



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

### **Manchester City Council Adoption Service**

**Chorlton District Office  
102 Manchester Road  
Chorlton  
Manchester  
M21 9SZ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Jayne Ivory

*Announced Inspection*  
7th November 2005      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

*Every Child Matters*, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above.

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	Manchester City Council Adoption Service
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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Sanjay Shah
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Adoption Service
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection** This is the first time Manchester City Council's Adoption Service has been inspected.

## Brief Description of the Service:

Manchester City Council's adoption service is an agency constituted under the requirements of current legislation. The Adoption Team is located within the Family Placement Service and comprises of six social workers and a senior practitioner. The adoption team manager, who is supervised by the acting family placement principal service manager, manages the agency. The adoption and fostering teams are located in a single office site on the outskirts of Manchester. The premises are reasonably accessible by people with a genuine interest in adoption and have access for people with a disability.

The agency undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters for domestic applicants. The recruitment and preparation of prospective adopters takes place in the recruitment and assessment team, who then transfer the case to the adoption team for assessment, approval and support. Manchester commissions another agency for those who wish to adopt a child from overseas. At the time of the inspection the agency offered a range of adoption support services to all those touched by adoption, administered indirect contact arrangements and undertook family finding for those children for whom adoption is the plan. Independent support facilities for birth families were arranged through a contract with the same local adoption support agency.

# SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

The inspection was well prepared for with all required pre-inspection material being forwarded as requested. The agency provided the best facilities available to them and engaged in the process as willing participants. The programme that was arranged was well coordinated and very manageable. This enabled the inspection to be carried out with the minimum of disruption and maximum efficiency.

The inspection was carried out over four days, with an extra-day being allocated to the observation of the adoption panel, and the interview of the Independent Panel Chairperson. During the course of the fieldwork interviews were held with key managers and staff, specialist advisers and an elected member of the council. An examination of personnel files was undertaken in the offices of Human Resources.

Visits were made to five adoptive families, with one additional adoptive family participating in a telephone interview. The views of adopters are incorporated into the text of this report. Completed questionnaires were received from adopters/prospective adopters (15), placing social workers (6), placing authorities (4) and specialist advisers (3). Two questionnaires sent to birth families were returned.

The case files of the adopters visited were read – and the files of children placed with them. Other case files were also examined. Written materials relating to the operation of the agency were read, including policies and procedures, protocols and information provided for children, prospective and approved adopters and social workers.

## **What the service does well:**

Manchester City Council had sought to improve outcomes for children looked after by the agency by increasing the numbers of children placed for adoption across the service.

For the year 2004-2005 the agency had exceeded the Local Public Service Agreement (PSA) Target of placing 80 children, with no disruptions in placement.

The effort of the staff in the agency at all levels to reach and then exceed this target is acknowledged. There can be no doubt that their hard work and commitment had contributed to better outcomes for an increased number of children in Manchester. There was evidence that the agency matched and

placed a number of children with adopters who were best able to meet their identified needs.

Some of the adopters said that their individual social worker had worked well with them throughout the assessment and had provided support and advice during the matching, introduction and early placement.

One adopter said of their social worker, "They were very clear, professional and sensitive to us as a couple throughout the assessment process."

And "the social worker explained the assessment process to us in detail we knew what to expect at every stage, and felt that it was a very thorough."

Another adopter said that their social worker had supported them in accessing adoption support services and in getting the life story book for their child "My social worker was really good, they helped me to get information about support and financial assistance before my child was placed with me"

Manchester supported adopters to care for children by providing access to specialist post adoption psychology services. One adopter spoke about the positive impact that this service had had on their child and on their ability to meet the child's needs, "We were really concerned about how our child was coping in their new school. They had a lot of problems at first. We sought advice from the psychologist and she suggested some simple things we could do together. Our child is now concentrating really well and they are now top of the class!"

The adoption agency benefits from experienced and knowledgeable staff who were well supported by the adoption team manager. The adoption team manager and principal manager for the agency demonstrated knowledge and experience of the strategic and operational challenges of managing the agency. The social workers and manager in the adoption team were well supported by the excellent adoption administrative team and their manager.

