



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

South Gloucestershire Council Adoption Service

**SSD, Children`s Services
St Lukes Close, Emerson Way
Emerson Green
Sth Gloucestershire
BS16 7AL**

Lead Inspector
Sally Woodget

Announced Inspection
14th September 2005 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

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Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	South Gloucestershire Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mike Connolly
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

This is the first inspection under the terms and conditions of the Local Authority Adoption Regulations 2003.

Brief Description of the Service:

South Gloucestershire Council's Social Services Department now forms part of a new Department for Education and Young People. The adoption agency is part of the Family Placement Team, which has two team managers job sharing, one who takes the lead on all the adoption work. The agency does not have large numbers of children available for adoption due to the demographic makeup of the area.

The team provides a central point of contact for all those interested in becoming adoptive parents, including inter-country adoption. The team provide a range of information leaflets to prospective adopters. The team coordinates all the recruitment and preparation for prospective adopters including training and assessment. The service manager chairs monthly children's review panels to monitor children's plans for permanence in order to prevent any delay in their plans. The team assist in family finding for all children requiring an adoptive placement including advertising where appropriate. The team operate a detailed linking and matching procedure to ensure children are placed with families who can meet their needs.

Adoption social workers support adoptive parents from the approval, through placement and to the final adoption order. The team are presently developing adoption support services and currently offer regular adoption support meetings and training opportunities. The team is responsible for managing support services to birth parents via an independent organisation. Staff also provide support, information and advice to childcare social workers in the area teams.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was undertaken by two inspectors over three days, plus an additional day to observe the adoption panel (which took place two months after the inspection fieldwork) and meet with a birth family member. The inspection undertook an analysis of pre-inspection material - including questionnaires from three birth parents; five approved adopters, seven placing social workers, seven placing authorities and specialist advisers. Interviews were undertaken with key staff, managers and an elected member. A sample of children's and adopters case files were read and visits to adopters and a birth parent carried out. Also included was the inspection of the records of the agency and an analysis of administrative and resource matters, including premises, record keeping and security.

Everyone involved in the inspection was helpful and courteous and the facilities and resources provided were of a good standard; this was appreciated. The preparation for the inspection by the agency was of a particularly high standard and demonstrated managerial efficiency and commitment.

What the service does well:

The adoption service in South Gloucester operates within a well-organised and well-managed framework. The Statement of Purpose was detailed and this together with the recently reviewed policies and procedures underpinned the management of the agency.

The agency have robust measures in place to ensure that there is no delay in children's plans.

Adoption preparation, training, and assessment were of a good standard and included where appropriate the extended adoptive family members. Adopters reported that training was "well structured" and "thought-provoking". They reported that assessments were being undertaken in a "sensitive" and "professional manner".

Good communication and working relationships were evident between the Adoption staff and child-care staff which insured that the agency provided a child focused service. Child-care staff reported that Adoption staff were "responsive" and "skilled".

Information provided to adopters about the process was a good quality. Matching processes more well-developed and there had been no disruptions of adoptive placements.

Adopters attending panel reported that the experience was positive, "welcoming and friendly".

Support services for adopters had recently been developed and further initiatives were planned.

Ongoing training for adoptive parents was provided regularly and all adopters were encouraged to attend a Webster Stratton behaviour management course.

Therapy services were provided for children and adopters as necessary and the service was being further developed in this area. Specialist advisers were fully committed to providing a quality service to children and adopters.

The staff were committed to ensuring that the family members were involved was contributing to the heritage of children placed and an independent service was available to provide support and counselling.

The agency was proactive in arranging meetings between birth family members and adoptive families around the time of placement.

The managers and staff are well-qualified and thoroughly committed to providing a quality service.

Support systems such as supervision and training were well-developed and social workers felt that they had encouragement and opportunities for skills and knowledge development.

The procedures for monitoring the activities of the agency were good and looked after young people were involved in contributing to the agency's initiatives.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection under the Local Authority Adoption Agency Regulations 2003.

What they could do better:

The agency need to strengthen their position in relation to child protection issues by ensuring that relevant child protection procedures regarding children placed for adoption are in place. They also need to ensure that their staff receive training on child protection issues on children placed for adoption.

Recruitment policies, procedures and practices must be tightened up to ensure that all the necessary checks and references are made prior to a member of staff, panel member or sessional worker taking up their duties in the adoption service.

