



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

SSAFA Forces Help

SSAFA
19 Queen Elizabeth Street
London
SE1 2LP

Lead Inspector
Rosie Dancer

Announced Inspection
14th February 2006 09:00

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	SSAFA Forces Help
Address	SSAFA 19 Queen Elizabeth Street London SE1 2LP
Telephone number	020 7463 9231
Fax number	
Email address	kate.burgess@ssafa.org.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	SSAFA
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Patricia Lowe
Type of registration	Voluntary Adoption Agency
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The category of registration is:- Domestic and Intercountry Adoption Service (DICA)

Date of last inspection

This is the first inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection under the terms of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005.

Brief Description of the Service:

SSAFA adoption agency is a part of SSAFA forces help. The organisation has charitable status. It was founded in 1885 to provide a range of services to soldiers and sailors families. It now assists all serving and ex-service communities.

SSAFA began work in the adoption field about 30 years ago. The service then comprised of the assessment of childless military couples as adopters for relinquished infants born to the military and supporting civilian community. The service operated only in British Forces Germany (BFG) and children were placed in Germany, Hong Kong, Cyprus and Gibraltar.

In 2000 a decision was made to extend the adoption service to assessing military couples as prospective adopters for older children and sibling groups who are in the UK looked after system. New posts and an adoption panel were established in the UK to cover the anticipated workload; social work staff from the RAF, the Naval service and social work staff working in Northern Ireland were also utilised to assist with the adoption work.

The numbers of applicants in 2000 were two. In the past five years the business of the agency had significantly increased. In the twelve months preceding the inspection the agency had completed eighteen assessments of adopters wishing to adopt from the care system and three adopters wishing to adopt from another country. The agency had placed nineteen children from the care system and worked with 10 different local authorities.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection focused on the work carried out in the UK. Although much of the work of SSAFA is carried out overseas, CSCI has no jurisdiction over armed forces bases abroad.

However, this report does provide a broad overview of the service as a whole, due to the following:

- Management and supervision arrangements all operating from the UK
- Shared policies and procedures
- The mobility of service personnel which can mean that the adoption process may have commenced in Germany and been completed in the UK

The preparation for the inspection by the agency was of a good standard and included an 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 three full days by two inspectors. Additional time was spent visiting four sets of prospective adopters prior to the main inspection.

During the course of the inspection interviews were conducted with key staff and managers and the director of social work. The chair of SSAFA adoption management committee was also interviewed. The lead inspector observed the UK adoption panel and interviewed the panel chair. Questionnaires were sent to adopters approved in the last twelve months, some who were awaiting placements and some who had children placed with them. Questionnaires were also sent to placing social workers, and professional advisers.

Some of the comments made by people with whom the inspectors had contact with 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.

As stated in the brief description, it can be seen that the agency has experienced a period of significant growth. Early in 2005 it had been recognised that the agency was not developing in many areas in a way that could ensure effective operation of the agency.

One of the areas identified was the lack of clear management arrangements, the post of adoption manager was created but attempts to recruit to this post proved unsuccessful. The director of social services continued to oversee all adoption activity along with the other many tasks involved in her role. There was an adoption adviser in place who had developed some areas of the service. However, the shortfall, in terms of the management arrangements, was significantly impacting on the service provision.

In June 2005 a part time interim manager was appointed and in August 2005 a full time adoption practice supervisor joined the agency.

An independent review was commissioned in May 2005 and this review, completed in November 2005, identified areas that required urgent attention. It was proposed that additional posts were created and a larger pool of sessional workers were deployed. The adoption management committee agreed all of the review recommendations on 15th February 2005.

This report will show the significant improvements being made following the development of the management team. The implementation of recommendations from the review and compliance with the requirements and recommendations of this report will ensure that the agency is able to continue to develop in line with regulations and allow it to build on the strengths already in place.

