



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

### **Swindon Borough Council Adoption Service**

**Civic Offices  
Euclid Street  
Swindon  
SN1 2JH**

*Lead Inspector*  
Rosie Dancer

*Announced Inspection*  
24th April 2006      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

<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

**Name of service** Swindon Borough Council Adoption Service

**Address** Civic Offices  
Euclid Street  
Swindon  
SN1 2JH

**Telephone number** 01793 463268

**Fax number** 01793 488978

**Email address**

**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Swindon Borough Council

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Terry Scragg

**Type of registration** Local Auth Adoption Service

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      2nd February 2004

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Swindon Borough Council's adoption service is managed within the children's services. Arrangements for the management of the adoption service are delegated through the Director of Children's Services to the Director of Children and Families, who is also the agency decision maker. The line management of the Family Placement Team is with Terry Scragg, Service Manager Resources. The family placement Team Manager, Graham Senior, is responsible for adoption and fostering work undertaken in the team. He is supported by two Assistant Team Managers who directly supervise the staff. There is also an Adoption Development Officer.

There are nine fte social workers in the team who undertake adoption and fostering work. The majority of the team are involved in the recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster carers as well as adopters. They also have a homefinding role, i.e. that is they are linked to particular children where it has been assessed that adoption or long term placements are in their best interests. The preference and skills of individual workers are taken into account in case allocation and some staff have more adoption work than others.

There are two unqualified workers who operate the team's office hours duty system. The team also provide, on a rota basis, an out of hours telephone support service to foster carers and adopters, in addition to the Borough's emergency duty service. The team has one administrative officer and three team clerks.

Swindon has an independently chaired adoption panel which meets monthly.

There is a post-adoption letterbox service which is administered by one particular worker in the team. Several team members provide birth records counselling. There are several workers who also undertake the assessment of people interested in intercountry adoption, and these occasional referrals tend to be taken up on a sessional basis in addition to the workers' regular caseloads.

There is a service level agreement with SWAN (South West Adoption Network) for the provision of support and advice to children, adopted adults, birth parents and birth families and adopters. This is by means of telephone advice, guidance and counselling through a helpline. In addition service users can arrange individual counselling or advice sessions. SWAN also provides support through local group meetings.

Support to adopters is also provided through an adoption support agency, Adoption UK. Swindon will pay for at least two years membership to this organisation for all adopters.

Swindon is a member of SWAC, South West Adoption Consortium.

The service has links with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. There is a special education adviser and a health adviser for Looked After Children.

# SUMMARY

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

This is the second inspection of the adoption service provided by Swindon Borough Council. Prior to the inspection fieldwork taking place supporting documentary evidence was sent to and read by the lead inspector. Questionnaires were received from no birth family members, Seventeen prospective and approved adopters, eight placing social workers, two placing authorities, and two specialist advisers.

Two inspectors spent three and a half days in the agency and interviewed five sets of adopters, one set of birth parents, the service managers, the nominated manager, the adoption development manager, the two assistant team managers, two Children and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) workers, an elected member, a group of placing social workers, the placing social workers managers, the adoption workers, the agency decision maker, a group of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), administrative staff. The panel was observed, the chairperson was interviewed and a selection of files, including personnel files, adopters' and children's' files were read during the course of the inspection. The premises and archive storage were also inspected.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation during the inspection and the hard work which they put in when organising both the pre-inspection material and the inspection programme. The openness and helpfulness of staff at all levels enabled the inspection to be carried out efficiently and effectively.

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

Adopters overall were happy with the service they received. Comments made by adopters included:

'it is difficult to isolate aspects we were satisfied with. The whole process was quick and thorough.'

'I am very happy and now waiting for a second child and that's going well.'



'Very impressed by our experience with Swindon the recruitment and preparation was rigorous and swiftly managed. A huge difference to our disappointing experience with (another) authority'

Overall adopters felt that:

Social workers were easy to contact, easy to talk to, reliable and most felt that they had been given choices about what happens.