A review of the arrangements for staffing levels needs to be carried out regularly to ensure; appropriate consistency and support to adopters and children placed or to be placed; successful placements and that children are thoroughly protected and their welfare is safeguarded.

The agency needs to develop a children's guide for all children who are placed for adoption to ensure that children understand what adoption will mean to them.

Further work needs to be undertaken to develop written strategies, policies and procedures such as; the recruitment of adopters, the provision of services to birth families, the functions of the adoption panel and the provision of a range of therapy services.

Some further work needs to be undertaken in relation to case records to ensure; clear evidence of decision-making, up-to-date information, clear filing procedures and comprehensive/consistent archiving procedures are in place.

Further attention needs to be given to ensure the adoption offices are wheelchair accessible.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

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

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

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

The agency makes safe and appropriate placements for children. They ensure that children are placed with adopters who have been well prepared, assessed and trained in order to meet the individual needs of the children in their care.

EVIDENCE:

The placement service has recently developed a marketing strategy that is thorough and detailed, however this document primarily deals with the need to improve the number of foster placements and does not indicate the need for improved recruitment strategy for adoption due to "an excess supply of adopters". Managers however, indicated that there was an informal understanding about the number of approvals of adopters, which needed to occur annually to ensure the appropriate choice for children waiting locally. As the numbers of children available for adoption in South Gloucestershire are low, a large number of these approved adopters go on to accept placements from other agencies. It is recommended therefore that the agency takes into account both the local and national need when recruiting adopters, and this needs to be addressed in their recruitment strategy.

A monthly record of; children waiting; best interest decisions made; available approved adopters and applicants undergoing assessment, is maintained and

monitored to ensure that assessments can be prioritised to meet the needs of children identified.

The adoption team operate a thorough and detailed matching and linking procedure to ensure that children are matched with adopters to best meet their assessed needs. In a couple of cases however there was insubstantial or conflicting evidence provided and poor recording about the reasons for decisions in respect of siblings being placed together or separately. The agency needs to ensure they provide clear, recorded evidence of professional decision-making in such cases, and ensure that this decision is clearly explained both to the children (having regard to their age and understanding), to adopters and to their birth families. It is suggested that some research is undertaken in this area to obtain guidance and tools for staff in assessing the attachments of siblings to each other.

It was clear that children's views were taken into account about the adoption process, this was indicated in the report completed by their social workers, and that the adoption service was child focused in its response.

Adopters, both domestic and inter-country, interviewed during the inspection, reported that the preparation and training provided was, "well structured", "realistic", "thought provoking" and "eye opening and challenging". One adopter said "it helped me to see it from the adopted child's point of view". This training is provided twice annually to ensure the right numbers of adopters are being assessed to meet the needs of children waiting locally.

Questionnaires returned by adopters also indicated that they found the course to be useful and informative.

The adoption team have recently undertaken an evaluation of the courses they provide, including the consideration of feedback from the attendees.

The quality of the adoption assessments were good and clearly identified the adopters capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way and provided evidence of their competencies and strengths. The adoption team carried out a good number of references and checks to verify information and determine the applicant's abilities. Members of the extended families of adopters were also invited to attend the preparation course where appropriate and interviews were undertaken with prospective adoptive grandparents to assist with their full understanding about the needs of children to be placed for adoption and to ensure good outcomes for the placement.

The adoption team reported that mechanisms were in place in order to decide whether to continue with an assessment if the CRB disclosure indicated previous convictions. These procedures however are not documented. The process should be transparent to prospective adopters, it is suggested

therefore that a written policy and procedure is created and circulated to staff and prospective adopters.

The adopters who were interviewed, praised the work of their adoption social workers in undertaking their assessments in a sensitive and professional manner. One adopter stated "the social worker was non judgemental and a good listener" another stated "it was intrusive but I didn't find this a problem" and another stated that " the staff were wonderfully helpful and supportive through it all".

Three adopters reported that the process was too long; one reported a delay in allocation of a social worker to carry out the assessment, the other two reported lengthy delays in obtaining a panel date. The managers reported some difficulty in carrying out assessments promptly due to staffing difficulties over the previous year, which may account for some of the difficulties described.

