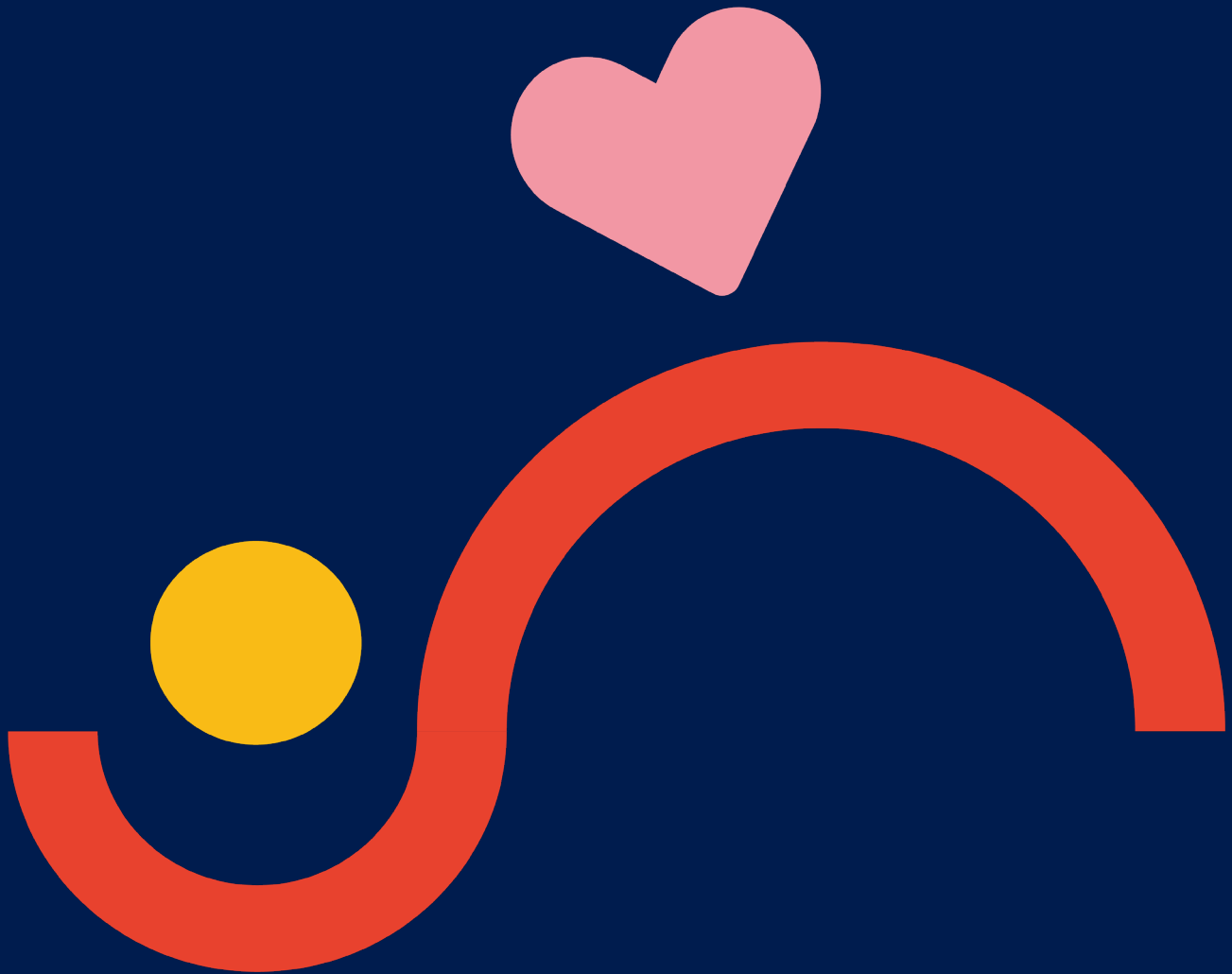


St David's Children Society Strategic Plan 2023 - 26



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Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant
St David's Children Society



**Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Dewi Sant**

**St David's
Adoption
Service**



**AFKA
CYMRU**

Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu,
Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu

Association for Fostering,
Kinship and Adoption

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Foreword



A message from the CEO & Chair of Board of Trustees

We are delighted to share our strategic plan with you that sets out the vision and priorities for St David's Children Society for the next three years.