Birth parents who are relinquishing their child for adoption are routinely invited to panel; this is good practice as it allows parents to be fully involved in the arrangements for their child/

Adopters were very aware about the importance of sharing information with their child about their birth family; it can be reasonably assumed that this reflects the training and preparation of adopters in this area.

The agency had a good range of specialist advice available and the CAMHS service to families was accessible and effective where used.

The Borough is seen as a good employer by staff.

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

The arrangements for the management of the service had improved considerably since the last inspection and staff relayed their increased confidence that children in Swindon were receiving a much improved service.

The Adoption Development Officer post had been filled and allowed a much more focused approach to the development of the service to be taken.

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

The agency needs to achieve a consistent approach to both the assessment of adopters parenting capacity and the assessment of children and their needs.

The service to adopters needs further development and the agency needs to ensure that all adopters are aware of the full range of services available to them.

The service to birth parents, particularly in the pre-adoption order phase, is limited. A more pro-active approach needs to be developed in encouraging

parental involvement in plans for the child, their contribution to the child's heritage and sharing information at an appropriate time.

Social workers need more time, training and resources to engage in life story work with children placed for adoption.

Staff and panel members files need to be audited and it must be ensured that all required checks and information has been obtained.

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):**

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

**Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.**

**Overall the adoption teams arrangements for assessing and approving adopters were satisfactory. However, there were some areas of inconsistent practice, that need to be addressed in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all children is promoted.**

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency did not have a written plan for the recruitment of adopters although it was stated that sufficient numbers of adopters are recruited.

One adopter commented that there were:

‘Very few children in our age range’

Five adopters spoke about delays in family finding.

A targeted approach to recruitment would better ensure that resources are used on assessing adopters who would be likely to be able to meet the needs

of children waiting for a placement. This was a recommendation made following the first inspection of the service and it should be implemented.

The majority of adopters were satisfied with the speed of the response to their initial enquiry. Fifteen adopters who completed questionnaires responded that they were happy with the agency's response to their initial enquiry, however two stated that they were disappointed with the wait following their initial contact.

The agency had a fast track system in place where it had been felt specific applicants would be likely to be able to meet the needs of a specific child. This was allowing children to be placed in a timely way.

It was noted that the agency was committed to placing siblings together. There was not however a clear system in place for assessing whether siblings should be placed together or separated; an assessment process needs to be developed in respect to this to ensure that appropriate decisions are made and evidenced.

The agency is a member of the South West Adoption Consortium and where a suitable match cannot be made with Swindon adopters the agency uses the consortium and the Adoption Register.

It was noted that children's views had been sought and taken into consideration in the care planning process.

The agency had a formal preparation, assessment and approval process in place.

Eleven adopters stated that they were satisfied with the timescales from submitting a written application to the preparation and assessment processes. Although one satisfied adopter stated that they had a seven-month wait.

One adopter spoke of frustration about a preparation course having been cancelled which meant they had to wait a further two months and a third adopter stated that they had a long wait until they could attend the groups and that they had not been kept informed. The manager should ensure that where there are such difficulties people are kept informed.

All prospective adopters were expected to attend the preparation sessions, with a few exceptions such as second time adopters. The preparation sessions were noted as being well-run and comprehensive in content. They are subject to evaluation and review. Experienced adoptive parents attend the preparation classes; this provides prospective adopters with an opportunity to speak with people who have first hand experience of adopting.

Overall adopters stated that they were satisfied with their experience of the preparation groups.

One adopter commented:

“Excellent courses...they have helped us deal with situations relating to our child. Advice and support all the way”

People wishing to adopt a child from another country are expected to attend the preparation groups or groups run by the consortium.

All prospective adopters go through a formal assessment process, a home study, and are expected to contribute to the assessment report.

The quality of the adopters’ assessment reports was noted as being variable. While some good assessments were noted a number of poor examples were read. The poor assessments showed little evidence that key information had been explored with applicants, lacked a detailed analysis of information gathered and failed to clearly identify the parenting capacity of the adopters and areas they would need to further develop. This was a requirement made following the first inspection of the service and it must be addressed.

One placing social workers commented of the adopter’s assessment report:

“It would have been useful to have known the adopters shortfalls”

A competency based approach to assessment would have clearly identified the shortfalls.

