



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**Rochdale Metropolitan Borough  
Council Adoption Service**

Foxholes House

Foxholes Road

Rochdale

OL12 0ED

7th July 2004

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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

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

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

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

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

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

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

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

**ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Name of Local Authority**

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

**Headquarters Address**

Foxholes House, Foxholes Road, Rochdale, OL12 0ED

**Adoption Service Manager**

**Tel No:**

01706 710750

**Address**

Foxholes House, Foxholes Road, Rochdale, OL12 0ED

**Fax No:**

01706 865386

**Email Address**

**Certificate number of this adoption service**

**Date of last inspection**

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

|  |          |                                     |                |
|--|----------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>  |          | 7th July 2004                       | <b>ID Code</b> |
| <b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>  |          | 10:00 am                            |                |
| <b>Name of Inspector</b>   | <b>1</b> | Jayne Ivory                         | 098916         |
| <b>Name of Inspector</b>   | <b>2</b> | Maureen Moore                       |                |
| <b>Name of Inspector</b>   | <b>3</b> |                                     |                |
| <b>Name of Inspector</b>   | <b>4</b> |                                     |                |
| <b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b><br>Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process. |          | None available for this inspection. |                |
| <b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>  |          | Not required.                       |                |
| <b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>  |          | Steven Garner                       |                |

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council offers a full range of adoption services as part of an integrated Children, Schools and Families Service. The Provider Service Manager for Children's Services had managerial responsibility at the time of this inspection. The Provider Manager was directly responsible to the Head of Service for Child Care, who was also the nominated agency decision maker.

Rochdale employed an independent chairperson to chair the combined Fostering and Adoption Panel.

The Family Placement Team had recently been restructured into two separate adoption and fostering teams.

At the time of the inspection the adoption team manager post had been vacant for 10 months. The inspection found that the team had experienced a number of staffing problems over the past year. Acute staff shortages had impacted upon the ability of the team to assess and approve adopters within the recommended timescales.

The inspectors found that although Rochdale Adoption Service has some significant challenges to meet National Minimum Standards and Adoption Agency Regulations that the skill of adoption social work staff and the managers of the adoption service have resulted in high numbers of children being matched. Rochdale has the potential to offer an excellent service to children and adults who require their service.

Rochdale provides the following adoption services for children and adults:

- To match and place children with adopters who can best meet their assessed needs throughout childhood and beyond once adoption has been identified as being in their best interests.
- To prepare children prior to introduction and placement with adopters in an age appropriate way whilst ensuring that the child's own history is understood and preserved.
- To recruit, prepare, assess and approve adoptive applicants who can meet the needs of children needing adoption both locally via the Greater Manchester Consortium and nationally. This includes the recruitment of adopters for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

- To provide a range of adoption support services, either directly or through contractual arrangements with other agencies for adopted children and their families. This includes financial support where appropriate.
- To offer a range of services and information to birth parents in order to make effective plans for their children, where adoption has been identified as being in the best interests of their child.
- To work in partnership with other agencies to offer a service to adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas.



## PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

### INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

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

This was the first time that Rochdale MBC's Adoption Service had been inspected against Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards. The inspection confirmed that Rochdale offers a good service to children. The authority has offered a diminished service to prospective adopters and adopters, but has the potential to improve. At the time of the inspection the service was prioritising the recruitment of an adoption team manager and was seeking to develop post adoption support services.

#### **Statement of Purpose 1**

**One standard was assessed. This standard was assessed as not met.**

The service must develop a Children's Guide, which meets the needs of all children who have a plan for adoption including younger children and children with a disability. The service should ensure that the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide is circulated to all stakeholders; including child-care social workers, adopters and children who have been or who are about to be adopted and other agencies that Rochdale has a professional relationship with.

#### **Securing and Promoting Children's Welfare 2**

**One standard was assessed. This standard was assessed as not being met.**

The service had lost some key members of the fostering and adoption service within the last year and this had had a significant impact on the service's ability to recruit adopters. The adoption service had prioritised the needs of children waiting for adoption by accessing placements from other local authorities within the consortium, or had purchased voluntary agency adoption placements. The service had invested in the appointment of a recruitment and marketing officer who was beginning to make an impact on the public profile of the adoption service. The inspector would like to keep Rochdale's recruitment strategy under review. The inspector considers that the agency must develop more effective systems for tracking children who have a plan for adoption to identify progress in their case. Further to this the service should review and revise existing policies and procedures around the matching process to ensure consistency in practice and expectations between the child care and adoption social workers.

## **Prospective and Approved Adopters**

### **Standard 3-6**

**All four standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the four standards two were assessed as nearly met and one was assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards. Standard 4 was assessed as not met.**

The case tracking and returned questionnaires confirmed that the service provided a very good and fast initial response from enquirers.

Adopters comments about their first contact with the service included the following; “ The Duty Social Worker was helpful and informative”, and “Our first call to the team was very helpful and informed us about the next stages.”

The inspection found that the service would benefit if they developed a clearer system for prioritising applicants who could offer a placement for a child waiting for adoption. This “fast tracking” of some applicants should form part of the service’s overall recruitment strategy and could be integrated with the adoption tracking information that the service is developing. The service commissions Nugent Care Society to assess families who wish to adopt a child from overseas.

Given some of the challenges the team has faced in the last year the staff should be commended for keeping adopters informed about delays in their assessments. A number of adopters interviewed may have been disappointed about the length of time it had taken to progress their assessments, but all of them had been informed in writing about the difficult staffing situation and all of them had understood the reasons for the delays.

Rochdale has an excellent information exchange scheme.