The plan was developed in the period between April and December 2022 and draws on extensive engagement with our families, young people through the AUK Connected group, our staff team, adoption panel members, Board of Trustees, and sector colleagues. It also aligns to the Welsh Government's five-year programme of change and the National Adoption Service 'Adopt Cymru 2025 and beyond' plan.

St David's Children Society has a proud history of adoption, spanning over 80 years and with a Wales only footprint, it is the longest serving voluntary adoption agency in Wales. It is a registered charity and a partner in the National Adoption Service. The National Adoption Service is made up of 5 Regional Collaboratives and 3 voluntary adoption agencies with close links to health, education, and academia. We also work closely with Welsh Government and are grateful for their continued commitment in assisting us to deliver our services across Wales.

As a not-for-profit organisation our ethos, social values and purpose have always, and will continue, to align with Welsh Government's 'Programme for Government' commitment to "eliminate private profit from care of looked after children."¹ This policy directive is the key driver in the development of St David's Fostering Service.

Whilst we celebrate our history and expertise in adoption, we recognise that in order to remain viable and sustainable we need to adapt and be agile enough to respond to a service that is subject to volatility and turbulence, and will

expand and contract according to these forces. Building on recent analysis from the Social Return on Investment report "A Home for Me?", by Sonnet Advisory and Impact² group, on the value adoption brings to children, families and wider society, we will use this evidence to promote the impact of adoption on life-long outcomes, whilst recognising the commitment required from St David's to deliver child-centred services to families.

We believe that every child has the right to grow up in a loving family. This strategic plan will set out how we will advocate for that right through the delivery of a modern and progressive adoption service and through the training and consultancy portfolio of the AFKA Cymru Service, who have proven expertise across the wider permanency sector.

Our registration as a fostering agency in 2022 will enable us to build on our many years of experience of placing children who have suffered early childhood trauma. Over the lifespan of this plan, and through the creation of a bespoke therapeutic fostering service, we will develop a 'modernisation of placement' approach. We will work closely with colleagues in the statutory sector to ensure that the needs of children are met through a spectrum of permanency options that could evolve through our fostering service, from rehabilitation home to adoption.

The registration as a fostering agency will also enable us to deliver Welsh Early Permanence (WEP), a NAS framework initiative which brings together the dyad of birth parent, adopter/ foster parent and child to determine the right permanency option for that child. WEP objectives are to minimise moves between primary caregivers with either rehabilitation home or

becoming adopted by their dually approved foster carer / adopter as the only two viable choices available to the courts. If the plan for the child is adoption, Welsh Early Permanence promotes connections with those important to the child. That sense of connectivity and belonging is at the heart of a modern adoption service and is embedded in our vision, mission and values.

This plan will demonstrate that the placement of children is only the start of the journey. We know that adoption brings immeasurable joy but also challenges that can ebb and flow over the years. We will pledge to support parents through our active offer of adoption support in response to individual need. That commitment of support to families is intrinsic to the core values of St David's and is fundamental to all our service developments, including support to foster parents and Welsh Early Permanence carers.

Our strategic plan is rightly ambitious. We have listened to what really matters to children and families from our own engagement and, through the work of the National Adoption Service and the annual AUK Barometer report, the voice of adopters and adoption experienced people. We know what is required to deliver services of excellence and we are realistic about the challenges ahead for the sector and wider community. This is at a time when the nation contends with a cost-of-living crisis and National and Local Government are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. We don't underestimate that the road ahead will be tough, but working alongside colleagues in the adoption and wider permanency sector we are committed to embracing these challenges and act as an enabler so that the children, parents, and professionals who rely on our services can be the best that they can be.

