



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**Southwark London Borough Council
Adoption Service**

47b East Dulwich Road

London

SE22 9BZ

2nd February 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

Southwark London Borough Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

47b East Dulwich Road, London, SE22 9BZ

Adoption Service Manager

Susan Sinclair

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020 7525 4409

Address

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020 7525 4449

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Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

Date, if any, of last SSI themed inspection of adoption service

Date of Inspection Visit		2nd February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Sean White	127556
Name of Inspector	2	Maureen Moore	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority adoption services are subject to inspection by CSCI, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976 as amended, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Southwark London Borough Council Adoption Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The adoption agency of Southwark Council is constituted under current legislation in respect of local authority adoption services; it is managed within the social services department. It is a medium sized agency that undertakes all required responsibilities in respect of the domestic adoption of children; including the recruitment, training, assessment and approval of adoptive parents and planning for the needs of children where adoption is the plan. Arrangements are made to assess and approve people who wish to adopt children from overseas.

The agency operates from premises in the borough that are conveniently located and which are accessible by both public transport and car.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The inspection upon which this report is based was well prepared for and very well organised and managed by the agency. This allowed the inspection to be undertaken and conducted efficiently and with cooperation from everybody involved.

The following summary is presented under the main headings of the national Minimum Standards.

Statement of Purpose.

The one standard in this section was met.

The statement of purpose provides a clear and unambiguous outline of the agency's aims, objectives and operations. It is presented in an easy to read style and had been made available throughout the organisation to people who need to be aware of its contents.

The agency had recently produced a children's guide for 0-6 year olds. It is a well-produced booklet and gives a good outline of the adoption process that could be understood by children who have the ability to read it, or have it explained to them by an adult.

Securing & promoting children's welfare.

The one standard in this section was met.

The agency had a clear strategy for recruiting adopters that could meet the needs of children requiring placement. Whilst the agency has struggled, hitherto, to recruit sufficient adopters from some parts of its community, it is fully aware of the ethnic needs of the children it attempts to place and has attempted a range of initiatives to achieve more positive outcomes. Notwithstanding the difficulties that have been experienced and the efforts made to recruit and place appropriately, it was clear that the agency is fully committed to matching children with adopters that closely reflect the heritage of children.

Prospective & approved adopters.

Of the four standards in this section, three were met and one was almost met.

The information pack that the agency sends to people interested in adoption is of a very high standard. The pack includes a wealth of well-presented booklets and documents that give as much detail as anyone would require should they be interested in adopting children. All of the information in respect of adoption makes explicit what kind of children the agency needs to find placements for and that adopters who have the potential to meet these children's needs will be prioritised.

The BAAF preparation for adoption model is used by the agency. Preparation groups are held frequently throughout the year in locations that are convenient for applicants; they are held over five days during the week. Adopters demonstrated that they found the preparation groups had been informative and had given them the necessary input for them to be knowledgeable about the process and the overall aspects of adoption. Although there were written assessments made of applicants' contribution to, and performance in, the preparation groups, these were sometimes not complete in the information provided. The agency should ensure that such information is full and relevant for the assessment process to be fully informed. All checks, including enhanced CRB checks, are undertaken and evidence to support this was found on all files examined except one.

The agency's approach to effective matching is rigorous and underpinned by a clear commitment to ensuring that children's needs are met as closely as possible. The adoption panel is a key feature in the process of matching and it was observed that it takes great care in ensuring that the needs of children are paramount in their adjudications by applying a thorough approach to considering the business brought before it.

Adoption support is developing at a pace in this agency and should show positive results as it progresses. The first contact that the post adoption service has with adopters and children is a 'welcome to being adopted' gift from the agency. This was noted as being a very caring and thoughtful approach to introducing the service.

Birth parents and birth families.

Of the three standards in this section, one was met and two were almost met.

The children's social workers demonstrated that they were fully committed to offering a service to birth parents that recognised the lifelong implications of adoption. The social workers felt that they had a responsibility to continue to work with and support birth parents and ensured, so far as was possible, that they were involved in or made aware of the plans that were being made for their children. Although the child's Form E includes details of parents' views, there was no clear evidence of efforts made to provide them with the opportunity to comment on what is written about them before such information is passed to the adoption panel.