What the service does well:

The initial response to prospective adopters was found to be friendly, informative and encouraging. Positive responses from adopters completed questionnaires about the initial contact with the agency included:

- 'Quick response'
- 'We were impressed with the face to face contact' (from the Social worker)
- 'Good Information and advice'
- 'The amount of information and the speed' was good
- The 'social worker was very nice, explained everything well.'
- 'Social workers positive attitude'

The arrangements for and content of the preparation groups were found to be good. All expenses were paid, including overnight stays for adopters.

Although in some areas a more consistent approach is needed, overall the assessment of adopters was of a good quality and information gathered was subject to a detailed analysis.

The social workers who were part of the inspection were knowledgeable, committed individuals with a good understanding of the needs of children requiring adoptive placements. The workers also had a good understanding of the strengths and pitfalls of service life that enabled them to work sensitively with adopters and inform the matching and placement processes and the planning for support services.

The agency was going through a significant period of change. It was noted that members of SSAFA adoption service, at all levels, had acknowledged where the service required strengthening and were ensuring that the developments required were being implemented.

General comments, made by adopters, about their experience included:

- 'I found the adoption process very good and it made our dreams come true.'
- 'SSAFA have been very good, each stage (was) explained thoroughly'
- 'Our process with SSAFA has been excellent. The contact with our social worker and link worker has been faultless. We have enjoyed every step of the way. Well done to SSAFA.'

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection under the terms of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to review the stage at which a formal application is accepted from adopters, to ensure that recently introduced legislation is complied with.

The agency needs to ensure that the positive developments in terms of ensuring that adopters are not waiting for allocation for a home study assessment are maintained.

The agency needs to ensure that the planned developments in terms of support services to adopters and the appointment of an adoption manager and other staff are progressed and subject to review. This will ensure that the needs of the service are not compromised due to staffing shortages at any level of the agency. All adopters should be made fully aware of the services available.

The agency needs to review the arrangements for quality assurance and ensure that an efficient system for feedback from the panel to the agency is established. The agency also needs to use the information, provided by adopters on their questionnaires, in a way that is geared to improving service delivery.

The arrangements for ensuring that expenses, for staff and adopters, are paid in a timely way need tightening up.

The agency needs to consider the options for office premises, as the current space available to the adoption team is inadequate.

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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Being Healthy - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

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)
- 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):

2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 24

Overall the adoption teams arrangements for assessing and approving adopters were satisfactory. However, there were some areas of practice that need to be addressed in order to ensure that secure and stable placements for children are made and maintained.

EVIDENCE:

The nature of the agency is such that recruitment activity takes place all over the UK, and within overseas bases. The recruitment of adopters had not been underpinned by a written strategic plan. However, there had been a steady stream of adopters applying to adopt. There was a good mix of applicants in terms of ranks and services and some evidence of a mix in terms of the ethnic backgrounds of applicants. The inspectors were impressed by the calibre of applicants, many of whom were looking to adopt older children and large sibling groups.

Means for recruitment included:

- The BAAF website
- The SSAFA website
- Leaflets which are held in the various information meeting points for service personnel

- Use of the media, both within the services and the general press
- Word of mouth via adopters who have been provided a service

The draft business plan included a written recruitment strategy, which builds on the established activity in this area. For example a meeting had been proposed and arranged between the manager and the SSAFA marketing and publicity section to discuss arranging for the section to feature the adoption agency in 2006.

It was reported from a number of sources that local authorities are reluctant to place with service personnel and that this is due to some social workers holding a narrow view about service personnel, especially in terms of their mobility. It was stated that there is a danger that adopters who had been assessed and approved as suitable to adopt may not achieve a placement within a reasonable timescale due to misconceptions about service life. To ensure that the profile of SSAFA is raised a series of 'road shows' had been arranged with SSAFA social workers visiting some authorities to talk about the adoption services SSAFA provides with the aim of allaying some of the common fears about placing children with service personnel.

The agency was using the BAAF preparation course. The preparation training was run on a rolling basis, twice a year in the UK and twice a year in Germany. The agency pays for all expenses incurred in connection with attendance, including airfares where necessary and overnight accommodation.