A procedure for organising assessments with time deadlines has been introduced recently and it is hoped that this will prevent further delays such as described.

Adopters are given a useful booklet, "Information for Approved Adopters", which provides them with detailed information about the linking, matching, introductions and placement process, with useful guidance as to how they can prepare for each stage in the process. Most adopters felt that the organisation was open and honest regarding the information provided about children being matched with them. One adopter who replied to a questionnaire, however, felt that information was being "kept secret" and that there was "not enough information on the child". It was not clear if this was an interagency placement, but staff need to be proactive in obtaining as much information about the child to be placed as possible to ensure that adopters fully understand the implications for them and their family. It is suggested that the adoption team consider the use of Child Appreciation Days, to ensure that as much information about the child's needs and background is shared with prospective adopters.

The Adoption and Permanence Panel meets monthly to consider best interests decision for children, applications from prospective adopters and long-term foster carers and matches.

The agency has developed protocols for panel members and advisers, and information about the panel process is documented in the adoption procedure manual. These do not include all the elements required by the standards however and panel policies and procedures therefore need to be developed to ensure thorough quality assurance of the work of the agency.

In one case it was noted that a panel member dissented from the discussion and abstained from the recommendation and had left the panel inquorate. The

agency must ensure that this case is considered again before a quorate panel. The agency must define policies in relation to declaration of interests for panel members and ensure that these are maintained via the panel process.

Two adopters reported having been approved for longer than two years without a placement, a process of annual review of prospective adopters should be introduced to ensure the applicant's continuing ability and capacity to care for children requiring adoptive placements.

It was noted that some recommendations were made "in principle". Managers reported that this no longer occurred and it is recommended that the panel chair ensure that all the information is available so that a clear recommendation can be made. It is the view of the Commission that the panel require all information in order to make a best interest recommendation and that the practice of "in principle" best interest decision making, should not be used.

The adoption team and the panel have devised checklists for adoption social workers and childcare social workers to assist them in writing of their reports on children and prospective adopters, and to ensure that they address all questions and concerns the panel may have when considering the application. Childcare social workers have reported that this has been useful in helping them to think about the most relevant factors in each case.

The panel also have useful checklists to assist panel members in their reading of the reports. The panel minutes are detailed and helpful and the identification of present hazards and strengths as well as future benefits and potential dangers is helpful for social workers in exploring potential matches, however it is not always clear what the reasons are for the recommendation.

Adopters are invited to attend the panel meeting for consideration of their approval and those interviewed reported that they had been fully informed about what to expect and been given information about panel members backgrounds. They felt questions they were asked where appropriate and relevant. One adopter reported that the panel chair was "pleasant" another stated that the panel chair was "welcoming and friendly". The agency has undertaken their own feedback from prospective adopters attending the panel, which has generally been positive.

Approved adopters are not however invited to the panel for the consideration of a match with them, and this is recommended.

Panel member's files do not comply with regulations or standards and the agency need to ensure that they carry out references and other status checks including CRB checks on all panel members.

The agency decision maker, who is also the Head of Children's Services, receives all panel papers prior to the panel meeting and discusses any issues of concern with the panel chair and the panel adviser. The agency decision is

normally made within two working days of the adoption panel and there are good systems in place for the agency to convey its decision to all the relevant parties.

South Gloucestershire's child protection policies and procedures do not presently include reference to children placed for adoption as required by the regulations. The organisation must prepare and implement a written policy and procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect of children placed for adoption. This is particularly important as the adoption team support a number of interagency placements. Any such policies and procedures need to include the name and address of the commission to enable any staff to report any concern about child welfare and safety.

Managers of the service had been recruited and selected appropriately and have received satisfactory enhanced disclosures from the CRB. There is a system in place to ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years.

The recruitment policy outlines that a member of staff who is promoted within the same division requires no references. CSCI would not endorse this policy, which needs amending. Two written references must be undertaken on each member of staff to ensure that they are suitable people to carry out the level of responsibility outlined in the job description and to ensure they have the skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform. The recruitment policy also needs amending to ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify all written references.

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 and 18.

The adoption service provides some good support services to adopters and children and further work is presently being undertaken to improve therapy and support services to ensure successful placements are made and maintained.

EVIDENCE:

The adoption team presently employ one adoption support social worker. The hours for this post have recently been increased to take into account the growing numbers of adopters and children requiring adoption support, both prior to and post adoption order.