ST DAVID'S



St David's Children Society is a registered Voluntary Adoption and Foster Agency working in Wales. It includes 3 main services.

- 1. Adoption Service** - dedicated to finding adoptive families for vulnerable children with a plan for adoption in Wales.
- 2. Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption (AFKA) Service** - develops and embeds good practice across the breadth of permanency planning for children and young people.
- 3. Fostering Service** - offers a bespoke, Wales-focused fostering service with therapeutic post placement support, and enables the delivery of Welsh Early Permanence.

POLICY



National Adoption Service (NAS) '2025 and beyond' Plan - promotes the modernisation of adoption, where children can maintain connection with those important to them. It recognises that 21st century adoption needs to be more flexible and responsive to individual need and supportive of children and families, including recognition and support for birth families.

Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) - a NAS framework which brings together birth parents, adopter/foster parent and child to determine the right permanency option for the child.

Welsh Government 'Programme for Government' - states a policy objective to "eliminate private profit from care of looked after children". This is one of the highest priorities for this Government.

Welsh Government 'Children and Young People's Plan' - outlines how Welsh Government will help families who cannot live together stay connected and get back together, if safe to do so.

VALUE OF ADOPTION



OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

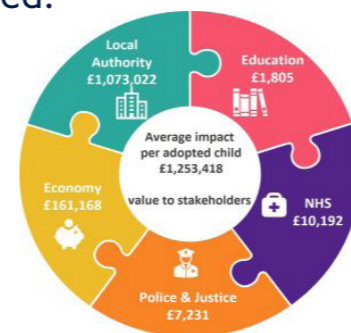
Individual and wellbeing outcomes from adoption are well evidenced.

Ward et al (2022) concluded that in comparison to long-term foster care adoption offered

- greater stability and greater sense of belonging and commitment.
- better support through transition from adolescence to adulthood.
- decreased risk of negative adult outcomes, such as unemployment and homelessness.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Sonnet Advisory and Impact Group (2022) research found adoption brings substantial value to the child and society through permanence and stability offered.
- Children have enhanced outcomes across health, education and future employment with a societal value of at least £1.3 million for every child adopted.



PRIORITIES 2023 - 26



1. To meet the needs of children by recruiting prospective parents and providing placement opportunities where children are at the centre.
2. To prioritise the need of the child, their right to a loving family and enduring relationships, through disseminating knowledge to embed best practice.
3. To support the lifelong and evolving needs of the child and their family by delivering accessible and progressive adoption and post placement support.
4. To drive effective relationships with key partners which ensures that the needs of children are met and that there is national level third sector representation.
5. To maintain and strengthen financial stability through prudent financial governance.

About St David's

St David's Children Society specialises in adoption and permanency planning for children. As a not-for-profit Voluntary Adoption and Fostering Agency we are dedicated to finding families for vulnerable children across Wales, and are committed to ensuring families receive the best post placement care.

Our registration as a fostering agency allows us to offer a bespoke, therapeutic, and Wales-focused fostering service. Through this fostering registration we are also able to deliver Welsh Early Permanence.

The Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption (AFKA) Cymru service develops and embeds good practice across the breadth of permanency planning for children and young people.

St David's Ethos

The purpose of St David's is to be an authentic voice of adoption and other permanent placement arrangements for children in Wales. We celebrate the diversity and complexity of the sector, and the rewarding futures offered to children and parents alike.

St David's Values

- **An Open Door** – we are available, accessible, and open to people interested in achieving permanency for children across Wales.
- **A Genuine Welcome** – we offer a warm, genuine, and honest approach in how we deliver our services.
- **An Inspiring Outlook** – we are enthusiastic, creative, and progressive in developing and delivering our services.
- **A Responsible Guide** – we are supportive, responsive, and guiding, building long-lasting relationships with people and professionals.
- **A Supportive Professional** – we are dedicated and reliable in offering expertise in our service delivery.