Evidence of gathering information in respect of a child's background – life story work – was somewhat inconsistent. Although it was clear that some effort had been made to train workers in life-story work, and its relevance to adopted children (and both birth and adoptive parents), this was not the case across the board. Children's adoption files were not put together in a consistent way. The agency explained that a new system and protocol had been introduced to inform social workers and give a foundation for effective auditing but this had not been fully implemented at the time of the inspection. There were also inconsistencies noted in respect of the quality of Forms E, which were not always written in a way that would enable them to be included with confidence on adoption files.

Arrangements are made to provide birth parents and birth relatives with information for them to access independent support services from two different voluntary agencies; this is put in place as soon as a referral is made to the adoption team in respect of a child who requires placement.

Adoption panels and agency decisions.

Of the four standards in this section, three were met and one was almost met.

The agency has an adoption panel procedure in place; this is contained in the Panel Members' Information Pack. The procedure is reasonably thorough and informs of the duties, responsibilities and processes of the panel; it does not, however, include all the information expected by this standard. This is a pack, nevertheless, of very good quality.

The adoption panel was fully constituted and there have been no incidences in recent times of the panel not being a quorum when it sat. The membership was appropriately balanced and the range of backgrounds and experiences of the members was suitably relevant to the panel's business and responsibilities.

The overall organisation, management and conduct of the panel were of a good standard. The panel is arranged to meet at appropriate intervals for it to consider the business brought before it in an efficient way, the arrangements for preparing and circulating papers was well organised.

Decision-making is undertaken by the Head of Direct Services (Children) and he ensures that he brings due scrutiny and rigour to his contemplations on the panel's recommendations. There is, however, sometimes a delay in the panel minutes arriving with him (up to seven days after the event).

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency.

Both of the two standards in this section were met.

All the people involved in the management of the agency were suitably experienced and qualified in social work, children's services and family placement. The service manager has undertaken a range of management qualifications but the team manager has no formal awards in management. The recruitment of managers and social workers is well managed and all appropriate checks are made, including the verification by telephone of written references. CRB checks are taken in every case.

Provision & management of the adoption agency.

All three standards in this section were met.

The overall management, control and organisation of the agency were of a good standard. They are underpinned by sound policies and procedures and it was clear that these inform good management practice and effective conduct of the service. The team manager is held in high esteem throughout the department.

There is a range of quality control and monitoring systems in place to manage the performance of the service. The executive of the council demonstrated a clear commitment to children's services in general and an up to date knowledge of adoption matters.

The agency's legal advice is provided by the council's legal section and the medical adviser provides a wealth of support and advice to both the panel and the service in general. It was evident that the medical adviser is highly respected for the commitment she demonstrates to the health and wellbeing of children placed for adoption.

Employment & management of staff.

Of the five standards in this section, four were met and one was almost met.

A well-qualified and experienced team of workers staffs the agency (all social workers had a recognised qualification); they were able to demonstrate a committed and enthusiastic approach to their responsibilities and were clearly a well-motivated staff group. The recruitment procedures and practices were suitably rigorous and all necessary checks, including enhanced CRB, were routinely undertaken.

The organisation of the agency, including work allocation, staff supervision and working arrangements were noted as being efficiently managed. The staff team felt well supported and there were positive comments made about the skills and abilities of the team manager in particular and senior management in general.

Although the administrative arrangements for the service were well managed, it was felt that the workload was stretching the service somewhat and should be monitored.

There are sufficient staff working for the purposes of adoption in the agency; they are well qualified and very experienced workers who bring a sound approach to their responsibilities. Workers carry, however – in addition to their adoption responsibilities – some permanent fostering cases. It was clear that, from time to time, this could place an onerous burden on the prioritisation of work programming.

The authority has sound employment and staff support systems in place. It was reported by all staff interviewed that they feel they work for an organisation that supports and cares for its workers.