The team has developed some good practice in supporting adopters to make Family Books, which help provide a child with clear and accurate information about their new home.

All adopters confirmed that they had been offered support and advice when needed.

Rochdale has a good allowance scheme, which is well understood by social workers in the adoption and child-care service.

The service is aware of the need to develop post adoption support services and is considering developing jointly funded post adoption services with a neighbouring local authority and within the consortium.

## **Birth Parents and Birth Families**

### **Standards 7-9**

**All three standards were assessed as part of this inspection. All three standards were assessed as nearly met.**

The inspectors found that the service does have a strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families. However the strategy is not clearly understood throughout the service. A strategy should be developed to ensure that the uptake of support from After Adoption is increased, and that all birth parents and birth families are given the opportunity to access independent support and advice. The inspectors recommend that the strategy for working with birth parents and their families should include how Rochdale will develop and implement their own standards of practice of working with birth families across the service. The strategy could also outline the role of other agencies in the Borough in providing ongoing support to birth parents and birth families both before and after adoption.

## **Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions**

### **Standards 10-13**

**All four standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the four standards one was assessed as met, two were assessed as nearly met and one standard was**

**assessed as not met.**

The inspector found that Rochdale's Fostering and Adoption Panel is in urgent need of review. An internal review of the panel had just started at the time of the inspection and the CSCI would like to be informed of the outcome. Issues concerning the effective functioning of the adoption panel are referred to in greater depth in the main body of the report.

### **Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency Standards 14-15**

**Both standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Both standards were assessed as met.**

The inspectors found that despite the absence of an adoption team manager, that the service manager was managing the adoption service efficiently and effectively.

The head of childcare had the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and adoption law.

The senior managers of the service demonstrated that they had the management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and were endeavouring to ensure that the team continued to offer a professional service despite the staff vacancies that the team were carrying.

### **Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency Standards 16-18**

**All three standards were assessed as part of this inspection. The inspection found that one of the standards was not met, and two were nearly met.**

The inspectors were initially concerned about the functioning of the adoption service but found that given the context of major staff shortages, sickness and the external pressures on the adoption service that Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council had been managed effectively and efficiently.

The service has a number of challenges concerning the need for the service to review and update all adoption policies and procedures in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Agency Regulations. The amended policies and procedures need to be reflected in the revised Statement of Purpose. The adoption agency also needs to ensure that it is managed in accordance with the Statement of Purpose.

The inspection found that there were clear roles for managers and staff, despite some of the gaps, with well-established lines of communication and accountability.

Despite the evident skill and knowledge of the staff and service manager the inspection found evidence that the quality assurance of cases was absent.

The evidence of the management of assessments through the process of supervision was also missing. The appointment of a team manager and the development of quality assurance within the service will hopefully address some of these shortfalls.

The service was aware of the need to develop written procedures concerning the arrangements for making referrals to the Adoption Register for children and approved prospective adopters.

### **Employment and Management of Staff Standards 19-23**

**Five standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the five standards two were assessed as met, two were assessed as nearly met and one was assessed as not met.**

Case tracking and interviews with managers, staff and adopters as well as examination of relevant files and training materials confirmed that social workers within the service had the

appropriate knowledge and skills in relation to adoption work.

The inspection found that staff were managed and had managed well given the absence of a team manager, and other social work vacancies in the team.

The service manager and senior practitioners were managing and monitoring the service, however the service manager had a very wide span of responsibility, and there was some evidence that the senior practitioner was in effect quality assuring the work of their peers. The inspection found that it was difficult for the service to evidence that the adoption agency had systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff.

The service manager had ensured that professional supervision continued to take place, but both he and the staff he supervised acknowledged that despite his excellent management skills and professional support, that supervision did not focus on the quality assurance of cases and development of good practice.

The service should be commended for placing so many children when staffing was at such a critically low level during the past year. However the staffing situation had impacted on the recruitment and progression of adopters' assessments and approvals. Despite being well informed about delays due to staff shortages some adopters had found it very hard to wait.

**Standard 24 does not apply to Local Authorities and was not assessed as part of this inspection.**

## **Records**

### **Standard 25-28**

**Four standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Three standards were assessed as not met, and one standard was assessed as met.**

The inspectors found that the service has a policy of not creating a separate adoption file for the child. They consider that the service must set up and maintain a separate adoption file for the child from best interests in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Service Regulations (1983) amended 2003. The service must backdate and create a separate adoption file for all children with a best interests decision from April 2003 onwards. The inspection found that adopters' files would benefit from an enhanced tracking form which records the date of initial enquiry, the dates that statutory checks are sent and also records the outcome of the checks.

The adopters' files would also benefit from a chronology type front sheet, which would record all significant events and would be easily accessible to other members of staff.

The inspectors recommend that the adoption service must review and implement clear policies and procedures concerning the creation of adoption files, the contents of files and the storage of files in line with Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

The inspectors found that staff personnel files had substantial failings. The service must ensure that staff files comply with Schedule 3 and 4 of the Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards as part of the service's action plan. Staff appointed after April 2003 must have files, which contain all this information. The inspector recommends that panel members' files should be separated and that evidence of training attended for each panel member is stored on file in accordance with National Minimum Standards.

## **Fitness of Premises**

### **Standard 29**

**One standard was assessed as part of this inspection. This standard was assessed as not met.**

There are identifiable office premises to which staff and others with a legitimate interest have access during normal office hours.

Records are not stored securely enough, despite being in a secure building, and this is something that the service must address as part of their action plan.

The premises and contents of the building are not insured, but arrangements would be made to replace lost items.