There have been a number of new developments recently, incorporating a range of support services, for example: an adoption support group which aims to meet four times annually and is co-ordinated by a core group of adopters; a five-year membership of adoption UK following adopters approval at panel; a resource library; a comprehensive range of post approval training for adopters, including the opportunity for adopters to attend the Webster Stratton behaviour management training course; as well as services that can be accessed through the South West Adoption Consortium. A leaflet has been developed, outlining the sort of issues that the adoption support social worker can assist with and this is sent out to approved adopters.

At the time of matching the child with approved adopters an adoption support plan, based on the needs identified in both the assessment of the child and the adopters is prepared, and procedures for reviewing this plan are developed. Information about financial support is provided for adopters in the "Information for Approved Adopters" booklet.

The looked after children education service works well with the family placement team however further developments need to be made to provide

much-needed support, advice and information to schools and adopters at a crucial time in the child's transition to their new family and to assist in the stability of the placement over the longer term.

The number of inter-agency placements has led to an increased amount of work for the adoption social workers in order to ensure thorough and accurate communication between agencies. Children with more challenging needs are increasingly being placed with South Gloucestershire adopters, which has an impact on the support services available locally. The agency will need to develop an adoption support strategy to take into account the level of interagency work it undertakes and the support needs of families caring for children with challenging needs.

The local CAMHS service has not been sufficiently well developed to carry out the discreet and subtle work that needs to be undertaken with young children to be placed for adoption, who have attachment and behavioural difficulties. However a great deal of work and planning has gone into addressing this issue, and a new post of a psychologist with dedicated time to work with children placed for adoption and their families was being advertised at the time of inspection.

The Adoption service has been able to spot purchase support/therapy packages from independent sources in order to support families where there are difficulties in the placement and this arrangement is intended to continue. The adoption agency do therefore, need to develop a comprehensive written strategy for the provision of a range of therapy services to support adoptive families and a system for evaluating the effectiveness of therapy services that are purchased on a one-off basis.

Adopters interviewed demonstrated their understanding of issues around self-identity for their adopted child and their role in encouraging them to reflect on this. It was clear that this area had been fully discussed with the adopters both at training and through the assessment process.

Inter-country adopters reported that they were happy with the level of support they received from the adoption team and a number of individual commendations by adopters about the levels of support provided by social workers were received; one adopter stated "our social worker was kind, reassuring and supportive" another adopter said of their social worker, "we can't fault her".

Although there had been no recent disruptions of children's adoptive placements, the agency had procedures in place to ensure independent chairing of disruption meetings and demonstrated an understanding of the needs for support and counselling services both to the adopters and to the child in question should this occur.

The medical adviser to the adoption service is clearly valued for her contribution and commitment to providing accessible information to adopters and social work staff alike.

The legal adviser contributes to the panel and is available for consultation by staff and adopters who reported that they found this advice valuable and supportive.

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,and 9.

The agency has a clear commitment to developing and improving services for birth families to enable them to contribute to their children's future and for them to develop a positive sense of their identity. However, further work is needed to provide a clear focus and ensure consistency of practice.

EVIDENCE:

The South Gloucestershire Social Services Procedures outline the work that needs to be undertaken with birth family members by child care social workers, following a review decision that adoption is being considered for their child. There was some evidence that social workers were able to engage with birth family members during this difficult period and the adoption adviser was pro-active in raising pertinent issues about birth family members, which needed to be addressed. Social workers are reminded and encouraged to share the child assessment (form E) with birth family members to ensure its accuracy and to ask them to sign the document. It was also evident that family resource centre staff continued to work with birth parents and birth family members in some circumstances, offering support and advice, and in assisting birth family members to recognise the lifelong implications of adoption by engaging them in life story work for their child.

The Adoption team have a service level agreement with SWAN (South West Adoption Network), an independent organisation, to provide an independent counselling service for birth family members. Childcare social workers are responsible for providing leaflets and information about the service to birth family members and they raised concerns about the appropriateness of this arrangement due to the often-difficult working relationships created by the adoption plan. The Adoption team should explore alternative ways of

informing birth family members about local and national support groups and services to facilitate maximum take up of support services.

