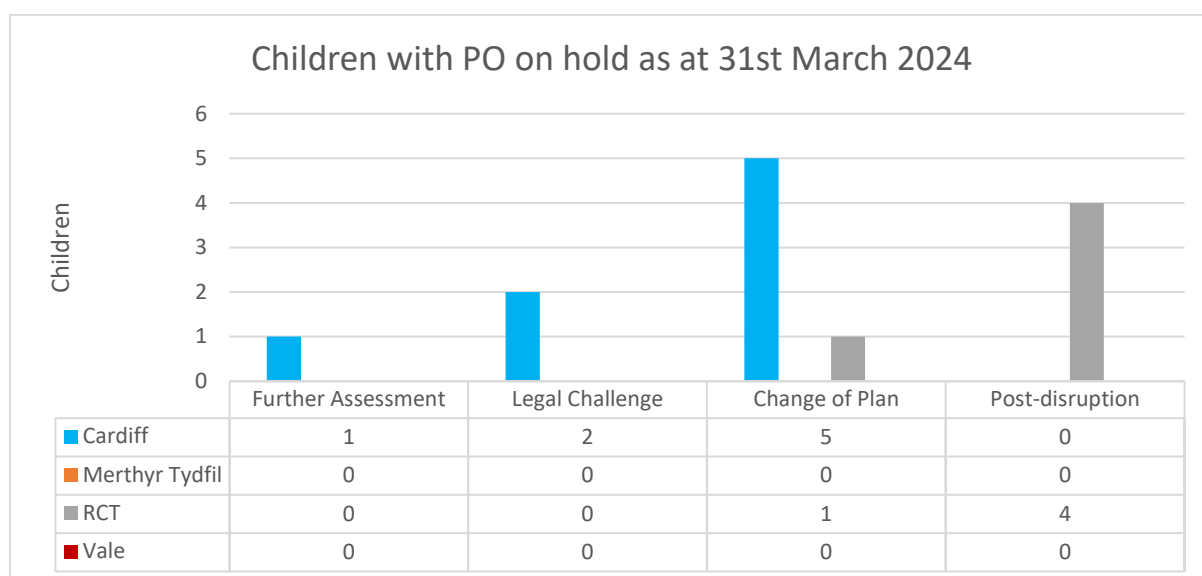
40 children are waiting as of 31 March 2024.



2 children are currently on hold pending a legal challenge but have been presented to panel for matching.

6 children are on hold while decisions are made in relation to plans of permanence with a likely change of care plan from adoption. 1 child is on hold pending the outcome of a further sibling assessment to determine if they can continue a plan of adoption on their own.

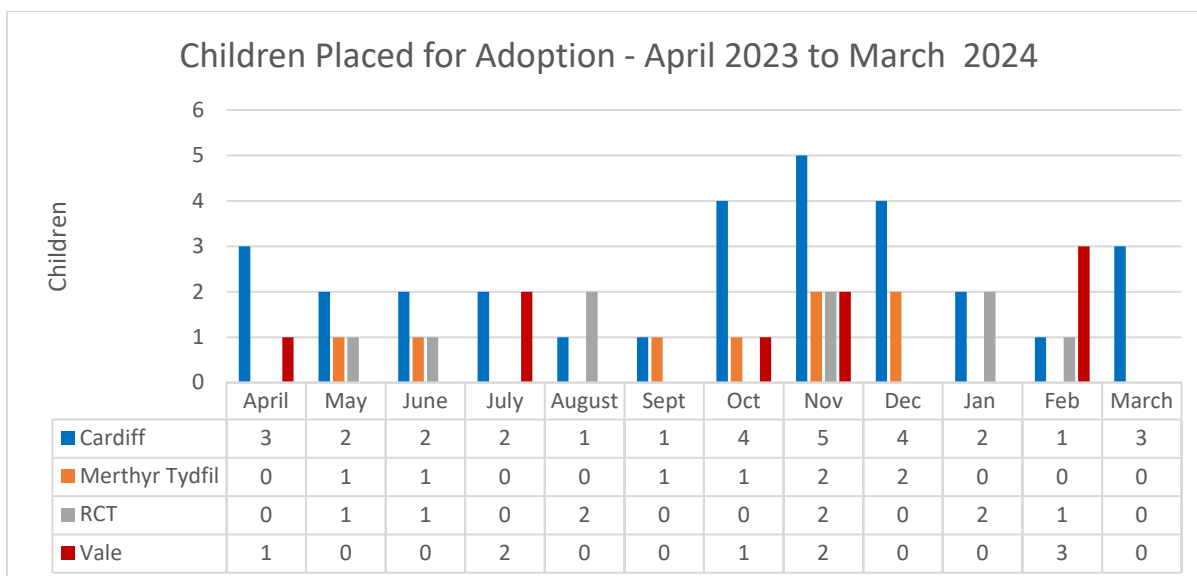
4 children are on hold following adoption disruption whilst further assessments of their needs are undertaken.



Children Placed

57 children were placed during the year; a **12%** decrease in placements when compared to the same period last year. This is in line with the significant reduction in SBA decisions and Placement Orders last year with less children having a plan for adoption. That trend did not continue in 2023-24 and so it is anticipated that if SBA decisions and Placement Orders continue to rise, we will see an increase in placement activity.

We have also had the transitions for a sibling group of 2 and one single child which commenced during 2023-24 but which did not progress to placement. We have 2 further children whose match was presented to panel but is now on hold due to a legal challenge to the placement order from parents.



Comparative Data

There has been a gradual reduction in the number of children placed over the past couple of years which is primarily due to the decrease in children with plans for adoption. If the rise in adoption plans observed during 2023-24 continues we will anticipate a similar increase in the number of children being placed for adoption. The national picture of reduced adopter approvals also needs to be monitored in view of its impact upon availability of adopters for children.

Type of placement

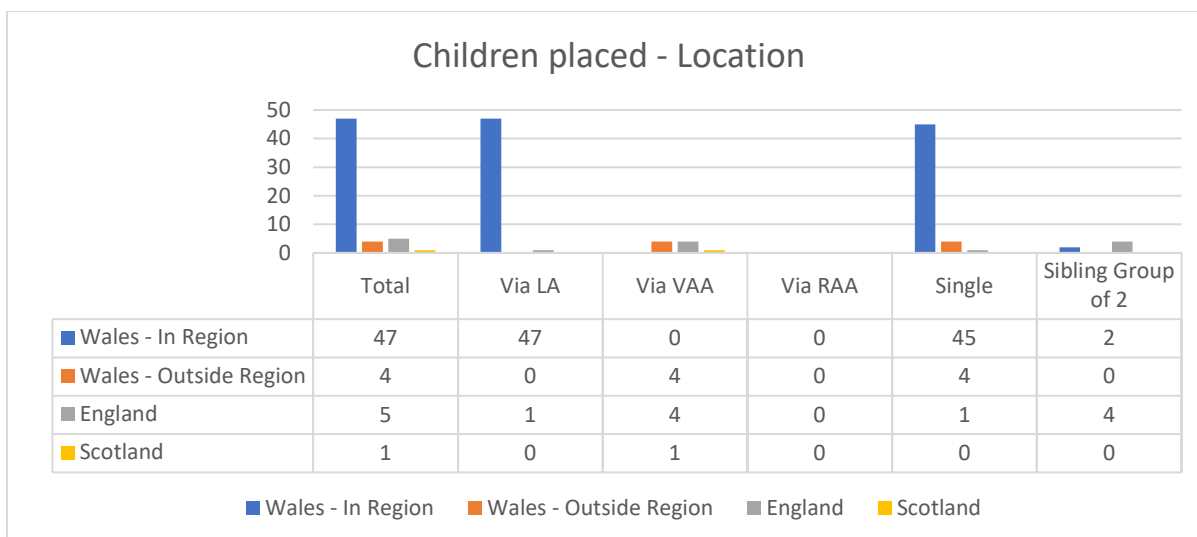
Of the 57 children placed:

82% were placed with VVC adopters

7% were placed within Wales with VAA adopters

9% (5 children) were placed in England with either VAA or English Local Authority adopters including children placed alongside siblings already adopted.

