



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Portsmouth City Council Adoption Agency

**Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2EP**

Lead Inspector
Rosie Dancer

Announced Inspection
15th November 2005 12:00

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

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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 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

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

Name of service	Portsmouth City Council Adoption Agency
Address	Civic Offices Guildhall Square Portsmouth PO1 2EP
Telephone number	023 9284 1161
Fax number	023 9284 1158
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Portsmouth City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Cherry Harnott
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection This is the first inspection under The Local Authority (England) Regulations 2003.

Brief Description of the Service:

The adoption agency is part of Portsmouth Council Councils' Health, Housing and Social Care Directorate. The agency is constituted as a service under current legislation that requires local authorities to provide or make provision for adoption services.

The agency is a member of the South Coast Adoption Consortium that comprises of four other Local Authorities.

Portsmouth accepts applications from people wishing to adopt a child from England and those wishing to adopt a child from another country. Portsmouth adoption service recruits, prepares, assesses and approves, provides post adoption support, places children with adoptive families and provides birth records counselling.

SUMMARY

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

The preparation for the inspection by the agency was of an excellent standard and included a very efficient approach to providing pre-inspection material and a thorough self-assessment. The facilities made available to the inspection team were comfortable and everyone involved was welcoming, courteous and helpful; this enabled the inspection to be carried out efficiently and with the minimum of disruption.

The inspection was conducted over two full days and two half days by two inspectors.

During the course of the fieldwork interviews were conducted with key staff and managers and an elected member of the council. The lead inspector observed the adoption panel and interviewed the panel chair. Visits were undertaken to a birth parent and four adoptive families; their views are incorporated into the body of the report. Questionnaires were sent to all adopters approved in the last twelve months, all prospective adopters currently being assessed, birth parents, placing social workers, placing authorities and professional advisers. Some of the comments made in these questionnaires are quoted in the report.

All relevant policies and procedures were inspected, as were records in respect of service users, staff and panel members. A selection of papers submitted to the adoption panel in recent times was also inspected.

Some responses by adopters expressed a frustration about delays at various stages of the process and at not being able to contact their social worker.

Adopters' comments about the timescales involved varied from:

'The process was long and very frustrating, but the end result was worth the wait.' (An adopter from 2003)

To:

'We choose Portsmouth because they had good post adoption support and could put us on a preparation group very quickly.'

Adopters' comments about the availability of social workers in 2003 included:

'It was very frustrating not being able to contact them...at that time they did not have e-mail.'

At the time of the inspection there had been recent reconfiguration of the fieldwork teams and the creation of additional posts within the adoption team and a move to 'adoption' dedicated premises.

It was reported by fieldwork team representative that there was a positive feeling now about the work as specific workers within the teams carry out adoption work and this reconfiguration allows them to drive forward the planning for the child.

The improvements in the delivery of the service to adopters were evidenced through the agency no longer operating waiting lists, social workers being supported by an efficient admin team and all staff being contactable by e-mail.

One adopter commented:

'Our social worker is always there for us we commend her.'

While the past frustrations and disappointments adopters have experienced are acknowledged it was clear that the agency had recognised the difficulties and by the time of the inspection the shortfalls had been fully addressed through the changes made.

What the service does well:

The services provided to children, adopters and birth family members recognised the life long implications adoption has for all involved in the adoption process.

The matching processes were commendable and ensured that children were placed with adopters who were best able to meet their needs throughout their childhood and the detailed support plans ensured that placement stability could be achieved.

The quality of the information provided to adopters was detailed and gave adopters a clear view about the processes involved in adoption and the complex needs of the children who needed an adoptive placement.

The knowledge and understanding of adoption throughout the management structure ensured that the workers operated in an informed environment. There was good support and encouragement provided to the workers in carrying out their work. The management team were adept in identifying and addressing difficulties in timely way.

The elected members were clearly committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for children.

The agency had access to a range of competent advisers and evidence was noted of effective working relationships between agencies.

The adoption and fieldwork team social workers were skilled individuals who all showed a firm commitment to providing each child with the best outcome possible. The newly formed adoption team were developing a clear identity and individual workers were commended by a number of sources.

There was one negative response from a birth parent about information provided about adoption. However, overall the service to birth parents and families was well established and offered a range of options for support to birth families.