Statutory checks had been carried out and a detailed health and safety check had been completed in each case. The checklist would benefit from the addition of an assessment of risk to a child from hanging strings on any window blinds fitted.

Following completion of the assessment a second opinion visits was being carried out.

There was a pack of information provided to prospective adopters that detailed the matching and placement processes. The agency also provides an optional training session for approved adopters, which covers the matching, introductions, placement and legal processes.

Three adopters expressed frustration about the lack of contact by the agency with them following approval; it is recommended that the agency consider if attendance at the training for approved adopters should be compulsory. This would mean that adopters approved are clear about the complexities of matching and provide them with:

- An opportunity to meet with others in the same situation

And:

- A forum in which they can speak with social workers about their worries position.

In terms of information provided to adopters about individual children adopters felt that they had been provided with sufficient information about children they were considering, However, some of the information and assessments carried out in respect to children's were of a poor quality. The quality of the information clearly has an impact on the success of the matching process. The standard of permanence reports must be improved and a more rigorous approach to quality assurance needs to be taken. This was a requirement made following the first inspection of the service and it must be implemented.

The agency does not hold life appreciation days and it is recommended that consideration be given to holding these as a way in which to share information about the child and his history.

The adoption policies and procedures were in the process of being updated in line with new legislation. This needs to be progressed and it should be ensured that all issues detailed in Standard 10.2 are included.

Adopters were routinely invited to attend the panel at which their approval was being heard. Some adopters found their attendance at panel a daunting experience but overall appreciated the opportunity to take part in such an important part of the process for them.

However, the details of a complaint made about panel, showed that there had been a lack of sensitivity shown by panel in one case, which included issues of diversity. It was pleasing to note that, as a result of this complaint, changes had been made to the way in which some aspects of the panel functions.

Adopters were not being routinely invited to the matching panel; the agency should consider routinely inviting adopters to attend the matching panel.

Birth parents who relinquish their child for adoption were invited to attend the panel at which the case was being considered; this is good practice as it allows birth parents to provide their views to panel on a first hand basis.

The independent chair had been recently appointed. He was suitably qualified and experienced in adoption matters and his appointment had been subject to a formal recruitment procedure. The panel membership included a more practice based and mixed membership than had been the case at the time of the last inspection. However, as the panel adviser is the adoption team

manager who is responsible for supervising the work of the adoption social workers, there is a conflict of interest in the quality assurance aspects of this role. Consideration should be given to appointing a more independent person to be the panel adviser.

There was an induction process in place for panel members that included a requirement for new members to observe a panel. There was also an appraisal system being introduced for panel members; this is in line with new legislation. There was a programme of training for panel members.

While the panel members files evidenced that enhanced CRB disclosures were routinely taken up not all checks required had been obtained. For example not all files viewed showed evidence that references had been taken up and verified, a requirement has been made in respect to this under standard 19.

The panel observed as a part of the inspection was noted as being well organised and conducted.

There was evidence that where an extra panel sitting had been required to hear an urgent case that this had been organised.

However, one adopter spoke of the cancellation of a panel that meant they had a further months wait.

The situation in terms of information provided to panel was noted to have improved since the last inspection; however, further improvement is required in terms of the quality of the information as had been discussed earlier in this report.

The administration of the panel was efficient; panel minutes were clear and detailed. The panel administrator was commended by a number of staff spoken to.

The decision making process was found to be timely and decisions were made only when the decision maker had taken into account all available information.

The operational manager was suitably qualified and experienced to manage the adoption agency. An up to date CRB disclosure was in place and he had completed a management course.

Staff and panel members' files were sampled and it was noted that not all information required was on file in every case. For example on social workers and admin workers files not all had a photograph of the individual and it had not been evidenced that references had been verified. Panel members files sampled were particularly poor and need urgent attention to ensure that they meet regulation. This was a requirement made following the first inspection of the service and it must be implemented.



There were child protection policies and procedures in place; these need some amendment in order to meet regulations.