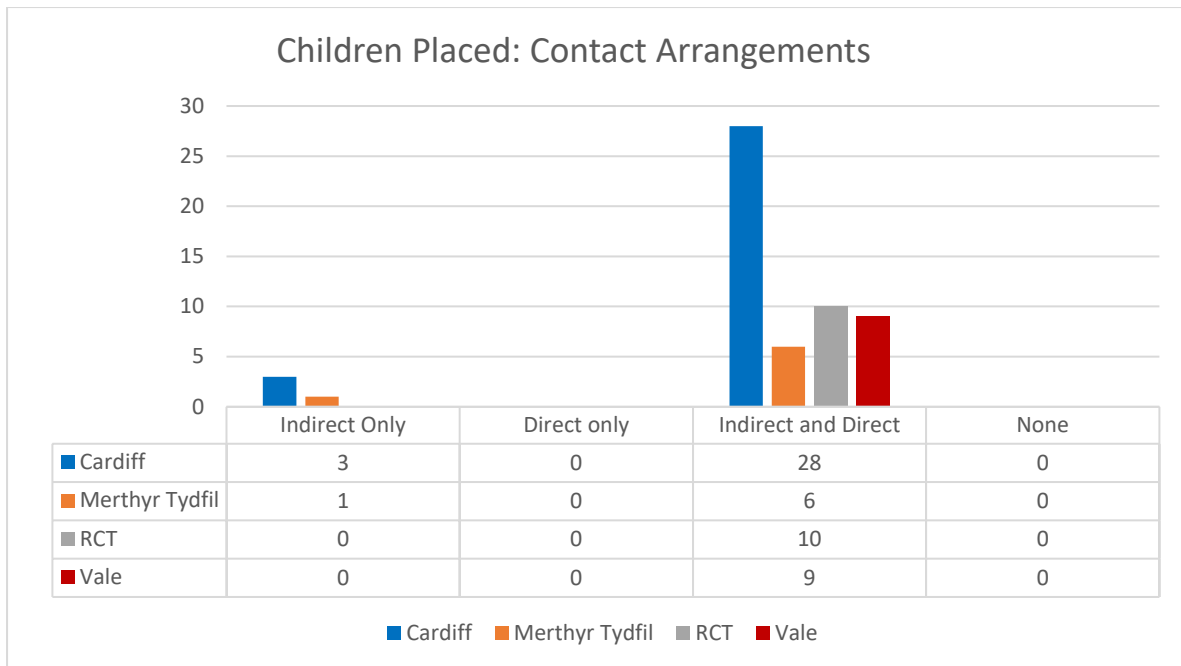
1 child (**2%** rounded to integer) was placed with adopters in Scotland.



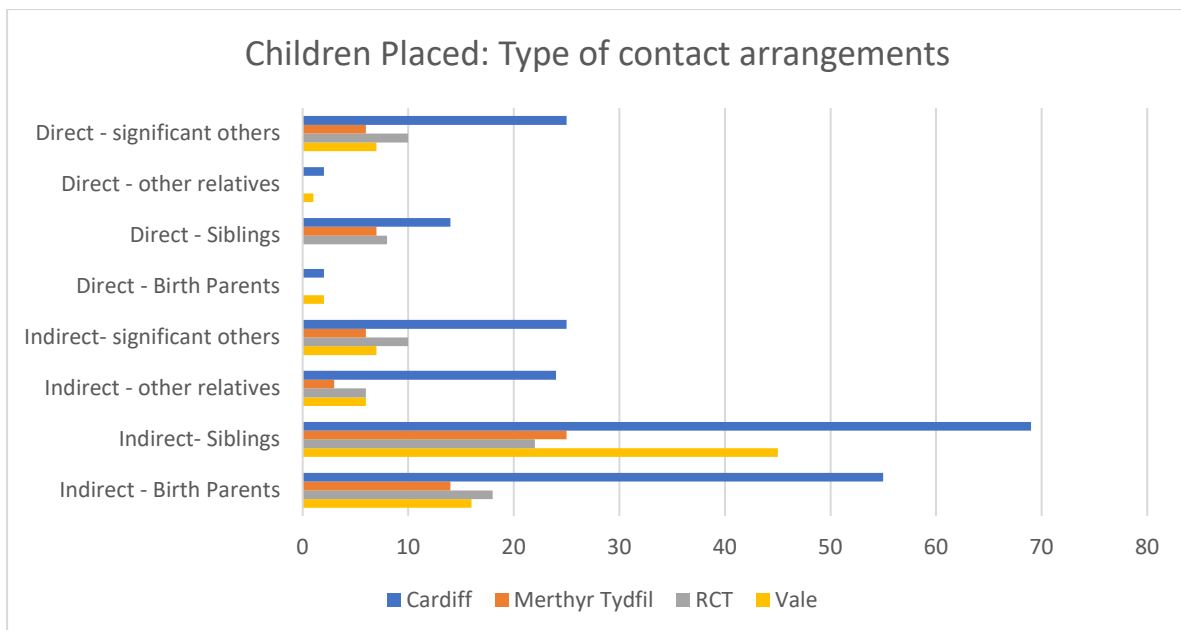
New performance measure – Contact

With effect from 30 September 2023, the region are required to report on two new measures introduced to capture the number of contact arrangements that are in place at the point that a child is placed for adoption during the quarter, and who the contact is with.

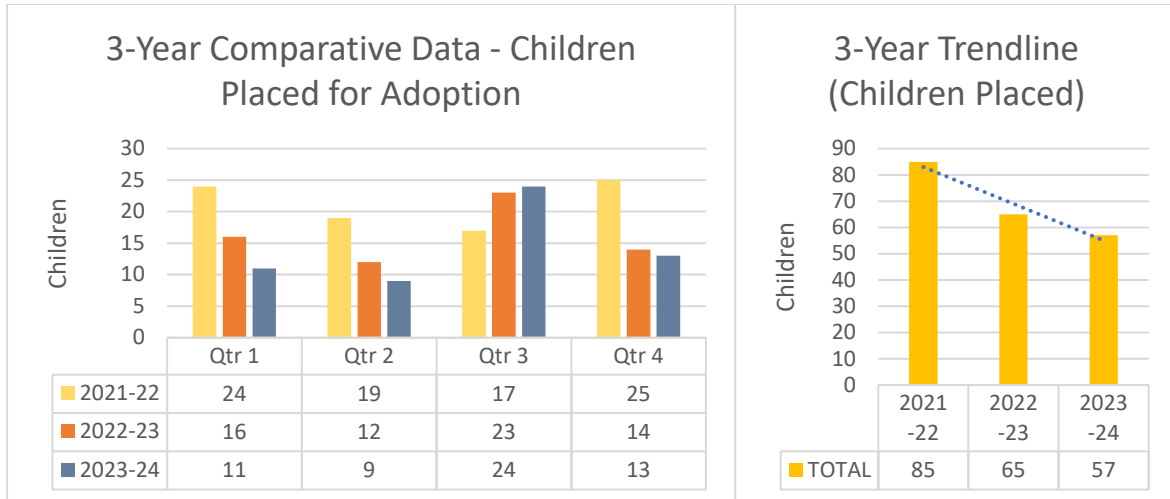
PI	Performance measure
M56	Count the number of children placed for adoption during the quarter who have arrangements in place for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indirect contact only, - direct contact only, - indirect and direct contact, - no contact.
M57	Of the children placed for adoption during the quarter with arrangements for direct contact, who was the direct contact with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Birth parents - Siblings - Other birth family - Significant others NB: Contact could be with all four.



93% of children placed have a plan for indirect and direct contact with birth relatives or significant others (for example foster carers).

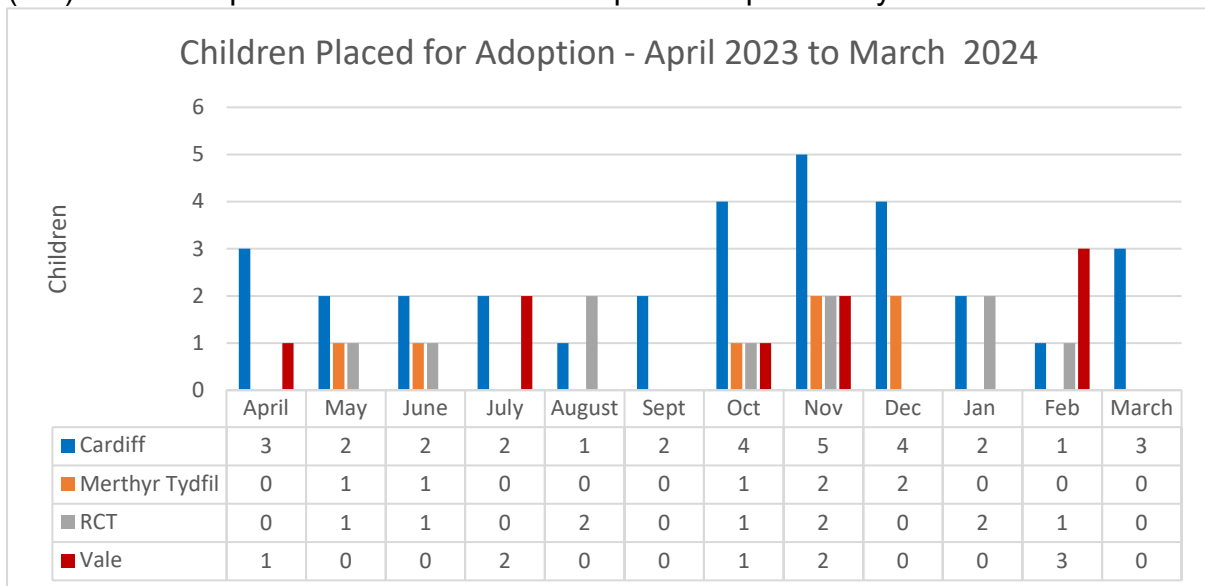


Of the 57 children placed during the reporting period there were **357** indirect contact arrangements in place and **84** direct contact arrangements. One-off meetings have taken place between adopters and **23** birth relatives.



