



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Leicestershire County Council Adoption Service

**Eagle House (4th Floor)
11 Friar Lane
Leicester
Leicestershire
LE1 5RB**

Lead Inspector
Rosemary Chapman

Announced Inspection
12th-22nd September 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Leicestershire County Council Adoption Service
Address	Eagle House (4th Floor) 11 Friar Lane Leicester Leicestershire LE1 5RB
Telephone number	0116 299 5899
Fax number	0116 299 5900
Email address	
Provider Web address	www.leicestershire.gov.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Leicestershire County Council Social Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Cath Sartoris
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: None

Date of last inspection 29th October 2003

Brief Description of the Service:

The adoption service is provided through a joint arrangement between Leicester City, Leicestershire County and Rutland Local Authorities. The managers are provided by Leicester City and Leicestershire County, with the County being the lead agency. Rutland County Council provides financial support. The team is based in a Leicester City centre location.

Given the joint arrangement, the majority of this report is exactly the same as those for the other 2 Councils. Any differences which relate specifically to a particular Council are detailed in the report for that Council.

The service:

- a. Places children for whom adoption is the plan, with suitable adoptive families
- b. Recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adoptive families, including those who wish to adopt from overseas
- c. Provides a range of support services to adoptive families, birth families and adoptive children
- d. Provides counselling, information and advice to birth families and adopted adults, including birth records counselling.
- e. Undertakes non-agency adoptions
- f. assists with tracing and provides intermediary services.

SUMMARY

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

This is the second inspection of the adoption service provided by Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Councils. Prior to the inspection fieldwork taking place supporting documentary evidence was sent to and read by the lead inspector. Questionnaires were received from 1 birth family member, 15 prospective and approved adopters, 11 placing social workers, 4 specialist advisers and the CAMHS service.

Two inspectors spent 8 days in the agency and interviewed:

- 2 groups of placing social workers (Leicester City and Leicestershire/Rutland)
- 2 groups of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) (Leicester City and Leicestershire/Rutland)
- Administrative staff
- Adoption social workers
- An independent counsellor for birth parents
- 3 birth mothers
- The adoption team managers
- The publicity officer
- Adoption support social workers
- The nominated managers
- The agency decision makers from each Authority
- An elected member from each Authority

Six adoptive families were selected to be case tracked and this involved reading their files, the files of the children placed with them and a home interview. A further 2 families receiving adoption support were also case tracked.

In addition, the adoption panel for each Authority was observed, the chairpersons were interviewed and a selection of files, including personnel files, adopters' and children's files were read during the course of the inspection. The premises and archive storage were also inspected.

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

What the service does well:

The agency progresses adopter assessments in a timely way, with very little delay. Adopters are very positive about the preparation training: "the preparation process was thorough and professional". Another adopter said: "the preparation meetings were interesting and very important information was given to help make us even more encouraged to adopt". It also has a good awareness of the children for whom an adoptive family is required and good processes in place to identify these at an early stage. The agency decision is also made in good time.

The provision of adoption support is excellent. It is flexible to meet the expressed needs of families and there is a good range of support and assistance available, including the quick response of the placement support team, consultation with CAMHS, groups for adopters and children and direct work.

The service to birth parents is also excellent and there is good evidence of their involvement in plans for their children, contributing to the information a child has about their birth family and the provision of independent counselling and support.

The agency is well managed with good communication, regular supervision of staff, relevant training and skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff and managers. Adopters have spoken highly about their social workers: "the adoption social worker was superb"; another was described as "fantastic". There is a high level of satisfaction expressed and they have also been positive about the process: "general experience has been very positive", "Leicestershire Social Services does a fantastic job", and "our experience with Leicestershire has been very positive". Other comments included: "the social workers we have been assigned are extremely good"; "Very professional staff who handled the case very well. Would recommend Leicester City Adoption Unit as an example to others" and "we have felt very safe during the whole process. We have found staff helpful, friendly and supportive.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection, the adoption support team has expanded and the range of support increased. The post box scheme has been reviewed and is now managed by the adoption support team.

