



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

London Borough of Islington Adoption Service

**Children and Families, Adoption Service
12 Highbury Crescent
London
N5 1RN**

Lead Inspector
Sue Nott

Announced Inspection
15th November 2005 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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.

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	London Borough of Islington Adoption Service
Address	Children and Families, Adoption Service 12 Highbury Crescent London N5 1RN
Telephone number	020 7527 4400
Fax number	020 7527 4401
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Islington Social Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Lindsay Wright
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection N/A

Brief Description of the Service:

The adoption service is based within the Children and Families Service division, for the London Borough of Islington, and has offices at Highbury Crescent. The agency provides a comprehensive adoption service which includes: placing children in need of adoptive families; recruiting, preparing, and assessing adoptive families; providing assessments for post adoption support to adoptive children and families; counselling and support to birth parents and families; and assistance and counselling to adopted adults who wish to see their birth records. Intermediary services in indirect and direct contact arrangements are also provided.

Islington has a contract with Norwood Adoption agency to carry out inter country assessments on their behalf, as well as a contract with Coram Family, to run a concurrency project on their behalf for very young children.

The manager of the adoption service also has responsibility for the permanent fostering service provided in the borough for children under 14. Islington has a high number of Looked After Children, of which 20% are unaccompanied minors for whom adoption is not an option. However, the number of children placed for adoption has still, until recently, been relatively small. A high proportion of children have been permanently placed with their foster carers, and interagency placements are used on a regular basis. The number of approved Islington adopters who were not previously foster carers is small. The agency has established partnerships with other services to provide consultancy and support services.

SUMMARY

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

This is the first inspection of the adoption service provided by the London Borough of Islington under the National Minimum Standards. Two inspectors spent three and a half days in the agency and interviewed child care and adoption social workers, adoption support workers, managers and administrative staff. The panel chair, the agency decision maker, two elected members, plus four sets of adopters were also interviewed. The panel was observed by the lead inspector on a separate day. Supporting documents were provided by the agency, and read by the lead inspector prior to, and during, the inspection fieldwork, and a selection of files, including personnel and panel member files, adopter's and children's files were read during the course of the inspection. Questionnaires were received from eleven prospective and approved adopters, seven placing social workers, one birth family, and the medical, legal and panel advisers.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation during the inspection and the hard work they put into organising both the pre-inspection material and the inspection programme, which demonstrated a commitment to the inspection process.

What the service does well:

The strategic and operational management of the service ensured that adoption was now being given a higher profile, and that workers had a clearer sense of the priorities of the service. There was a developing culture of encouraging improvements in the adoption service delivery, and managers and staff were responding proactively where shortfalls had already been identified.

There were now effective systems for information management, with systems for tracking the progress of children, and which identified reasons for delay. The system for tracking the progress of adopters was not as well developed.

Strategies to recruit adoptive families were developing well, with a good range of publicity materials, and a dedicated campaign manager. The agency was welcoming to prospective adopters, and staff were particularly aware of the need to reduce delay in approving families. A number of adopters felt they had undergone a thorough assessment and felt they had a good experience and commented favourably about staff with which they had had contact. Comments included: "One to one preparation was very good"; "We are very satisfied with the services provided".

Adopters generally felt the assessment process itself was good, but this was let down by delays at different stages, including delays in the allocation of a social worker in some cases, and delays in identifying suitable children following approval. "The preparation group and assessment were positive experiences, but were followed by a long delay in identifying a child for placement".

The service endeavoured to place children with the most appropriate adopters, and make good matches, with careful consideration of the cultural, religious and ethnic needs of the children. However, a number of cases were seen where it had taken too long to find a family, and permanency plans had changed in response to the attachments that had been made with foster carers. The tracking systems now in place should help to ensure that children should not wait an unnecessarily long time to achieve a suitable match.

An adoption support team had been established to undertake long-term work with adopters and their families where needed. Individual packages of support were also negotiated with other professionals where necessary. Adopters were aware of the support available, and one commented: "we have received an excellent support package with my eldest child, and felt the service was absolutely there for me and her. They are supportive and approachable and always willing to bring in other support where necessary".

The agency placed emphasis on providing good legal and medical advice, although it was noted that there had been some inconsistency in the legal service offered due to changes in personnel.

The adoption panel had a consistent and thorough approach to its role in monitoring the quality of assessments, and considering appropriate matches. The agency decision maker operates within good timescales. He meets with the agency adviser, and there is opportunity to pick up on relevant departmental issues when making his decision.