# 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, 8**

**Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.**

**The Borough provides a good range of specialist services for children and families. The agency provides some support to adopters to encourage successful placements, not all adopters were aware of all the services available. The agency needs to monitor and keep under review the service delivery to ensure that the casework is manageable for social workers and that support can be provided in a timely way.**

## EVIDENCE:

Adoption support plans were noted as having been developed; the quality of the plans were variable and it should be ensured that in every case there is a clear plan which details who is responsible for each action.

Responses on adopters' questionnaires were overall positive about the support provided to them by their social worker. One adopter commented:

“ Excellent support and information from Swindon, hence doing it again.”

However, the support that is provided by the agency is delivered by the assessing social workers who have a wide role as they also deliver the fostering services for Swindon children. Adoption support is an ever expanding part of the life long process of adoption. In recognition of this Swindon were considering the possibility of setting up a multi-agency team to deliver support to permanent placements; this would be a positive development.

The agency pays for at least two years subscription for each adopter to Adoption UK, a national adoption support agency. This organisation provides training to adopters and a support service through a buddying scheme, group meetings and family days.

The agency also has a service level agreement with another support agency SWAN. The services include a helpline and counselling sessions for adopters and children.

A third agency, Our Place, is available to provide information about free training courses, support groups and other activities. This service is available to intercountry adopters and intercountry adopters were also provided with information and advice about specific support organisations.

Some adopters had little awareness about the external services available to them and the detail of what each service can offer in terms of support. It should be ensured that adopters are fully informed about the services and how to access them.

It was noted that adopters had a good awareness about the importance of helping the child develop a positive self-identity and ensuring that children learn about their journey to adoption.

Despite a good level of support being provided to placements which had been identified as being unstable, sadly, there had been four disruptions involving three families between March 2005 and April 2006. All of the disruptions involved placements of children from other agencies with Swindon approved adopters. The manager had identified action points to be carried out, especially in situations which involved other local authorities; these need to be incorporated into the adoption procedures to ensure that a robust approach is taken in preventing disruptions. There also needs to be a formal process for ensuring that disruption meetings are held in a timely way and that the findings of these meeting are shared with all staff working in adoption.

There was a good range of specialist advice available to social workers and adopters. The legal and medical advisers were commended by some and were described as being accessible. There are good arrangements in terms of educational and health input for looked after children; this service does not end when a child is placed in an adoptive placement and support will continue for as long as is necessary.

The CAMHS in Swindon for children appeared of a good standard; it was noted in one case that could have benefited from such a service that the service had not been used.

The plans being considered in respect of a multi disciplinary team would provide an integrated specialist service.

# **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**

**Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement has been made using all available evidence including a visit to this service.**

**The service to birth parents in Swindon was not working effectively in every case. There was little evidence noted of birth parents involvement in the planning for their children and little evidence of meaningful support, having been provided, in a timely way.**

## **EVIDENCE:**

One set of birth parents met with the inspectors, a second couple that had agreed to talk to the inspectors did not keep the appointment. Ten questionnaires for birth parents were provided to the agency; none were returned. The assessment of these standards is therefore based, in the main, on the cases sampled and discussions with staff.

The practice in terms of working with birth parents and families was noted as not having been as fully developed as would have been hoped. It was however noted that a number of strategies to improve the service had either been implemented or were about to be.

One good example of parents being offered support and encouragement, in most aspects of the process, in the planning for their child was noted in respect to a baby who had been relinquished for adoption. Sadly it was noted that they had not been involved in the contact planning arrangements. It was also noted that a contact session, which had occurred, was ended by the worker in an insensitive way.

For those parents whose children have been the subject of care proceedings there was little evidence to show that in the cases sampled parents had been involved in the process in any meaningful way.

At the stage of adoption having been identified as a plan for the child the agency offers independent support for the birth parents through SWAN, an independent adoption support service with which Swindon has a service level agreement. The take up of this service was described as being low, especially at the early stage of the proceedings. The agency had recognised this and had begun to be more proactive in promoting the service to birth parents via providing local solicitors and the Swindon Advocacy Service with information about the service. SWAN had also agreed that initial meetings could be held in parents home, subject to a risk assessment. This will need careful monitoring by the manager.