Intercountry adopters attend sessions, run by the Overseas Adoption Centre, at their own expense. These sessions focus on issues relating to inter country adoptions.

Placing social workers felt adopters were well informed and well prepared and one stated that the social worker 'took time taken to reinforce/return to issues discussed in the preparation process where a child had been identified.'

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

- 'We thoroughly enjoyed our preparation group meetings, it gave us a chance to get to know other people in our circumstances.'
- 'We found the courses very helpful and useful and important.'
- 'The courses were very useful.'

The agency was accepting formal applications from adopters only after the completion of the preparation courses. Due to recent changes in legislation the

agency must review this and ensure that practice in this area complies with The Children Act 2002 Regulations and Statutory Guidance.

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, including checks with the military police, health and safety assessments were done, a number of references had been taken up and referees visited.

Where there were already children in the family their views regarding adoption were well documented and the impact on them of another child joining the family had been subject to assessment.

The agency had introduced second opinion visits to ensure all areas have been fully explored.

Placing social workers commented on the quality of the adoption assessments with one stating that:

- The Form F was an accurate assessment

A second stated:

- 'An excellent Form F was provided. The report was detailed accurate and the assessors personal opinions were reflected very well.'

A third stated:

- 'The Form F contained considerably more evaluation than others I read for the same child.'

However, there were some areas noted which needed attention. These were:

- The months of employment on adopters' career histories were not always recorded, this being important to ensure that any gaps in employment can be explored
- Inconsistent practice in respect to making contact with ex-partners with a policy that stated where there were no children involved in a previous relationship there was not an expectation that the ex partner be contacted. It would be good practice for all ex-partners to be contacted unless there are compelling reasons evident that to do so would be unsafe or unadvisable in some way

- One reference from a commanding officer was not on headed note paper and another reference was addressed to whom it may concern, these issues could put into question the validity of the references
- One adopter had been recommended by panel as being suitable to adopt prior to a satisfactory CRB disclosure having been received. While this did not directly effect any child as no placement was made, an assessment cannot be considered complete until all checks have been satisfactorily completed. It was however clearly recorded in the panel minutes that this practice should not occur and we were satisfied that this was a one off occurrence aimed at minimising delay for the couple. A satisfactory check had been subsequently received.
- An inconsistent approach was taken in terms of health and safety checks. The agency should ensure that social workers all use the same form when carrying out these checks and assessment of the storage arrangements for firearms or other weapons kept in the home should be undertaken.
- There was also inconsistency in the use of the competency based approach. Some excellent examples of adopters' portfolios were noted, which were underpinned by clear evidence of how the competency had been met. However, other examples were poorly evidenced and added little value to the process. If the agency chooses to use a competency based assessment process it is recommended that the agency ensure that social workers work to agreed expectations in this area. It is also recommended that it is clearly explained to adopters the value this approach adds to the assessment and to their learning and development.

The agency needs to take a more pro-active approach in respect to family finding activity. There was inconsistency between social workers in terms of the level to which they were involved in finding children for their adopters. Some adopters were expected to make approaches to local authorities about individual children. This is unsatisfactory as local authorities expect to be contacted by other professionals to enable a full discussion about the often complex needs of the children to take place. This practice also leaves adopters in a vulnerable position when considering the view some external social workers have of placing children with a service family. One of the service review recommendations was that a new post be created which would incorporate the family finding and adoption support aspects of the work; this recommendation has been agreed by the adoption management committee and plans to recruit to this post need to be progressed.

However, some good examples were noted, of SSAFA social workers ensuring that adopters were provided with full information about children where a potential match had been identified. One set of adopters stated that they had been most satisfied with:

'How well they matched us...very impressed.'

The adoption panel policy and procedure documents need some additions to ensure that they meet regulation and standard.

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.

One adopter commented:

- 'Going to panel was not as frightening as we imagined-everyone was very friendly.'