The adoption agency has a partial Disaster Recovery Plan, but should ensure that existing adoption records are backed-up consistently as the current micro-fiching of records has been suspended until the more accessible digital imaging becomes available.

## Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

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

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

NA

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

NA

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

NA

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

NA

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

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

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

**If No please list below**

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

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

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

| No. | Regulation   | Standard * | Requirement   |         |
|-----|--|------------|---|---------|
| 1   | Regulation<br>3.2 b<br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 2003                                 | LA1        | Rochdale must produce a children's guide for every child, subject to their age and understanding, who may be or has been placed for adoption                        | 31.1.05 |
| 2   | Regulation<br>7.1 a and<br>b<br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 2003                        | LA2        | The agency must develop more effective systems for tracking children who have a plan for adoption to identify progress in their case and prevent unnecessary delay. | 31.1.05 |
| 3   | Regulation<br>8.2 b part<br>6 of<br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br>amended<br>2003 | LA4        | The service must ensure that a record of all status checks and their outcomes is kept on prospective adopters files.  | 31.1.05 |



|   |   |      |   |          |
|---|---|------|---|----------|
| 4 | Regulation<br>10.3 a and<br>b<br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br>Amended<br>2003 | LA10 | The service must ensure that in considering what recommendations to make that the Adoption Panel promotes the welfare of the child and requests any relevant information.   | 29.10.04 |
| 5 | Regulation<br>7.1 b<br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br>Amended<br>2003           | LA10 | Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council 's internal review of the adoption panel must be completed within the given timescale. The review must ensure and evidence the adoption panel's ability to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.   | 31.1.05  |
| 6 | Regulation<br>6.1<br><br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br><br>Amended<br>2003     | LA16 | The service must review and update all adoption policies and procedures in line with Adoption Agency Regulations.   | 31.5.05  |
| 7 | Regulation<br>14.2 and 4<br><br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br>Amended<br>2003  | LA25 | Rochdale must set up and maintain a separate adoption file for the child from best interests in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Service Regulations (1983) amended 2003. The service must backdate and create a separate adoption file for all children with a best interests decision from April 2003 onwards. | 31.1.05  |
| 8 | Regulation<br>14.2<br><br>Adoption<br>Agency<br>Regs 1983<br>amended<br>2003        | LA27 | The adoption service must review and implement clear policies and procedures concerning the creation of adoption files and the contents of files in line with National Minimum Standards and the Adoption Agency Regulations.   | 31.1.05  |

|    |  |          |  |         |
|----|--|----------|--|---------|
| 9  | Regulation 14.4 Adoption Agency Regs 1983 Amended 2003   | LA29LA27 | Rochdale must store adoption records in a place of special security, and as far as is possible minimise the risk to the records from fire and water.   | 31.1.05 |
| 10 | Regulation 11.1 a and b Adoption Agency Regulations 2003 | LA28     | The service must ensure that staff files comply with Schedule 3 and 4 of the Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards. Staff appointed after April 2003 must have files, which contain all this information. | 31.1.05 |

#### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

| No. | Refer to Standard * | Recommendation Action  |
|-----|---------------------|--|
| 1   | LA1                 | The service should ensure that the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide is circulated to all stakeholders; including child-care social workers, adopters and children who have been or who are about to be adopted and other agencies that Rochdale has a professional relationship with. |
| 2   | LA2                 | The service should develop effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of child waiting for adoption in the Rochdale.   |
| 3   | LA2                 | The service should demonstrate that they are reviewing and evaluating their recruitment strategy.  |
| 4   | LA3                 | The service should develop separate information packs for foster carers and adopters.  |
| 5   | LA3                 | The service should develop a system for prioritising applicants who could offer a placement for a "harder to place" child who may have been waiting.   |
| 6   | LA4                 | The service should develop and maintain links with ethnic minority communities in Rochdale to promote placement choice.  |

|    |      |   |
|----|------|---|
| 7  | LA5  | The service should develop and implement written policies and procedures concerning the matching process.   |
| 8  | LA5  | The service should develop written policies and procedures concerning the referral of approved adopters to the Adoption Register.   |
| 9  | LA7  | The service should ensure that all birth parents and birth families have the opportunity to receive independent support.  |
| 10 | LA7  | The service should provide additional training for staff in recording birth parents views as part of the Form E assessment.   |
| 11 | LA8  | The service should develop an overall adoption service strategy which addresses the need to maintain the child's heritage and which provides resources to enable life storybook work to be produced within the child's timescale. |
| 12 | LA9  | The service should develop a strategy to ensure that the uptake of support from After Adoption is increased, and that all birth parents and birth families are given the opportunity to access independent support and advice.    |
| 13 | LA10 | The existing policies and procedures should be amended to cover all aspects of the National Minimum Standards.  |
| 14 | LA10 | Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council should ensure that councillors are supported to attend and participate fully in the adoption panel.   |
| 15 | LA10 | The adequacy of administrative support for the adoption panel should be kept under review and should be increased if panel continues to operate every two weeks.  |
| 16 | LA10 | The service should consider the value of having a wider and more representative panel membership, including the involvement of frontline workers.   |
| 17 | LA11 | The service should develop a formal induction to the adoption panel for new panel members.  |
| 18 | LA12 | Child-care social workers may benefit from additional training in the role of the adoption panel under Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards.  |
| 19 | LA12 | The service may benefit from reviewing and revising current practice in care planning when concurrent planning may be being considered.   |