The Adoption Letterbox was well organised and managed by staff within the adoption and adoption administration team.

The agency had access to specialist legal advice in the form of the Adoption Solicitor. This specialist post within the council's children's legal team offered information and support to care planning for children with a plan for adoption and provided a valuable link with the courts in the area. The Adoption Solicitor had been involved in developing and delivering training concerning effective planning for adoption.

The agency has Adoption Panels that have developed sound practice concerning the quality assurance and scrutiny of all the assessments and reports that come to panel. The panel has an experienced and knowledgeable panel chairperson who provides regular feedback to the agency decision maker.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

This is the first time that the agency has been inspected against National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Agency Regulations.

## **What they could do better:**

Manchester had placed a large number of children for adoption however the size of the looked after child population in the City meant that at the time of the inspection there were approximately 60 children waiting for an adoption placement. The service must ensure that their current recruitment strategy is reviewed so the needs of children with a plan for adoption and who are waiting inform how the agency effectively recruits the range of adopters to meet their needs.

Systems and processes between the recruitment and assessment team, the adoption team and the children's social work teams need to be clearer, more effective and more able to demonstrate timely care planning for children and prioritisation of adopters who are most likely to meet children's needs. As one worker in the agency said " We don't have anything as sophisticated as a service wide system to track the progress of children's care plans." The fragmented approach to the care planning process for children was a contributory factor to unnecessary delay.

The adoption team and child care teams enjoyed positive and improved working relationships however the resources available to the adoption team did not allow them to become involved in the adoption care planning process until quite late on in the care planning process.

There were problems with consistency in the children's assessments. Some assessments of children's needs were good others were extremely poor. The service must ensure that staff and their managers are trained, supported and supervised concerning the quality of children's assessments. Life story work was an area of particular concern given some of the poor examples that were seen. One adopter said about her child's life story book " I am really disappointed on my child's behalf, the book took ages to come, my social worker kept having to chase the other social worker, when it did come we thought it was going to be really special but it was really poor and will not help me to help tell her about her birth family."

There was evidence to suggest that the agency did fast track prospective adopters who offered a potential placement for children waiting, however the lack of a robust system, which was implemented in practice, concerning prioritisation meant that many adopters had to wait long periods of time for



their assessments to be allocated after they had completed their preparation training.

These are some of the comments made by adopters, "on the whole our experience has been positive but it's taken a long time. We waited from the summer to the February to get on the preparation group, then we waited from the February to the November before our assessment started."

"It has been quite a long process, it has been nearly two years to get approved, although our social worker was brilliant when they came to do our assessment."

The quality assurance of adopter's assessments was also not evident on adopter's case files and this is another area in which the service must do better.

Manchester has two Adoption Panels, Panel A and Panel B, in the last twelve months some of the panels had not been quorate. This situation had been caused by some panel members failing to give apologies. The Adoption Panel must only make recommendations when they are quorate.

Despite the range of existing and developing support services for children, adopters and birth families the arrangements fell far short of a service wide strategy for providing post placement and post adoption support services. This is an area that the service must address.

The agency had reorganised in preparation for the creation of multi-agency district based teams. The principal manager for the adoption team was only in a temporary "acting" post. There is a clear need to recruit a permanent member of staff into this key position, given the proposed reorganisation of the service and some of the challenges that Manchester faces concerning post-adoption support.

The service must ensure that safe staff recruitment and selection is evidenced on staff personnel and panel members files and should also support staff working in the adoption service to conduct their work efficiently and effectively by providing them with access to suitable and safe premises to work from.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Manchester has a number of skilled and experienced staff in the Adoption Service, however inconsistencies in the assessment of children's needs must be addressed in order to ensure that all children with a plan for adoption stay safe and secure and are placed with their adoptive families in timely way.

## EVIDENCE:

Manchester had developed a recruitment strategy to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption locally. The service had recognised that they needed to attract a broader range of adopters. In the twelve months prior to the inspection Manchester had placed 83 children for adoption, with over 60 children waiting for an adoption placement. The recruitment and preparation of adopters took place in the recruitment and assessment team.