At the panel observed by one of the inspectors the adopters attendance was sensitively handled and after the case had been heard the couples two children came into speak to the panel. It was not clear that had the panel been minded not to recommend approval of the couple how this would have been managed.

The panel was properly constituted, however the ethnic mix of the members was limited.

The two most recent appointments to panel had completed the induction process, which included observing a panel. It was evident that panel members had undertaken a range of training.

Panel papers were provided prior to the panel hearing and it was evident that members had studied the papers carefully.

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

Overall 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.

A very experienced and knowledgeable manager was managing the adoption service, on a part time interim basis. She was assisted in her role by an experienced adoption practice supervisor and the experienced adoption adviser. It was noted that significant improvements in the service had been made over the preceding seven months. This is discussed further under the management section of this report. It was further noted that a CRB check was on file in respect to the manager of the agency but that the check had not been carried out by SSAFA. This issue is addressed in the management section of this report.

The staff members who met with the inspectors were clearly knowledgeable and experienced in adoption matters. Some competency issues with other staff members had been appropriately addressed by the agency.

Adopters spoken to were aware of the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure is also evident in the statement of purpose. The procedure needs some amendments to ensure that it meets regulation and staff should receive training in the procedure as detailed in the National Minimum Standards. No recent formal complaints had been made, however a recording system had been set-up, which enabled the adoption manager to monitor progress of any complaints received.

SSAFA has a child protection policy and procedure in place; sessional workers had not received training in the procedures. As the procedures had been updated it is required that all members of staff receive training in the procedures and that this training is carried out periodically to ensure that staff keep their knowledge up to date.

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

SSAFA has shown a commitment to developing a good quality support service to adopters and children. This service will help adopters meet the children's changing needs.

EVIDENCE:

This area of work within the agency is a developing service. The new post created which will incorporate the family finding and adoption support aspects of the work will allow further development in this area.

The arrangements for supporting placements were:

- Continued social work involvement, usually by the assessing social worker
- The recent introduction of social events for approved adopters with and without placements
- Full cooperation with the placing agency support plan which includes agreed visiting frequency
- A two-year post approval training programme had been developed and arrangements were being made to expand the range of post approval training available.
- The preparation training prepares adopters well in terms of meeting the needs of children who have been in the care system.
- Literature was provided about attachment issues
- Adopters are encouraged to join the organisation Adoption UK

Adopters' comments about individual workers included:

- 'Lots of good support and information from our social worker.'
- 'Contact with the social worker was fantastic, always at hand when we needed her.'

One placing social worker stated the most positive aspect of working with the agency had been:

- 'The commitment dedication and support provided to the adopters and myself, the placing social worker.'

However, a second placing social worker stated that for one family:

- 'A change in social worker and the distance involved had caused some difficulties during the placement process.'

One family, living in Germany echoed this view.

Examples were also noted of adopters not being aware of what support is available. One adopter thought that the support role was the local authorities lone responsibility.

The agency has the services of a medical adviser who also gives medical advice to the panel. He is an active member of the BAAF medical group. He was described by SSAFA social workers as approachable, helpful, efficient and able to give a speedy response to queries. The medical adviser confirmed that he is encouraged to take up training, that he receives an annual appraisal and feels that the agency uses him appropriately. He stated that SSAFA is a:

- 'Small friendly agency with clear lines of responsibility'

He also stated:

- 'I enjoy my role and feel valued'

The agency also has the services of a legal adviser who is very experienced in the adoption field. While he does not attend panel he gives legal advice in writing to panel and is available for consultation. He is a member of the adoption management committee and provides training for staff in legal matters.

The agency has an adoption adviser who provides advice to the two panels and the agency.

There is a disability needs adviser employed within SSAFA and while in terms of adoption work she has had little input to date she would be an excellent support where a child with disabilities is placed or where an adopter has a disability. The growth in the business of the agency means an increase in the potential for a child with disabilities to be considered for placement. It is therefore recommended, that consideration is given to developing protocols about referral systems and the management of this work prior to this occurring.