The department has a 'Training and Development Strategy' and an annual training plan. These demonstrate an active approach to staff development and a commitment to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

Records.

Of the four standards in this section, two were met and two were not met.

In the main, adopters' and prospective adopters' case files were maintained to a satisfactory standard. It was felt that the files would be improved if they included a checklist and a more detailed audit tool. The files were audited and all relevant matters checked for inclusion and overall quality; the audit tool did not, however, show details of any action taken to address shortfalls. Most required information was kept on files – including checks and references – but there were some omissions that required attending to. Children's adoption files were in the process of being re-designed to follow a departmental protocol for inclusion and management of information. Whilst this was proving satisfactory in most cases, there were some files examined that did not follow the protocol and included information that should be filed elsewhere.

All issues of security and confidentiality of information that is shared is satisfactorily managed and organised, informed by clear guidelines.

The personnel files that were examined as part of this inspection showed that, in general, they were maintained appropriately and contained, in the main, all information required. There were some minor omissions noted and brought to the attention of the personnel section.

The records in respect of adoption panel members did not include the details required by NMS and regulations; these need to be addressed to ensure full compliance.

Premises.

The one standard in this section was met.

The premises occupied by the agency are located in a part of the borough that is easily accessible to anyone with legitimate business. The office facilities, whilst adequate for the purposes of the agency, are somewhat cramped; there are plans, however, to review the office facilities. The office suffers from a storage problem – this may be addressed as part of the review.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's adoption service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NA

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their adoption service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of a failure by a Local Authority adoption service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority adoption service:

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first CSCI inspection)**

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate officer of the Local Authority is requested to provide the Commission with an action plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan is shown in Part D of this report.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 or the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services. The Authority is required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for adoption services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	Reg. 11 (2003)	LA28	The agency must provide all required information in records of adoption panel members.	1 May 2005
2	Reg 7 (1983)	LA25	The agency must ensure that each child has a properly constituted adoption file.	1 May 2005

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
	LA4	The agency should ensure that all contributors to the preparation groups are suitable skilled.
2	LA4	The agency should ensure that the recorded information about applicants' contributions to preparation groups are fully recorded.
3	LA7	Birth parents' views on the information written about them should be recorded – or an indication that they have waived this.
4	LA8	The information included in Forms E should be written in a way that is appropriate for future reading by an adopted person.
5	LA10	The agency should produce a policy and procedure for the adoption panel that includes all required information.
6	LA21	The agency should consider re-allocating the long-term fostering cases that the adoption workers carry.

- Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. LA10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	NO
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	YES
• Interview with birth family members	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	02/02/05
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	58
Number of Inspector days	6
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	NA
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	NA
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	13

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable on this occasion.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.2, 1.3 (partial) and 1.4 – 1.7)

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The statement of purpose provides a clear and unambiguous outline of the agency's aims, objectives and operations. It is presented in an easy to read style and had been made available throughout the organisation to people who need to be aware of its contents. It is included, for instance, in the prospective adopters' information pack and in the adoption panel members' pack. It was a relatively new document having only been approved by the executive of the council recently; it has not, therefore, been reviewed.

The statement appears to reflect the information contained in the general policies, procedures and practice guidance material of the agency. The details of the commission are included but the address shown is not that of the adoption inspectorate and should be changed.

The agency had recently produced a children's guide for 0-6 year olds. It is a well-produced booklet and gives a good outline of the adoption process that could be understood by children who have the ability to read it, or have it explained to them by an adult. As with any guide, it is not suitable for babies.

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually?
(Record N/A if the information is not available)

NA

Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?