The recruitment team were responsible for sending out initial information to adopters and then conducted individual visits or mini-assessments on applicants before they moved onto the preparation training. Adopters confirmed that the recruitment team were effective at sending out information in a timely way. The initial visit process was an opportunity for sharing information and for starting with the pre-application checks. The beginning of

the process worked well, however when cases were transferred from the recruitment team to be allocated for assessment by the Adoption Team, there could be considerable delay. Not all adopters were told about the wait that they may have in getting their case allocated. However the agency had already invested resources in initial assessments and preparation for adopters, a number of who would wait for considerable periods of time.

The current system for recruiting, preparing and assessing adopters would benefit from a review. The service is not resourced to assess all comers and it may be fairer if some adopters were advised to go elsewhere before their cases are taken further than initial enquiry.

Adopters who could offer a placement to a child or children waiting were seen to be fast tracked at allocation. Some of the fast tracked assessments were undertaken for specific children, however the case files and presentation to panel did not give an indication that these assessments were for specific children and had been facilitated accordingly. It would be helpful if the service could develop clearer practice guidelines for social workers concerning the conduct of fast tracked assessments to ensure that the assessment and preparation process for prospective adopters is not compromised. The needs of the children waiting should inform the recruitment strategy. Despite the activity concerning the promotion of children waiting in preparation groups and the hard work of the Senior Practitioner in the Adoption Team, there was no service wide early warning system to ensure that adopters were being recruited for children waiting or children coming through the system with a plan for adoption. The formal system for the allocation of family finding for a child involved a referral to the Adoption Team at the point of best interests. Best practice in permanence planning means that the Adoption Team social workers are invited at the second review. The service should review their current practice to ensure effective recruitment, care planning for children and the avoidance of unnecessary delay. As one social worker said "We are not always invited to reviews for children that we are allocated to family find for, let alone children who are coming through the permanency planning process."

The inspection found evidence that the wishes of children and their birth families were not ascertained during the child's assessment. There was substantial evidence that the wide variations in practice had been exacerbated by staff turnover in the child -care teams and by some of the challenges for workers in transferring cases between teams according to agreed protocols. This is an area that will be addressed later in the report.

Manchester should develop the management oversight and internal quality assurance of children's assessments and matching reports to ensure staff follow policies and procedures that minimise unnecessary delay.

The agency should review the current practice of not consistently sharing the child's assessment with the prospective adopters before they proceed with a match. Adopters should have access to the most up to date information

concerning the child's needs and a post adoption support assessment of need before the matching meeting.

There was evidence that a number of plans for children requiring adoption had been delayed by the lack of clear policies and procedures concerning post-adoption support for children and their adoptive families. This is an area that should be addressed as part of the services action plan.

Prospective and approved adopters confirmed that they had access to good, informative preparation training that had helped them to understand the full range of issues surrounding adoption. The preparation training would benefit from addressing the full range of issues concerning diversity in adoption. Many adopters confirmed that the home study had been completed with skill and sensitivity by the assessing social worker.

The service ensured that prospective adopters were subject to the full range of checks and safeguards that were evidenced on file, however in one case the social worker had not sought checks from a prospective adopters country of origin. The need for the service to apply strenuous efforts to ensure that all prospective adopters are evidenced to be safe must form part of the action plan.

Social workers in the Adoption Team had accessed some training in completing prospective adopter's assessments. The quality of the assessments varied with some workers being far more able to analyse information and identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of prospective adopters. Staff within the team had identified that they would benefit from additional specialist training in completing assessments.

Expectations regarding support and contact between prospective and approved adopters would benefit from being defined. A number of adopters felt as if they had to chase their social workers to get a response, or in the case of some adopters who had been assessed by a sessional member of the team that their new social worker would not know them as well or be able to promote them.

Manchester had a system in place to record whether prospective adopters waived their rights to consider their assessment for 28 days.

Manchester has two Adoption Panels. The panels have clear policies and procedures and are well supported by the professional advisers. The panels ensure that the care planning for children who have a plan for adoption is thoroughly scrutinised and have developed feedback forms for social workers and their managers about the quality of assessments and presentation at panel. The feedback forms are collated and analysed by the panel chairperson and the agency decision maker.

The feedback forms could be developed to record whether birth parents have signed or seen their child's assessment and could also ask to see evidence of Life Story Work at any matching panel. This would ensure that this work is completed to an acceptable standard and in a timely way.