The agency has experienced managers, capable of providing good leadership, support and communication. Supervision sessions were regular, and staff confirmed that managers were approachable and supportive. They valued their knowledge and skills, although felt pressure of work impacted at times on their availability. Social workers were enthusiastic but their experience, knowledge and skills were variable; a placing social worker commented: "The workers in the adoption service have shown that they are knowledgeable, and have been very helpful", but an adopter said "the adoption social worker was very inefficient and seemed unsure of the procedure".

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of this service relating to the National Minimum Standards.

What they could do better:

The agency was aware that it needed to attract more families who can match the needs of the children in the borough requiring adoptive families, particularly for children of black and dual heritage backgrounds, as well as for boys and older children with complex needs. Draft recruitment plans to broaden the range of adopters for the children who need families should continue to be developed and extended. Responses received from any adoption publicity should be monitored to inform future practice.

The agency had also identified that it needed to improve the quality and consistency of its services to birth families. The extent to which efforts were made to engage birth families in the adoption planning process for their children was variable. Their involvement in information giving about their own and their child's history needs to be evidenced in the paperwork provided to panel.

The quality of direct work being carried out with children moving towards an adoptive placement also needed improvement. There were examples of good work, but this was not consistent. A number of the Child Care Planning teams had suffered considerable staff turnover, and some staff would benefit from a better understanding of attachment issues in the assessment of a child's present and future needs. Whilst some social workers demonstrated skill and understanding of the adoption process, others lacked knowledge and familiarity with the tasks to be completed. Specialist training opportunities for them in this area need to be ongoing.

Also child protection training in relation to children placed for adoption should be included in the borough's training programme, and covered by clear policies alongside the general framework provided by the London Child Protection procedures.

There had been delays in the allocation of assessments of adopters in the year preceding this inspection. A number of the questionnaires received from adopters expressed frustration about the delays and the process. "We were very disappointed with the service we received from the adoption team"; "the social worker was slow to return calls, was always changing appointment times, and was not an easy person to talk to"; "we were very disappointed by the experience as it was a huge event in our lives". The communication at both the post approval stage for those not quickly matched with a child had also not always been as reliable as should be expected.

Managers should monitor individual assessments to ensure an equal and consistent service for all users. Gay and lesbian applicants commented that whilst they accepted that the needs of children were central to the assessment process, they had experienced what they felt was an over zealous approach to

their assessments, and were concerned that they were treated differently to other applicants.

The adoption team aimed to work closely with the child care social workers. However, there was evidence that communication and working relationships across the teams was extremely variable. Placing social workers commented on an emphasis in achieving targets, and felt some adoption assessments were inadequate and rushed. Adopters commented that there was "poor communication between the adoption team and field social workers" and "There was a lack of communication and regular update".

Islington's adoption support service was still in the process of developing. Multi-disciplinary support systems provided with the local CAMHS service were still in the early stages, and it will be important that this service has expertise in the special needs of all the parties involved in the adoption process.

Record keeping in some areas needs improving. The system was carrying out CRB checks, logging details and ensuring the outcome is filed appropriately must be improved.

The files of staff, sessional workers and panel members must have all the necessary information as detailed in the regulations. The computerised index of archived records should be completed, and records stored appropriately.

The adoption service was supported by a dedicated administrative staff who worked hard, but the volume of work and changes of social work staff impacted on their ability to carry out all the tasks necessary. Adopters found the administration particularly frustrating "The administration of the team is shocking"; "The social worker had poor administrative skills".

Underlining all areas needing improvement were the need for:

A stable, suitably experienced staff group for those workers dealing with permanency planning for children;

Improvement in communication between teams;

Ongoing training on the adoption process to all staff groups whilst a more stable staff is sought.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

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

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- 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 and 19

The agency has developed its service and systems to aid more timely and effective planning for children. It prepares some adopters well to meet the needs of children placed for adoption, and to ensure appropriate placements are made and maintained, but the quality and delivery of the service is inconsistent.

EVIDENCE:

Although the numbers of children placed for adoption in Islington was improving, staff were aware that their recruitment strategy needed to be developed further to meet the needs of all the children in the borough needing adoptive placements. Many of the recent adoption placements made had been with current carers, where due to delay in progressing plans, strong attachments had already been made. Steps have been taken to introduce a more rigorous monitoring system to reduce delay for the children needed permanent families.

Islington was a member of the North London Adoption Consortium, which was said to be working well, and was a good source of families, shared resources and training events. A joint recruitment website was being explored.

A concurrency project operated with Coram Adoption Service, and was well thought of by placing social workers. It is recommended that referrals for this

project are monitored via the adoption team manager, so that there is a closer overview of the work being carried out.