There is now an effective and sensitive independent counselling and support service for birth parents.

The procedures have been updated to take account of the new legislation and the administrative processes are tighter. The IT equipment has also been improved.

What they could do better:

The agency should improve on the consistency of adopter assessments as a variable standard were seen. There needs to be better evidence of how a match is made, and better recording generally, as the files are not well structured. Internal monitoring systems need to be more effective to ensure consistency of practice.

The agency needs to ensure it has a welcoming attitude to a diverse range of applicants, in order to have a positive approach to single adopters and same sex couples and this needs to permeate throughout the agency, including social work staff and panel members.

The delay in undertaking birth records counselling, which is currently at least six months before allocation, is unacceptable and needs to be addressed.

The Children's Guide to adoption needs to be reviewed so that it can be relevant to a range of children's ages and abilities. Information to enquirers would also benefit from updating.

Notifications to birth parents need to be in evidence on the files and notifications to adopters need to be reviewed to give them the importance they should have.

The files of panel members, adopters and children, need to be reviewed to ensure they meet the requirements of legislation.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The quality of assessments is variable and thus the safety of some placements is not consistently promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Most of this section relates to all 3 Authorities but information about the panel and agency decision has been recorded separately on the appropriate Authority's report.

There are effective strategies in place for identifying the types and numbers of children who may require an adoptive family and thus target the recruitment process to meet these needs. The agency has a written recruitment plan and is able to access the skills and advice of the publicity officer who mainly works with the fostering service. Team managers receive early notification of children who are being "twin tracked" and once the plan is adoption, an adoption link social worker is allocated to assist in progressing the plan. Children waiting are reviewed at team meetings, in supervision and by the panel. The membership of the local Consortium has widened placement choices for children and the agency will also advertise if there is not an appropriate local family.

There was evidence of siblings being placed together, adopters being approached to care for a new sibling and children were placed in culturally appropriate families. Social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that the wishes and feelings of children are ascertained and acted upon where possible.

The agency has a formal process for the preparation, assessment and approval of adopters. Adopters attend an information evening, which is then followed by a thorough initial visit by two social workers. If the prospective applicants are deemed suitable, they are sent an application form, invited to the preparation training and then have a home study assessment. Adopters have commented very positively about the preparation groups: "It was the experience of the preparation group that has made this a positive placement." Another said: " I felt every session was worthwhile and that you'd learnt something that you could use". The agency also runs a preparation group specifically for applicants who are black and Asian, which has proven to be useful and appreciated by one black adopter who was interviewed. Those adopters who wish to adopt from overseas attend these sessions also and the social worker addresses specific issues with them in the home study. The preparation is evaluated and reviewed.

There was a variable standard of assessments inspected. Some used a lot of the applicants' own words with little analysis or verification of the information and little emphasis on competencies. Diversity was addressed in a very narrow way and feedback from the preparation groups was not always used. There was inconsistent practice in the taking of certain checks and references, which gave cause for concern. For example, there were instances where other Local Authorities were not contacted, police checks were not undertaken when applicants had lived abroad, reasons for not contacting ex partners were not stated when this had occurred and some referees had not known applicants for very long. The health and safety questionnaires did not address guns or dangerous weapons and there was no analysis of the pet questionnaires, which are undertaken by the pet owner rather than the staff member. Some health and safety questionnaires were completed just prior to placement but still had issues to be resolved. Some assessments were thorough and there were examples of good and sound practice to promote safe placements.

However, there was evidence that the assessments are undertaken in a timely way with little delay in the process. Applicants are kept informed and given the reason if an assessment is taking longer than expected.

There was little clear written evidence of how a family is chosen for a particular child, either in the files inspected or in the reports presented to panel. Having spoken to the staff involved, it is clear that they do take this process seriously but there must be written evidence of how the match is made, so that a child in future years knows why a particular family was chosen for them. This will

also assist in identifying needs, strengths and weaknesses, to inform an adoption support plan. Currently the adoption support plans presented to the adoption panel are very sparse and need to include the support needs of the child, the adopters and the birth family.