The adoption service operates the letterbox scheme to enable indirect contact between birth family members and adoptive families. The service has been managed in the past by an administrator but it has been recognised that this task should be undertaken by a qualified social worker who can handle the more complex and sensitive issues that arise, such as; assisting birth family members to compose letters, reviewing contact arrangements and dealing with other queries. The adoption support social worker has been undertaking some of this work and is also involved in planning, supporting and supervising some direct contact arrangements.

There was evidence that adopters and birth parents were encouraged, prepared and supported by the adoption social workers, to meet with each other at the start of the placement to ensure better understanding of each other's background and circumstances and to improve outcomes for children.

Three questionnaires were received from birth family members and two were unhappy about the service they had received, one had not been told about support groups. These questionnaires indicated that the birth family members had failed to understand significant issues about adoption and contact arrangements.

One birth family member who was interviewed felt that extended birth family members i.e. grandparents were often excluded throughout the process. This birth family member reported that one of the childcare social workers with whom she was involved was excellent but that this experience was exceptional. Further training needs to be provided for childcare social workers to ensure that extended birth family members are included in the arrangements to contribute to the child's heritage and are able to receive support and independent counselling.

It is felt that all the above arrangements need to be brought together to form a clear written strategy for working with birth family members, and that birth family members are advised of the different services and facilities that are available to them. This information also needs to be included in the Statement of Purpose.

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 and 29,

The adoption service is well managed at all levels throughout the organisation and ensures a good service is provided to both children and adopters.

EVIDENCE:

The adoption agency has a clear written Statement of Purpose, which describes their aims and objectives, some small amendments and additions need to be made in order to fully comply with the regulations for example; the address of the manager, the services and facilities provided to birth family members and the address of the CSCI National Adoption Inspection Team.

Seven questionnaires were received from other placing authorities, none of whom had received a copy of South Gloucestershire Council Adoption Service's Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose needs to be brought to the attention of birth family members, persons wishing to adopt, adopted persons and other placing authorities so that they can request a copy as specified in the regulations.

The Adoption agency has recently developed a draft children's guide to adoption and this needs further work to ensure it fully complies with the regulations and standards. The agency need to include information about the children's rights director and children's rights website as well as local information and services for children for whom adoption is the plan. It is suggested that staff research other adoption agency's children's guides that had been commended by the Commission in their Inspection reports.

The information booklet "Thinking about Adoption?" developed by South Gloucestershire adoption service is an extremely comprehensive, concise, colourful, realistic and upbeat guide for prospective adopters. This document sensitively describes the needs of children available for adoption and identifies the sort of capabilities and skills adopters will need to have or develop to be able to care for a child from a troubled background.

Both the service manager with strategic responsibility for the adoption service and the team manager with day-to-day responsibility for the adoption service are appropriately qualified and experienced in child-care and family placement work. The service manager has a postgraduate diploma in leadership and organisation in public services. The team manager has recently undertaken some management training and is due to commence a postgraduate certificate in management studies later this year. Both managers exercise effective leadership of the staff and operation of the service.

It was evident that there were good lines of communication and responsibility in operation, and good working relationships not only within the adoption service but also across the wider child-care services. Child-care staff valued the support and advice received from the Adoption staff, one social worker reported that the adoption staff were "excellent", another reported that they were "supportive and responsive" and another that they were "professional and skilled".

South Gloucestershire Council has an equal opportunities policy and has developed a "managing diversity initiative" which required all departments in the council to produce equality action plans linked to their team service plans.

There was good use of the Adoption Register with clear and concise written procedures to cover these arrangements.

There were a number of procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency in place. An annual report of the adoption agency is provided to council members and it is planned that the new corporate parenting board will receive a six-month report on the work of the adoption service. Initiatives to involve looked- after young people in the new corporate parenting board had been successful and the contributions of these young people had provided informative, insightful and useful feedback to the service as a whole, indicating a child focused approach to child-care planning.

Recent shortfalls in staffing in the Adoption team have been effectively addressed in the short-term to deal with the present workload, through the use of "locum" social workers and by developing a panel of social workers who are available to undertake assessments of prospective adopters. Also the hours of adoption support staff have been increased in line with the increased level of need. There was one part-time vacancy for the new post of acting team manager at the time of the inspection.

