

Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

JULY 2020

- 1.1 The Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 require all adoption agencies to provide a written statement that sets out the aims and objectives of the agency and the services and facilities provided. This document is made available to staff, adopters and prospective adopters, any child placed by the service and the parent of any child placed. It is available in English and Welsh and will be made available in any other language or format as necessary. It is reviewed on an annual basis.

Legal Framework

- 1.2. All local authorities are required by legislation to establish and maintain a service designed to meet the needs, in relation to adoption, of a child who has been or may be adopted, parents and guardians of such children and persons who have adopted or may adopt a child.
- 1.3 The service should include arrangements for:
- The adoption of children,
 - The provision of adoption support services.

The legal framework for adoption is the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the regulation and guidance arising from it. The Welsh Assembly Government, under section 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, has issued National Minimum Standards for local authority adoption agencies in Wales.

- 1.4 Section 170 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 inserted Section 3A into the Adoption and Children Act 2002, giving Welsh Ministers the power to direct local authorities in Wales to enter into regional partnerships with one another.

1.5 Further to Section 3A, Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys form the Mid and West Wales Adoption Service (MWAS) with Carmarthenshire being the lead Authority. The accountability for the quality of the Adoption Service lies with individual Local Authorities via Specified Arrangements.

Each of the Local Authorities has a lead officer and the work of the Region is overseen by a Management Committee. Mid and West Wales Adoption Service is one of the five regional adoption collaboratives that deliver adoption services forming the National Adoption Service in Wales. The MWAS management committee includes representatives from Health, Education and the voluntary sector. The management committee reports to the National Adoption Service and to the regional collaborative board.

Aims, Objectives, Values and Standards

1.6 Mid and West Wales Adoption Service seeks to provide a comprehensive adoption service of the highest possible quality to all parties involved in the adoption process.

1.7 The Adoption Service works to the following objectives

- To assist with identifying children whose needs would best be met by being placed with adoptive families?
- To support and prepare children through the process of adoption.
- To identify and recruit appropriate people to act as adoptive parents.
- To assess and prepare applicants in order to approve them as adoptive parents.
- To match children with carers to achieve good outcomes for each child.
- To assess and identify ways of meeting the support needs of families brought together by adoption.
- To assess the support needs of families affected by adoption, including siblings, grandparents and significant others.

1.8 The Adoption Service works to the following values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet

their needs during childhood and beyond.

- Every reasonable effort will be made to enable and support the child's own birth family to provide a permanent home for the child, when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Children whose birth families cannot provide them with a secure, stable and permanent home are entitled to have adoption considered for them.
- The child's welfare, safety, needs and views should be central to the adoption process.
- Adoption is about meeting the needs of children, including their welfare and safety, not the needs of adults.
- Delays in securing permanency through adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided, whenever possible.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs of those affected by adoption.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be respected and considered when decisions are made.
- Children will be placed with their brothers and sisters wherever possible unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- Children will be matched with families who can best meet their needs but they will not be left to wait indefinitely for the 'perfect family'.

1.9 **The Adoption Service works to the National Minimum Standards**

These standards form the basis of the inspection process by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in determining whether the local authority adoption service is meeting the relevant regulatory requirements. They are 'minimum' standards and it is the intention of the Mid and West Wales Adoption Service to meet these standards and aspires to exceed them.

Organisation Structure and Management

1.10 The adoption service has offices in Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Aberaeron, Newtown and Brecon and this helps to maintain effective relationships with the childcare teams. This supports their role in providing advice and guidance to the childcare teams. The adoption social workers undertake the recruitment, assessment, training, management and support of adopters. There are several specialist posts in the MWAS. The training officer and the adoption support staff work across the 4 counties. The adoption teams are managed by Norry Hutchison who is based in Block 1, Parc Dewi Sant, Job's Well Road, Carmarthen, SA313HB and Claire Phillips who is based in The Park Offices, Newtown, Powys SY16 2NZ . There are two adoption panels. One meets in Carmarthen, the other in various locations in Powys. There is an adoption panel chair and vice chair. The respective local authorities retain responsibility for decision making and funding of services to meet the needs of the children they have or plan to place for adoption.