There is good information sharing with adopters, which is supported by some excellent foster carers. Adopters have the opportunity to meet social workers, foster carers, the medical adviser, go to the child's school, and talk to nursery staff as well as seeing written information about the child. Adopters also prepare family books about themselves and those shared with the inspectors were of a very good quality and age appropriate for the child.

One concern which was highlighted was the sharing of children's information before an adopter was approved or before the agency decision had been made. Whilst appreciating the good intentions behind this practice (which was said to be rare), this must not happen in future.

There were some instances of introductions of children to adopters taking place with undue haste, for example, the process being speeded up when things were going well and in another case, taking place over one weekend with little access to professional involvement. The agency needs to ensure this does not happen and that introductions take place in a planned and measured way with the professionals owning and having responsibility for the process.

The adoption panel has appropriate and up to date policies and procedures. Prospective adopters are invited to attend for approval and adopters can also attend for matches. Generally adopters spoken with felt they were made welcome, although it is clearly daunting.

The adoption panel is properly constituted. The panel has a good mix of experience, including adoptive parents and adopted adults and there was evidence of regular training, including training on overseas adoption and the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Training takes place with agency staff on some occasions. New members observe a panel and have an induction, but the recording of this on their files could be improved. All panel members have signed confidentiality agreements and have an up to date CRB check.

It is recommended that the use of 2 Councillors on the panel be reviewed, as the Adoption Agency Regulations only require 1 elected member. One of the social work members on the County panel is an adoption manager and it is felt by the inspectors that this does not give sufficient objectivity and independence to the role.

Generally panel members appear to be committed and well informed but more training could be provided, both to social workers and panel members on the value of having a diverse range of adopters, including single applicants and same sex couples, as it is clear from interviews and observation that some

people struggle with this issue and do not see it as a positive and appropriate choice for some children.

The adoption panel is well organised and held on a regular basis, with no evidence of delays to adopters or children. Panel members receive the papers a week in advance. The minutes are adequate but need to be reorganised, so that the panel discussion is clearly detailed to convey the content and outcome of the matters presented. The capacity in which panel members appear should also be detailed, and this information should appear on each individual minute, which is placed on file.

The agency decision is made in a timely way, and is given due seriousness and is child focussed. The agency decision maker receives the papers in advance, any issues are highlighted by the panel adviser and she reads the draft minutes. She then signs the decision sheet within the timescales. The decision sheet is confusing and does not make clear that it is a two part process. The adopters are notified of the decision in writing, but the pro-forma for this needs revising, as the decision maker does not "ratify" the recommendation, the pro-forma is signed by the team manager who inserts the names of the people concerned. This does not give due weight to the importance of the decision. No notifications to birth parents were seen on any of the files inspected, including adoption files which were about to be archived.

The nominated manager is an appropriate person to manage the agency and the personnel file gives evidence of an enhanced CRB check and references.

Likewise, the agency uses appropriate recruitment and selection processes to employ its staff. Social workers are qualified, have appropriate training, knowledge and skills and other staff are supervised and supported by qualified social workers

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

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

6,18

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The flexible arrangements for support and advice to adoptive families is pivotal in promoting and maintaining secure placements.

EVIDENCE:

These comments relate to all three Authorities.

The adoption agency provides good and flexible support to placements both pre and post order. The preparation training and post approval day give some assistance in enabling adopters to know what issues they are likely to face, opportunities to meet the adoption support team and further training can also be accessed to reinforce this learning. The adoption link worker is usually involved up to an adoption order being made, but at the request of an adopter, this was extended to meet her preferred wish for support, showing that adopters are listened to, heard and the service flexible enough to respond.

The adoption support team was developed 4 years ago and has been increased in the last 2 years and now consists of 2 full time social workers and 2 support workers, one of whom is full time and the other who works about 20 hours. The workers in the team, although employed by 2 local authorities, work across both and include Rutland in the service it provides.