NO

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans 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.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency had a clear strategy for recruiting adopters that could meet the needs of children requiring placement. There is great diversity in the borough and there are many children from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds who need placements. Whilst the agency has struggled, hitherto, to recruit sufficient adopters from some parts of its community, it is fully aware of the ethnic needs of the children it attempts to place and has attempted a range of initiatives to achieve more positive outcomes. It was trying to recruit a worker with a specific brief to improve recruitment of adopters and if this is a successful appointment then it will probably pay dividends. Notwithstanding the difficulties that have been experienced and the efforts made to recruit and place appropriately, it was clear that the agency is fully committed to matching children with adopters that closely reflect the heritage of children. Adopters interviewed and those who responded to questionnaires confirmed this and evidence drawn from files and direct observation of the adoption panel demonstrated the rigour with which the agency approached this aspect of its responsibilities.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

52

How many children were matched with adopters?

10

How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?

16

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

12

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

52

In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?

7

What percentage of children matched with the adoption service's adopters does this represent?

75

%

How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?

6

How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made about adopters approved by this adoption service?

0

On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?

29

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **The adoption agency recruits and supports sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, who can offer children a stable and permanent home to achieve a successful and lasting placement.**

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The information pack that the agency sends to people interested in adoption is of a very high standard. The pack includes a wealth of well-presented booklets and documents that give as much detail as anyone would require should they be interested in adopting children. It makes clear that all members of the community are welcome to apply. Eligibility is included in the general information but the agency has full written criteria that are available on request. The information contained in the pack includes: the statement of purpose, booklets on applying, support services and attending panel - and further information on matching, contact, training and complaints.

All of the information in respect of adoption makes explicit what kind of children the agency needs to find placements for and that adopters who have the potential to meet these children's needs will be prioritised. Applicants who may not be able to meet the range of needs in the borough would be informed that they were not being prioritised.

The agency had a policy of giving foster carers the opportunity to consider adopting children placed with them if the needs of the child, including their ethnic and cultural needs, could be met by them.

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The BAAF preparation for adoption model is used by the agency. Preparation groups are held frequently throughout the year in locations that are convenient for applicants; they are held over five days during the week and although this was not particularly convenient for some people, it had been decided that this was the most efficient and effective system. Adopters demonstrated that they found the preparation groups had been informative and had given them the necessary input for them to be knowledgeable about the process and the overall aspects of adoption and how it would impact on their lives. All said that they felt fully informed and prepared, although there were comments made – acknowledged by the agency – that some workers were more skilled than others at running groups.

Although there were written assessments made of applicants' contribution to, and performance in, the preparation groups, these were sometimes not complete in the information provided. The agency should ensure that such information is full and relevant for the assessment process to be fully informed about applicant's capacity, attitudes and motivation.

All checks, including enhanced CRB checks, are undertaken and evidence to support this was found on all files examined except one.

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The adopters' information pack includes a leaflet on the matching process; attached to this is a copy of the matching criteria tool used by the department. The rest of the information is a basic step-by-step guide to matching children with approved adopters.

The agency's approach to effective matching is rigorous and underpinned by a clear commitment to ensuring that children's needs are met as closely as possible. The adoption panel is a key feature in the process of matching and it was observed that it takes great care in ensuring that the needs of children are paramount in their adjudications by applying a thorough approach to considering the business brought before it.

Adopters are fully informed about the life-long implications of adoption and are routinely asked if they would inform the agency in the event of the death of a child in placement; this is a recent innovation, but the responses of adopters are now recorded on case files – along with information about contact arrangements.

Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)

Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Key findings and evidence**Standard met?**

3

Adoption support is developing at a pace in this agency and evidence gathered during this inspection suggests that if current plans, strategies and practice continue the agency should have a very good service indeed. Adopters said that they felt well supported during the introduction and placement period and the post-adoption service was found to be very focused on its development and strategic direction.

The first contact that the post adoption service has with adopters and children is a 'welcome to being adopted' gift from the agency. This was noted as being a very caring and thoughtful approach to introducing the service.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months

23

Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months

16

Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months

16

Number of adopters approved but not matched

5

Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register

5

How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?

0

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The children's social workers demonstrated that they were fully committed to offering a service to birth parents that recognised the lifelong implications of adoption. The social workers felt that they had a responsibility to continue to work with and support birth parents and ensured, so far as was possible, that they were involved in or made aware of the plans that were being made for their children. Nevertheless, arrangements are always made to provide birth parents with the opportunity to access the services of two independent organisations that specialise in this area of support work. It was very clear that those birth parents with particular difficulties are provided with appropriate levels of support and advocacy.