The quality of Form E's seen was very variable, and included some very poor examples, which were lacking in accuracy and chronological accounts of information. Ensuring a consistency in the quality of the reports produced is essential in ensuring clear and accurate information is available for the child in the future. Training in writing and understanding the purpose of the new Child Placement Forms should be provided in the annual training programme on a regular basis, particularly while there continues to be a high turnover of staff.

Islington has a recruitment campaign manager, who has since March 2005 focused only on adoption. She has a good knowledge of appropriate strategies, and has reviewed all the adoption teams relevant publicity. Material seen was of a good standard. Systems were not yet in place to record information on where a particular child was advertised, and the responses received. She plans to evaluate future enquiries to inform practice.

The team runs information meetings to link in with three planned sets of preparation groups a year. It is recommended that the number of information meetings is increased.

Feedback received from adopters through questionnaires and interviews regarding the preparation groups was generally positive. The content of the groups was regularly reviewed.

Assessments were generally thorough, and a number of good quality Form F's were seen, which were analytical, competency based and clearly summed up applicants strengths, and issues of concerns. A good range of references were taken up. However, it was not clear whether all ex partners were approached, regardless of whether there were children of the relationship or not. Some adopters reported considerable delay in the assessment process, and felt that their satisfaction with the process had been let down by poor administration, and lack of management oversight in remedying this. Comments included "We were very disappointed by the experience as it was a huge event in our lives", "We had to chase a lot", and "Our adoption social worker was very inefficient and seemed unsure of the procedure". The system for tracking adopters progress was not yet as well developed as that now operating for children.

Although staff felt they had been successful in recruiting gay and lesbian adopters, feedback received was less than positive. Some applicants commented that whilst they accepted that the needs of children were central to the assessment process, they felt they had experienced an over zealous approach to their assessments, and were concerned that they were treated differently to other applicants. It is recommended that workers attend training on diversity issues, particularly on working with gay and lesbian carers, and

that managers monitor individual assessments to ensure an equal and consistent service for all users.

Evidence of up to date CRB's were missing on some files, particularly where the adopter had previously been the child's foster carer. The CRB system must be reviewed to ensure it links more effectively and efficiently with the system for foster carers, and that information is recorded in the appropriate file. The Health and Safety check form also needs to be updated to include firearms.

A number of good matching reports were seen, which were thorough and detailed. Adopters were given relevant information about the child being considered for matching, but with a constantly changing staff group, there is a danger of valuable information being lost. Life appreciation days should be considered as a means to ensure all available information is shared and recorded. However, on the whole, there was evidence of a suitable matching process taking place for children and adopters.

The permanence panel was held every two weeks. The membership met the regulations, and had an experienced, independent chair. The panel observed showed a committed and interested group, who took their responsibilities seriously. The panel was efficiently chaired, was alert to safe caring issues and provided sufficient time for thorough discussion. There was good feedback from adopters regarding their attendance at panel. Quality assurance issues on work presented were taken up by the panel, and fed back to the agency and decision maker via the panel adviser and a feedback sheet completed by the panel chair. There were appropriate policies and procedures concerning panel. An induction programme was provided for new panel members, and an appraisal system was in the process of being introduced. Annual panel training had taken place. Some social workers said that they found panel intimidating, and unrealistic about the level of information requested, but they also noted recent efforts by panel to commend good work. Managers should ensure that they support new and inexperienced workers in attending panel. Panel feedback forms were given to social workers attending panel.

The decision maker met with the panel adviser within two or three days of any panel recommendations being made to talk through the issues involved. The panel papers were available for these meetings, but the decision maker did not see the minutes. This will change with the new legislation and guidance. There was evidence on files that decisions were made and letters confirming these decisions were sent out within the required seven days. There was also evidence that panel made clear statements of their view to the agency on issues of importance, such as twin tracking and therapy. New systems were in place to ensure that cases were not booked into panel unless the paperwork was completed, although court timetables sometimes over ruled these procedures. There was a process for monitoring the timescales of cases being presented to panel. In addition, there was a system for cases to be brought

back to panel, as a further monitoring tool, to ensure plans for children were being appropriately progressed. However, although the agency's policy states that disruption meetings would be held, and taken back to panel for discussion, no cases had been discussed in recent years.

There was a good awareness, understanding and knowledge of cultural and religious issues amongst staff, which were appropriately addressed in practice, policy and procedures.

The manager was suitably experienced and qualified, and was in the process of completing a management qualification.

Telephone enquiries to verify references were being carried out for new staff.

There was evidence that not all panel members had up to date CRB checks. The agency must also ensure that all relevant checks have been carried out on agency, sessional, and contractual staff.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

6 and 18

The adoption agency is actively developing a more cohesive approach to a range of support services for adoptive parents within the borough to ensure appropriate placements are made and maintained. Staff and adopters have access to specialist advisers, which enable the provision of services to meet the needs of the children and their adoptive families.