- 1.11 All the social work staff in the teams hold the relevant qualifications; have appropriate experience and are appointed by interview in accordance with equal opportunities good practice and human resources recruitment policy. The Team Managers hold an NVQ 4 in management. Personnel files are available for inspection by the appropriate inspectors and managers and contain staff qualifications, references and DBS checks (which are renewed every three years) and other relevant information. An organisation chart can be found in the attached appendix. The management committee oversees the operation of MWAS. MWAS reports to the National Adoption Service, including the provision of quarterly performance data.

Scope of the Adoption Service

- 1.12 MWAS provides the full range of adoption services including:

- planning and development of services,
- development and implementation of policies and procedures,
- development of information on the service for potential service users, staff within the agency and other professionals,
- management of the Adoption panel,
- liaison with the Adoption Register Wales
- recruitment, training and assessment of prospective adopters,
- support to approved adopters both prior to and after placement,
- letter box contact and other contact issues.
- work with adults who have been adopted
- counselling of birth families
- advice, guidance and training

Work with the Children

1.13 Work with children that are to be, or have been, placed for adoption remains the responsibility of the children's teams. The adoption teams will provide advice and support to social workers in the fieldwork teams on the processes of adoption including:

- planning the adoption for individual children,
- working with birth parents,
- working with children,
- preparing assessments for Adoption panel,
- matching and linking processes,
- making and supporting the placement,
- completion of reports to the Court
- Life journey work

Management Arrangements

1.14 The MWAS team managers are line-managed by the Carmarthenshire Service Manager.

Links with Other Services

1.15 MWAS works closely with:

- Children's services teams
- Fostering teams
- AFA Cymru and Adoption UK
- Health and Education
- Voluntary adoption agencies such as St David's Children's Society and Barnardo's
- The 4 other regional services
- The central team of the National Adoption Service
- Adoption Register Wales
- Welsh Assembly Government particularly in respect of inter-country adoption

Procedures for Recruiting, Preparing and Assessing, Approving and Supporting Prospective Adoptive Parents

Eligibility Criteria

- 1.16 People wishing to become adoptive parents must be over 21 years of age (18 years if one of a couple is the birth parent). They may be a couple or a single person and have adequate space as well as the capacity to meet the needs of a child. People who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice and will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Recruitment

- 1.17 The Mid and West Wales Adoption Service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of adopters to meet the particular needs of the children and young people for whom it provides a service. The profile of children with a plan for adoption can change significantly. Therefore MWAS reviews its recruitment strategy annually. In addition specific recruitment activities may be undertaken for particular children.

Initial Contact

- 1.18 People interested in adoption will make contact through the Adoption teams when basic details will be taken and initial information given. An information pack will be sent.
- 1.19 Applicants can be invited to an information session. One of the adoption team will make a visit. Information on adoption, examples of children needing adoption and details of the processes that need to be followed will be given.

Stage One – enquiry stage

1.20 An enquiry will be made and prospective adopters will be advised that a number of checks need to be carried out with their consent.

These include:

- Personal Checks – to confirm the identity of the applicant(s),
- Disclosure and Barring Service Checks – to ascertain if the applicant(s) has any relevant criminal convictions,
- Disqualification Checks – to ascertain if the applicant(s) or any member of their household has been disqualified under the Children Act 1989, and the Children (Protection from Offenders) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997, Disqualification from Caring for Children (Wales) Regulations 2004.
- Checks with all the other local authorities where the applicant(s) has lived.
- Checks with other relevant agencies including CSSIW, Probation Services, NSPCC, if appropriate.
- Applicants will also be expected to undergo medical examinations and provide references.

Preparation and Training

1.20 Pre-adoption training is provided on a regular basis for prospective adopters and the expectation is that all applicant(s), including second time adopters, will attend preparation sessions as part of the adoption process. Where there are two applicants, it is expected that both applicants will attend.

1.21 Training will be undertaken within the Stage 1 process

1.22 On successful completion of the enquiry stage the prospective adopter(s) will be advised that their enquiry will progress to assessment

Stage 2 - Assessment

1.23 Assessment will be carried out by a qualified social worker using the BAAF/Coram Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR).

1.24 Adult applicant(s) will be interviewed together and at least once separately. The whole family will be seen together at least once. Applicant(s)' children will be

interviewed and their comments included in the report. This includes adult children who no longer live at home.

1.25 Previous partners must be contacted and interviewed if possible. Children from previous relationships should be interviewed where appropriate.

1.26 The assessment process will explore issues and challenge perceptions. It is about assessing, with the family, if it is appropriate for them to become adoptive parents, at this time, and the kind of child or young person for whom they would be best suited.