Although the child's Form E includes details of parents' views, there was no clear evidence of efforts made to provide them with the opportunity to comment on what is written about them before such information is passed to the adoption panel.

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Evidence of gathering information in respect of a child's background – life story work – was somewhat inconsistent. Although it was clear that some effort had been made to train workers in life-story work, and its relevance to adopted children (and both birth and adoptive parents), this was not the case across the board. It is advised that the agency should exercise its influence in children's services and suggest a more active approach to social workers gathering information as soon as possible. Nevertheless, some good practice was noted and some adopters said that they had been pleased with social workers efforts at gathering important information and putting it together in an appropriate and timely way.

Children's adoption files were not put together in a consistent way. The agency explained that a new system and protocol had been introduced to inform social workers and give a foundation for effective auditing but this had not been fully implemented at the time of the inspection. Some files were well constructed and managed whilst others did not follow the protocol and included inappropriate material. The agency should ensure that consistency is achieved as quickly as possible.

There were also inconsistencies noted in respect of the quality of Forms E. Whilst it is understood that some inexperienced workers, new to adoption, may not fully understand the nature and importance of a Form E, the authority has a responsibility to ensure that such written records are constructed and presented in a way that can be included in adoption files with full confidence that they will always be relevant documents – in the present to ensure appropriate matching and in the future to inform adopted people of their circumstances at the time of their adoption.

Standard 9 (9.1)

The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Arrangements are made to provide birth parents and birth relatives with information for them to access independent support services from two different voluntary groups; this is put in place as soon as a referral is made to the adoption team in respect of a child who requires placement. The post adoption service of the agency has procedures in place to provide on-going support to birth families and there are appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that birth parents are helped and encouraged to maintain contact as agreed.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The agency has an adoption panel procedure in place; this is contained in the Panel Members' Information Pack. The procedure is reasonably thorough and informs of the duties, responsibilities and processes of the panel; it does not, however, include all the information expected by this standard. It does not include, for instance, the arrangements for potential emergency sitting of the panel or how and to whom it provides feedback in the agency. These are minor details, however, when judging the overall quality of the procedure and information pack. The pack is a comprehensive inclusion of relevant and necessary information that provides panel members, regardless of background, with an extensive brief of how panels operate, their responsibilities, the legal structure and the departmental procedures governing them. This is a pack of very good quality.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)
 The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The adoption panel was fully constituted and there have been no incidences in recent times of the panel not being a quorum when it sat. The membership was appropriately balanced and the range of backgrounds and experiences of the members was suitably relevant to the panel's business and responsibilities.
 The recruitment and induction of new members was managed in a satisfactory manner with necessary rigour being applied to the suitability of people being accepted to be involved in this sensitive and important role.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO	
Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	YES	

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)
 Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The overall organisation, management and conduct of the panel were of a good standard. The panel is arranged to meet at appropriate intervals for it to consider the business brought before it in an efficient way, the arrangements for preparing and circulating papers was well organised. The minute-taking and information dissemination was, in the main, satisfactorily managed; it was reported, however, that it sometimes takes up to seven days for the minutes to arrive with the decision-maker.
 The conduct of the panel was particularly rigorous and it was clear that the chairperson ensured that all due scrutiny was brought to bear, particularly in complex cases. Members were clearly committed to the importance of their task and role, and their contributions to discussions and analysis of cases demonstrated a particular commitment to thoroughness.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Decision-making is undertaken by the Head of Direct Services (Children). As stated in the previous paragraph, there is sometimes delay in the panel minutes arriving with the decision-maker (up to seven days after the event). The panel minutes should be forwarded as soon as possible after the panel has made its recommendations in order for the decision-maker to make his judgement in a timely way on every occasion. Nevertheless, the decision-maker ensures that he brings due scrutiny and rigour to his contemplations on the recommendations before him and will pursue further information if he feels that the minutes do not provide sufficient detail for him to draw a confident conclusion. Decisions are made in a timely way but he does not sign the approval letters sent to adopters; it was suggested that a signature by the decision-maker would demonstrate to adopters the appropriate level of gravity that is given to such decisions.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The agency has a well-defined management structure. All the people involved in the management of the agency were suitably experienced and qualified in social work, children's services and family placement. The service manager has undertaken a range of management qualifications but the team manager has no formal awards in management. The job descriptions of the service and team managers showed a clear definition of roles, responsibilities and duties.</p>		
<p>Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?</p>	YES	
<p>Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?</p>	YES	