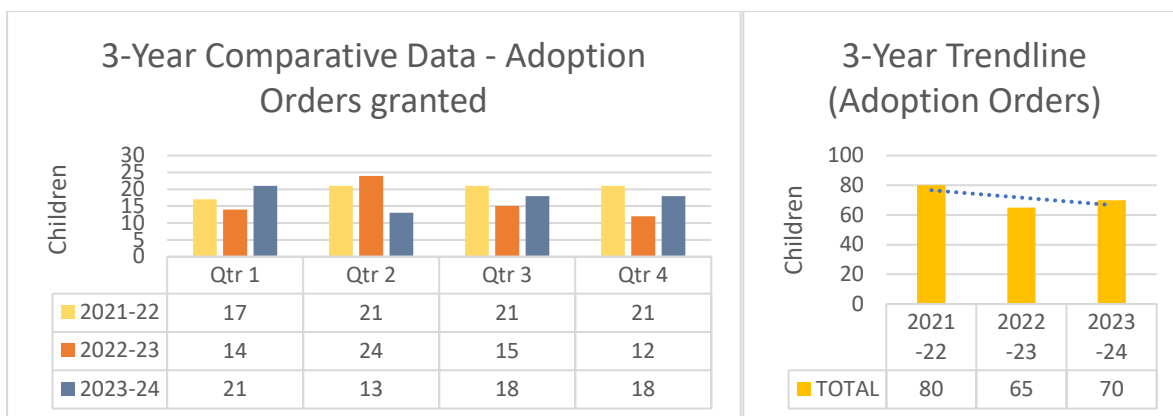
Adoption Orders

70 Adoption Orders were granted in the reporting period, which is slight increase (8%) when compared to data for the same period in previous year.



Comparative Data

Adoption Orders granted in 2023-24 are at a very similar rate to those in the previous year, in line with the number of children placed across both years.



Placement Breakdown

During 2023-24 we have seen an unusual spike in the number of placements which have disrupted. The disruption rate had been held at 0 for a number of years.

One placement disrupted for a single child after 6 days in placement. A disruption meeting has been held and identified a mismatch between the adopters expectations and the reality of the child being placed. No deficits were identified in the matching process for this child.

One placement disrupted for a single child and one for a sibling group of 2 during the year where extensive support services had been provided and the independently chaired disruption meeting commended agencies for the support offered. In both cases there were differences between the adopters expectations and perceived skills and the reality of the needs of the children and the therapeutic parenting approach needed.

One final placement disrupted for another sibling group of 2. This placement had experienced some challenges although not to the extent of the other disruptions. The placement broke down following an allegation made by one of the children against the adopters and the adopters decision that they couldn't continue. The disruption meeting identified some key learning points and the adopters' agency (external) identified deficits in their assessment of the adopters.

Of the disruptions, 2 were VVC approved adopters and 2 were external (Barnardo's Cymru).

The Family Finding Manager has regularly completed reviews and work around our disruption rate over the past few years and delivered workshops with the Team. The most recent of these was held in March 2024 with VVC staff and panel members. Data relating to pre-adoption order placement breakdowns within VVC is now available over a 12-year period where **3.8%** of placements disrupt overall pre-adoption order. This is in line with findings from research around adoption disruption.

Work is now being undertaken to capture learning from adoptions which disrupt post-adoption order.

Life Journey

During 2023-24 **100%** of life journey material in draft format was made available at the time of panel and the finalised life journey book was completed by the 2nd adoption review for **100%** of children. The grant-funded life journey worker posts within the LAs are consistently achieving this 100% return.

The completed later life letter has remained the responsibility of the child's Social Worker and due to workload pressures, there are a small number of children where completion has not been possible by 2nd review. A pilot is being explored with one local authority for the life journey workers to prepare the later life letter.

Three additional performance measures are now included in the performance framework and the first six months data was reported to NAS on 30 September 2023 (measures 53, 54 and 55).

During the year, meetings were held with regional IROs to review the Adoption Review paperwork and as an Operational Group to discuss the introduction of the new measures to the 2nd Review process. It was agreed that Team Managers within the local authorities would be responsible for the completion of quality assurance checklists for life journey materials. This decision was made in the latter part of Q3 and so it is expected that performance will be low for this year in relation to Measures 54 and 55. Merthyr held 4 2nd adoption reviews in Q4 and 100% had quality assurance C

checklists completed. The other local authorities did not have a process in place for this at the end of Q4.

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 during 2023-24
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	32	32	32	100%	100%
Merthyr	7	7	7	100%	100%
RCT	10	10	10	100%	100%
Vale	9	9	9	100%	100%
TOTAL	58	58	58	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

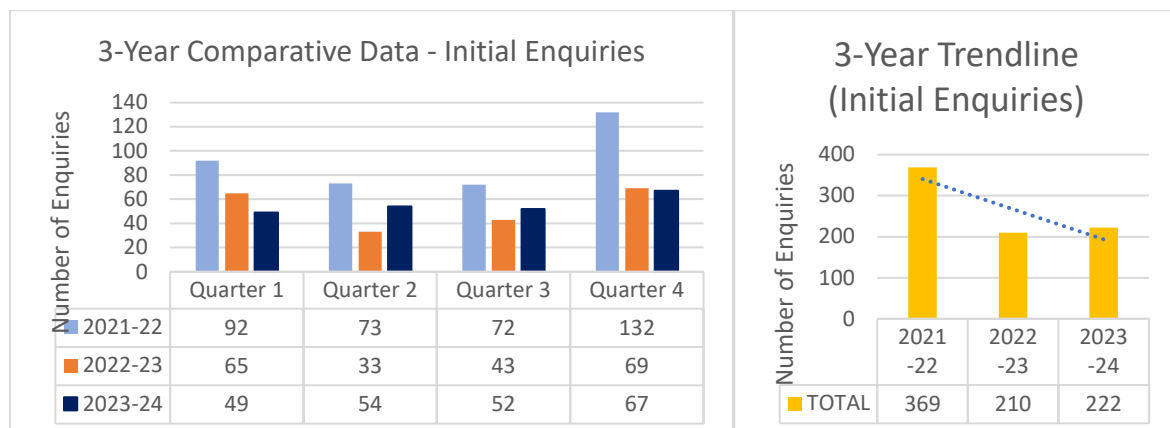
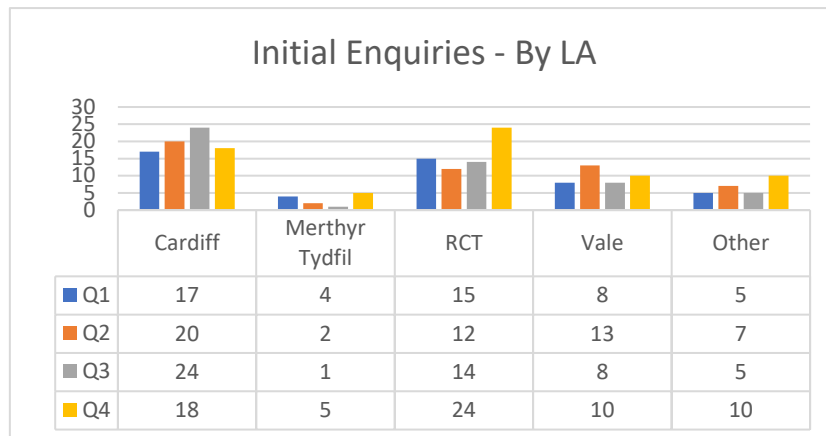
	2 nd Reviews Held	Life Journey Book at 2 nd review	Later Life Letter at 2 nd review	% Life Journey Book	% Later Life Letter	QA checklist completed at 2 nd review	% QA checklist completed	Acceptable standard	% Acceptable standard
Cardiff*	10	10	9	100	75	0	0%	N/A	N/A
Merthyr	4	4	4	100%	100%	4	100%	4	100%
RCT	7	7	7	100%	100%	0	0%	N/A	N/A
Vale**	10	10	8	100	80%	0	0%	N/A	N/A

TOTAL	27	27	24	100					
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Appendix 2 – Recruitment and Assessment

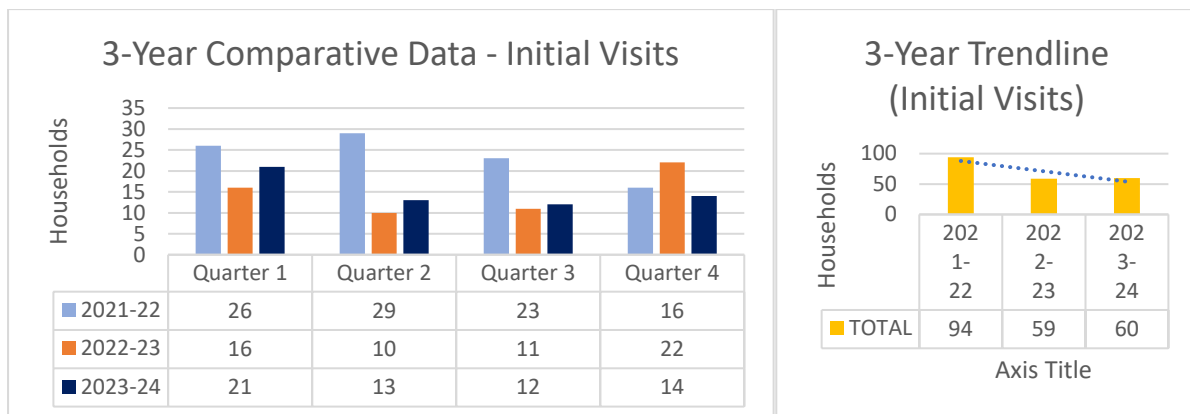
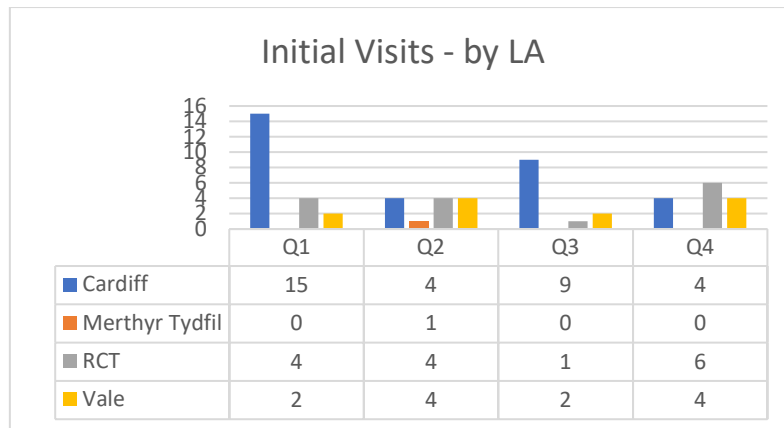
Initial Enquiries

222 enquiries were received during the reporting period April 2023 to March 2024 representing a nominal increase when compared to the same period in the previous year where 210 enquiries were received.