SSAFA is a member of BAAF and the intercountry adoption centre.

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

In most cases it is not SSAFA's responsibility to be the main agent working with birth parents, however the service it does provide is committed to ensuring birth families are actively involved in the planning for children's futures.

EVIDENCE:

SSAFA does offer a service to mothers wishing to relinquish their baby. However, there had been no such placements made since the last inspection three years ago. The policy and procedure documents in respect of relinquished babies were viewed and it was noted that the arrangements made were subject to a clear procedure and included consideration of the birth parents wishes and feelings at each stage.

The agency recognises the lifelong implications adoption has on the birth family, the child and the adopters.

For birth parents who have relinquished a baby the service is available to them at any point in time.

The inspectors were impressed by some of the adopters knowledge and understanding about the importance of maintaining and promoting the child's heritage and their willingness to ensure that contact is maintained between the child and birth family where this has been deemed in the child's best interests.

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, 30, 31

At the time of the inspection the significant changes in the management arrangements had meant that the efficiency and effectiveness of the service had been vastly improved. This situation needs to be maintained through the appointment of permanent adoption manager and the other staff as planned.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a clear written statement of purpose that clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the agency. Staff spoken to confirmed that they had been consulted about the content of the statement. The adoption management committee formally approved the statement in October 2005. It was planned that the statement be reviewed following this inspection and then on an annual basis.

The statement needs the addition of the organisational structure of the agency and the procedure for assessing needs for adoption support services.

The agency provides a range of written information for adopters and these documents along with the initial and subsequent contact with the agency provide adopters with a good view of the adoption process. Some of the information in written form needs to be updated in line with the very recent changes in legislation.

The relatively recent changes in the management arrangements for the agency had significantly impacted, in a positive way, on the effectiveness and efficiency of the service provided. A review of the service, commissioned by SSAFA, had been carried out by an adoption consultant. The review had identified a number of changes required in staffing arrangements. The adoption management committee accepted all of the recommendations of this review on 15th February 2005. The recommendations need to be followed through and a permanent adoption manager needs to be appointed to ensure that the momentum of the positive changes made to date are built on and developed.

It was stated that the SSAFA 'quality manager' monitors the quality of the activity of the social work service as a whole and the adoption practice supervisor audits the written case files and the assessment reports submitted to the panel.

The adoption manager and the panel monitor timescales. Due to the nature of military families there are occasions when delays may occur, for example deployment of the serving member of the family abroad, and evidence was noted to show that the reasons for delays are clearly recorded on file.

A number of adopters expressed frustration at a wait, related to staffing of the agency, between attending the preparation groups and being allocated a worker to carry out a home assessment. It was evidenced that this situation had been fully addressed prior to this inspection. All adopters who were to attend the next preparation group in March 2006 had a named worker who would be carrying out their assessment on successful completion of the preparation group stage.

It was noted that the systems for feedback from the panel, to the agency, about the quality of assessments were not robust. There needs to be an

effective system established for formal feedback from the panel to the agency in respect to quality assurance issues noted in adopters assessments.

It was also noted that each adopter completes a questionnaire about their views about the experience of the adoption process. However, although these are presented to panel, the information had not been routinely used to inform the development of the service. It was evidenced that a system whereby this information will be collated and used to inform the development of practice had been introduced.

There was a gap noted in terms of the links between the director of SSAFA and the panel chairs. It had not been routinely planned that meetings would occur between them and it is strongly recommended that regular meetings are set up in order that any issues arising can be discussed and addressed.

The adoption management committee, which in terms of its present constitution is relatively new, meets three times a year. The committee met during the inspection fieldwork and it was noted the report presented to that meeting clearly detailed outcomes for children. The adoption service review commissioned by the agency was also presented to that committee meeting and they agreed the recommendations.

The management committee need to take a more pro-active approach in respect to the monitoring and controlling role. In the immediate future the committee needs to ensure that the recent significant progress made in the staffing and management arrangements are sustained, and built upon through the implementation of the independent adoption review recommendations and the requirements and recommendations arising from this inspection.