The amount and variety of work they undertake is impressive, given the small number of workers in the team. Consideration may have to be given to increasing the size of the team to cope with increasing demands, in order to continue to offer the service at the same level. They undertake social events, run activity groups for young people, support groups for adopters, pre school groups for adopters and children, a group for teenage girls, provide direct work with families and signpost and liaise with other agencies to obtain appropriate support. They also buy into Adoption UK's "A Piece of Cake" training and

“buddying” scheme and adopters can access other training on attachment, run by an independent, registered counsellor.

The adoption support assessments viewed were timely, comprehensive and clearly shared with the adopters.

Two families receiving adoption support were visited. One of the workers was described as “brilliant” and “very good at giving me positive feedback”. He had “nothing but praise for what (the social worker) has done but would like there to be more of it”. One family said they rang the adoption team and they made an urgent referral and a worker became involved straight away. The adoption service also has access to the Placement Support Team and fund one post in this team. This is a team of workers with a good skill mix, whose remit is to undertake crisis intervention. This is an invaluable resource which can give immediate and intensive support and offer a service appropriate to the need e.g. babysitting, supporting bed time routines, behaviour management, direct work and respite care (taking children out or looking after them in their home). It is available to all three authorities although it is a City team and is available pre and post adoption order.

Families spoken with were aware of the importance of information about the birth family and the involvement of birth parents in the preparation groups reinforces this.

The adoption agency has access to a number of specialist advisers. This includes the medical adviser to all 3 panels, the legal advisers to the panels and the CAMHS service. There is good evidence of interagency working to ensure that services can be accessed quickly and there are now 2 CAMHS posts specifically identified for adoptive children. There are also links to the Disabled Children’s Team as required. In relation to inter-country adoption, there is a worker in the team who has developed a specialism in this area and who can also access information and advice from the DfES, the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and the International Social Services (ISS) (UK).

Staff, both placing and adoption social workers, spoken with said that the medical and legal advisers were “accessible and approachable” and adopters confirmed that they had opportunity to speak with them and found this helpful. The panel chairs interviewed also felt the advice provided to the panel was good.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

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

7,8,9

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The efforts made to involve and support birth parents in the adoption process enables them to make a positive contribution towards their child's heritage and thus give good and accurate information to children about their history.

EVIDENCE:

These comments relate to all three Authorities.

There is evidence which confirms that the adoption agency takes the involvement of birth families very seriously and recognises their important contribution in maintaining a child's heritage.

The majority of the child placement reports inspected showed that birth parents' views, wishes and feelings were recorded, in some cases, by the parent themselves, with a lot of detail. In cases where this had not been done, the adoption panel (for all three authorities) raised this as an issue and asked for this to be added.

Since the last inspection, birth parents now have access to an independent service which offers counselling and support (Parents Independent Counselling Service, known as P.I.C.S). This is an independent group of counsellors with whom the agency has a service level agreement. At the time of writing this report, the status of these counsellors is being reviewed to ensure their use is compliant with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated Adoption Support Agencies Regulations 2005. As well as individual counselling, there is also a birth mothers' group and efforts are being made to establish a birth fathers' group, with a male counsellor/facilitator. Two of the workers employed to offer adoption support act as liaison points for this group. Although only 6

sessions are paid for as part of the service level agreement, staff confirmed that this can be flexible and increased where there is a clear need.

As part of the inspection, 3 birth parents were spoken with by an inspector, as were two of the independent counsellors. One birth mother had a very positive relationship with the child's social worker who had clearly explained things well and supported her – in fact she said: "she is absolutely fantastic". The social worker had discussed what sort of family she would like for her child and this was so accurate that the birth mum said: "if I could have picked (the named adopter) myself I would have done". She worked closely with the social worker on life story work and provided information and photographs for the life story book. She met the adopter prior to her child being placed and she was able to access counselling both before and after the court proceedings. The adopter also wrote a letter to her which she felt addressed a number of concerns and worries she held. Other people interviewed (adopters and social workers) provided evidence that efforts are made to obtain information from the child's birth family and items such as photographs, cards and wrist bands were seen.