Initial Visits

14 initial visits were carried out during Q4, lower than the 22 initial visits completed during the same period of 2022/23. Whilst disappointing when considering our enquiry rate was somewhat similar in both this and last years' Q4, a theme VVC is observing is the enquirers are providing positive feedback from the engagement we have with them at the enquiry stage, but individuals are wishing to pause and reflect on the information being shared before proceeding to an initial visit. Our overall initial visit figure for 2023-24 is on par with that of 2023-22

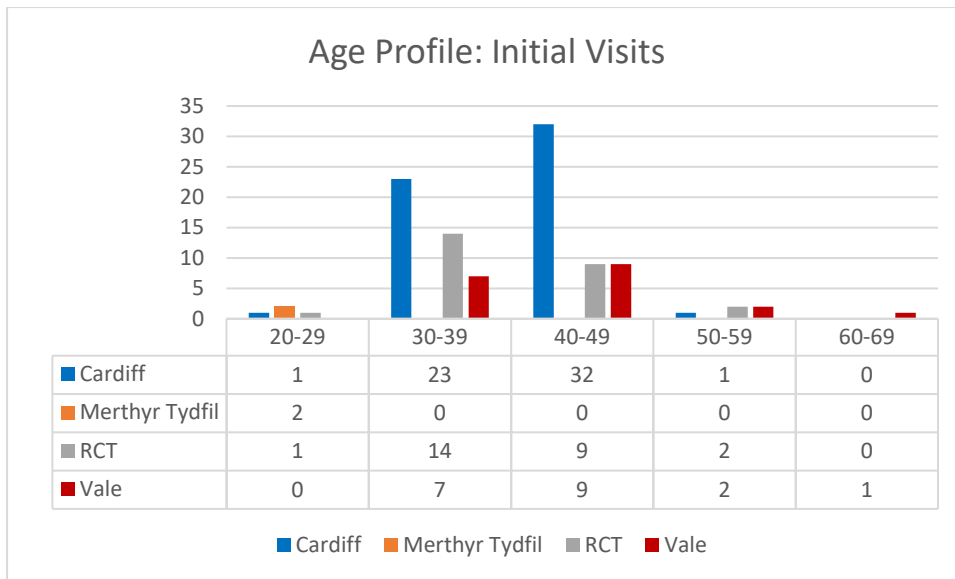


Age and ethnicity

Age and ethnicity profiles have been drawn from initial visits completed during the year. Although previously provided at enquiry stage, not all enquirers provide age and ethnicity data.

Of those who engaged in initial visits:

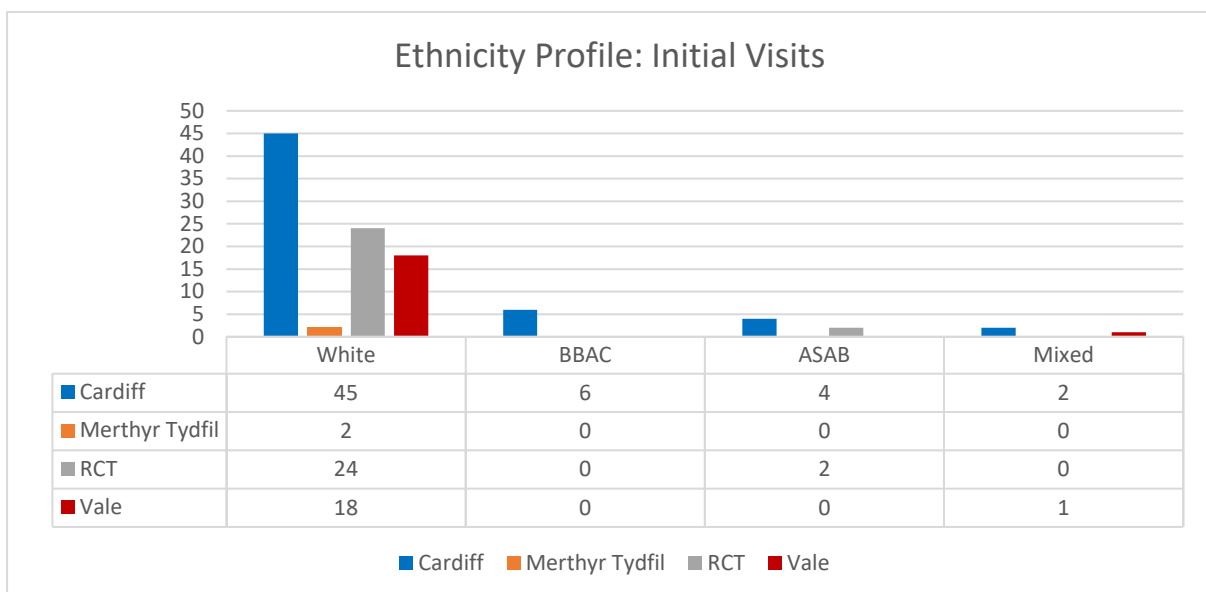
- **4%** were aged between 20-29
- **42%** were aged between 30-39
- **48%** were aged between 40-49
- **5%** were aged between 50-59
- **1%** were aged between 60-69



Of those who engaged in an initial visit, **86%** identified as being White **6%** identified as being BBAC **6%** identified as ASAB, **2%** identified as being of mixed heritage.

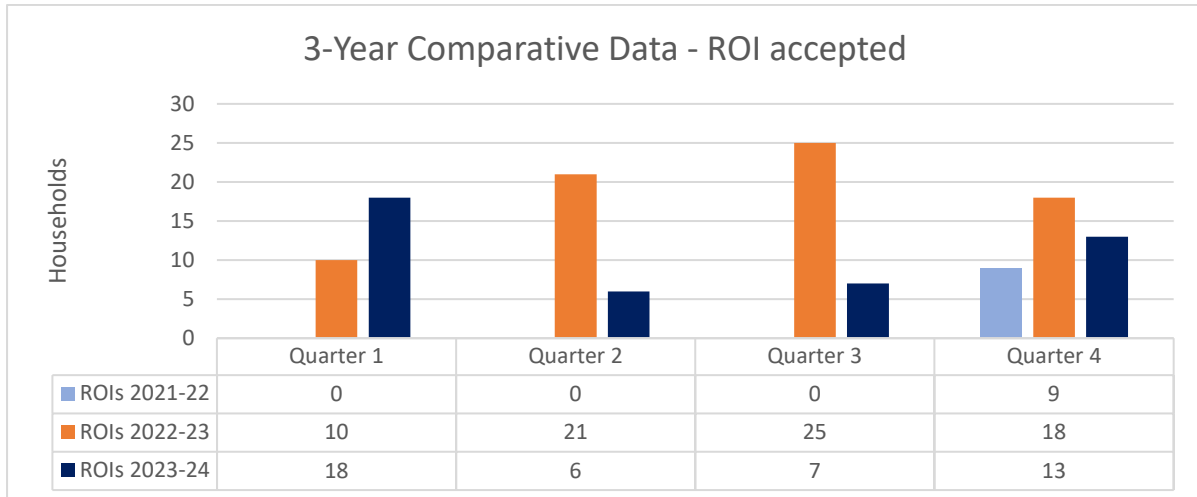
Definitions are taken from Children Looked After Census 2021-22, Office for Statistics, Welsh Government as follows:

- WHITE - White
- MIXD - Mixed ethnic groups
- ASAB – Asian or Asian British
- BBAC – Black, African, Caribbean or Black British



2 stage model

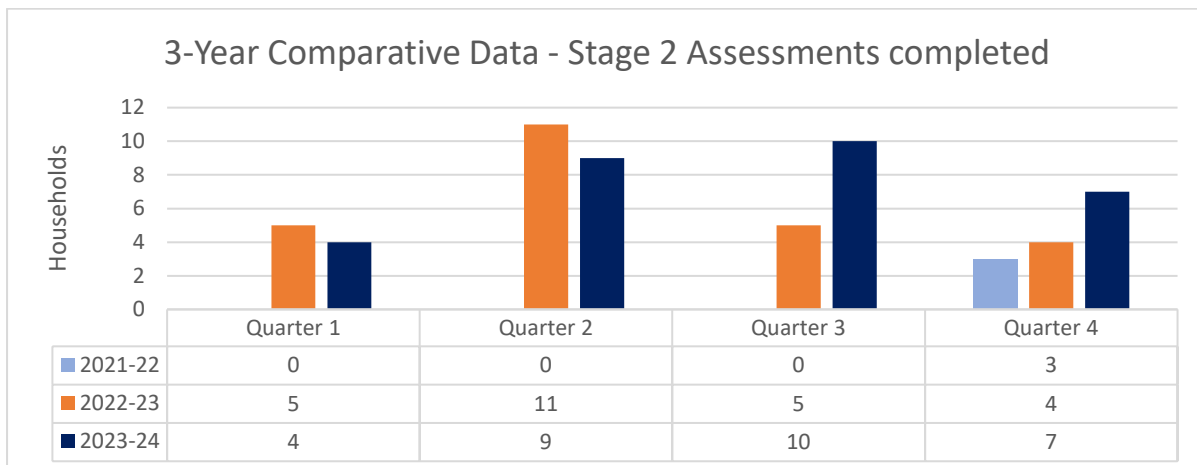
13 registrations of interest were accepted during Q4 and all are currently being progressed within the structure of the 2-stage model of progressing adoption assessments.