Adopters are given an opportunity to attend the panel and be heard. One adopter said about this " We were really nervous but our social worker explained what would happen. The room was full of people, but one lady was really nice to us, she had adopted herself."

The Adoption Panels have annual training in accordance with National Minimum Standards.

The Adoption Panels would benefit from developing and implementing an induction for new panel members, which is completed within 10 weeks of becoming a panel member and which is evidenced on file.

The Adoption Panels had some challenges to ensure the efficient use of panel and panel member's time. Breakdown in communication from the child-care teams meant that panel business was often subject to a number of cancellations. The service should develop and implement robust gate keeping practice to ensure that the use of panel time is maximised.

The Adoption Panels are very busy and make great demands on their panel members. There was evidence to suggest that a few Adoption Panels had conducted their business when they were not quorate. The Adoption Panels must be clear that they cannot function if the meeting is not quorate, and that a system should be developed to ensure that all panel members give apologies if they are unable to attend. Panel Members files should also record attendance, which should be kept under review by the professional adviser and independent panel chairperson. One independent member of the panel had not attended a series of meetings and had not given their apologies, this wasted the time of other panel members who were clearly extremely committed to their role, and impacted on the ability of the Adoption Panel to function effectively. This is an area that should be addressed as part of the services action plan. The service must ensure that all recommendations and the subsequent decisions are reviewed by a quorate adoption panel and the agency decision maker to ensure that children's welfare is not compromised. Minutes of the panel were very clear and recorded the reasons for any recommendations made. Panel administrators were efficient and effective in their role and had received specialist training.

The Agency Decision Maker was committed to their role and tried to ensure that the decision was made in a timely way. Not all decisions were made within timescale and this is an area that the service must address. The standard letter concerning the agency decision should be amended and should be sent from the Agency Decision Maker and signed by them.

Manchester must develop and implement a system that ensures that all those affected by the agency decision are provided with written notifications of the outcome in a timely manner.

As one birth parent wrote " I know my child has been adopted but nobody has told me from Manchester when it happened."

The service must ensure that safe staff recruitment and selection procedures are implemented and evidenced for all staff working for the purposes of the adoption service. The inspection confirmed that all staff had received a CRB check, however other safeguards were not in place. The service must ensure that all staff provide proof of their qualifications and that copies are kept on file, that all staff have two written references and that these references are followed up by telephone verification.

The current child protection policy and procedures do not specifically offer guidance to staff investigating an allegation made by a child in an adoptive placement, this is an area that must be addressed as part of the services action plan.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Manchester must review current provision and implement sufficient resources and develop strategies to ensure that all adopters and their children are supported effectively.

## EVIDENCE:

There was substantial evidence that post placement and post adoption support services were a real area for development in Manchester. There were several examples of individual cases where post adoptions support arrangements were still being negotiated after the placement of children with their adopters. Cases were dealt with on a case by case basis and were subject to the involvement of the Adoption Team Manager, Principal Service Manager and Assistant Director.

The service should develop post adoption support assessment practice for children and their adopters prior to the matching meeting taking place. The needs of children and adopters for post placement and post adoption support are currently considered as part of the formal matching meeting but these arrangements fall short of a child focused assessment of need that is scrutinised by the panel as part of the best interest decision.

The service would benefit from developing a clearer strategy for working with and supporting adopters. This could involve the development of a working agreement between Manchester and prospective adopters. The agreement should contain information concerning the arrangements for the assessment, target dates for panel and details of the post approval support and training that is already available to Manchester adopters.



Manchester has a service level agreement with After Adoption to provide post adoption support. There were some concerns about the difficulties some adopters had in accessing supports services from After Adoption if they did not live in an area covered by After Adoption. The Adoption Team Manager and the Principal Service Manager were in the process of reviewing the agreement at the time of the inspection to ensure that it was providing an accessible service to all Manchester children, adopters and birth families.