The birth record counselling referrals were on the increase and the service provided was efficient and sensitive to the needs of service users.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection under The Local Authority (England) Regulations 2003.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to better evidence that all statutory checks have been carried out in respect to staff and adopters.

The agency must not employ staff until all statutory checks have been completed.

The agency should devise an adoption specific induction programme for new social work staff.

The agency should establish a file audit system for adopters and children's files.

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 or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

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Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

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)
- Adoptors 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):

2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15,19

The agency makes provision for the safety and effective matching of children with suitable families, which enables optimistic, lasting adoptions to be realised.

EVIDENCE:

There was a written plan in place in respect of the recruitment of adopters. The recruitment plan is reviewed on a regular basis, and had been endorsed by the elected members. As Portsmouth children are not usually placed within the city recruitment was targeted at people living outside the city, within a thirty-mile radius, and included recruiting people who may be able to meet the needs of the children of the consortium members. There were well-established practices involved between the consortium members with inter-agency placements being arranged on a regular basis.

Portsmouth welcomed enquiries from people seeking to adopt children from the UK or overseas.

There were efficient matching processes in place that were underpinned by clear policies and procedures. The agency was mindful about achieving the right balance between matching and timescales. In the event that a suitable

family could not be found the agency looked more widely for families who were able, with training and support, to develop strategies to meet any shortfall.

Foster carers were expected to be fully involved in the matching, introduction and placement processes. Individual foster carers were commended, by adopters and staff working for the agency, in terms of their skills in moving children on to their adopters.

There preparation training was run on a rolling basis. Domestic, intercountry adopters and foster carers who were hoping to adopt the child placed with them attended this training. Intercountry adopters were also expected to attend sessions, run by the Overseas Adoption Centre. These sessions focused on issues relating to inter country adoptions.

The sessions were run over two days and some early evening sessions to facilitate attendance by adopters who work. Adopters were provided with an opportunity to give their views about each session via a questionnaire. The adoption workers and the adoption team manager periodically consider the questionnaire responses, and changes to improve the arrangements or content can be made.

The most recent evaluation was viewed as a part of the inspection. The sample involved sixteen adopters. Overall the respondents were very satisfied with the sessions. One area of difficulty identified was ensuring that the timing of the sessions suit all. Some adopters found the day sessions inconvenient while others found the evening sessions tiring following a full day at work. It was also stated, to the inspectors, for some adopters with children at home attending preparation groups could present difficulties.

Overall adopters who expressed a view to the inspectors found the preparation groups to be useful with the following statements made by adopters:

'We found the preparation group very useful'

'The preparation groups were excellent, the subject matter was good and easy to understand, we were able to voice our own opinion.'

Overall the quality of the adoption assessments were good and clearly identified the adopters capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way, and provided evidence of their competencies and strengths.

Statutory checks had been carried out, health and safety assessments were done, a number of references had taken up and referees visited.

Placing social workers comments about the quality of the assessments included:

' (the assessment) contained qualitative information necessary for selection and linking'

and

'The assessment focused on their ability to meet the needs of the child'

In respect to medical issues, following approval, a request is sent to adopters GP's asking that they inform the agency in the event of a significant medical issue arising post approval. While clearly this cannot be enforced it is a commendable attempt to ensure that any significant health issues arising can be subject to further assessment in a timely way.

Areas noted which needed attention are as follows:

- The months of employment on adopters' career histories were not always recorded, this being important to ensure that any gaps in employment can be followed up.
- While CRB checks were recorded as having been carried out the certificates were not being kept for inspection and the record keeping of the checks was not detailed enough.
- One Form F that had been written over two years ago required updating due to significant positive changes in the prospective adopters circumstances. In addition a placing social worker commented that the quality of the Forms F are variable. In light of these issues it is recommended that the manager ensure that there are no other Forms F, which would benefit from being updating to ensure that up to date information is available to social workers looking to place a child.

A number of adopters commended their and the child's social workers. The following comments were made about individual workers:

- 'Both social workers have been excellent'
- 'We were happy with both our social workers and would like to single out our child's social worker who should be highly recommended. We commend our social worker she has always been there.'
- 'I have an excellent relationship with the social worker – I always have felt the social worker listens to me.'
- 'The social worker was excellent.'