|    |      |  |
|----|------|--|
| 20 | LA16 | The service should develop written procedures concerning the arrangements for making referrals to the Adoption Register for children.  |
| 21 | LA17 | The service should develop written procedures, which are implemented, for the effective monitoring and controlling of the activity of the adoption service.  |
| 22 | LA18 | The adoption service should set out a written protocol governing the roles of specialist advisers.   |
| 23 | LA19 | The service should demonstrate how they will meet or exceed the recommendation that by April 2006 20% of the social workers in the adoption service should hold the ACCA.  |
| 24 | LA20 | The service should develop systems, which are implemented, to manage workloads and the quality assurance of individual cases.  |
| 25 | LA20 | The service should review and revise the current adoption information tracking form in line with National Adoption Standards   |
| 26 | LA23 | The service should ensure that all staff have annual appraisals and Personal Development Plans which link staff training needs to improved service delivery.   |
| 27 | LA25 | The service should review and revise the adoption tracking form to ensure that each file records the date of initial enquiry, the dates that statutory checks are sent for and the outcome of the checks.<br>The service should also develop a chronology type front sheet, which would record all significant events and would be easily accessible to other members of staff or the manager. |
| 28 | LA25 | The service should amend the existing standard reference request form to other agencies to prevent the disclosure of third party information.  |
| 29 | LA25 | The service should develop a system to ensure that decisions made by supervisors are recorded on case files and are legible, clearly expressed, signed and dated.  |
| 30 | LA27 | The service should develop a system which clearly records the status of prospective adopters files, including those adopters who have been counselled out, withdrawn or who have been refused.   |
| 31 | LA28 | Panel members' files should be separated into individual files. Evidence of training attended for each panel member should be stored on their individual file.   |
| 32 | LA29 | The service should ensure that it backs up all adoption records from April 2003.   |

|    |      |  |
|----|------|--|
| 33 | LA21 | Rochdale should ensure that there are a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the adoption service and should continue to make all efforts to recruit an adoption team manager. |
|----|------|--|

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

**PART B****INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Placing authority survey  | YES      |
| Placing social worker survey  | YES      |
| Prospective adopter survey  | YES      |
| Approved adopter survey   | YES      |
| Birth parent / birth family member survey   | YES      |
| Checks with other organisations and Individuals   |          |
| • Directors of Social services  | YES      |
| • Specialist advisor (s)  | YES      |
| Tracking Individual welfare arrangements  | YES      |
| • Interview with children   | YES      |
| • Interview with adopters and prospective adopters  | YES      |
| • Interview with birth parents  | YES      |
| • Interview with birth family members   | YES      |
| • Contact with supervising social workers   | YES      |
| • Examination of files  | YES      |
| Individual interview with manager   | YES      |
| Information from provider   | NA       |
| Individual interviews with key staff  | YES      |
| Group discussion with staff   | YES      |
| Interview with panel chair  | NO       |
| Observation of adoption panel   | YES      |
| Inspection of policy/practice documents   | YES      |
| Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)                                  | YES      |
| Date of Inspection  | 07/07/04 |
| Time of Inspection  | 0930     |
| Duration Of Inspection (hrs)  | 100      |
| Number of Inspector days  | 10       |
| Additional Inspection Questions:  |          |
| Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection   | NA       |
| The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection | NA       |
| Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)   | 4        |

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

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

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council has a Statement of Purpose that was reviewed on the 24 June 2004.

The inspector recommends that the Statement of Purpose should be developed to provide an accessible document that reflects the full range of adoption services that Rochdale provides. For the National Minimum Standards to be met the amended Statement of Purpose should be endorsed by the Quality Protects Forum.

Rochdale has purchased the BAAF Children's Guide to adoption and has started to circulate it.

The service must develop a Children's Guide, which meets the needs of all children who have a plan for adoption including younger children and children with a disability.

The service should ensure that the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide is circulated to all stakeholders: including child-care social workers, adopters and children who have been or who are about to be adopted and other agencies that Rochdale has a professional relationship with.

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

YES

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

NO

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

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

NO



## Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The inspection found evidence that the majority of social workers in adoption and child-care pay careful attention to finding the best available match for a child. The service had placed a large number of children for adoption and all staff confirmed that they had management support to access agency placements. Additional finances had been made available to support the use of agency placements.

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council has an adoption strategy that should be developed to include effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of child waiting for adoption in the borough. For example some older children may benefit from being placed locally. The service should also demonstrate that they are reviewing and evaluating their recruitment strategy.

The service had lost some key members of the fostering and adoption service within the last year and this had had a significant impact on the service's ability to recruit adopters.

The adoption service had prioritised the needs of children waiting for adoption by accessing placements from other local authorities within the consortium, or had purchased voluntary agency adoption placements.

The service had invested in the appointment of a recruitment and marketing officer who was beginning to make an impact on the public profile of the adoption service.

The inspector would like to keep Rochdale's recruitment strategy under review.

The inspector considers that the agency must develop more effective systems for tracking children who have a plan for adoption to identify progress in their case. Further to this the service should review and revise existing policies and procedures around the matching process to ensure consistency in practice and expectations between the child care and adoption social workers.

#### In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

34

How many children were matched with adopters?

20

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

3

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

17

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

0

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

100

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

100

%

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

1

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

0

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

27



## Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

**Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The inspectors found evidence that the service had already invested in a recruitment and marketing worker to raise the profile of the family placement service.

The inspectors saw large banners in the town centre and high quality eye-catching leaflets in public places in the town centre.

The managers were keen to develop a more distinct individual profile for the fostering and adoption services.

As part of this process the inspectors recommend that the service should develop separate information packs for foster carers and adopters.

The case tracking and returned questionnaires confirmed that the service provided a very good and fast initial response from enquirers.