When the review is completed Manchester would benefit from ensuring that adopters have easier access to their own multi-agency and commissioned post-approval and post adoption support services. As part of this the service should advertise and recruit for an Adoption Support Services Adviser and should work with partner agencies to ensure that the excellent Post Adoption Psychology Service is expanded to meet the needs of all Manchester children who have a plan for or who are placed for adoption. A number of Adoption Agencies have worked with partners in health and education to ensure that children and adoptive families can access universal post-adoption services to support matching and subsequent placement. This may be an area of development for the service.

As has already been mentioned Manchester has access to excellent legal advice. The PSA grant had been used to create the Adoption Solicitor for Manchester. The Adoption Solicitor had with other staff in the agency developed practice concerning permanence planning and had contributed to the increased numbers of children being placed for adoption. The funding for this post is due to finish in March 2006. Given some of the challenges of ensuring effective care planning for children in a service this size the Adoption Solicitor has demonstrated that they have achieved much but still have a great deal more to do if the service is to continue to develop and improve outcomes for children.

There was evidence that the arrangements for medical advice for the service were under some pressure and that despite the clear commitment and dedication of the agency medical adviser that the service would benefit from seeking additional time from the PCT or an additional medical adviser to ensure that all children's and adults medical assessments were scrutinised before the Adoption Panel.

As part of the need to improve access to medical advice the service should develop a written protocol between Manchester and the health trust to ensure that the full role and responsibilities of the medical adviser are clearly described and understood.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

### **The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

### **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

The service does not effectively support or enable birth parents to participate in the care planning processes for their children, when adoption is the plan.

### **EVIDENCE:**

There was little evidence of the involvement of birth parents or birth families in their child's adoption plan. Birth parents rarely signed their child's assessment and social workers did not always give an account of when birth parents had been told about the plan for adoption. In one case birth parents had been told about the plan for adoption prior to the child's birth and had been offered no subsequent service or counselling.

Despite the arrangements for with After Adoption child- care social workers were not clear about how and when parents should be referred for independent counselling.

There was evidence that despite a policy of not supporting name changes that a number of children including one relinquished baby had had their first name changed. This is an area that should be addressed as part of the services action plan.

The placing social workers advised that they had received some training in working directly with children and had some resources to help complete Life Story work. There was compelling evidence that some of the Life Story work seen was not fit for purpose. One adopter spoke of their real disappointment for their child about the information and presentation of the Life Story book. Other adopters spoke of the delay in getting the work for their child, whilst another adopter said " The social worker came to give the children their life

story books. She didn't know what to say and just handed them over...the book uses the word deceased, my child didn't know what that word meant." The need to ensure the Life Story work is completed to an acceptable standard and in a timely way should be a part of the services action plan.

The Letterbox scheme was administered and overseen by the Adoption Team senior practitioner and post adoption support administrator. This part of the service was well organised and delivered to a very high standard. All the staff involved administered the Letterbox sensitively and they should be commended for their commitment to this work.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1,3,14,16,17,20,21,22,23,25,26,27,28,29

The management systems are improving in the adoption service. However, the agency needs to ensure that social workers have the training and developmental support and supervision to ensure that good outcomes for children are achieved in a timely manner.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There was a statement of purpose in place that had been reviewed as recently as September 2005 and had been formally approved by the executive of the council. It clearly outlined the aspirations and operations of the agency and was written in an easy to read style. The children's guide to adoption was well presented and gave a realistic overview of the issues involved; it also provided contact details of other relevant agencies and explained how a child could complain. When the children's guide is reviewed it should contain the correct title and information of the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The guide, is only understandable by older children, and although the agency states its commitment to developing a guide(s) to enable more children to be provided with information relevant to their level of understanding, this has yet to be achieved.

The policies and procedures of the agency, many of which had been recently reviewed and revised, supported the statement of purpose and most indications were that the agency operated in line with these.

The information provided for prospective applicants is of a very good standard; it gives a clear indication of all the implications and processes of adoption, including profiles of the kind of children requiring placements, and it also specifies the range of people that the agency wishes to recruit. It is a very well - presented pack that is welcoming and clearly aimed at providing all relevant information in an accessible and encouraging format.

There was substantial evidence that despite some of the clear challenges facing the agency that the operational and strategic management of the Adoption Team was becoming increasingly effective.