The adoption panel policies and procedures were found to be comprehensive. The panel was properly constituted and there was an induction process in place

for new panel members; this included the chance to observe a panel. Panel members had been provided with training relevant to their role. Training was provided for panel members in the complexities of inter country adoption when such a case was being heard.

Social workers comments about panel included,

- 'Panel make good valid points, they are good at raising birth parents views.'
- 'The panel is child focused; they ensure good matches are made.'
- 'Panel treats us with respect.'
- 'Very open and inclusive, people are made to feel comfortable and the chair is skilled.'
- Panel asks thorough, clear and diverse questions.

Social workers welcomed the feedback provided by panel and the adoption adviser, which it was stated, includes constructive criticism and compliments.

Adopters described their experience of attending the panel as being sensitively handled and while some adopters described the experience as daunting it was generally felt that individual social workers had prepared them well for the experience.

While all adopters were fully involved in the comprehensive Matching Information Meetings, which are discussed further on in this report, not all were invited to attend the matching panel. Consideration should be given to inviting all adopters to the panels in order that their views can be heard 'first hand' by panel members.

The panel was timely. The monitoring role was noted as being tight in terms of the quality of work presented. It was clear that information was taken seriously and that the panel was conscientious about avoiding delays wherever possible. The adoption adviser was providing updates to panel about cases it has heard and social workers were expected to provide written updates to panel. It was noted that this was not always occurring and consideration should be given to if a written update from social workers is needed in each case to compliment the information provided by the adviser.

There was an Adoption Forum held on approximately a quarterly basis. This was made up predominately of panel members and staff. The minutes from the last three meetings were viewed and it was noted that this is a useful arena that allows for a range of issues to be discussed and addressed, including performance issues.

The administration of the panel was efficient and effective. There were comprehensive minutes produced of each panel meeting. The minutes were of an excellent quality.

The decision making process was efficient and timely and decisions were made after careful consideration of all of the papers, including the detailed panel minutes.

Staff working for the purposes of the adoption agency were noted as being appropriately skilled and qualified in their respective fields of expertise and committed to achieving the best outcomes for children as is possible.

It was however noted that there was one member of staff who had begun work prior to a CRB disclosure having been received. While arrangements were in place to ensure close supervision took place and the individual was not allowed contact alone with children, in children's services staff must not begin work until all statutory checks have been satisfactorily completed.

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):

6,18

Portsmouth has well-established arrangements for supporting adoptive families pre and post order and the support provided ensures children are placed in stable placements with adopters who are able to meet their needs throughout their childhood.

EVIDENCE:

It was evident that Portsmouth had a clear commitment in supporting families affected by adoption regardless of when the adoption took place.

The arrangements in place for informing adopters about the services available as they are going through the assessment and approval processes included:

- A range of leaflets and contact numbers of national and local support services.
- A Post Adoption Telephone Help Line, which is for use by all adopters.
- Five years paid membership of Adoption UK.
- Detailed adoption support plans which were subject to regular review. Following an order being granted all adopters had the option to have an annual review of the support plan.

A leaflet written for family and friends had been produced that contained general information about adoption. This enabled the family support network to have a clear understanding about areas in which support may be required. Likewise there was a leaflet for schools about issues relating to an adopted child; it was reported that feedback from head teachers about this leaflet had been positive.

The arrangements for preparing adopters and any children already living in the home in meeting the needs of a child to be placed with them were commendable and included the following:

- A comprehensive Matching Information Meeting. The Adoption Agency Manager was chairing these meetings, clear minutes were taken and attendees included the adopters and all professionals who had specific knowledge of the child. The meetings allowed for careful consideration the needs of the child and adoptive family and the identification of support services. Adopters were given an opportunity to consider all of the information, with the support of their worker, and it was then arranged for the case to be heard at panel where all were in agreement that the match was appropriate.
- The Adoption Introduction Planning Meeting. During these meeting the timetable for the introductions and the placement were devised. All basic information such as contact details were exchanged, financial considerations were discussed and agreed and details of reviews of the introductions and placement were also agreed.

Evidence was noted that children placed for adoption had well prepared prior to placement and timescales for completion of individual life storybooks had been introduced.

The above activities ensured that adopters were well prepared to meet the needs of the child and that a firm foundation for support was in place prior to the placement.