Vision and Mission

St David's Adoption Service

Vision – Every child with an adoption plan in Wales is found a loving family and supported to be the best that they can be.

Mission – Every adoption journey starts with a child. Our modern and responsive adoption service enables and supports our families across Wales to help children grow and thrive throughout their lives, valuing all relationships that are important to them.

AFKA Cymru

Vision – Today's knowledge supporting tomorrow's families.

Mission – To develop and influence good practice across the breadth of permanency planning for children and young people. We provide advice, training and consultancy to professionals and members of the public to embed practice that achieves the best outcomes for children and their families.

St David's Fostering Service

Vision – Every child living with a foster family is provided with a nurturing environment in which to grow and thrive.

Mission – Through a modernisation of placement approach we will provide open recruitment focused on the needs of children looked after (CLA) and will support families who can nurture children living in Wales where a foster placement is needed.



Our Services

Established in 1942, St David's Adoption Service has placed over 2,000 children with families. We have placed on average 35 children each year and approved on average 25 new adoptive families. Our primary objective is to recruit, train, assess and approve families for adoption, and to offer ongoing adoption support. The specialist Adopting Together Service forms part of our adoption service provision. This is a bespoke service which includes family finding and clinical psychology-led transitions and support interventions for children who wait the longest to be adopted.

As a learning and development service, AFKA Cymru responds to the needs of the sector by providing adaptive information, advice, training, and workshops to professionals and members of the public. Its growing contract and consultancy work develops and disseminates best practice across the sector, and the hosting of various special interest groups, on behalf of Welsh Government, gives diverse understanding from which it can advocate and influence.

In 2022, St David's became a registered fostering agency with Care Inspectorate Wales and during the lifetime of this strategic plan we will be implementing and delivering our 'Modernisation of Placement' (MOP) approach. A visual representation of MOP is presented in Diagram 1.

The services offered under this approach intends to improve foster care sufficiency, while also stepping children down from residential care and out of care through reunification or adoption. Adoption and Welsh Early Permanence placements are also delivered under the model.

Following extensive review of the St David's Children Society brand position, in 2022 our adoption service was rebranded to St David's Adoption Service. This consumer facing rebrand clearly positions St David's as a modern and progressive adoption agency, bringing our core and specialist Adopting Together Service more closely aligned in internal and external communication.

St David's Children Society will remain the organisations legal entity, as its registered name with the Charity Commission for England and Wales and as a company limited by guarantee.

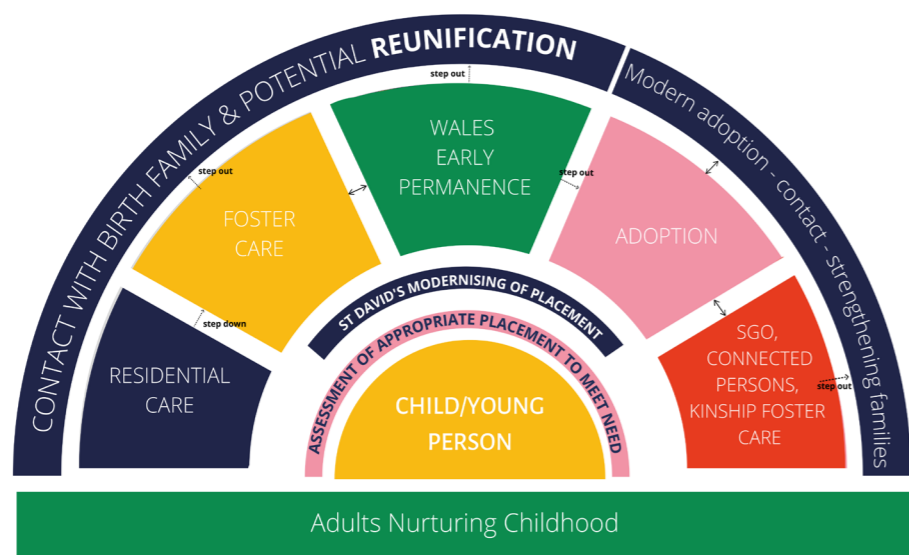


Diagram 1

Operational Analysis

Understanding of the internal and external operational environment gives context to St David's current service provision and potential developments in delivery.