Adopters comments about their first contact with the service included the following; “ The Duty Social Worker was helpful and informative”, and “Our first call to the team was very helpful and informed us about the next stages.”

The inspection found that the service would benefit if they developed a clear system for prioritising applicants who could offer a placement for a child waiting for adoption. This “fast tracking” of some applicants should form part of the service’s overall recruitment strategy and could be integrated with the adoption tracking information that the service is developing.

The service commissions Nugent Care Society to assess families who wish to adopt a child from overseas.

Approved and prospective adopters confirmed that they were given a great deal of information about preparation and support services available to them. The preparation training involves an opportunity for prospective adopters to talk to someone who has adopted children.

**Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)**

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

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

1

The service has a clearly set out preparation programme. The majority of adopters and prospective adopters gave the preparation programme very positive feedback. The preparation training is based upon BAAF's Preparing to Adopt. Rochdale has an arrangement with Oldham MBC to provide training groups on a reciprocal basis to allow for more groups to be run throughout the year. People interested in adopting a child from overseas would be offered the specialised training provided by the Nugent Care Society.

The inspectors found evidence that the service functions within the framework of equal-opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice, but that more needs to be done to reach out to prospective adopters from the ethnic minority communities in Rochdale. The inspection found that the effectiveness of preparation is evaluated after each session but that the service needs to formally review their own preparation every year to incorporate any improvements.

The inspection found evidence that applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way. The Form F assessments seen as part of this inspection were generally of a good quality but there were indications of some carelessness and lack of management oversight in the detail of the assessments. For example one Form F had several different spellings of the adopters surname, whilst another had not recorded the number of times the prospective adopters had been seen. The service must ensure that a record of all status checks and their outcomes is kept on file. Given some of the challenges the team has faced in the last year the staff should be commended for keeping adopters informed about delays in their assessments. A number of adopters interviewed may have been disappointed about the length of time it had taken to progress their assessments, but all of them had been informed in writing about the difficult staffing situation and all of them had understood the reasons for the delays.

**Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)**

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

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

2

The service is aware of the need to develop written policies and procedures concerning the matching process.

Rochdale will also be required to develop written policies and procedures concerning the referral of approved adopters to the Adoption Register.

Rochdale has an excellent information exchange scheme, which includes as part of the agreement and information stored on file the need for adopters to notify the agency about the death of the child or any medical information, which is relevant to the families involved.

The team has developed some good practice in supporting adopters to make Family Books, which help provide a child with clear and accurate information about their new home.

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

NO

**Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)**

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

**Key findings and evidence****Standard met?**

3

The inspection found evidence from a number of sources that the service supports adopters' to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Adopters were aware of the pressures that the adoption service was under, and were realistic about the levels of support available from the team when they were so short staffed. All adopters confirmed that they had been offered support and advice when needed.

Rochdale has a good allowance scheme, which is well understood by social workers in the adoption and child-care service.

The service is aware of the need to develop post adoption support services and is considering developing jointly funded post adoption services with a neighbouring local authority.

The service had also recently created an adoption support social worker post. They had not recruited into this post at the time of the inspection.

**Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months**

16

**Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months**

2

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

3

**Number of adopters approved but not matched**

2

**Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register**

3

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

1

## Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence  | Standard met? | 2 |
|--|---------------|---|
| <p>The inspectors found some evidence that birth parents and birth of families are involved in adoption plans. It was also evident that some social workers had been unable to engage with birth parents and their families and that awareness of the independent social work support provided by After Adoption was not as well developed as it could be. The childcare social work service may benefit from additional training in recording birth parents' views about adoption and contact as part of the Form E assessment of the child's needs. The inspectors found evidence of inconsistent practice concerning the involvement of birth parents and birth families during the inspection. One agency that had had a Rochdale child placed with them complimented the social worker on the quality of the Form E. The inspectors found evidence of Forms E that were not of a high standard during the inspection.</p> |               |   |

### Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence  | Standard met? | 2 |
|--|---------------|---|
| <p>The inspectors found that Rochdale have an excellent Letterbox scheme which has recently been enhanced by an increase in administrative support. The Letterbox scheme does allow birth parents and birth families to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage. There was substantial evidence in the inspection that the Letterbox is well understood and integrated into practice and that birth families are aware of the scheme and its significance to them and their child. The inspection found evidence of some delays in life-story bookwork during the inspection. The inspectors recommend that the service should develop an overall adoption service strategy which addresses the need to maintain the child's heritage and which provides resources to enable life story book work to be produced within the child's timescale. As one social worker said in the inspection, "we should start recording the child's life story from the point of first enquiry." The service had recognised that some staff needed training in undertaking life storybook work.</p> |               |   |

**Standard 9 (9.1)**

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

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

2

As has already been mentioned the service does have a strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families. However the strategy is not clearly understood throughout the service. A strategy should be developed to ensure that the uptake of support from After Adoption is increased, and that all birth parents and birth families are given the opportunity to access independent support and advice. The inspectors recommend that the strategy for working with birth parents and their families should include how Rochdale will develop and implement their own standards of practice of working with birth families across the service. The strategy could also outline the role of other agencies in the Borough in providing ongoing support to birth parents and birth families both before and after adoption.



## Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence   | Standard met? | 1 |
|---|---------------|---|
| <p>Rochdale's Adoption panel is shared with the fostering panel and takes place twice a month. An Independent Chairperson with a great deal of experience in adoption and fostering matters, chairs the adoption panel.</p> <p>The Adoption Panel does have good policies and procedures, which support the functioning of the panel. However the existing policies and procedures should be amended to cover all aspects of the National Minimum Standards, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rules and practical arrangements for ensuring the panel is quorate</li> <li>• Clearer guidance concerning decision making when panel members are not in agreement</li> <li>• The need for panel to promote good practice and consistency of approach and fairness in assessing cases</li> <li>• And for panel to receive progress reports on individual cases</li> </ul> <p>The inspector had some concerns about the panel observed as part of this inspection. Staff members said that they had difficulties in getting a time slot on panel, despite the fact that the joint Adoption and Fostering Panel meets every fortnight.</p> <p>The inspection found evidence that the panel administrator works hard and provides excellent support to the functioning of the panel, The panel administrator seemed, in the opinion of the inspector, to have a great deal of responsibility for ensuring that the panel was quorate. There was evidence from staff interviews and from minutes of previous panel meetings that panel had struggled to be quorate. Whilst this is often an issue during holiday times the Rochdale panel appeared to have some members who found their commitment to the panel too onerous. This had left the panel without a quorum on two occasions throughout the previous year.</p> <p>The service had recognised that the joint panel needed to be reviewed. The inspector supports the service's decision to review the panel and requires that the existing panel membership, role and function is amended to include the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many agencies the panel administrator does that job without any additional responsibilities. The inspector appreciates that the service had recently reviewed and increased administrative support to relieve some of the other responsibilities from the panel administrator. But the adequacy of administrative support for the adoption panel should be kept under review and should be increased if panel continues to operate every two weeks.</li> <li>• The Vice Chair took responsibility for chairing the panel observed by the inspector.</li> </ul> | 1             |   |

This was due to the planned absence of the Independent Chair. During the panel there was one serious issue that was, in the inspectors opinion, misjudged by panel. Panel made a positive recommendation on a match, subject to another local authorities panel decision to re-approve the adopters. The Vice Chair clearly struggled to resolve this case. However in accepting the verbal presentations of the child care and link social worker the panel failed to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child by ensuring that panel had all the information about a new and partially assessed situation.

- It is the inspector's view that Rochdale Adoption Panel should have made the decision to defer the match independently.

The adoption panel must first and foremost promote and safeguard the welfare of children. Even if this means there is further delay until additional information and assessments can be completed to ensure that the match in question was still the best available for the child.

- The panel seemed to be over represented by Team Managers from children's services. The inspector recommends that the agency consider the value of having a wider and more representative panel membership, including the involvement of frontline workers.
- The panel invites prospective adopters to attend the meeting. Adopters attending the panel were given the opportunity to be heard in a sensitive manner. As an area of good practice the inspector recommends that more could be done to prepare and support prospective adopters who want to attend the adoption panel by preparing an information leaflet and or poster about panel members.
- The inspector was concerned that the elected council member who attended panel was clearly pressed for time. The inspector advises that Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council should ensure that councillors are supported to attend and participate fully in panel. The Adoption Agency Regulations outline the need for an elected member on panel given their significance as corporate parents to all the children who have a plan for adoption in Rochdale.

The inspector requires that Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council 's internal review of the functioning of panel takes place within a given timescale and that the subsequent enhancement of the adoption panel's performance will be monitored by the CSCI.

**Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)**

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

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

2

The service, as has already been stated, works hard to ensure that the panel is properly constituted. Panel members' files demonstrated that adoption panel members have knowledge and expertise.

The medical and legal adviser support the functioning of panel and are available to offer advice and assistance to social workers and prospective approved adopters.

The adoption panel have had access to half-day training, However panel members should have training in the implications of inter-country adoption and should also have the opportunity to attend joint annual training with the adoption agency's staff.

The inspector found evidence that new panel members are invited to observe adoption panel before taking up their role.

New panel members had also been supported to attend consortium training for panel members. The inspector recommends that this training should form part of a formal induction to the adoption panel, which should be developed in accordance with National Minimum Standards.

Copies of the completed induction should then be kept on panel members' individual files.

**Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?**

NO

**Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?**

YES

**Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)**

**Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.**

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

2

As has already been stated the inspectors found a mixed picture concerning the efficiency of the adoption panel. The panel administrator was knowledgeable and ensured that panel members received information one week before each meeting. Panel minutes were written, amended and distributed quickly with the business for the following panel.

The inspector found that the minutes of the panel were comprehensive, accurate and informative about panel's discussions and the recommendations made.

The panel had some flexibility in ensuring that urgent items received priority, however as has already been stated some social workers expressed concern about the availability of panel time.

Some of the pressures on the adoption panel and on the service as a whole were as a result of concurrent planning. The inspector appreciates that care planning is a very dynamic process and is subject to other external factors when a child's case is going through legal proceedings. However the inspectors did find some evidence of cases where the need to seek a best interest decision was a little premature.

The service may benefit from reviewing current practice in care planning when concurrent planning may be being considered. Any review of practice would have to take into account National Adoption Standards and be compliant with court timescales.

The inspectors found evidence from the wider service of a lack of knowledge about the role and significance of the adoption panel. Child-care social workers may benefit from additional training in the role of the adoption panel under Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

**Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)**

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

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

3

The inspectors found evidence that the agency decision was made without delay, taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and the welfare and safety of the child.

The inspector was reassured that the agency decision maker had referred the item concerning a match back to the adoption panel for further information.

The agency decision maker gets a copy of the draft minutes and meets with the panel chair on the morning after the panel meeting to go through the business.

The agency decision is communicated in writing within 7 days of panel meeting.

## Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

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

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors found that despite the absence of an adoption team manager, that the service manager was managing the adoption service efficiently and effectively. The head of childcare had the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and adoption law. The senior managers of the service demonstrated that they had the management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and were endeavouring to ensure that the team continued to offer a professional service despite the lack of a team manager.