For intercountry adopters it was Portsmouth's policy that adoptive parents provide the Adoption Manager with details about the child's background and medical history. The medical adviser would then carry out a medical, consider the information provided and provide advice where there were implications for caring for the child. The intercountry policy clearly stated that children who have been adopted from overseas have the same right to post-placement and post-adoption services as any other child has.

There were clear arrangements in place in the event of a disruption occurring, there had been no disruptions in Portsmouth in excess of the twelve-month period the inspection covered.

The agency had access to a range of specialist advisers. The legal, medical and adoption advisers were attending and advising panel in issues pertaining to their respective fields.

In addition to this the medical adviser was providing medical advice to fieldwork social workers, adoption team members and was available to offer advice to adopters by phone or in person. The medical adviser had established

good links with a range of specialists within the medical profession and as a result was able to access a range of specialist medical services for children and adopters.

The medical adviser was singled out, by a variety of professionals and adopters, as a committed individual who is approachable and responsive to requests for advice and has the ability to explain medical issues in a detailed but understandable way to those not medically qualified.

There were also excellent links to education services, particularly in the special needs area. The panel chair at the time of the inspection was an educational psychologist; another education specialist had recently joined the panel membership. Evidence was noted that these individuals had excellent links with colleagues and were ensuring that prompt action was taken in meeting the educational needs of children.

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):

7,8,9,

The agency's approach to working with birth parents to enable them to contribute to their children's futures and to support them at any stage was well managed and coordinated.

EVIDENCE:

The agency had a three year service level agreement, which commenced on 1st June 2004, with Portsmouth Counselling Service. This service was independent from the agency and as such provided birth parents with access to confidential counselling. The agreement allowed for eight sessions of counselling and one session specifically to help parents to write their views for presentation to the adoption panel. It was clearly stated in the agreement that counsellors who worked with birth parents must have to be trained in issues relating to adoption and that all staff and volunteers were expected to have been subject to CRB checks. That this service had been available for nearly a year and a half demonstrates the forward thinking in Portsmouth in respect to the services to birth parents.

In addition to the above service there were a range of other options available to birth parents. These were as follows:

- It had been found that some parents wished to receive support from their child's social worker and evidence was noted during the inspection of some extremely sensitive and skilful work having been carried out by the fieldwork teams.
- The family centre workers had also been found to be a useful source of support to birth parents. These workers had often built up positive working relationships with birth family members and as such were seen as familiar and trusted people.

- Adoption team members were also a resource that birth parents could use to help them understand the adoption process and the decisions that had been made.
- The Portsmouth learning disability team also on occasions had been a support to birth parents with learning difficulties.
- A leaflet was available for birth parents, which detailed local and national support groups.

The support services detailed above were available to the birth parents at any stage during the adoption process, or many years ahead. The services aimed to enable birth parents to be actively involved in the planning for their child, to assist them to be involved in maintaining their child's heritage and to provide general support and advice.

It is evident that Portsmouth was fully aware of the life-changing and lifelong consequences of adoption and had a commitment to providing services that recognise this.

The panel expected to see firm evidence that parents views had been sought and explored; each of the sets of panel papers relating to children's plans viewed provided the panel with birth parents views; some parents had chosen to put their views in writing to the panel.

Evidence was noted in some cases of parents having read and commented on what had been written about them. It had been recognised that where parents declined to read the information this was not being consistently recorded and arrangements had been introduced to ensure that this is addressed.

Evidence was noted from viewing children's files that social workers and independent reviewing officers had written to birth parents to inform them of decision made and to explain the reasons for the decisions reached.

Throughout the planning for the child birth parents and family members were encouraged to contribute to their child's heritage. This may have been through contributing to the life storybook or thorough being supported in writing a letter to the child, which was then placed on the adoption file. Also positive comments were made by adopters in respect to meeting birth parents; one adopter stated:

'The meeting with birth parents was extremely useful. We now have photographs, comments and thoughts from them that we can share with our children.'

This clearly evidences that the agency prepares adopters well in terms of maintaining and promoting the heritage of the child.

The Adoption Information Exchange Service was well planned and organised effectively. This service enabled parents and birth family members to contribute to the maintenance of the child's heritage on a long-term basis.

However, there were two views expressed, one by a birth family member and one by a placing authority, which indicated they had experienced some difficulties.

In the case of the birth parent the individual concerned stated that the information provided could be improved on. It was not possible to establish the circumstances of this case due to the questionnaires being completed anonymously.