- Service delivery opportunities are strengthened by supportive relationships with Welsh Government and the partnership relationship with the National Adoption Service in Wales.
- Legislative directives in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 support ability to develop and deliver appropriate services.
- The modernisation of adoption agenda provides opportunities for the organisation to be innovative in its service delivery.
- Developments in fostering creates opportunities to assist in supporting the Welsh Government's policy directive of eliminating profit from care and the rebalancing of the social care agenda.
- The organisations years of experience, skilled and knowledgeable staff, pan-Wales remit, and the work of the AFKA Cymru service reinforces its ability to influence and develop best practice in permanency planning for children.
- An increase in other permanency options for children such as Special Guardianship Orders and Kinship Foster Care arrangements are to be celebrated if this enables children to live safely and with appropriate support within their birth families while generating organisational opportunities in the delivery of training and the dissemination of knowledge.
- Opportunities and advances in technology enables St David's to reach a wider Wales audience and improve internal working efficiency.
- The position of reserves offers financial stability to the organisation and enables us to reinvest any surplus funds to support existing and new service developments.





Policy Context

In recent years there has been a recognition that adoption needs to change to embrace a broader concept of growing up within an adoptive family. There is increased understanding of the need to review how adoption is planned in terms of responding to the needs of children and young people. Described as 'modern adoption', it reflects on the necessity to deliver a service which is more responsive to individual needs, is inclusive and supportive of the lifelong needs of children and families, better recognises and supports the continued importance of connections with birth family members and those who are important to the child, and offers improved delivery of information, support, and services into adulthood.

This much-welcomed modernisation of adoption comes at a time when there is a decline in the number of children with adoption as a plan. From 2019/20 to 2021/22 there was a 10% decline in the total number of children placed for adoption, and a 15% decrease in the number of Adoption Orders made. In contrast to this, in 2021 there were 7,265 children looked after, a 6% increase since 2019 (6,855). Welsh Government's programme of change sets out a priority to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into the care system and to support timely exit from care. Exiting the care system can be achieved through adoption for a small, yet distinct, group of children, but there is increasing awareness of a need to promote greater understanding of adoption as a positive outcome. This includes

ensuring professionals have confidence to evidence in a timely way to the judiciary that adoption can be the most appropriate plan to meet a child's long-term needs.

Adoption removes children from the looked after system on a permanent basis and the individual and wellbeing outcomes from adoption are well evidenced. A study by Ward³ et al (2022) concluded that adoption offers greater stability as well as a greater sense of belonging and commitment than long-term foster care. It also offers better support through the transition from adolescence to adulthood; as a result, there is evidence that adoptees are less at risk than care leavers of negative adult outcomes such as unemployment and homelessness.

A recent independent analysis by Sonnet Advisory and Impact Group⁴ confirmed that adoption brings substantial value to the child

and society through the permanence, stability and support it can offer children who cannot live with their birth families. According to the available evidence, adopted children and young people have enhanced outcomes across health, education and future employment compared to other placement types, such as long term fostering. The research found that at least £4.2 billion in value was generated across England, Wales and Scotland in 2021 when 3,359 children were adopted. This included savings of £3.6 billion to local authorities, £542 million to the economy and £34 million to the NHS. This modelling found a societal value of at least £1.3 million for every child adopted, and that the human value created for adopted children is incalculable.