There are clear details provided to placing authorities in respect to fees for placements and written details provided to intercountry adopters in respect to charges.

The members of the adoption team with whom the inspectors met demonstrated that they were appropriately qualified, and were a skilled and experienced group. They had a good insight into and knowledge of adoption and were up to date in their understanding and thinking. The workers present at the meeting with the inspectors were a mix of permanent and sessional workers. They described their development, as a team, over the past months and stated that they were now feeling valued as workers and as a team. They described an open and inclusive management approach to them as workers and improved support in terms of formal supervision, team meetings and peer group support.

It was clear that they were developing into a strong team of workers with shared aims.

Adopter comments about individual workers included:

'Our initial and our current social worker have been superb.'

'The social workers were always willing to listen and help with any questions or worries that may have arisen.'

'They always kept us informed of the process and were always contactable and helpful'

'The social worker (was) very open and assisted us with further help and advice.'

'How committed and efficient our social worker was, she pushed full steam ahead and found us our son...so pleased and proud.'

One placing social worker stated:

'The worker had an excellent understanding of the child's needs and was very thorough in her approach.'

Staff with whom the inspectors spoke with felt overall that SSAFA was a fair employer. There were however some issues raised, which were discussed with the adoption manager, about the operation of the finance departments. For example, it was reported that expense payments to both staff and adopters were often late and many occasions were cited where paperwork had been submitted on time and subsequently mislaid. This issue needs to be urgently addressed to ensure that staff and adopters, feel valued within the wider organisation.

There is a counselling service available for SSAFA staff, however it was reported that the arrangements for accessing this service involved putting a request in to the line manager. It is recommended that the viability of commissioning a counselling service, staff can access, on a confidential basis, is explored.

Training opportunities offered to staff by SSAFA were reported as being good. Money was reported as being available for internal and external training and some staff were undertaking post-qualifying awards. Training in the SSAFA child protection procedures has been addressed in the staying safe section of this report. It is also recommended that staff receive training in the new policy and procedures being introduced to ensure that there is a shared understanding about the changes made.

There were separate files for adopters and children. The agency had only recently introduced a system for ensuring that central files were kept. The sessional workers had previously held information about adopters they were assessing in their home environment and as a result some files had information missing. The new system should address this situation in the

future but will need careful monitoring as one file viewed that had been subject to an audit was missing a CRB disclosure even though it had been recorded on the audit sheet that the disclosure was on file.

The information kept in respect to children is in relation to the matching and placement activity. It is not the agency's responsibility to keep adoption files on children placed by other agencies. However, the recently introduced adoption legislation and accompanying guidance, clearly states what information should be kept, about children, by agencies that are not placing a child. SSAFA needs to ensure that the files kept comply with this guidance.

SSAFA has a clear access to records policy and procedure in place.

There is a written policy on case recording. Separate records are kept for each member of staff, all complaints and all allegations.

Within the adoption offices adoption records were stored securely. There is a policy in respect of records held at home, by sessional workers. However, while the policy states that an annual inspection of storage of records in the home should be undertaken this had not occurred in at least two cases. It was stated that the home working policy was subject to review at the time of this inspection. When this review has been completed SSAFA need to ensure that all storage arrangements at workers home base are adequate.

The arrangements for archiving were adequate but should be subject to a risk assessment to ensure that no actions are required to ensure the safety of archived material.

The human resources department holds the personnel files. Not all files viewed met regulation and standard and the department was unable to evidence that CRB checks had been carried out on some staff working for the purposes of the agency. Clear evidence, of all required information, must be obtained and placed on each individual files to ensure that staff are suitable to work in the adoption field. While there was evidence to show that a current CRB was in place in respect to the manager this had been carried out in respect to other employment. SSAFA must undertake a CRB check in respect to the manager.