In respect of the placing authority it was stated that there had been some problems in planning an indirect post adoption contact arrangement. The issue related to the two agencies reaching agreement about the time of year the contact would take place. This had been resolved and a contact plan agreed.

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 arrangements for the management of the service were in the main, of a very high standard. The strong management team provides for a coherent service that conducts its business and carries out its responsibilities to the advantage of service users.

EVIDENCE:

There was a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency. This document provided a thorough foundation for the agency's work.

A range of clear and detailed policies and procedures supported the Statement and ensured the agency's activities were operated in line with the Statement.

The Statement is subject to periodical review. The last review led to the amendment the details of the adoption team following the restructuring and extended the information on the preparation of prospective adopters.

The revised Statement was subject to formal approval by the executive committee in October 2005.

The agency was using the guide for children produced by BAAF and had included local information about adoption in this guide. It had been recognised by the agency that this guide was not suitable for all children and at the time of the inspection a guide for younger children had been completed.

Staff were involved in the development of the Statement of Purpose and the new Children's Guide.

These three documents each contained contact details for the CSCI. However, each guide contained the details for three different CSCI offices. The correct address, which needs to be included in the documents, is:

CSCI
11th Floor
West Point
501 Chester Road
Old Trafford
Manchester
M16 9HU

016 1876 2400

The agency might like to consider including in the guides the children's website for the Office of the Children's Rights director which is:

www.rights4me.org.uk/

The agency could arrange for all information to be provided in a range of formats and languages.

Portsmouth was welcoming all enquirers without prejudice. Enquirers were provided with clear detailed written information about the stages of the

adoption process with separate packs available for those who wished to adopt in the UK and those who wished to progress an intercountry adoption application.

Portsmouth had a Statement of Priority in place, which had been approved by the Elected Members and clearly detailed the priorities in terms of the recruitment of adopters. Adopters were being provided with this information routinely at the point of their initial enquiry. This information was reinforced during the preparation process.

Prospective adopters were provided with information about the needs of children waiting for a placement on a local and national level, and all were provided with an opportunity to speak with adoptive parents.

The adoption agency manager demonstrated that she has considerable knowledge and experience of adoption law and practices, excellent people management skills and commitment to achieving positive outcomes for children. It was clear that staff in the adoption team, the childcare teams and senior management valued her experience, skills and knowledge in the adoption arena. The adoption agency manager did not hold a management qualification; the adoption team manager did have a management qualification and she was the operational manager responsible for the day-to-day work of the adoption team.

The overall arrangements for the management of the service, although relatively recent following the reconfiguration of the fieldwork teams and the strengthening of the adoption team, were found to be effective both at an operational and strategic level. It was evident that all tiers of the management structure had a firm commitment to achieving positive outcomes for those children for whom adoption is the agreed plan.

The executive of the council were provided with regular reports on the activities of the service and it was evident that there was an enthusiastic approach taken by the executive in the work of the adoption service. The arrangements for monitoring the performance of the adoption work were robust with shortfalls in the adoption service noted as having been quickly identified and addressed in a timely way. The corporate parenting role was evidenced as being considered a high priority by the members.

The backlog of work had reportedly been cleared, which indicated an appropriate level of staffing numbers. There was a high level of optimism from all interviewed about how the service was developing. Social workers within the adoption team and the fieldwork teams expressed confidence in the management teams and it was evident that the adoption workers were enjoying the experience consolidating as an effective team

The allocation and monitoring of workloads within the adoption service was effective and enabled social workers to undertake their responsibilities

effectively. All staff had been consulted about the reconfiguration and had been provided with options about their employment in the new structure.

Staff received regular supervision. There was an 'open door' policy operating to ensure that advice and support was provided to workers as required and workers clearly valued the skills and knowledge of their managers. Social workers reported that they felt well supported by the management team. Some workers from the adoption team welcomed the 'family friendly' policies in place which allowed for flexible working arrangements to fit in with family life.

The adoption and fieldwork staff with whom the inspectors met were clearly suitably skilled, knowledgeable, competent and enthusiastic about their roles. The overall high standard of the assessment reports produced, the competence and understanding about adoption issues shown by the social workers and the many compliments adopters made in respect to individual workers confirmed this view.