In his self-assessment of the service the manager identified the need to work to increase the number of birth parents taking up the support services and develop the services available further. Some of the strategies are:

- SWAN setting up a group for birth parents
- Subscription to the National Parents Network for at least 15 birth parents per year to join the organisation
- Subsidising access to the services of an adoption support agency
- Reduced rates for Swindon residents in accessing support from NORCAP
- Development of a range of information sheets for birth parents

While it was stated that birth parents are encouraged to read and sign the reports written for the panel, this was not being consistently evidenced.

It was reported, from a number of sources, that life story work, including books, was not being carried out in a timely way. This work is key in helping children understand their situation and providing birth parents with an opportunity to input into providing the child with information. A higher priority needs to be placed on ensuring that all such work is progressed in a timely way. It was also reported, from more than one source, that some social workers were not confident in carrying out life story work with children; some training in this area for social workers is needed.

It was pleasing to note that training had been planned for social workers on "Providing information and Counselling to birth parents"; it was not however clear that there was the capacity in terms of social workers caseloads to carry out this work and the manager will need to consider this.

There were post adoption contact arrangements in place. However, there was one case in which the systems used had led to the disclosure of identifying information about adopters. As a result of this some aspects of the arrangements had been changed.

In terms of contact arrangements some adopters seemed to have a lack of clarity about arrangements for their child. Out of seven adopters who

confirmed that contact was planned with birth families, four adopters stated that post adoption contact arrangements had been provided to them in writing, two stated that they had not been provided with written details of the arrangements and one responded that they were not sure about any contact arrangements. It should be ensured that where contact arrangements are planned adopters are clear about what the arrangements are.

# 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**

**Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.**

**The management of the adoption agency had benefited from a period of stability and a more strategic approach to the work was being taken. This had improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the service when compared to the last inspection. Developments planned by the agency, some of which are detailed in this report, will further improve the service provided to children and their families.**

## **EVIDENCE:**

There is a statement of purpose in place. The statement needs some revision in order to meet legal requirements. The section in the statement about complaints needs expanding, this being especially relevant as questionnaires completed by adopters showed that five adopters were unclear about how they could make a complaint.

The statement was revised in February 2006, had been approved by the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2006, is available on the Borough's website and included in the adopters information pack.

There are a range of documents provided to children and these explain the adoption process; the information needs to include details about the support services provided.

It was stated that an information pack was being developed for birth parents; this will be a positive development.

Adopters overall felt welcomed on their first contact with the agency. Some adopters cited this as being the primary reason for them deciding to progress their application with Swindon.

The majority of adopters found the information provided to them useful and informative. Two adopters did not, they commented:

' Would have liked better info about the process'

And

' We felt it did not explain the process'

However, a majority of fourteen adopters were satisfied with the information provided by the agency.

The nominated manager and the operational manager had substantial relevant experience and both had a management qualification. One of the assistant team managers had gained a management qualification and it was planned that the second assistant team manager was to begin to study for a management qualification. It was noted that since the last inspection the then relative new management arrangements had begun to be consolidated which had led to a more focused approach in developing the service. Management were able to acknowledge the need to further build on improvements achieved since the last inspection and did so with enthusiasm.



Some staff reported an increased confidence in the management of the agency.

The developments in the electronic systems achieved since the last inspection meant that the ability to monitor the work of the agency had increased and it was pleasing to note that further developments in the systems were planned.

The post of Adoption Development Officer, which was being advertised at the time of the last inspection, had been recruited to. While much of the work carried out by this individual had involved developing policy and procedure in line with the newly implemented Adoption Children Act it is hoped that she will be able to focus on development of the service as a whole.

Some feedback from adopters indicated that not all were aware about when adoption allowances maybe available and it would be good practice to ensure there is no confusion about this.

Interview with one of the Borough's counsellors, the 'Children's Champion', evidenced there is a commitment, at this level of the Borough to ensure good outcomes for children are achieved.