The Adoption Team reported that they were well supported by their manager, and the managers involved in the adoption service reported that they were well supervised and supported by the Acting Principal Service Manager. All managers involved in the adoption service were suitably qualified and experienced. The service would benefit from recruiting a permanent Principal Service Manager and from appointing an ASSA to develop the post adoption support service.

The inspection found evidence that the Adoption Team worked well within the wider constraints of the service and that the relationship between the team and placing social workers was generally positive.

The Team Manager dealt with the few complaints made against the agency sensitively, efficiently and effectively. Withdrawals and de-registrations were also managed well.

Staff in the adoption service had accessed training in undertaking assessments but advised that they found it hard to access specialist training in developing their practice. This is an area that the agency may wish to review. All staff said that they were familiar with the council's personal development and annual appraisal system.

The council had acknowledged the achievements of the Adoption Team in exceeding the PSA target and they had been nominated and won the Team of the Year Award.

Some of the practical and logistical support arrangements seemed to conspire against efficient and effective practice in the team. Staff had huge problems in getting financial assistance for introductions to take place. Delegation of budgets for access to specialist training, and access to transport were also extremely restrictive and complex.

Systems to ensure the efficient and effective access to finances to support the core functions of the adoption agency should be developed and implemented. The service had developed and invested a great deal of time and money in the adoption database in partnership with a private company. Access to the database is through the email system.

Manchester does not have a workload management system in place and it is difficult to gauge the weight given to work in terms of complexity and quantity. It is recommended that a system is devised so that managers can identify issues of capacity. A number of staff in the adoption team reported feeling a sense of achievement in placing so many children for adoption in the last year, but also feeling that they were on a treadmill with little time for professional development and reflection on their practice. This poses a threat to the agency and to some of the strengths of having such an established and experienced group of workers in the services Adoption Team.

The service should establish, without delay, a robust system of file auditing: children's adoption files showed no evidence of any management oversight, and the quality of some of the paperwork was poor. It is of utmost importance that children's adoption files reflect an accurate record of all work undertaken in relation to the adoption, which will be readily understood by the adoptee at any future date.

Adopters' files were generally well ordered, with many files keeping a copy of contemporaneous notes from the assessment. However these files too, lacked management oversight. Decisions made during supervision should be recorded on all files and any signatures on documents should be dated and supplemented by the manager's or social worker's full name. The service should develop and implement effective quality assurance systems for the supervision of children's and adopter's assessments.

Administrative staff were seen to be hardworking and sensitive to the nature of the work of the service. However, the agency should consider the adequacy of its provision as there was evidence of matching reports being delayed in going to panel because there had been no one to type them.

Staff personnel files do not meet the regulations or the standards. For example, some files do not have evidence of qualifications, two written references and the agency does not follow up written references with telephone enquiries. Although independent and sessional staff are not directly employed by the council, the service must keep appropriate files on them that contain the information set out in Schedules 3 & 4.

Panel members' files do not meet the regulations either; CRB disclosures were present however the full range of information required was not present. All adoption files are copied to disc and are scanned on to a secure server. Original copies of documents are stored securely, however they are not in stored in a cabinet that is fire and flood proof. The service should review its arrangements for the safe storage of these original records.

The Adoption Team and their managers are located in a large council office on the outskirts of Manchester. The offices have limited staff and public parking but are easily accessible by public transport. The offices themselves are cramped and not fit for purpose. The electricity is regularly overloaded in the winter months and the whole functioning of staff and the service grinds to a halt. Work on computers is lost and is not accessible. The lift stops working and there is no adequate lighting in the corridors and stairwells. The service must review the current accommodation for the Adoption Service to ensure that the requirements on the agency to protect and promote the health and safety of staff can be met in the current office accommodation.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption have been met and uses the following scale.