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The recruitment of managers and social workers is well managed and all appropriate checks are made, including the verification by telephone of written references. CRB checks are taken in every case and there is a system in place to ensure that they are renewed every three years.</p>		

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The overall management, control and organisation of the agency were of a good standard. They are underpinned by sound policies and procedures and it was clear that these inform good management practice and effective conduct of the service. Managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The structure of the organisation is such that everyone understands their position within it, the lines of communication and accountability, and the inter-relationship between the adoption service and children's services in general. It was evident that managers exercised effective leadership in respect of the legal responsibilities of the service and its duties to promote the best interests of children. This also includes effective procedures in respect of the use of the national register and relationships within the consortium.

It was clearly and unequivocally stated by a range of people associated with and employed by the agency that its management is held in very high esteem.

Number of complaints received by the adoption service in the last 12 months

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

0

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a range of quality control and monitoring systems in place to manage the performance of the service. The executive of the council demonstrated a clear commitment to children's services in general and an up to date knowledge of adoption matters; it was clear that there is enthusiasm in the executive, demonstrated by a developing commitment in the corporate parenting group. The executive is provided with written reports, including regular management information and performance indicators.

How frequently does the executive side of the council receive written reports on the work of the adoption service?

Monthly?

Quarterly?

Less than Quarterly?

YES

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)

The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The agency's legal advice is provided by the council's legal section and the medical adviser provides a wealth of support and advice to both the panel and the service in general. It was evident that the medical adviser is highly respected for the commitment she demonstrates to the health and wellbeing of children placed for adoption.

There are facilities and arrangements to gain access to a wide range of other specialist advice whenever this may be necessary, either to support the adoption process or to provide particular input to meet particular needs.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A well-qualified and experienced team of workers staffs the agency (all social workers had a recognised qualification); they were able to demonstrate a committed and enthusiastic approach to their responsibilities and were clearly a well-motivated staff group. It was clear that there was a high level of knowledge and understanding of the principles and practices of adoption matters, including the legislative framework, and that the team was up to date on current thinking. The quality of the work undertaken, through examination of assessment records (Forms F) and interviews with adopters, demonstrated a skilled and effective approach to their duties and responsibilities. However, as alluded to earlier in this report, the agency needs to ensure better quality assurance in respect of children's Forms E and life-story work.

The recruitment practices in the authority were sound and ensured that only workers who could demonstrate abilities to undertake the role were appointed. The recruitment procedures and practices were suitably rigorous and all necessary checks, including enhanced CRB, were routinely undertaken.

The agency has an active approach to encouraging workers to Post-Qualifying Awards and had exceeded the minimum requirement.

Although the workers involved in birth records counselling were experienced and skilled, they had not undertaken specialist training in this area. The agency is reminded that should further appointments be made to this service, they must attend suitable training to equip them for the role.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

YES

What % of the adoption service's social workers have a PQ award?