1.27 The assessment will include the following areas:

- **Strengths Needed – including** the amount of time, energy and space available within each family's emotional and other commitments, the family's support networks and willingness to use professional help need to be clear.
- **Issues Relating to the Family – including** motivation, infertility issues, health and disability issues, family structures, identity issues, discrimination and disability, discipline issues, health and safety issues, financial matters
- **Meeting the Child's Needs – including** unidentified needs, attachment issues, identity issues, abuse and neglect issues, behavioural, educational and health and disability issues, contact, needs of siblings

The applicant(s) will be given a copy of the written report and offered the opportunity to discuss or make comments on it. (excluding referee statements)

- the manager will visit/consult with prospective adopters halfway through the assessment to get feedback

The Approval Process

1.28 The Mid & West Wales Adoption panels consider all adoption applications and can have an advisory role part way through the process, where there is concern as to whether the assessment should proceed.

1.29 When assessments are completed, the applicant(s) will be encouraged to attend the Adoption panel and will be sent advance information on the Panel. The applicant(s) are told verbally the Panel's recommendation on the day of the panel.

1.30 The relevant authority's designated Agency Decision-Maker considers the assessment and the panel recommendation and makes the final decision on whether

or not the applicant(s) should be approved or the matter deferred for further work to be done.

- 1.31 In cases where the Panel feels unable to recommend approval and the Agency Decision-Maker agrees with this, the applicant(s) will be given written notification, including the reasons for the refusal and will be invited to submit written representations to the agency within 28 days (see section on the IRM process).

After Approval

- 1.32 Supporting applicant(s) in the period following approval is important and approved adopters will be visited and their situation formally reviewed every 12 months.

Updated DBS checks will be requested after 3 years and updated medical examinations every 2 years.

- 1.33 The names of approved adopters will be entered on the Adoption Register Wales

Inter-country Adoption

- 1.34 People wishing to adopt children from abroad will receive a service to the same standard as domestic adoptions. A fee will be charged for the service.

- 1.35 When an application is made to adopt a child from overseas, the inter-country adoption process should take account of the legal requirements of both countries. Information is given below.

- The requirements in England and Wales are set out in a range of legislation and guidance, outlined on the Department for Education and Skills and Welsh Government websites. . The primary source of information is the “Inter-country Adoption Guidance and Information on Process” which was updated by the Welsh Government in November 2012
- The requirements for individual countries are summarised in fact sheets available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/intercountry-adoption>
- It also provides a useful link to the Home Office UK Border Agency, which sets out the rules on entry to the country.

- 1.36 The Mid and West Wales Adoption Service will:

- provide information about overseas adoption procedures,
- offer counselling to those wishing to adopt a child from overseas and to people adopted from overseas,

- assess applicant(s)' suitability to be adoptive parents (to the same standards as for domestic adoptions). There is a nationally agreed fee for this.

1.37 Preparation classes will be similar to those for domestic adoptions but with additional elements covering the particular challenges of adopting a child from overseas.

1.38 There are a number of additional requirements for the assessment of intercountry adopters.

- The report will include an assessment of the applicant(s)' suitability to adopt a child from another country.
- Some sending countries do apply age restrictions and this may be a relevant factor for some applicant(s) as they consider their options.
- Investigation of each adoptive applicant's health and consideration of any health risks, including those associated with lifestyle, should follow domestic adoption practice.
- The financial status of applicant(s) should be established and referred to in the report. This should cover both current financial status and probable status after placement, if there is likely to be a change. Some countries require applicant(s) to provide documentary evidence of income, savings and property value. It should be remembered that one of the immigration conditions is that the prospective adoptive child will be maintained and accommodated adequately without recourse to public funds by the adoptive parents. Therefore, applicant(s) in receipt of public funds can only be considered for overseas adoption if they will not have to rely on further additional public funds to support their child.
- As with domestic adoptions, the Adoption panel is required to consider the suitability of adoptive applicant(s) and to make a recommendation to the agency Decision-Maker.
- The Panel should have an understanding of both domestic and intercountry adoptions and should consider the suitability of adopters in the same way regardless of the type of adoption being considered.
- The decision making and notification processes are the same as for domestic adopters.