**4** Standard Exceeded (Commendable)      **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)  
**2** Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)      **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion  
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>7</b>	1
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	2

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>2</b>	1
<b>4</b>	1
<b>5</b>	2
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	1
<b>12</b>	2
<b>13</b>	1
<b>15</b>	1
<b>19</b>	1
<b>24</b>	N/A

<b>ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>6</b>	2
<b>18</b>	2

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>1</b>	2
<b>3</b>	1
<b>14</b>	3
<b>16</b>	3
<b>17</b>	3
<b>20</b>	2
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	2
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	2
<b>28</b>	1
<b>29</b>	1
<b>30</b>	N/A
<b>31</b>	N/A



Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? N/A

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD1AD2	9.1 and 2 LAA 2003	Manchester must write and implement a written policy to safeguard from abuse or neglect children placed for adoption.	30/01/06
2	AD4	8A & 8.2 Schedule 6	Manchester must ensure that all background information and checks, including checks from overseas are sought, so far as is reasonably practicable, concerning the background of prospective adopters.	30/03/06
3	AD11AD15AD19AD28	15 LAA 2003	The agency must ensure that all staff and panel members' personnel files comply with schedules 3 & 4 of the regulation (this includes staff not directly employed by Manchester but who work for the purposes of the adoption service).	30/03/06
4	AD10	5.4 1983 AAR 2003	The agency must ensure that they shall only	30/03/06

			make a recommendation when at least six of its members meet and those members include the chairman and a social worker in the employment of the adoption agency.	
5	AD13	11.2 d	Manchester must ensure that all adopters receive written notification of the agency decision as soon as possible.	30/03/06
6	AD3	7	Manchester must develop a service wide approach to ensuring effective systems are in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting.	30/03/06
7	AD29	7	Manchester must review the safety and adequacy of the current office premises to ensure that they are fit for purpose.	30/03/06
8	AD10	5.4 1983 AAR 2003	The service must ensure that all recommendations and the subsequent decisions made by adoption panels that were not quorate are reviewed by a quorate adoption panel and the agency decision maker.	30/03/06

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD2	The agency should produce a written strategy for the recruitment of sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting.
2	AD2AD5	The agency should review how it conducts initial matching meetings with potential adopters, to ensure that adopters have the full range of information available to them about the child's assessed needs.
3	AD4	The agency should ensure that its preparation for adopters covers all aspects of diversity, and that proper assessment is made of applicants' attitudes in these areas.
4	AD4AD5AD7AD20	The agency should develop and implement robust quality assurance systems in respect of its children's and prospective adopter's assessments.
5	AD13	The agency should ensure that letters confirming agency decisions are signed by the decision maker and sent to relevant parties without undue delay.
6	AD10	The agency should ensure that panel considers adoption support plans each time a child's case is considered for matching.
7	AD11	The agency should ensure that all panel members complete an induction programme that is completed and recorded within ten weeks of becoming a panel member.
8	AD12	Manchester should develop robust gate keeping systems that are implemented in practice concerning the management of the agenda for each adoption panel to prevent delay and to promote the effective use of panel members time.
9	AD18	The agency should develop written protocols to govern the role of the agency medical adviser.
10	AD7	The agency should ensure that birth parents are enabled to contribute effectively to their child's care plans. The agency should develop a system to promote the independent support service for birth parents and families; and analyse the take-up rates.
11	AD8AD9	The agency should develop and implement a

		strategy for working with birth parents and families from when a child becomes looked after, to ensure that they are treated openly and that vital information regarding the child's heritage is maintained. This strategy should include a service wide review to enhance the quality of life story work for children with a plan for adoption.
12	AD1	The children's guide should be altered to ensure that the name of the Commission for Social Care Inspection is communicated accurately.
13	AD20	The current system of case management should be reviewed to ensure that it delivers the most efficient and effective service. The agency should develop a workload management system that takes into account the quantity and complexity of cases held within each of the teams. The agency should consider whether the current provision of administrative support is adequate to meet the demands of the service.
14	AD20	The agency should review access to delegated budgets for core business activities.
15	AD15AD19	The agency should ensure that written references for members of staff are verified by telephone enquiries.
16	AD25	The agency should review its arrangements for the storage of original adoption records, to minimise risk of damage from fire and or water.
17	AD27	The agency should establish and maintain a robust system for the auditing of files. Case notes should be typewritten, signed and dated. Any signatures should be supplemented by a full printed name. Any case decisions taken during supervision should be recorded on files.
18	AD4	The agency should develop clearer practice guidelines for social workers concerning the conduct of fast tracked assessments to ensure that the assessment and preparation process for prospective adopters is robust.

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