As a Welsh Adoption Agency St David's promotes the NAS family finding strategy which supports,

wherever possible, the right for children placed for adoption to grow up in their country of birth. This aligns to the modern adoption agenda, and Welsh Government's objective of providing more accessible connections with those important to the child, including the promotion of ongoing contact with siblings growing up in different families.

The Welsh Government Children and Young People's Plan outlines how 'all children and young people should receive the support they need to stay together or come back together with their family, if possible' and how Welsh Government will "help families who cannot live together, stay connected and get back together, if safe to do so." This policy directive is the key driver in St David's modernisation of placement approach.

As a partner within the umbrella body of the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales St David's works alongside five regional adoption services and two VAAs. In 2022 NAS set out the 'Adopt Cymru 2025 and beyond' plan and its strategic priorities; 1) The best families for adopted children, 2) Great adoption support where and when it is needed, 3) Better adoption records and access to information at any age, and 4) Healthier contact through better birth family services. It is crucial that St David's is aligned and contributing to the 'big picture' of adoption in Wales and that these priorities are echoed in the organisation's own plans.





Strategic Priorities

Priority 1

This strategic plan sets out how St David's will align its services to equip the organisation to deliver within the context of a changing adoption and permanency environment. Built on a robust review of the current services' delivered, and following extensive consultation with stakeholders, it outlines areas for strengthened service delivery and plans for service diversification. This diversification intends to meet the needs of children, young people, parents, and families across the permanency sector, while generating opportunities to diversify income. It will also support the organisation to be responsive as services contract and expand, with staff able to be open and flexible to needs.

The plan includes how the AFKA Cymru service will continue to deliver advice, training, workshops, conferences, and consultancy, whilst engaging extensively with the wider permanency sector across Wales, to develop and disseminate best practice.

It is the intention that by the end of 2026 St David's will have embedded its foster care service within the sector and that the organisation will have established its offer of a range of placement choices through a Modernisation of Placements (MOP).

Our strategic priorities for the next three years are:

1. To meet the needs of children by recruiting prospective parents and providing placement opportunities where children are at the centre.
2. To prioritise the needs of the child, their right to a loving family and enduring relationships, through disseminating knowledge to embed best practice.
3. To support the lifelong and evolving needs of the child and their family by delivering accessible and progressive adoption and post placement support.
4. To drive effective relationships with key partners which ensures that the needs of children are met and that there is national level third sector representation.
5. To maintain and strengthen financial stability through prudent financial governance.

To meet the needs of children by recruiting prospective parents and providing placement opportunities where children are at the centre.

We will recruit, train, assess and approve prospective parents who can help to meet the diverse needs of children who are unable to live with their birth family.

The needs of these children are complex, and we aim to recruit parents with a willingness to provide a loving family environment, to be responsive to individual needs, to listen, and to promote connections that are important to their child. We aim to approve parents with an ability to recognise that needs may flex and change in accordance with their child's evolving development and individual care plan.

We will promote opportunities for prospective adoptive parents to also be dually approved as foster carers to support developments in Welsh Early Permanence.



Priority 2

To prioritise the need of the child, their right to a loving family and enduring relationships through disseminating knowledge to embed best practice.

Where it is not possible for children to remain living with their birth parents, we will provide a service which seeks to support birth family members (including kinship carers and special guardianship parents), foster parents, adoptive parents, professionals, and practitioners to effectively understand the evolving needs of the child and promote the best long-term outcomes. We will achieve this by delivering forward-thinking, high-quality, research informed training, workshops and conferences and providing expert knowledge and guidance in consultancy, information, and advice.

We will work directly with foster parents to enhance understanding of the importance of positive transitions from their care in accordance with the individual plans for the child and provide support in promoting ongoing connections.

To inform our understanding we will consult directly, or via other organisations, to co-produce with children, foster parents, adoptive parents, birth families, and professionals/practitioners, ensuring their collective voice is reflected in our work.