Following Approval

1.39 There are also additional requirements following approval and these include:

- The assessment and all the checks, medical reports and references together with the Adoption panel minutes and the Agency Decision-Maker's decision are sent to the Welsh Government who endorses the application and forwards this to the Intercountry Adoption Casework Team (IACT), Level 0, Riverside House, Bishopsgate, Feethams, Darlington, DL1 5QE. A fee will be charged for this.
- The IACT will issue a Certificate of Eligibility on behalf of the Welsh Government.
- The authorities in the country concerned will consider the application and, if the application is approved, the applicant(s) will be added to the waiting list of approved overseas adopters until the authorities can match them with a child.

1.40 When the family has been matched with a child and introductions have taken place, the family will return with the child to the UK and will have to comply with immigration and entry clearance requirements.

1.41 Depending on the country of origin of the child, the prospective adopters may need to notify the Local Authority and apply to the Court for an Adoption Order.

1.42 Families who have adopted children from overseas may seek advice and assistance from the Local Authority. This should be given if an assessment of need indicates that services are required. All parties are also entitled to an assessment under the Adoption Support Regulations.

Step-parent Adoption

1.43 Initial enquiries about step-parent adoptions will be dealt with by the Mid and West Wales Adoption Service who will provide advice and guidance on the process and on the alternatives which may be available.

If the applicants decide to proceed, the work will be undertaken by a social worker in the relevant authority.

Arrangements for Providing Adoption Support

Statutory Responsibility

1.44 The Adoption Agency has responsibility for providing adoption support under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the associated regulations and guidance.

1.45 Those eligible for the provision of services include:

- a child who has been or may be adopted
- the parents and guardians of such children
- persons who have adopted or may adopt a child.

1.46 The regulations place additional duties on local authorities to carry out assessments of need for adoption support services and, having carried out the assessment, the local authority is required to decide whether to provide a service.

1.47 Social Services Departments carry the lead responsibility for arranging both an assessment and adoption support services. There are some services that they are required to arrange and these include:

- support groups for adoptive parents and adoptive children,
- support for contact arrangements,
- therapeutic services,
- services to ensure the success of the adoptive placement or adoption such as training or respite care,
- counselling, advice and information.

It does not, however, mean that they are expected to provide all the necessary services. The regulations emphasise the corporate responsibilities of local authorities and it is recognised that services may be required from other agencies such as health and education.

- financial support

Accessing Support Services

1.48 An assessment for adoption support will form part of the planning for all children being placed for adoption.

It will be considered:

- as part of the report to the Agency Decision Maker when consideration is given to whether the child should be placed for adoption,
- when considering a match with prospective adopters,
- at a review of adoption support arrangements, when the placement for adoption of a looked after child is reviewed within the first 4 weeks of placement.

1.49 The social worker for the child will have the responsibility for undertaking the assessment, preparing, implementing and reviewing the plan.

The Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) leads on the development of adoption support services within the region. This includes forming effective relationships with partner agencies to increase the support available.

- 1.50 When a referral is made for an assessment for adoption support post order, it will be passed to an Adoption Support social worker to undertake an assessment or to direct the referrer to the appropriate source of support. This may involve sign-posting the referrer to universal services. Upon completion of an assessment the Adoption Team Manager (in consultation, where appropriate, with the Designated Responsible Officer in the child's local authority) will decide the services that will be provided and an adoption support service plan will be completed. This plan will be reviewed at agreed intervals.

The Adoption Service in West Wales has a psychologist who contributes to the formulation of support plans and interventions.

Placements from Other Authorities

- 1.51 The regulations require placing agencies to contact the authority where a child may be placed, before the decision to place for adoption is made to ascertain if the required support services are available within the area. The regulations also define responsibilities in this situation. With an agency placement, both prior, after placement and after adoption, responsibility for undertaking the assessment remains with the local authority who is considering, or who has placed, the child for adoption. The exception to this is, where there is a new request for an adoption support service (including financial support where none was previously provided) more than 3 years after the date of placement or one year after the Adoption Order was granted.

In this case, it is the authority where the family lives who is responsible for carrying out

the assessment and providing the services.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service

Regular Feedback

- 1.52 Systems will be established for routine feedback to be sought from all participants in the adoption process. This information will be evaluated on a regular basis and will inform both the quarterly and annual reports and practice development.

Information

- 1.53 The Mid and West Wales Adoption Service regularly collects data in respect of adopters and children who are to be placed, or have been, placed for adoption as part of the National Performance Framework. These performance indicators are in line with the requirements of the Welsh Government and the National Adoption Service.