The shortfalls (mentioned above) had affected the service delivery for a while, which was evident in some of the responses received from adopters (this was also mentioned earlier in the report). Three of the five questionnaires received from adopters reported poor communication by the adoption agency one reported that there was "little contact from staff"; two others felt they were "not kept informed about what was going on". One adopter also expressed concern about having an independent social worker to undertake the assessment. Managers of the service need to consider whether the continued use of independent social workers to undertake Adoption assessments provides enough consistency and continuity for adopters and social workers, particularly as the need for the social worker to fully understand the skills, sensitivities and complexities of the adopter is crucial in ensuring a good match and the need for the adopter to fully trust the social worker in such circumstances.

Managers of the service also need to continually monitor and review the staffing levels in the adoption service in relation to the number of children annually placed by other adoption agencies with South Gloucestershire adopters, particularly in relation to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of these children and to promote successful placements.

The adoption service has systems in place to determine and prioritise workloads. Staff reported that they received regular supervision and annual appraisals. Adoption staff reported that they had "good support" from the

managers who operated an "open door policy". A system needs to be implemented to ensure that decisions made during supervision sessions are recorded in the case files.

South Gloucestershire Council Social Services Department operate a sound recruitment and retention policy with a good career structure in place for staff. Staff reported they were generally happy about their conditions of service but they reported being paid less than neighbouring local authorities. Managers reported their intention to monitor the new systems to ensure they continue to attract and retain staff.

South Gloucestershire Council Social Services Department reported that they had received "Beacon Status" for social care training and development last year. The annual training plan provided evidence of a diverse range of training available for staff members. Child-care social workers reported that the training opportunities were "excellent", but the time to undertake training was a problem due to their workloads.

The adoption social workers need to regularly update child protection training (including administrative staff) particularly in relation to children placed for adoption and especially due to the number of inter-agency placements.

The work of the administrative staff was highly valued and staff were complimentary about the quality of work that they undertook however, some social work staff were still undertaking photocopying and filing. There are plans to relocate administrative staff within the Adoption team within the next six months and it is hoped that this will improve the amount of administrative support available to staff.

Procedures for dealing with enquiries from prospective adopters were in place and adopters reported that the response was quick and initial visits were made promptly. The family placement team's recruitment officer receives telephone enquiries from prospective carers and it was felt that this work required a level of understanding of and sensitivity to the needs of prospective adopters provided by a qualified and experienced adoption social worker. Guidelines about when to refer the enquirer to an adoption social worker need to be developed to ensure these procedures are managed appropriately and it is suggested that managers oversee this process.

The Adoption files for children were based on childcare files, which did not have appropriate or relevant contents list or divider sections. Some files contained inappropriate information such as child protection documentation and in some files information was not kept up-to-date. It is suggested that life storybooks are photocopied and placed on a child's adoption file in order to ensure that this information is safely stored for the child in later life.

New IT systems have recently been introduced and information assistants regularly prepare statistical information, which is useful for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption service.

The policy for closing and archiving adoption files is anomalous and needs to be reviewed and updated.

The Adoption archives are well organised and managed with good systems in place for accessing records in a secure and confidential manner.

A risk assessment is required for all files, both open files and closed/archived files, to ensure that the risk of fire and water damage is minimised, and a disaster recovery plan needs to be developed to ensure measures are in place in the event of such damage i.e. freeze drying.

The Adoption premises were suitable for the purposes of carrying out the work of the adoption agency, there were appropriate security measures in place and the IT facilities were good. There were however few staff facilities and there was no wheelchair access to the main building.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
8	3
9	2

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
6	2
18	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

N/A

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD19AD11	LAAA '03 Reg11(3)(d)	The adoption agency must ensure that full and satisfactory information is received in respect of all panel members and sessional workers, including enhanced CRB checks and all the matters specified in Schedule 3.	01/02/06
2	AD2AD23	LAAA '03 Reg9	The adoption agency should ensure that South Gloucestershire Council prepare and implement a written policy and procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect of children placed for adoption. This needs to include the name and address of the Commission For Social Care Inspection to enable any staff to report any concern about child welfare and safety. Child protection training must be provided for adoption agency staff in relation to children placed for	01/03/06