The service was anxious to recruit an experienced and skilled team manager. The manager of provider services has the Certificate in Management Studies and the service needs to be mindful that any team manager appointed will have to hold the NVQ level 4 in management or equivalent, or be supported to commence the NVQ level 4 within six months of their appointment.

Staff within the agency confirmed that the service manager was supportive and exercised effective leadership of the staff and operation despite having a wide area of responsibility for all children's provider services within the borough.

The managers within the service had clear written job descriptions, which set out their duties, responsibilities and levels of delegation. Managers interviewed as part of this inspection were clear about their levels of responsibility and accountability within the service.

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

NO

Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?

YES

**Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The inspection found evidence that the service manager was a suitable person to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.  
The service manager had a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau check.

## Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The inspectors were initially concerned about the functioning of the adoption service but found that given the context of major staff shortages, sickness and the external pressures on the adoption service that Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council had been managed effectively and efficiently.

In the absence of a team manager the service had created senior practitioner posts within the team. Senior managers within the service provided evidence of their need to develop contingency plans if the latest recruitment for a team manager was not successful.

The service has a number of challenges concerning the need for the service to review and update all adoption policies and procedures in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Agency Regulations. The amended policies and procedures need to be reflected in the revised Statement of Purpose. The adoption agency also needs to ensure that it is managed in accordance with the Statement of Purpose.

The inspection found that there were clear roles for managers and staff, despite some of the gaps, with well-established lines of communication and accountability.

The service did have systems to ensure that staff who work with children and adults involved in adoption take into account and respect all aspects of their race, culture, religion, language, sexuality, gender and disability. However despite the evident skill and knowledge of the staff and service manager the inspection found evidence that the quality assurance of cases was absent. The evidence of the management of assessments through the process of supervision was also missing. The appointment of a team manager and the development of quality assurance within the service will hopefully address some of these shortfalls.

The service was aware of the need to develop written procedures concerning the arrangements for making referrals to the Adoption Register for children and approved prospective adopters.

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

3

**Number of the above complaints which were substantiated**

3

**Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)**  
**There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>2</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

The service has established reporting systems on national performance indicators and had recently implemented an Adoption Tracking reporting system.  
 The service recognised that they needed to improve the quality of information gathered for reporting and to develop written procedures, which are implemented for the effective monitoring and controlling of the activity of the adoption service.  
 The Head of Child Care reported to the Quality Protects Forum in the council about the service's performance in general, and the adoption service specifically every quarter. The performance of the adoption service was seen as an integral part of children's services.  
 The Executive Member and portfolio holder for the service expressed a clear intention to enhance existing reporting structures within the service.  
 The service is clear about allowances paid and provides clear information and case specific advice to purchasers of services and others with a legitimate interest.

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

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| <b>Monthly?</b>             |     |
| <b>Quarterly?</b>           | YES |
| <b>Less than Quarterly?</b> |     |

**Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)**  
**The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>2</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

The adoption service has access to good specialist advisors and services. The medical advisor is available to offer advice to the fostering and adoption panel. The legal advisor ensures that panel members receive up to date information on adoption issues.  
 The service has access to other sources of specialist advice, however there are no written policies and procedures for staff to follow. It is recommended that this be corrected.  
 The adoption service should set out a written protocol governing the roles of specialist advisers.



## Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

All social workers are professionally qualified. Although with one exception there was no evidence on personnel files of qualifications. (This issue is dealt with in standard 28)  
One of the social workers holds the ACCA, whilst another is currently studying for the qualification. By April 2006 20% of the social workers should hold the full ACCA and the service should demonstrate how they will meet or exceed this Standard in the Action Plan.

From discussion with managers, staff and adopters as well as examination of relevant files and training materials, social workers were seen to have appropriate knowledge and skills in relation to adoption work. Given the staff shortages that had hit the team it is positive to note that social workers have still been supported to attend a range of training events relevant to their current roles and responsibilities.

The inspection found that staff had access to appropriately qualified and experienced advisors as necessary.

The service commissions another agency to deliver Section 51 counselling on its behalf and therefore does not provide specific training for staff in this area.

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

YES

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

25

%

**Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)****Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The inspection found that staff were managed and had managed well given the absence of a team manager, and other social work vacancies in the team.

The service manager and senior practitioner were managing and monitoring the service, however the service manager had a very wide span of responsibility, and the senior practitioners were quality assuring the work of peers.

The inspection found that it was difficult for the service to evidence that the adoption agency had systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff.

The service manager had ensured that professional supervision continued to take place, but both he and the staff he supervised acknowledged that despite his excellent management skills and professional support, that supervision did not focus on the quality assurance of cases and development of good practice.

The inspection found little evidence that there were consistent systems for ensuring that assessments and approvals of prospective adopters were managed and implemented effectively.

The need to manage workloads and develop systems, which support the effective and efficient operation of the adoption service, should be addressed as part of the service's action plan.

It was clear from case tracking and returned questionnaires that approved and prospective adopters were pleased about the fast and positive response they had received from the service when they had made their first contact.

The inspection found that the service had recently increased the administrative support to the team. The senior administrator and panel administrator were positive about the additional post. The inspector considers that if the service does become fully staffed that the adequacy of administrative support should be kept under review and increased if deemed necessary.

The inspectors were impressed by the knowledge and commitment demonstrated by the administrative staff in the service.

The inspectors recommend that the service should review and revise the current adoption information tracking form in line with National Adoption Standards.

**Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)**  
**There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>2</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

The service should be commended for placing so many children when staffing was at such a critically low level during the past year. However the staffing situation had impacted on the recruitment and progression of adopters' assessments and approvals. Despite being well informed about delays due to staff shortages some adopters had found it very hard to wait for two years to get through the approval process.

The delay has been heightened for some adopters who have attended preparation groups in a neighbouring local authority and who had been told that their assessments would be starting three months before the prospective adopters in Rochdale.

There was also evidence of support to adopters being compromised by the shortage of staff. The service had struggled to recruit a manager despite changing the post from a family placement team manager to an adoption team manager. The service manager advised that Rochdale were on the second contingency for recruiting a team manager.

The inspectors would like to be kept informed about the recent recruitment for an adoption team manager.

If Rochdale has not been successful at recruiting a team manager the inspector wishes to be informed of the service's next contingency in providing for professional experience and support to staff. The service also needs a team manager to support the operational and strategic development the adoption service.

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Total number of social work staff of the adoption service</b>   | 4 | <b>Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months</b> | 1 |
| <b>Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.</b> | 1 |   |   |

**Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)**  
**The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>3</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council has sound employment practices. Staffs had been given information on the whistle blowing policy, and were aware of how to implement the policy if required.

The inspectors were advised that the service has adequate public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

|   |                      |   |
|---|----------------------|---|
| <b>Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)</b>  |                      |   |
| There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.  |                      |   |
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>  | <b>Standard met?</b> | 2 |
| <p>As has already been stated the service has a good quality-training programme for staff members.</p> <p>The service has a service specific Induction Programme for new staff, in line with TOPSS Induction Standards.</p> <p>The service should ensure that all staff have annual appraisals and Personal Development Plans which link staff training needs to improved service delivery.</p> |                      |   |

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

|  |                      |   |
|--|----------------------|---|
| <b>Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)</b>   |                      |   |
| The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.   |                      |   |
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>   | <b>Standard met?</b> | 1 |
| <p>The service has a policy of not creating a separate adoption file for the child. The Inspectors consider that the service must set up and maintain a separate adoption file for the child from best interests in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Service Regulations (1983) amended 2003. The service must backdate and create a separate adoption file for all children with a best interests decision from April 2003 onwards.</p> <p>The inspection found that adopters' files would benefit from an enhanced tracking form which records the date of initial enquiry, the dates that statutory checks are sent and also records the outcome of the checks.</p> <p>The adopters' files would also benefit from a chronology type front sheet, which would record all significant events and would be easily accessible to other members of staff.</p> <p>The inspectors found evidence that the service sends out a standard reference request form to all agencies. This request contains details of the prospective personal referee's names and addresses and as such represents third party information. This form should be revised as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>The service should also develop a system to ensure that decisions made by supervisors are recorded on case files and are legible, clearly expressed, signed and dated.</p> |                      |   |

**Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)**  
**The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>3</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

The adoption service provides relevant information to other adoption agencies at the earliest, appropriate opportunity.  
 Rochdale has a clear and well-understood system for authorising access to adoption case records and their indexes and for authorising disclosure of adoption information in line with Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards.

**Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)**  
**There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.**

|                                  |                      |          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b>Key Findings and Evidence</b> | <b>Standard met?</b> | <b>1</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------|

Rochdale had issued staff with guidance on good recording. The inspectors recommend that the adoption service must review and implement clear policies and procedures concerning the creation of adoption files, the contents of files and the storage of files.  
 The inspection found that complaints are stored separately, but that the records of adopters who were counselled out, refused or who had withdrawn were not recorded in a way which made it clear what the status of their applications were. This is something the service must address.  
 The adoption records were stored in the building. Records were not stored in fire- proof cabinets. The floor in Foxholes House could not support the weight of fire- proof cabinets. Although most records were kept in lockable rooms, and in locked cabinets, some adoption records had to be kept in a staff meeting room that was open to other staff in the building. The current storage arrangements for adoption records do not meet the regulations and National Minimum Standards.  
 Rochdale should make all efforts to store adoption records in a secure, fire and waterproof setting. This area must be addressed as part of the service’s action plan.

**Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)**

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

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

1

The inspectors found that staff personnel files had substantial failings. The service must ensure that staff files comply with Schedule 3 and 4 of the Adoption Agency Regulations and National Minimum Standards as part of the service's action plan. Staff appointed after April 2003 must have personnel files, which contain all this information.

The service must also ensure that third party information is not stored on individual personnel files. For example the inspection found evidence of generic e-mails concerning the outcome of several staff members' Criminal Records Bureau checks on individual files. The inspection found that files for panel members contained all Criminal Records Bureau checks and that a system had been set up to ensure Criminal Records Bureau checks were renewed every three years. The inspector recommends that panel members' files should be separated and that evidence of training attended for each panel member is stored on file in accordance with National Minimum Standards.

## Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 1 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|
|---------------------------|---------------|---|

There are identifiable office premises to which staff and others with a legitimate interest have access during normal office hours.

Records are not stored securely enough, despite being in a secure building, and this is something that the service must address as part of their action plan.

The premises and contents of the building are not insured, but arrangements would be made to replace lost items.

The adoption agency has a partial Disaster Recovery Plan, but should ensure that existing adoption records are backed-up consistently as the current micro-fiching of records has been suspended until the more accessible digital imaging becomes available.

The adoption service must ensure that all adoption records are safeguarded in accordance with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Agency Regulations.

The requirement for adoption records to be stored in a place of special security has been referred to in Standard 27 of this report.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_



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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Amendments to the report were necessary  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comments were received from the provider   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26<sup>TH</sup> August 2004 , which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Action plan was required   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Action plan was received at the point of publication                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provider has declined to provide an action plan  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other: <enter details here>  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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