There is a well established post box scheme which is administered by the adoption support team. They are able to offer support and advice in relation to writing letters and one of the independent counsellors commented that: "the social worker works very hard to maintain contacts". One suggestion to make the post box more robust would be to take a copy of everything before it is sent on. The team have also established a secure email post box to encourage and facilitate adopters in maintaining their agreements. There are approximately 10 direct contacts which have been reviewed and are managed by the adoption support team, who try to ensure the same worker is involved each time.

Two birth mothers give a talk to adoptive applicants on the preparation groups and this is invaluable in having a real impact on prospective adopters' attitudes towards maintaining contact and valuing the contribution of birth parents in a child's life. One adopter spoken with commented how powerful this was.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

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

1,3,14,16,17,20,21,22,23,25,26,27,28,29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The agency is well managed which enables staff to carry out the purposes of the agency efficiently and effectively and provide good outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

Most of this section relates to all 3 Authorities but information about the monitoring by the executive and the personnel and panel members' files has been recorded separately on the appropriate Authority's report.

The statement of purpose has been reviewed and provides a comprehensive piece of information about the adoption agency. Staff interviewed were aware of it and felt it gave an accurate reflection of the service.

The agency uses the BAAF Children's Guide to adoption. This is geared to the needs of older children and did not contain the information about the agency such as the complaints procedure and summary of the statement of purpose. A number of social workers have commented on this: "it feels too wordy and more suitable for older children". There is a version available on audio tape for younger children. It is accepted that the adoption team have a wide range of resources available to social workers to use to assist children to move on, and that they should have been given the complaints information on another occasion. However, the Guide now needs to include details of the support services for children (standard 1.4a) and further work should be undertaken to address how it can meet the different ages and abilities of children who are being placed for adoption.

The child protection procedure is in the process of being reviewed and the review must take into account the requirements of Regulation 9 of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003. This will make explicit that the procedures relate to children placed for adoption.

The agency's written information states that people will be welcomed without prejudice; however, some single adopters have expressed the view that the first approach to the service was off putting and there is only a small number of same sex couples approved to adopt. The written information is rather dated and includes a leaflet about childlessness, which is not necessarily appropriate, makes assumptions and is rather negative. It is recommended that this information be reviewed and that the complaints procedure is sent to prospective applicants at this stage, rather than with the application form, as they may wish to complain if they do not get to that stage.

Applicants are able to talk to adopters at the preparation group and at the information evening and all valued this opportunity.

The service is very clear about the types of children needing adoptive families and this is communicated to applicants. Only applicants who will meet the needs of children waiting are assessed and the reasons for this approach are made very clear.

The agency is well managed. There are clear roles and responsibilities and staff interviewed were clear about whom to go to for advice and guidance. The managers of the service are skilled, knowledgeable and appropriately qualified and communication is effective, despite the joint working arrangements across 3 local authorities.

The lead member for children and young people was interviewed. There are good monitoring systems in place to keep the Council informed of the work of the adoption agency. He meets regularly with the Director and Assistant Director and also has dialogue with his 2 colleagues who sit on the adoption panel. He has observed a panel and receives regular reports. He believes firmly in providing a good quality service and feels the regular reporting and constructive questioning keep him informed.

Monitoring systems within the agency appear to be less effective, as some of the issues highlighted by the inspection should have been picked up and dealt with either by the team managers or panel advisers, as part of their quality assurance role.

The joint arrangement appears to work well and enables staff to work efficiently and effectively across the 3 authorities, according to the fluctuating demands of the job. Staff can prioritise assessments if necessary and adopters did not report delays in their assessments. Staff confirmed that they received regular and useful supervision from their managers. They also felt they were enabled to undertake appropriate training. They have an annual appraisal where training needs are identified, all staff had training in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and there is a good in-house programme although adoption staff can also access external, more specialist courses.