Unable to produce a 3-year trendline as Stage 2 process introduced less than 3 years ago.

Stage 2 assessments

7 Stage 2 assessments were started during Q4 and a further 7 Stage 2 assessments were completed during the same period. 1 of these assessments was out of 4-month stage 2 timescale, albeit by 4 days.

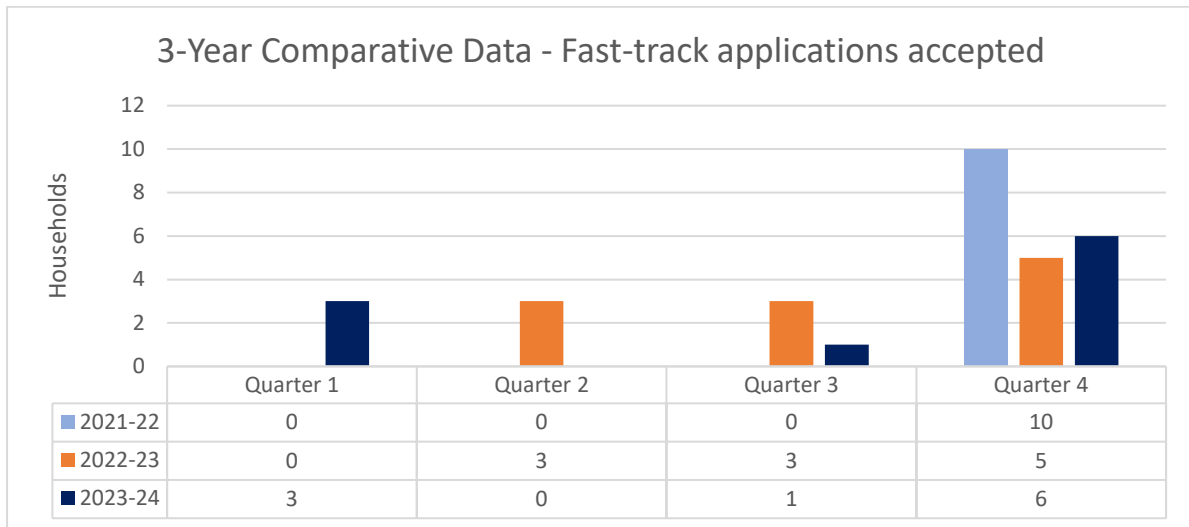


Unable to produce a 3-year trendline as Stage 2 process introduced less than 3 years ago.

Fast-track applications.

6 fast track applications were accepted Q4, with 1 of these almost immediately withdrawing owing to a change in personal circumstances.

2 fast track applications were completed during Q4, 1 of these well within the 4-month timescale and 1 taking 8 months to complete owing to the family experiencing a range of unexpected changes in employment and living arrangements.

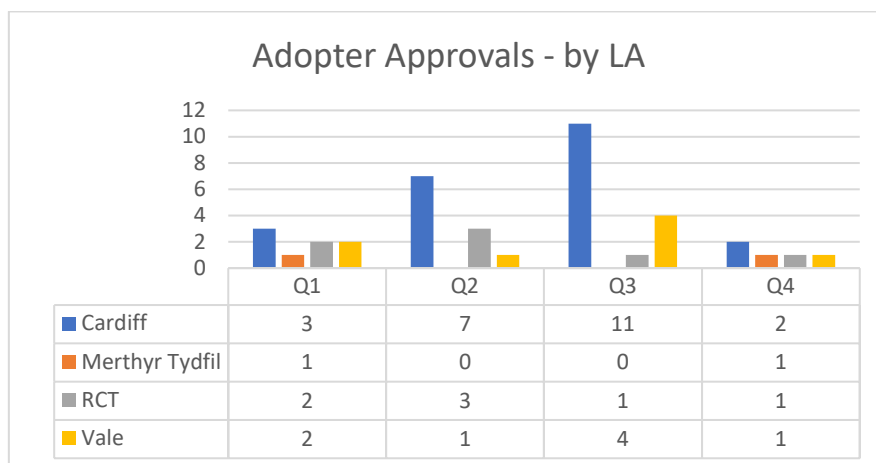


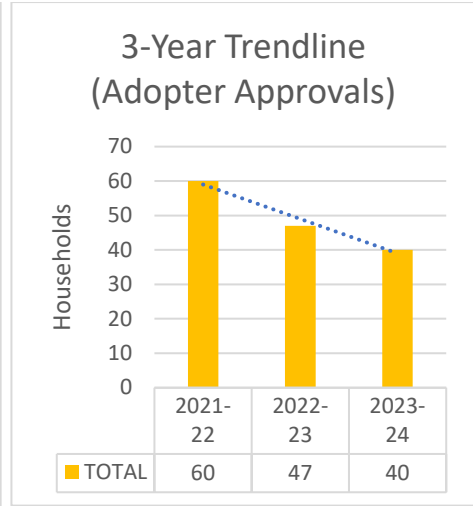
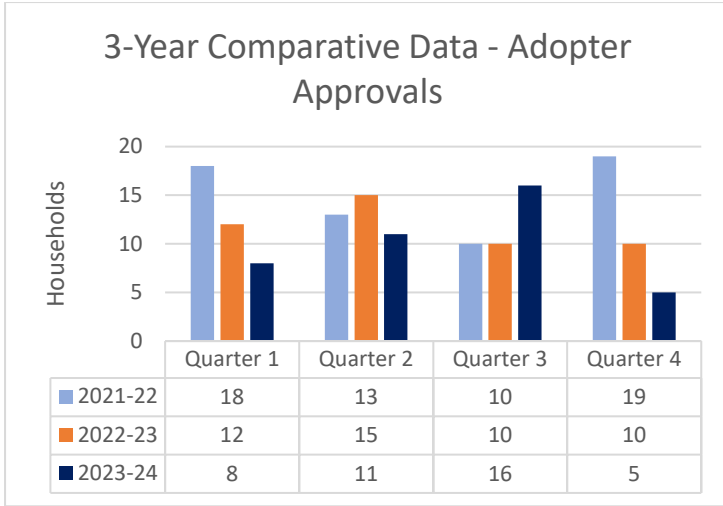
Unable to produce a 3-year trendline as Stage 2 process introduced less than 3 years ago.

Adopter approvals

9 approval recommendations were made by Adoption Panel during Q4 with 5 of these being ratified during the Q4 reporting period.

A total of 40 adopter approvals were made during the reporting year, which is a decrease of 7 when compared to the same period in the previous year. Although disappointing, this mirrors the trends we are observing within all Welsh adoption services.