75

%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12) Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The organisation of the agency - including work allocation, staff supervision and working arrangements - were noted as being efficiently managed. The staff team felt well supported and there were positive comments made about the skills and abilities of the team manager in particular and senior management in general. It was clear that the arrangements in place to organise workloads, plan for assessments to be carried out and family finding to be efficiently managed were well coordinated and equitable. A workload weighting system was in place but was used flexibly to accommodate matters that needed urgent attention. Administrative arrangements, although fairly 'tight', were adequate for the needs of the agency; this needs monitoring, however, to ensure its continued performance is sufficient to ensure satisfactory support.</p> <p>The agency has access to specialist advice and it was discovered that the medical adviser in particular provided the team (and the adoption panel) with a wealth of advice and knowledge; there was a significant level of commitment and energy provided by this person.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4) There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.			
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?		2
<p>There are sufficient staff working for the purposes of adoption in the agency; they are well qualified and very experienced workers who bring a sound approach to their responsibilities. Workers carry, however – in addition to their adoption responsibilities – some permanent fostering cases. It was clear that, from time to time, this could place an onerous burden on the prioritisation of work programming because of the (sometimes) emergency nature of foster carer support. The agency is strongly advised to examine the impact that foster carer support places on the adoption service's duties and responsibilities and put appropriate safeguards in place to ensure that adoption priorities are met.</p>			
Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	13	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	2
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	0		

Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)

The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The authority has sound employment and staff support systems in place. It was reported by all staff interviewed that they feel they work for an organisation that supports and cares for its workers; this included flexible working arrangements and working from home. All staff were aware of the department's policies and procedures, including those in respect of grievances and whistle-blowing. The Director of Social Services holds a regular 'Listening Group', which is a forum for workers to express their views on the operation and management of the department. Staff spoke positively of this and cited examples of when they felt that they had been listened to.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The department has a 'Training and Development Strategy' and an annual training plan. These demonstrate an active approach to staff development and a commitment to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Individual training and development needs are explored through an annual appraisal system and in supervision. All workers undergo an induction programme and it was clear that appropriate levels of support and integration strategies are in place; new workers felt that the induction system was a useful system from which future developmental needs could evolve.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are maintained securely, kept and are accessible when required.

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
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In the main, adopters' and prospective adopters' case files were maintained to a satisfactory standard. It was felt that the files would be improved if they included a checklist and a more detailed audit tool. The files were audited and all relevant matters checked for inclusion and overall quality; the audit tool did not, however, show details of any action taken to address shortfalls. Most required information was kept on files – including checks and references – but there were some omissions that required attending to.

Children's adoption files were in the process of being re-designed to follow a departmental protocol for inclusion and management of information. Whilst this was proving satisfactory in most cases, there were some files examined that did not follow the protocol and included information that should be filed elsewhere.

The storage of files and the security of electronically held information was satisfactory, although there is a developing storage problem at the agency office that needs to be addressed in the near future to ensure sufficient facilities are available.

Although there was evidence of supervision decisions being recorded on some adopters' files they were noted as being somewhat inconsistent in the detail and information provided. A more qualitative approach to auditing would address this matter.

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)

The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
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The agency has appropriate policies, systems, protocols and procedures in place to ensure that information for other agencies is provided in a timely and efficient way, both within the consortium and the rest of the country. All issues of security and confidentiality of information that is shared is satisfactorily managed and organised.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The department has clear guidelines and procedures for the maintenance and storage of files and confidential information. As already stated earlier in this report, there are systems in place to determine the format of both adopters' files and the adoption files of children; each has a contents checklist and they are audited as part of a wider quality assurance and control mechanism.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)

Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

1

The personnel files that were examined as part of this inspection showed that, in general, they were maintained appropriately and contained, in the main, all information required. There were some minor omissions noted and brought to the attention of the personnel section.

The records in respect of adoption panel members did not include the details required by NMS and regulations; these need to be addressed to ensure full compliance.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises occupied by the agency are located in a part of the borough that is easily accessible to anyone with legitimate business. The office facilities, whilst adequate for the purposes of the agency, are somewhat cramped; there are plans, however, to address this to create more working space for the adoption team. The office also suffers from a storage problem – this will be addressed as part of the new arrangements.

Administrative and IT systems were adequate, with satisfactory arrangements in place for safety and security of both hard and electronically held information.

Arrangements for disaster recovery and business continuity were satisfactory.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Local authority manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2nd February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the local authority adoption manager, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 12th April 2005 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Local authority manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of Southwark London Borough Council confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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