However, reports to the executive are written on an annual basis by the panel chair. It had been recognised by the managers that reporting to the executive should be a minimum of 6 monthly and that such reports should be written by the agency's management, not the chair of the panel who is not privy to all aspects of the agency's functioning. This would enhance the information provided to the executive and ensure that they are fully aware of the strengths and areas for development on a more regular basis. This was a recommendation made following the first inspection of the service and it should be implemented.

Recruitment initiatives had been put in place including overseas worker recruitment. While some difficulties in staffing on fieldwork teams remained, this is a national issue, Swindon was continuing the endeavour to ensure that vacancies were kept to the minimum and retention of workers was maintained. A number of staff reported that due to the increased stability in the management arrangements and their confidence in the managers it was their intention to remain in Swindon's employ. The same staff reported that had not been the case at the time of the last inspection when some of them had considered leaving due to the concerns about the management arrangements.

In respect to the social workers on the family placement team who carry out the work with adopters there was a good level of knowledge about adoption issues, the staff were suitably qualified and experienced in adoption work. Some areas of the need for training were identified and are stated later on in this report.

The staff on the adoption team were clearly very busy and expected to increasingly deliver adoption support services. There is consideration being given to the possibility of developing a multi-disciplinary team to carry out adoption support work. However, in the meantime the manager should ensure that the family placement team have the capacity to carry out the current work in adoption support to ensure that the service provided meets the needs of families.

Comments from adopters about the family placement team workers included:

'100% happy. A great team, a credit to Social Service Department.'

'Our social worker is very supportive, always available to talk to and gives us lots of advice.'

'Social worker has been super, brilliant. We couldn't fault her she works so hard, makes us feel comfortable and explains everything to us.'

'The commitment and dedication of our social worker and the supporting team have made what could have been a difficult experience a pleasurable one.'

Not so positive comments made by adopters included:

'Initial social worker excellent and reliable – replacement has let us down, cancelling several appointments, on one occasion giving less than an hours notice.'

One intercountry adopter reported delays due to the appropriate forms for their application having not been provided to them.

There seemed to be good relationships and links between the fieldwork and family placement teams.

The administrative team and panel administrator were held in high regard by all staff spoken to. However, There was a high level of anxiety expressed by staff at all levels of the organisation about plans to contract the administrative work out. If plans to do this are followed through there will be a need to ensure that administrative staff working for the purposes of the adoption service are dedicated members of staff. This is due to the specialist nature of this work and the need for confidentiality.

Staff reported that they felt that Swindon was a good borough to work for in terms of the support provided to them and a high level of loyalty was noted from staff to their employer.

Staff reported that they receive good quality supervision. It was noted that the assistant team managers had gaps in the frequency of their supervision due to other pressures which had meant sessions had been cancelled. This needs to

be addressed to ensure that supervision for these staff occurs at the correct frequency. However, all staff spoke of the accessibility of managers and stated that managers provide them with informal supervision.

There was a corporate induction programme in place which was reported as being useful; it was suggested that the team induction could benefit from a more structured approach.

Staff reported that the training opportunities in Swindon were good; although some difficulties were reported in having space to attend training on occasions.

There was a PQ programme in place which a number of staff reported they were studying for; training in the new Adoption and Children Act had been provided to staff.

Due to some gaps noted in skills it is recommended that relevant staff receive:

- training in life story work
- training to further improve assessment skills

The later would ensure that assessments for adopters and children are consistently of a good standard.

It is noted that training for staff in working with birth parents is planned.

A sample of case files for children and adopters were viewed. It was noted that files were generally well ordered and recording legible.

In respect to adopters' files notes made during assessment visits to adopters should be placed on the file to ensure that it can be evidence that issues have been fully explored in the event of a dispute between adopters and social workers.

In respect to children's files there were some gaps in information including a lack of mementos, photographs and copies of life story books.

On all files there was little evidence of file audits and it was noted that supervisors decisions were not on file in every case.

There are policies and procedures in respect to access to records; it was stated that these are being revised in line with recently introduced requirements.

There was a departmental complaints procedure. The manager maintained a separate file about complaints, concerns and allegations. Outcomes of complaints need to be clearly recorded on this file to enable management monitoring.