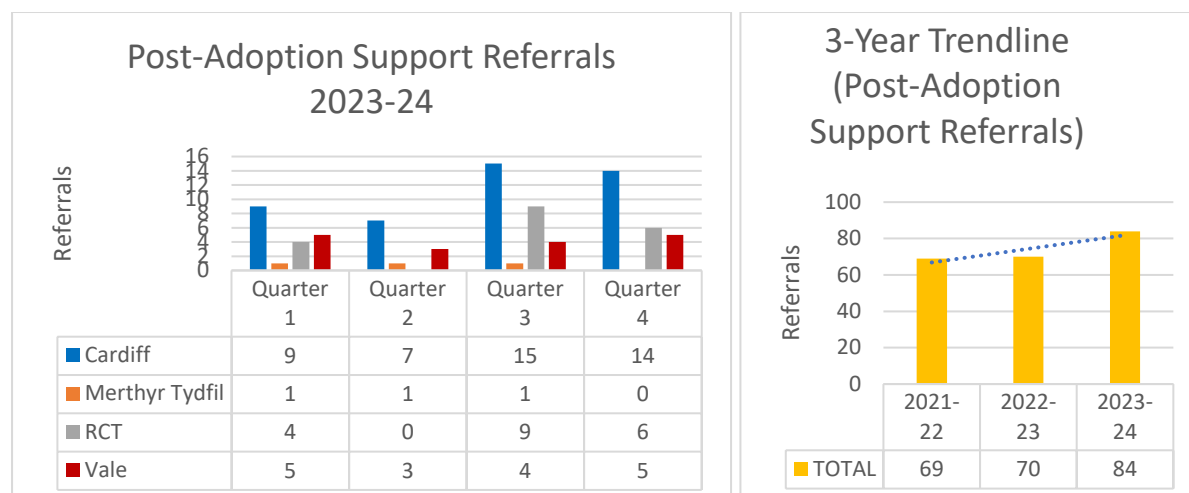




Adoption Support

Referrals

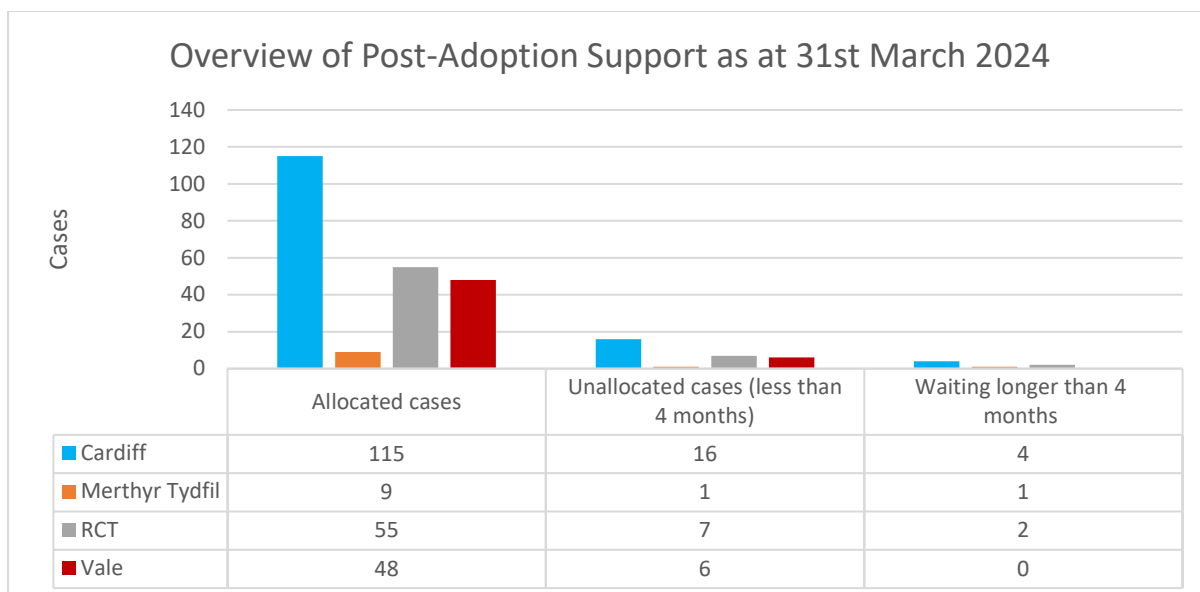
84 new referrals for Post Adoption Support were received during the reporting period (April 2023 to March 2024) which is a 20% increase from the previous year.



New performance measures – Adoption Support Plans

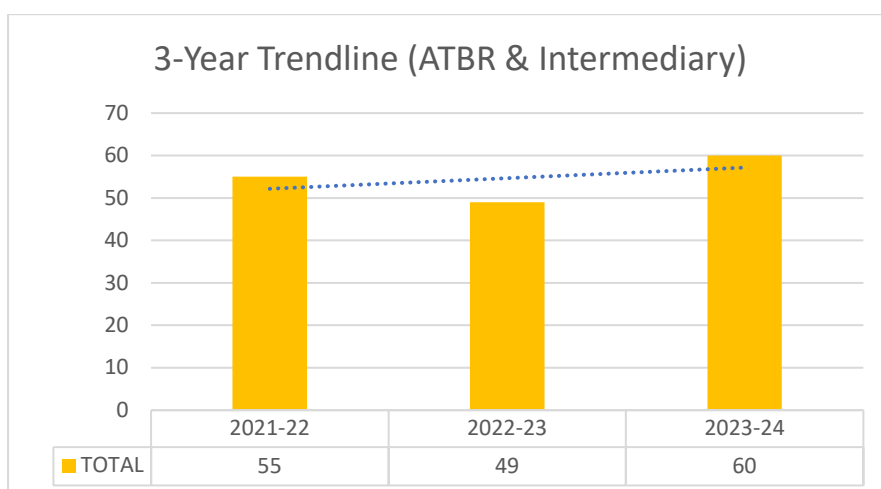
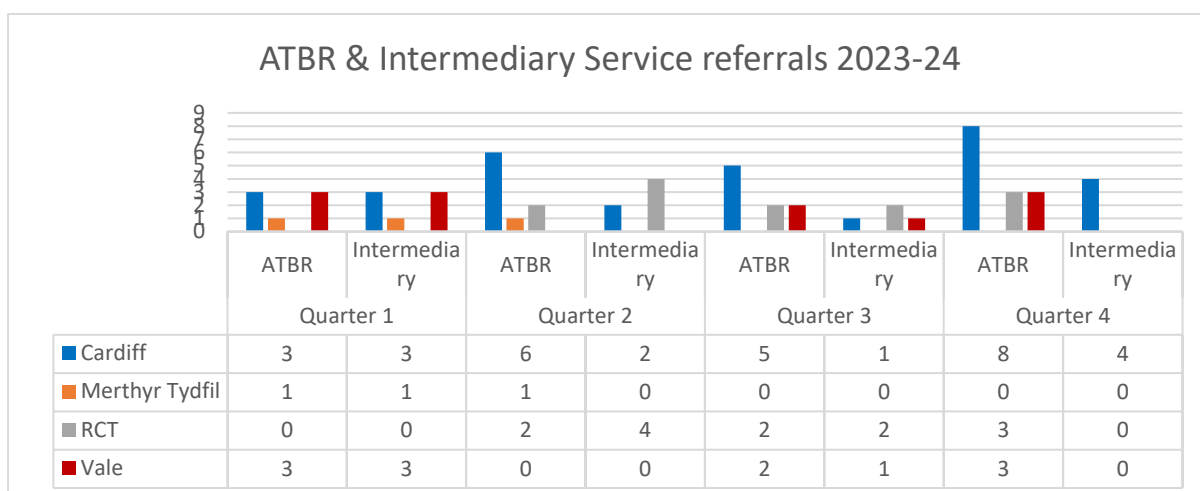
Three new measures were introduced for adoption support cases. The service now reports on a six monthly and yearly basis.

PI	Measure	TOTAL
M56	Number of active adoption support cases receiving a service as at mid-year and end of year.	257
M57	Number of adoption support cases who are on the waiting for allocation as at mid-year and end of year	30
M58	The number of children waiting more than 4 months from first referral with the agency to receiving a service.	7



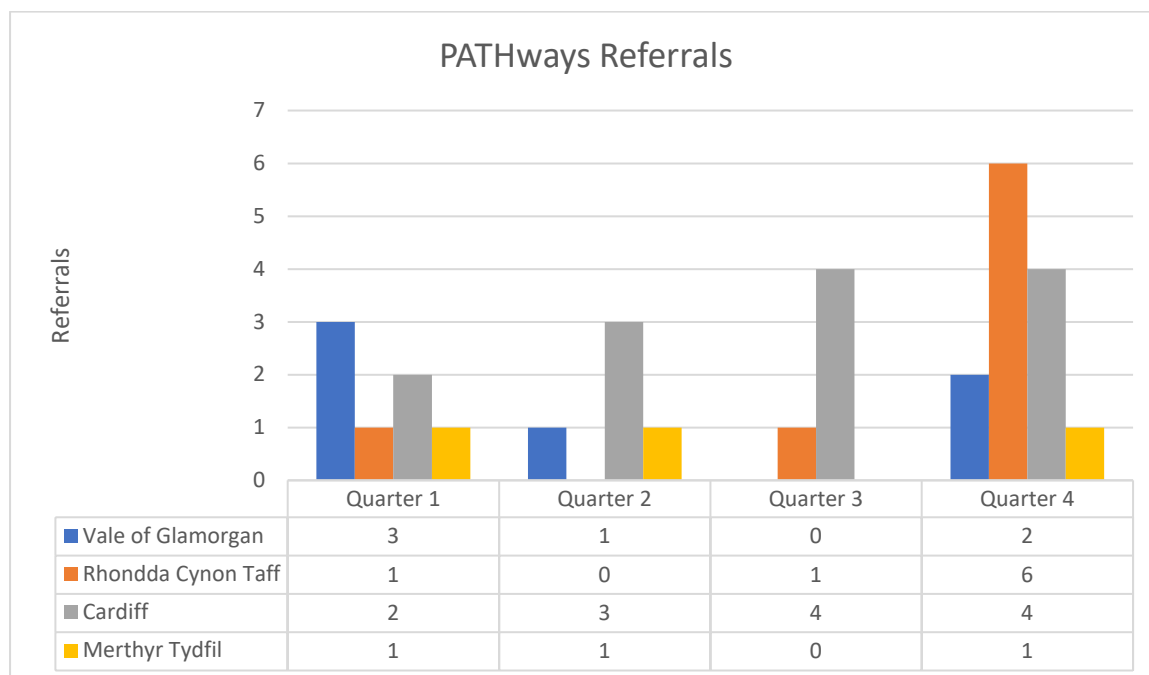
Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services

60 referrals were received for Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services which reflects a 22% rise from the previous year.