Administrative staff felt they were overstretched but another person has been appointed to a vacancy so that may help. They felt the telephone system did not assist them get on with their work without interruption. Placing social workers commented that the adoption clerk was "absolutely fabulous".

All tasks other than birth records counselling appear to be carried out efficiently and without delay, but there is a six month wait for birth records counselling, so more staff are needed for that function. The adoption support function is also likely to grow so staffing levels for this should be monitored and reviewed.

Staff felt that Leicestershire County Council was a fair and competent employer, with good employment practices.

Some staff were very clear about setting up a child's adoption file and there was a written policy with respect to this. However, the children's adoption files inspected, including those which were about to be archived, did not contain all the relevant information so this needs to be clarified, reviewed, implemented

and monitored, to ensure staff are aware of the purpose of a child's adoption file and comply with the agency's policy.

Each prospective and approved adoptive family has a file but these would benefit from better organisation and structure. Although there is a file audit system in place, the files inspected did not appear to have been audited regularly and systematically. Records are typed and legible and there is evidence of supervisors' decisions on case files. All records are stored securely in lockable cabinets in lockable rooms.

The archives are well organised, well managed, safe and secure, with risk assessments in place and a good system for access.

The staff personnel files are appropriately maintained. The records on panel members need further work. There should be a file for each panel member and they need to include more detail, for example, full name, home address, date of birth, evidence of qualifications, CV, references, and when the panel member had an induction and observed panel.

The agency is located in a very central location in the city centre of Leicester and is accessible and a very visible presence. Appropriate security for the premises and records is in place and there is a disaster recovery plan.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
6	4
18	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD13	AA Regs 2005 19 and 33	The agency must ensure that there are written notifications to birth parents and that these are on the child's file.	31/12/06
2	AD1	LAA Regs 2003 Reg 3	The Children's Guide must contain a summary of the statement of purpose and the complaints procedure, include details of the support services to children and be suitable for a range of ages and abilities.	31/12/06
3	AD1	LAA Regs 2003 Reg 9	The child protection procedures must comply with Regulation 9 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.	31/12/06
4	AD21	LAA Regs 2003 Reg 10	The agency must ensure there is sufficient staff to meet their statutory responsibilities in a timely way.	31/12/06
5	AD25	AA Regs 2005 Reg 12	The agency must ensure that children's adoption files comply fully with the regulations.	31/12/06
6	AD28	LAA Regs 2003 Reg 11	The agency must ensure that panel members' files contain all the information detailed in Schedule 3 and 4.	31/12/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD4	The adoption agency should ensure that there is consistent practice in assessments of adopters and that appropriate checks, such as previous local authorities, checks when applicants have lived abroad, former partners, long standing referees, are carried out in all cases, or reasons given, and an assessment made, if this is not possible.
2	AD4	Health and safety questionnaires should be extended, implemented at an appropriate time and pet questionnaires should receive independent scrutiny.
3	AD5	There should be clear written evidence of how a match is made, including needs, strengths and vulnerabilities, and these should inform a more robust support plan.
4	AD5	Information about children should not be shared with applicants before they are formally approved adopters, following the agency decision.
5	AD5	The agency should ensure that plans for introductions take place at a planned and measured pace and are not speeded up because things are going well and there is pressure to do so.
6	AD11	The agency should review the use of 2 elected members and the adoption manager as a member of panel.
7	AD11	Social work staff and panel members should receive training on the positive choice a diverse range of adopters can bring to the placement of children.
8	AD12	The panel minutes should state the capacity in which members appear, this should be detailed on each panel minute and the discussion should be detailed before the recommendation and reasons.
9	AD13	The written notification to adopters should be reviewed to give more weight to its importance i.e. signed by the decision maker and a more individualised letter, not a pro forma.
10	AD8	The agency should keep a copy of all the contacts which are made through the post box scheme.
11	AD3	The agency should review and update the information sent to enquirers and include the complaints procedure at this stage.

12	AD27	The agency should ensure the file audit system is implemented effectively.
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