It was noted that there were bids in for additional staff for the teams. If accepted there is no doubt that further developments planned for the service will be achieved in a timely way.

The Birth records counselling service was identified by a placing social worker as being a positive aspect of the work carried out by the agency; information from other sources confirmed this work was being carried out in a supportive and sensitive way.

The opportunities for training and professional development were noted as being varied and of a good quality. Finances for external training were reported by the social workers as being forthcoming and one social worker was being supported financially to study for a degree course. There was a Post Qualifying training programme in place and some social workers found the learning sets run on a regular basis to be useful.

It would be good practice for the administrative staff to receive some basic training about what to do in the event of them receiving a potential child protection referral.

While there was a corporate induction programme in place there was not an induction programme specifically for people joining the adoption team. It is recommended that the Adoption Team Manager establish an adoption specific induction programme to aid new members of staff settle into their role on the team.

It was evidenced that as an employer Portsmouth operates in a transparent and inclusive way, and is committed to supporting staff in their demanding roles. This confirmed Portsmouth's competence and commitment as an employer.

The case records were kept securely and it was evidenced that confidentiality issues are complied with. The files for adopters were well ordered but there were some gaps noted as follows:

- Decisions made by supervisors were not routinely being placed on the file
- While there was a monitoring system on some files in respect to timescales there was not a formal quality assurance audit system in place
- The recording of the CRB checks did not provide all necessary information (this issue has been addressed under Standard 28 and a recommendation has been made.)

Some children's adoption files required some attention. The main issues noted were as follows:

- Not all of the required contents were on the files. For example the minutes from the meeting where adoption was identified as a plan, panel minutes and decisions made by supervisors.
- While on one of the files viewed an audit of the file was in place and had identified some of the missing information this had not been addressed

There were clear case recording policies in place. These were general policies for the use of children's and adult services workers. It would be good practice to provide some clear written guidance about the content and structure of files relating to adoption.

The arrangements for the general administration of the service were underpinned by sound policies and procedures.

Adoption team staff reported that they were well supported by an efficient and friendly team of administrative workers.

There were robust arrangements in place in respect to, access to records and data protection.

The arrangements for access to archived records were particularly impressive with access limited to three named people for whom photographic identification is required.

Records in respect of staff were generally well maintained; although some attention, is required in the following areas:

- While evidence was noted that references are followed up by a telephone call to referees this was not being recorded, in writing on staff files.
- While there was some evidence on each file that CRB checks had been undertaken the certificates had been destroyed. Current requirements are that all CRB certificates are kept, until the next CSCI inspection when they can be destroyed. The commission advises that before the certificates are destroyed that the following details of the check is recorded on file
 - The name address and birth date of the applicant
 - The number of the disclosure
 - The date of check
 - The level of check
 - Confirmation that the individual has been checked against the relevant lists and has not been disqualified from working with vulnerable people

The records in respect of panel members were comprehensively kept.

The service was run from identifiable office premises which are accessible for those with a genuine business with the adoption service These were new premises for the team and the spacious accommodation provided pleasant working conditions and space for various meetings with adopters and others to take place in a comfortable and relaxed environment. The premises are accessible to people with a physical disability.

There were adequate security arrangements in place and a 'signing in and out' requirement for all visitors.

The social workers reported ready access to IT and other equipment. Record storage was secure with limited access to areas where records are stored.

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

BEING HEALTHY	
Standard No	Score
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
Standard No	Score
7	3
8	4
9	3

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard No	Score
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
6	4
18	4

MANAGEMENT	
Standard No	Score
1	3
3	3
14	4
16	4
17	3
20	3
21	3
22	3
23	3
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	2
29	3
30	N/A
31	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	AD19	Reg 11	No member of staff is to start employment until all statutory checks have been completed.	18/11/05

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	AD4	Adopters' assessments should include months of employment history and full details of CRB checks should be retained on adopters' files.
2	AD4	The manager should ensure that all adopter's assessments have been kept up to date.
3	AD10	The manager should consider inviting all adopters to the matching panels.
4	AD23	The manager should consider providing some basic training to clerical staff in respect to child protection issues.
5	AD23	The manager should consider developing an induction

		programme specific to the work of the team.
6	AD25	The manager should ensure that all adopters and children's files meet the standards.
7	AD28	The manager must ensure that each staff file clearly evidences the issues detailed in the main body of the report.

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