Supervision

- 1.54 The work of individual members of the team is monitored through regular supervision and appraisal. As part of supervision, files are audited for compliance with the relevant regulations and policies.

Quality of Service Annual Report

- 1.55 A Quality of Service annual report will also be compiled and will incorporate the Annual Report of the Adoption panels and the Business Plans for the Teams for the forthcoming year.

The Quality of Service Annual report

- 1.56 The annual of report includes the following:
- Summarises the work of the Adoption Service over the past year,
 - Summarises the work of the Adoption panels,
 - Gives examples of successful or particularly good working practices,
 - Gives the performance indicators and highlight any concerns about the maintenance of adoption standards,
 - Highlights unmet need and service shortfalls and make suggestions as to how these are to be addressed,
 - Provides a full budget statement,
 - Details any training needs in relation to: the Adoption Service members, the Adoption panel, other child care staff & other professionals,
 - Reviews the functioning of the Mid and West Wales Adoption Service and suggest changes or developments,
 - Outlines a work programme for the Adoption Service and for the Adoption panels for the forthcoming year.

- Reports will be provided as required to elected members.
- Practice issues will be addressed at the Management Board if significant matters arise.

Complaints and Representations

1.57 The Mid and West Wales Adoption Service has a formal complaints procedure in line with legislation for

- children,
- parents/carers and other interested parties including adopters.

Complaints

1.58 The complaints' procedure emphasises the need for staff to deal with disagreements and difficulties before they become complaints.

1.59 However, if matters cannot be resolved any complaints should be forwarded to the appropriate complaints' officer, who will ensure that matters are properly investigated. The complaints officers monitor all complaints and produce an annual report.

Children's Complaints

1.60 All children involved in the adoption process have the right to access their own Authority complaint process 'Getting it sorted'. They can talk over a problem with their social worker, a children's advocate (see below) or get in touch with the complaints officer.

Public Services Ombudsman

1.61 At any stage in a complaint, the matter can be referred by the complainant to the independent Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Representations to Adoption panel

1.62 There is a procedure for the Adoption panel to hear representations in cases where the Panel feels unable to recommend approval.

- The assessing social worker will visit the applicant(s) to give them written notification including reasons for the refusal. After discussion of the issues, the applicant(s) will be invited to submit written representations to the agency within 28 days.

- If none are received in that time, the Agency Decision-Maker will proceed to make the final decision on behalf of the Service, which will be conveyed to the applicant(s) in writing and will include the reasons for the decision.
- If representations are received, the matter will be referred to the Adoption panel for further consideration. The Panel will then make a further recommendation to the Agency Decision-Maker who will consider the matter in the light of the reconsidered recommendation and the representations made by the applicant(s). This final decision will be conveyed in writing to the applicant(s) along with the reasons for the decision and including the Panel's recommendation if they differ from that of the Decision-Maker.

Information will be given on the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and how this can be accessed.

Independent Review Mechanism

- 1.63 The Independent Review Mechanism (Adoption and Fostering) (Wales) Regulations 2010, which came into force on April 2nd 2010, set up a formal mechanism for an independent panel to review certain adoption agency decisions in relation to prospective adopters. The IRM is run by Children in Wales
- 1.64 These relate to decisions where the adoption agency does not propose to approve a prospective adopter as suitable to be an adoptive parent or considers that a prospective adopter is no longer suitable to be an adoptive parent following a formal review.
- 1.65 The review panel includes:
- The panel is managed by for the Welsh Government and is comprised of no more than five people who must (where reasonably practicable) include 2 social workers with experience in adoption or family placement
 - A registered medical practitioner
 - 2 people who have personal experience of adoption
 - The panel is supported by professional advisers
 - A prospective adopter(s) makes a request to the Independent Review (IRM) Administrator to review the decision of the adoption agency.
 - The request must be made within 40 working days beginning with the date on which a notification was sent by the adoption agency of their decision. The request must be in writing and state the reason for the request.