			adoption.	
3	AD19	LAAA'03 Reg6(2)&11(3)	The adoption agency must amend their recruitment policy and procedure to ensure that full references and checks are undertaken when a member of staff is employed or promoted, to ensure that they are suitable people to carry out the level of responsibility required and have the skills and experience necessary.	01/02/06
4	AD1	LAAA '03 Reg2	The adoption agency must amend its Statement of Purpose to ensure that the services and facilities provided to birth family members are included, as well as the address of the manager of the Adoption service and of the CSCI National Adoption inspection team. A copy of this document must be available on request.	01/02/06
5	AD1	LAAA '03 Reg3	The adoption agency must produce a children's guide, which should include all the elements of Schedule 2. This guide should be produced in different formats to meet the needs of children of different ages and abilities. This guide should include information about the Children's Rights Director and children's rights websites.	01/01/06
6	AD21	LAAA '03 Reg10	The adoption agency must review the continued use of independent social workers to ensure that this arrangement provides sufficient consistency and continuity for adopters and staff, particularly in relation to matching arrangements	01/03/06

			and placement support. The review of staffing levels must also be carried out in relation to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed by other agencies and to promote their successful placements.	
7	AD10	AA Reg5(4)	The adoption agency must ensure the panel is quorate at all times and that any decisions made by inquorate panels are returned to panel for consideration and recommendation.	31/12/05

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD2	The adoption agency should develop a written plan for the implementation and the evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of a range of children waiting for adoption both locally and nationally.
2	AD2	The adoption agency should ensure that evidence of professional decision-making is clearly recorded to ensure that where siblings are separated or placed together a clear explanation is provided to them (having regard to their age and understanding), to adopters and to their birth families.
3	AD2	The adoption agency should ensure that the decision-making procedures used regarding positive CRB disclosures are documented and circulated to both staff and prospective adopters.
4	AD5	The adoption agency should ensure as much information is given to prospective adopters as possible, to help them understand the needs and background of the child and the implications for them and their family. The use of child appreciation days would assist with this process.
5	AD10	The adoption agency should ensure that prospective adopters are given the opportunity to attend the adoption

		panel and be heard when the panel are considering matches of children with them.
6	AD12	The adoption agency should ensure that the panel minutes clearly state the reasons for the conclusions reached.
7	AD10	The adoption agency should have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and this should include all the elements of Standard 10.2.
8	AD6	The adoption agency should ensure that the educational service run by South Gloucestershire Council Family Placement Service addresses the specific requirements of children placed for adoption, in order to provide the much-needed support advice and information to schools at a crucial time in the child's transition to the new family and to assist the stability of the placement in the longer term.
9	AD6	The adoption agency should develop an adoption support strategy. This needs to take into account the level of interagency work it undertakes and the support needs of families caring for children with challenging needs.
10	AD6	The adoption agency should develop a comprehensive strategy for the provision of a range of therapy services to support adoptive families. The system for evaluating the effectiveness of therapy services that are purchased on a one-off basis also needs to be developed.
11	AD9	The adoption agency should explore alternative ways of informing both immediate and extended birth family members about local and national support groups and services. This should facilitate maximum take-up of support services and ensure that the family members understand the significant issues about adoption and contact arrangements and are able to contribute to maintenance of the child's heritage.
12	AD9	The adoption agency should develop a clear written strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families, which include the arrangements that are presently available. This information should be circulated to birth family members.
13	AD15AD19	The adoption agency should ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references.
14	AD25	The adoption agency should develop a system whereby decisions of supervisors are recorded on case files, and are clearly expressed, signed and dated.
15	AD20	The adoption agency should develop written guidelines to ensure that those who receive enquiries from prospective adopters have the required level of knowledge and understanding and sensitivity to manage this work will

		know when to refer the enquirer to an appropriate qualified worker.
16	AD25	The adoption agency should devise appropriate systems for the filing of children's adoption records. A relevant content checklist and divided sections should be provided for childcare staff. These files should contain up-to-date information.
17	AD25	The adoption agency should amend its policy and procedures for closing and archiving Adoption files in order to ensure it is consistent and up-to-date.
18	AD25	The adoption agency should ensure a risk assessment is carried out on all open, closed and archived files to ensure that the risk of fire and water damage is minimised. Also the disaster recovery plan should ensure that measures are in place to repair any damage that may occur.
19	AD29	The adoption agency should ensure that the premises provide access to wheelchair users.

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