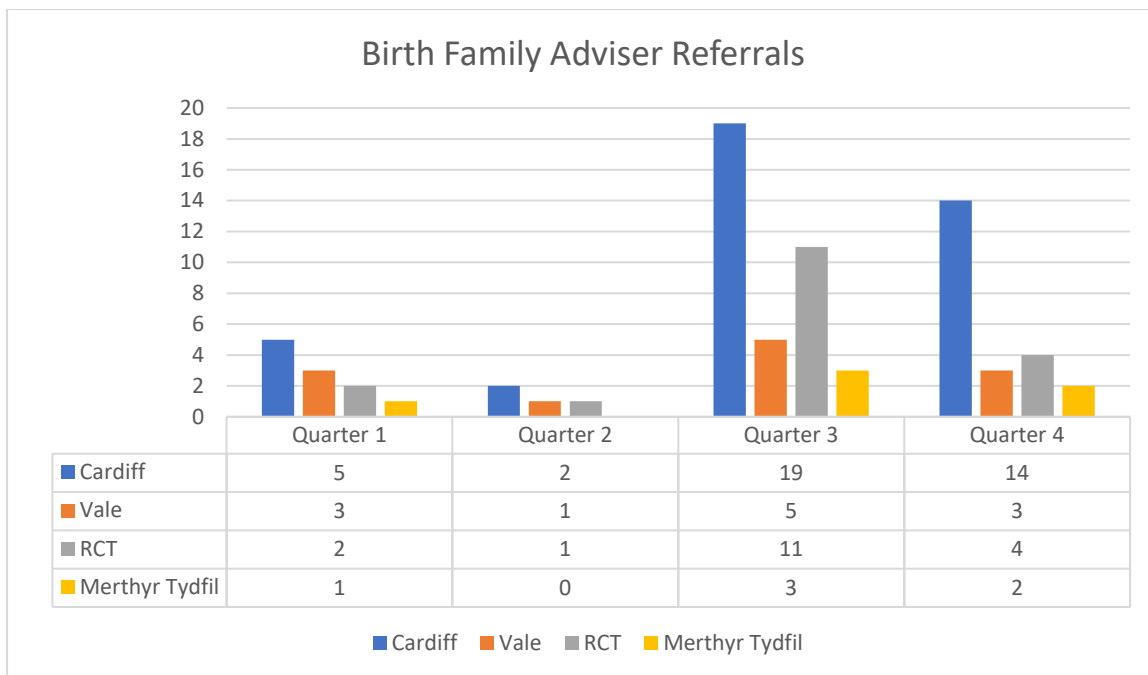
PATHways (formerly known as TESSA)

30 referrals were submitted to PATHways during the period April 2023 to March 2024 and the service continues to have a positive impact on supporting families with lower priority needs



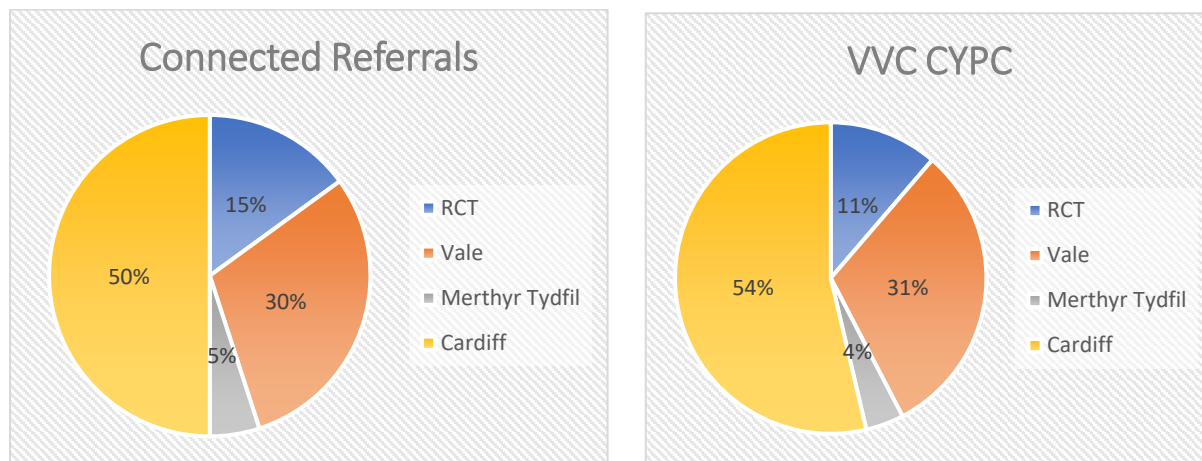
Birth Parent Adviser

76 new referrals were received during the period April 2023 to March 2024. Additionally VVC are supporting birth families by running a group every 3 months. The increase of referrals is partly related to gaps in the letterbox service and the support for families being picked up through this role.



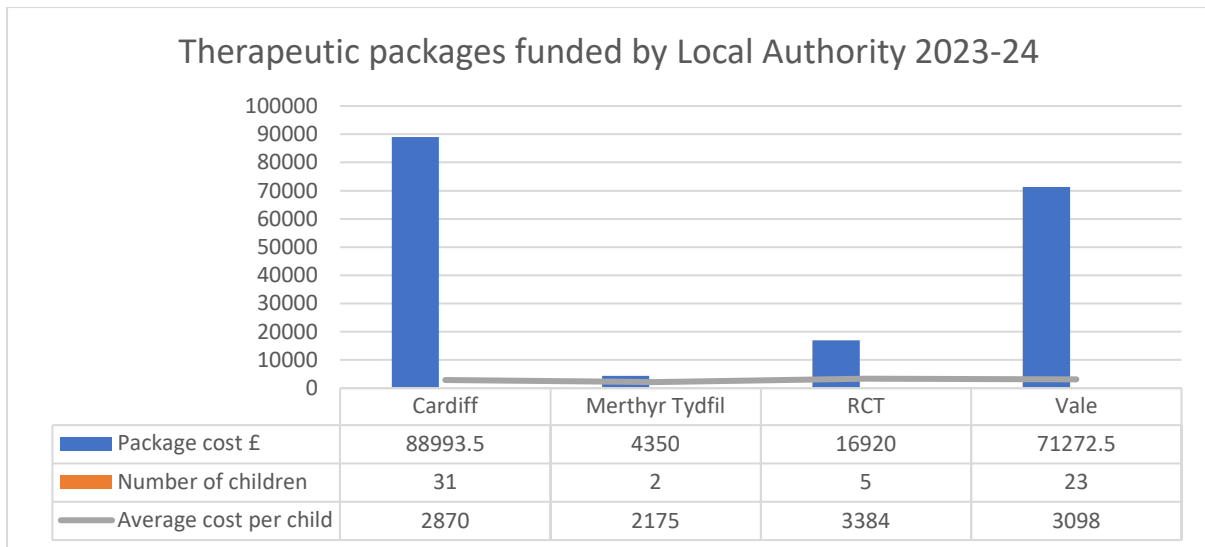
Children & Young Person Co-Ordinator (CYPC) April 2023 – March 2024

The Adoption UK Connected Service reported 20 new referrals of children and young people from the region into the service into the group provision in addition to those already registered. The graphs show the geographical breakdown by %.

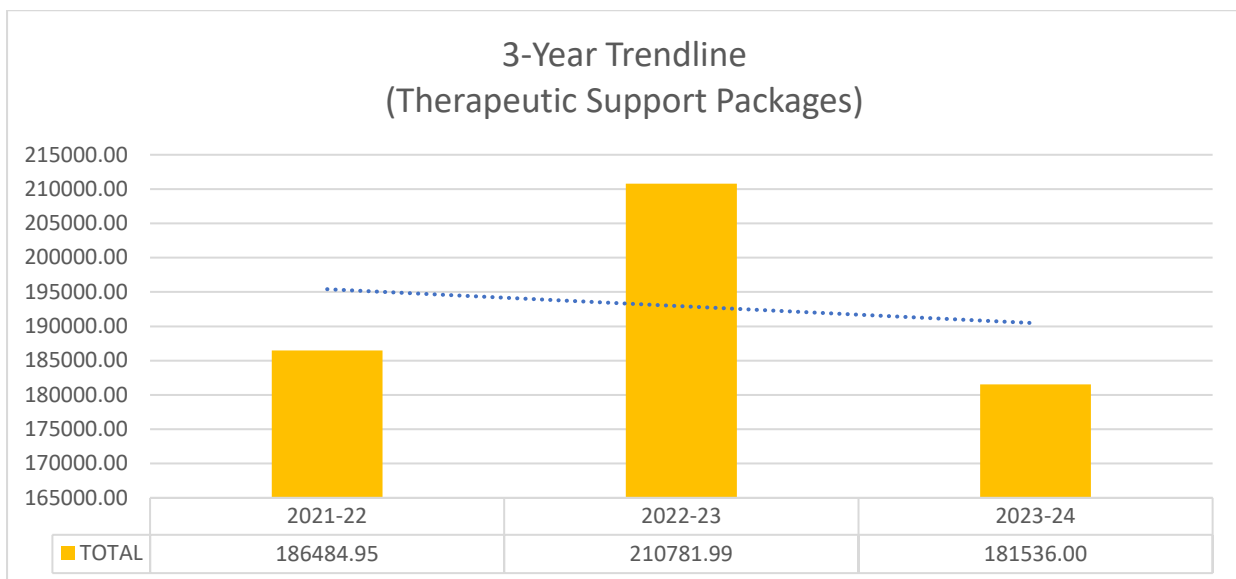


Post Adoption Support Therapeutic Packages

With the introduction of the MAPSS and ENFYS commissioned services, a notable decrease in the funding for independent therapeutic services is observed from 2022-23 to 2023-24.