The premises are identifiable, accessible and secure. There are appropriate security systems in place for the storage of records and the IT systems.

A signing in system should be considered on health and safety grounds. This was a recommendation made following the first inspection of the service and it should be implemented.

There was not a disaster recovery plan in respect to the adoption agency; this should be developed to cover the premises and the safeguarding and back up of records amongst other things. This was a recommendation made following the first inspection of the service and it should be implemented.

# 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>	2
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	2

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>2</b>	2
<b>4</b>	2
<b>5</b>	2
<b>10</b>	2
<b>11</b>	3
<b>12</b>	3
<b>13</b>	3
<b>15</b>	3
<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>	3

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

Yes

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	AD4	AA Regs 2005 Reg 25	Assessment reports must address the competencies and strengths that adopters have or will need to develop.	30/09/06
2	AD5	AA Regs 2005 Regs 15 & 16	The permanence report for children must include all information required by regulation and satisfactorily reflect the assessed needs of a child.	30/09/06
3	AD28	LAAS 2003 Reg 11	The agency must ensure that files on all staff and panel members contain all the information required by Schedule 3 and 4.	30/09/06
3	AD19	LAAS 2003 Reg 11	As above	30/09/06
4	AD1	LAAS Regs 2003 Reg 2(2)	The adoption agency must revise the statement of purpose.	30/09/06
5	AD1	LAAS Regs 2003 Reg 3(1)	The children's guide must include matters as specified in Schedule 2.	30/09/06

6	AD2	LAAS Regs 2003 Reg 9	The child protection policy and procedures need to be amended in line with regulation	30/09/06
7	AD23	LAAS Regs 2003 12	Training for social workers in assessment and report writing skills should be provided to those social workers that would benefit from this.	30/09/06

## 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 have a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.
2	AD2	The agency needs to develop clear systems for decision making about whether siblings are placed together or separately.
3	AD4	Where there are window blinds in adopter's homes it would be good practice to carry out an assessment of any risk to a child from hanging strings.
4	AD5	It is recommended that the agency consider if attendance at the training for approved adopters should be compulsory.
5	AD5	It is recommended that consideration be given to holding life appreciation days for each child.
6	AD10	The adoption policies and procedures need to be completed and it should be ensured that they contain all issues stated in standard 10.2.
7	AD10	The agency should consider routinely inviting adopters to attend the matching panel.
8	AD11	The agency should consider who should undertake the panel advisor's role to ensure independence in the quality assurance aspects of this.
9	AD6	Adoption support plans should clear and each plan should detail who is responsible for each action.

10	AD6	It should be ensured that all adopters are fully aware about the support services available to them.
11	AD6	The action points identified by the manager in respect to disruptions should be incorporated into the adoption procedures and a formal process for ensuring that disruption meetings are held in a timely way needs to be developed. The findings of disruption meetings should be shared with all staff working in adoption.
12	AD8	It should be ensured that where contact arrangements are planned adopters are clear about what the arrangements are and that arrangements are provided to adopters in writing.
13	AD7	The agency should develop its strategy for working with birth families, to ensure advice and counselling is available at an early stage in the process and that birth parents have a choice of service to access.
13	AD9	As above
14	AD17	The adoption management should provide a written report to the executive at a minimum of a six monthly basis.
15	AD20	The manager should ensure that the assistant team managers receive regular formal supervision.
16	AD21	The management of the agency should consider if in light of the new legislation, which places further duties on Local Authorities in supporting adopters and birth families if there is a need to increase, staffing levels.
17	AD23	The adoption team induction process should be better structured.
18	AD23	Social workers should have training to undertake life story work and later life letters and be given the support, time and technology to provide quality pieces of work.
19	AD25	Files for adopters and children need to contain all relevant information and should be subject to a regular process of audit.
20	AD27	Outcomes of complaints should be maintained in the complaints folder.
21	AD29	The adoption agency should have a Disaster Recovery Plan which will include safeguarding/ back-up of records.
22	AD29	A signing-in system to the family placement team premises should be considered.



## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

North West Regional Office

11th Floor

West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

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