Recognising the modern permanence agenda, we will develop services that will support contact arrangements with birth family members and foster parents, supporting the child and key adults to protect and maintain lasting relationships where it is safe and right to do so.



Priority 3

To support the lifelong and evolving needs of the child and their family by delivering accessible and progressive adoption and post placement support.

In promoting adoption support as the norm, we provide a responsive, flexible, needs-led, adoption support service.

We recognise the complex needs of children placed for adoption, and the lifelong implications of adoption for the child, and their adoptive and birth family. Communicating our adoption support offer honestly and transparently, we will build a trusted and reliable service for St David's families. We will provide post adoption support that, when required, is easily accessible to children and families for as long as needed.

We will assist life journey work, actively seeking and listening to the opinions of children and their family to recognise individual needs that could change over time. We will promote systems to support children and young people as they grow, and assist in supporting and maintaining connections with those who are important to the child. We will offer information and support to those seeking to access their early life records, providing guidance to adoption experienced people.

We will work alongside foster parents and Welsh Early Permanence carers to support them in caring for the child whilst long-term care plans are being determined. Through our expertise in adoption, we will enhance their capability through ongoing training based on a therapeutic model of parenting. We will ensure that their voice is heard in the development of our service.



Priority 4

To drive effective relationships with key partners which ensures that the needs of children are met and that there is national level third sector representation.

We will drive partnerships across Wales and the UK with organisations that add value to St David's delivery of high-quality services.

We will work collaboratively with agencies and professionals that place the needs and outcomes of the child at the centre of their practice, and build partnerships which aid the sharing of knowledge and information that is in the best interests of the child, adoptive parent, foster parent, Welsh Early Permanence carer and where appropriate the birth parents and family.

Utilising the skills, knowledge, and position of St David's services we will advocate in the best interests of the child and the relationships that are important to them in all permanency arrangements.

As a well-established third sector organisation we will ensure that we are represented at a local and national level and that our contributions to policy direction is heard.



Priority 5

To maintain and strengthen financial stability through prudent financial governance.

We will maintain prudent fiscal management through monitoring income generation and income generating opportunities. We will continue to ensure our financial sustainability and our ability to deliver high-quality services for the benefit of our beneficiaries.

During the lifespan of the strategic plan we anticipate fluctuations within the market that we operate and it is therefore imperative that we monitor and control finances to ensure;

- Our systems and infrastructure can support and facilitate service delivery.
- Our available cash will maintain service delivery and ensure practice quality.
- Any surplus reserves are reinvested for service growth.
- Internal financial controls are monitored, reviewed, and adhered to.





Twitter: [@adoptionwales](https://twitter.com/adoptionwales)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StDavidsChildrenSociety>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/st.davids.children.society/>

Website: www.stdavidsadoptionsservice.org

Endnotes

1. The Deputy Minister for Social Services set out her thinking on this commitment at a Senedd Plenary debate "Eliminating profit making from care of looked after children is on the highest priorities for this Government. We believe that public care should mean that children are cared for by local authorities or other not for profit providers where social values and the best interests of and outcomes for children are the overriding motives."

2. Clifford, J., Hutchison, E., Hulbert, A., Kemp, J. and Turrell M. (2022). '[A home for me? A comparative review of the value of different forms of permanence for children – Adoption, SGOs and Fostering](#)', London. Sonnet Impact.

3. Ward, H., Moggach L., Tregeagle S., Trivedi, H. (2022) '[Outcomes of Open Adoption from Care: An Australian Contribution to an International Debate](#)

4. Clifford, J., Hutchison, E., Hulbert, A., Kemp, J. and Turrell M. (2022). '[A home for me? A comparative review of the value of different forms of permanence for children – Adoption, SGOs and Fostering](#)', London. Sonnet Impact.



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St David's Children Society is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales
(Registration No: 509163) and a company limited by Guarantee (Registered Cardiff 1546688)