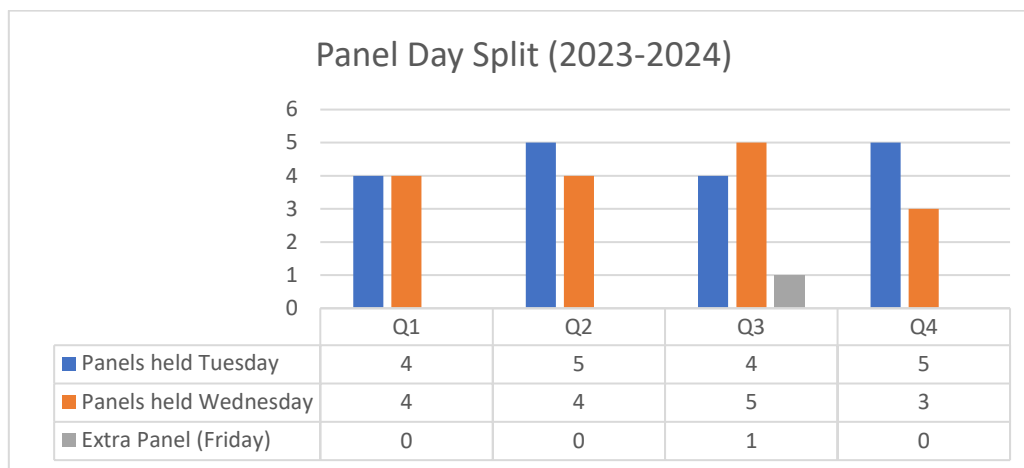
The average cost of packages per child is relatively consistent across the region. The total of 61 children with therapeutic packages represents just **24%** of our end of year active adoption support cases.



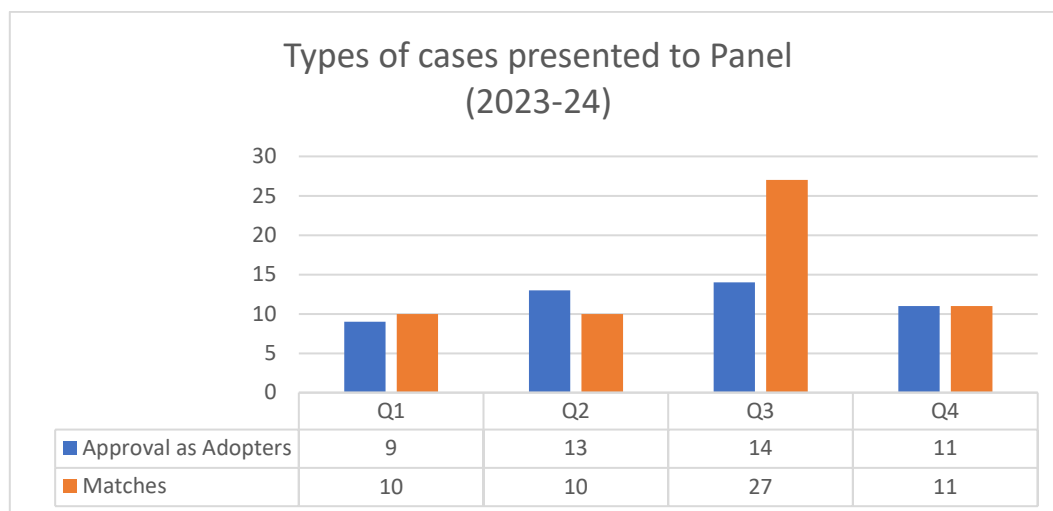
Adoption Panel

The data outlined relates to the number of prospective adopters / matches presented to the Adoption Panel during 2023-24. 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.

46 panels were scheduled for the period April 2023 to March 2024 and in total 35 proceeded. Panels were cancelled either due to there being no matters for consideration or clashing with panel members' availability. One additional panel was scheduled during the year outside of ordinary meeting dates as outlined below.

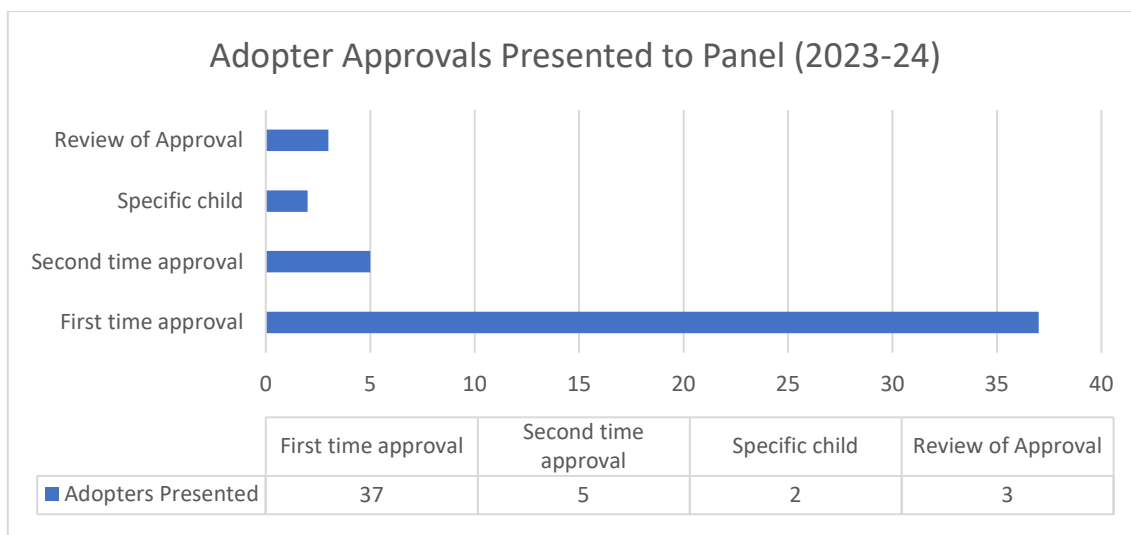


105 approvals/matches were presented to panel, **47** cases were for adopter approvals and **58** cases were for the matching of children with prospective adopters.



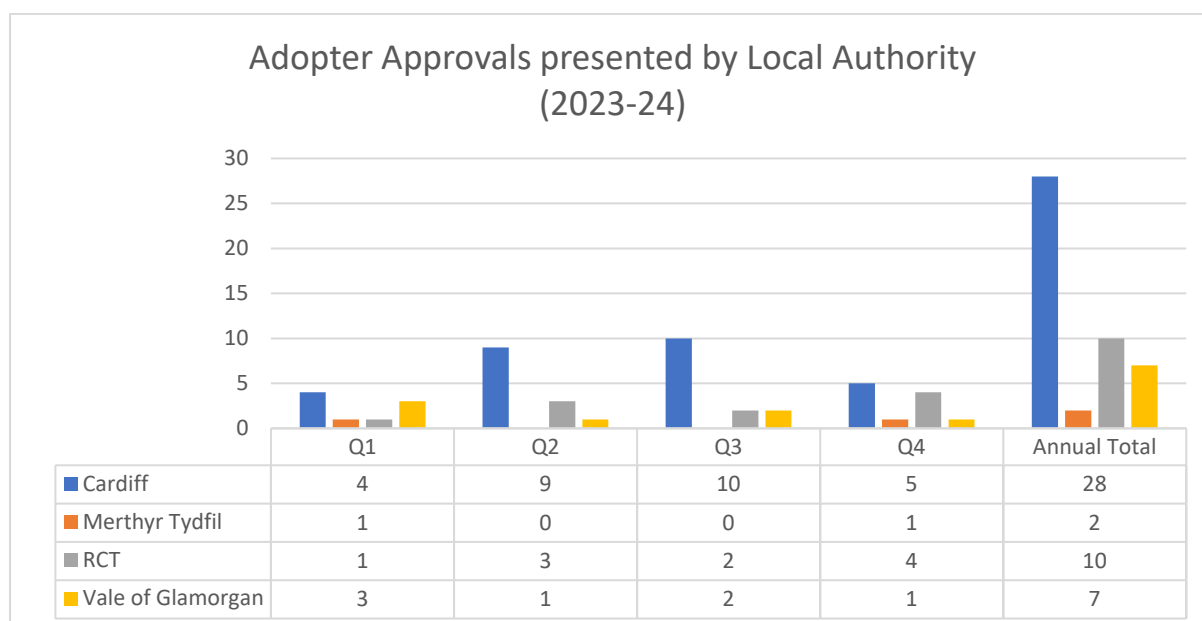
Adopters

Of the **47** households which were presented to panel for adopter approval. **5** adoptive households were presented to panel for a second time approval, **2** adoptive households were presented to panel for a specific child and **3** were presented for approval reviews, either due to length of time waiting or due to a change in their circumstances.



Approvals by Local Authority

60% of approvals were ratified by Cardiff Council, **4%** of approvals were ratified by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, **21%** of approvals were ratified by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and **15%** of approvals were ratified by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.



Matches by Local Authority

58 matches were presented to the panel during the reporting period broken down as follows: **55.2%** Cardiff, **10.4%** Merthyr Tydfil CBC, **17.2%** Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC and **17.2%** Vale of Glamorgan Council.