The adoption service was run from the SSAFA central office in the centre of London. Space here for the adoption team was at a premium and appeared inequitable when compared to the space other departments were provided with. With the planned increase in staff for the adoption service it was difficult to imagine where these staff would sit. When considering the proposals in respect of staffing increases and the competitive nature of staff recruitment in the adoption field it is imperative that arrangements are made for existing staff and future staff to be provided with suitable space and equipment to carry out their role effectively and efficiently.

There needs to be a written disaster recovery plan developed, for the adoption service, to ensure that in the event of a disaster the adoption work is able to continue.

The IT systems were backed up on a daily basis and were password protected. It was stated that a system specifically suited to adoption work was to be installed imminently. The arrangements at the time of the inspection for the indexes for case files and the archive arrangements were a work in progress. It was hoped that the new system when installed would address any shortfalls in this arrangement. It is strongly recommended that this work be progressed as a matter of urgency so as to ensure the confidentiality of such important information is secured.

It was stated that the charity has adequate insurance cover.

SSAFA and the Ministry of Defence financially underwrite the adoption service.

SSAFA's financial records are subject to annual audit arrangements and to the knowledge of the inspectors in these areas SSAFA appeared to run on a sound financial basis.

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	3
9	3

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
6	2
18	3

MANAGEMENT	
Standard No	Score
1	2
3	2
14	3
16	3
17	2
20	1
21	2
22	2
23	3
25	1
26	3
27	3
28	1
29	1
30	3
31	3

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

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	AD1	2 (a)	Staff must receive training in the child protection procedure and it would be good practice to ensure that this training is updated on a regular basis.	01/05/06
2	AD1	3	The statement of purpose needs some additions as detailed in the main body of the report	01/05/06
3	AD4	21 (CA 2002)	The agency must review the stage at which it accepts a formal application from adopters, to ensure that practice is in line with recent changes in legislation.	01/05/06
3	AD20	13	The increased staffing numbers as recommended in the independent review of SSAFA adoption service need to be progressed as a matter of urgency.	09/03/06
4	AD28	17	Personnel files for all staff working for the purposes of the adoption agency must be audited and missing information that is required by regulation must be obtained.	31/05/06
5	AD29	18	The options for providing the	31/05/06

			expanding staff team with suitable accommodation must be urgently considered and the CSCI must be kept informed about any changes planned.	
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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	The agency should ensure consistency in the following areas of the assessment of adopters: Months on employment history should be included in every case, any gaps explored Ex-partners should be contacted unless clear reasons why this should not occur are evident Only references with official stamps or on headed notepaper should be accepted A consistent approach to health and safety checks should be established A consistent approach to competency based assessment should be taken
2	AD3	The information provided to adopters about the adoption process needs to be updated in line with recent legislation
3	AD5	The agency should ensure that the post for a family finder/adoption support worker is recruited to.
4	AD6	The plans to develop the adoption support service available to families needs to be progressed and adopters should be fully informed about what support is available and how they might access it.
5	AD10	The adoption panel policy and procedure documents need some additions to ensure that they meet regulation and standard.
6	AD24	Staff should receive training in the complaints procedure.
7	AD17	There needs to be a formal system of feedback from panel to the agency in respect to the quality of adopters' assessments.
8	AD17	It is strongly recommended that the director of SSAFA and panel chairs meet, on a planned basis, at regular intervals, to discuss any issues arising.
9	AD22	It is strongly recommended that difficulties staff stated

		they have experienced with the finance department be explored with staff and arrangements should be made to address these with the departments concerned.
10	AD22	The viability of commissioning a confidential counselling service for staff should be explored.
11	AD23	Staff should receive training in the amended and new policy procedure documents which have been updated in line with new legislation.
12	AD25	Attention needs to be paid to the maintenance of case files for adopters and children.
13	AD25	The arrangements for the indexes for case files and the archive arrangements need to be urgently addressed.
14	AD25	SSAFA need to ensure that the policy, under revision, in respect to home working is followed.
15	AD27	The archive arrangements should be subject to a risk assessment.
16	AD29	A disaster recovery plan needs to be developed.

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