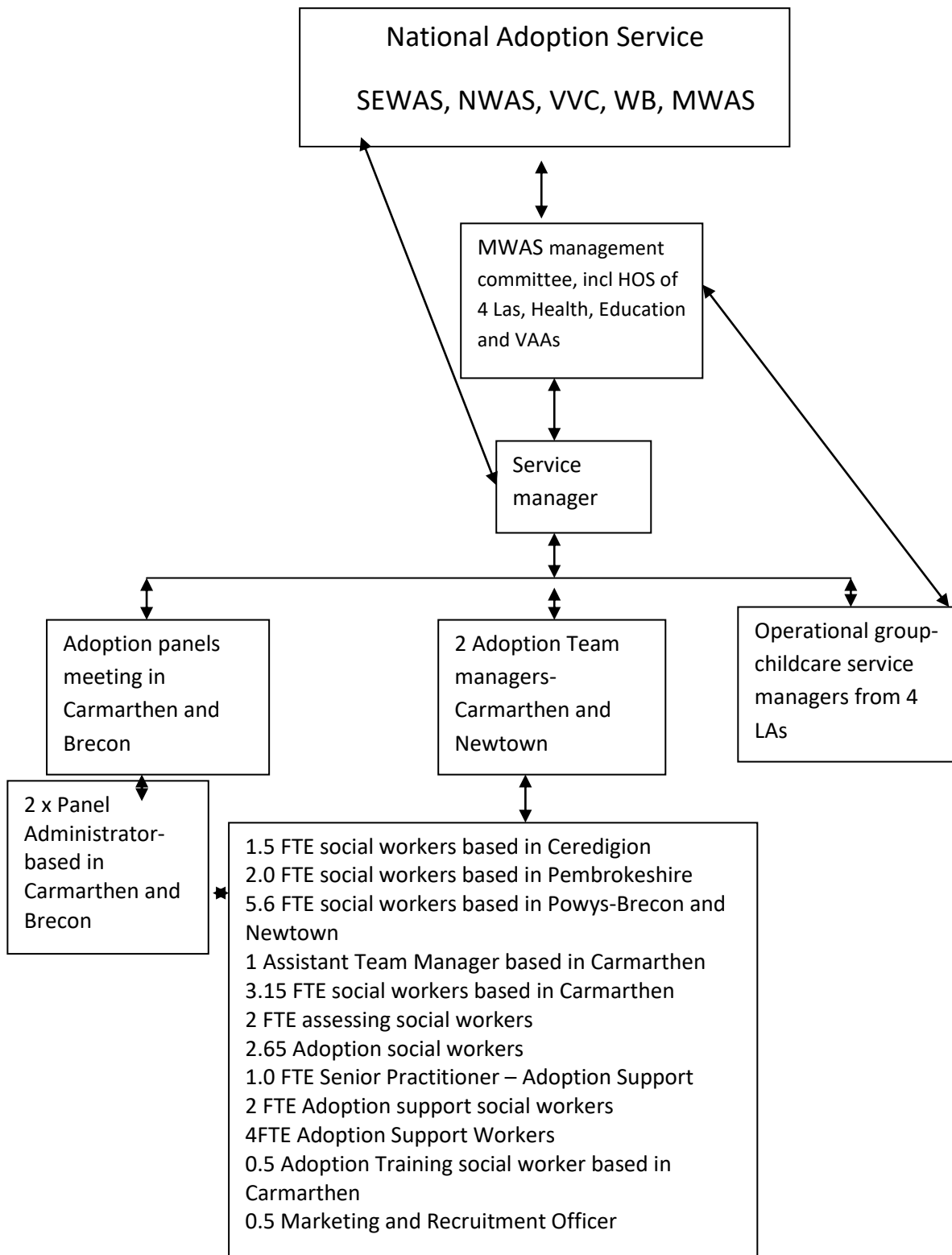
- There are timescales for responding to the applicant, for notifying the local authority and for setting the date for the review panel.
- The date fixed for the review will be no later than 3 months after the date that the determination is referred and all parties must be notified of the date, time and place for the review no less than 5 working days before the date fixed for the review.

Recommendation of Review Panel

- 1.66 The panel's recommendation must be that of the majority and may be made and announced at the end of the review or reserved.
- 1.67 The recommendation and the reasons for it must be recorded without delay in a document signed and dated by the chair. The IRM Administrator must send a copy of the recommendation to the adoption agency which made the qualifying determination and the prospective adopters no later than 10 working days after the date on which the recommendation is made.
- 1.68 The recommendation is then considered by the Agency Decision-Maker who can decide whether or not to refer the recommendation back to the Adoption panel for consideration or to make a final decision.

Appendix 1

Organisational chart



Appendix 2

Staffing and qualifications

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Appendix 3

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