EVIDENCE:

The agency is undertaking a review of its present adoption support services. Managers were aware that take up of future services could be high, and there would be a need to monitor the take up against their capacity to provide services. The development of the agency's adoption support services is still in its early stages. The adoption support team is small, but includes a part time family therapist. She has helped to improve links with the local CAMHS service, and monthly consultations with them were now available. The development of a buddy scheme for adopters with Adoption UK is also being considered, and the agency has also recently rejoined the Post Adoption Centre to widen its access to a range of services for adopters. There are plans to provide a programme of post approval training with other members of the consortium. Only a limited amount of training has so far been provided

The agency has also referred families to Family Futures for consultation and intervention. In addition, they have a service agreement with Coram Family, who operate Islington's concurrency project, and who will offer consultancy on specific cases. The manager also has the flexibility within budgetary restrictions to spot purchase extra services as necessary. It is recommended that all services purchased should be regularly evaluated to ensure best value.

Some post adoption cases are being picked up by front line services, and there is a need to ensure these are dealt with appropriately by staff who understand issues specific to adoption.

There was positive feedback from adopters and staff on the quality of medical advice available to adopters. However, the consistency of legal advice was said by staff to be more variable, although it was seen as a positive step that one person within the legal team had now been identified to oversee adoption matters in the department.

Some adopters and staff commented that accessing appropriate educational services had in some cases been problematic. Communication and joint working relations should be developed between the relevant services.

The adoption support team operate a letterbox service, provide Section 51 counselling, and manage all contact agreement arrangements. The team operate their own duty service.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

7,8,and 9

Although there was a clear commitment to providing services that enabled birth families to contribute to their children's futures, a more consistent approach to practice needed to be established.

EVIDENCE:

Unfortunately no birth family members were interviewed, and no birth family questionnaires were returned.

The turn over of staff in the department had had an impact on service delivery in some cases, and consequently, in maintaining ongoing working relationships with birth families. There was little evidence of a proactive approach to engaging birth families in the adoption process, and improvement was needed in involving birth families in gathering information for the child. The quality of life story work was found to be very variable, although one child care planning team was said to be particularly interested in this work, and had recently run a workshop for other teams. Sessions were also included in the annual training programme. There was evidence that foster carers were being left to carry out this role in a number of cases without appropriate support and training. Some workers struggled to prioritise the importance of gathering information about the child within the competing demands of their role.

No leaflets giving information for birth parents were available at the time of inspection, but new copies were in the process of being produced. Child care staff complained that leaflets regarding adoption were generally kept with the adoption team, and were not easily accessible for them. This should be rectified.

The panel checked that Form E's had been signed, and that counselling had been offered. There was a good system for tracing birth parents.

A help line, called Family Talk, was established in May 2005 for birth families offering independent advice, counselling and support through After Adoption, and arranged via the Consortium. Take up data was not yet available.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

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

Clear improvements had been made in the operation of management information systems to help in reducing delay for children needing adoptive families. However, there were areas of practice, organisation and management that were impacting on the agency's efficiency in ensuring that good outcomes for children were achieved in a timely manner.

EVIDENCE:

There is a Statement of Purpose that covers all areas required, with the attached appendix. It is recommended that the address for CSCI offices in Manchester, which deals with the inspection of adoption agencies, is included.

A Children's Guide has been produced in two different picture formats for different ages, although the level of information provided is exactly the same for each age group. The guides do not include details on how to make a complaint, how to contact the Children's Rights Director or the Commission, or how to access an independent advocate. Copies of the BAAF guide were also to be given to the children, and a LAC handbook was in the process of being produced which also did not include details of the Commission.

Policies and procedures were in the process of being updated in light of the imminent changes in legislation. Adoption support policies had already been completed.

Suitable information about the adoption process was provided for prospective adopters, and questionnaires received confirmed this. Second time adopters commented on how the information had been improved since their first application to the department.

The manager was suitably experienced and qualified. She was studying for a management qualification, and hoped to complete her diploma course in May 2006. There was evidence that the manager was at times overwhelmed by the volume of work involved in providing and developing this busy service. The adoption service had grown rapidly over recent years, and the management structure within the service had developed on an "ad hoc" basis to keep up with the growth in the number of staff. It is recommended that the structure of teams both within adoption and child care planning is reviewed to ensure they provide the best service possible in achieving good outcomes for children requiring a permanent family. Clear guidelines are needed regarding who deputises for the manager in her absence, in light of the expansion of the team.

The authority has had difficulty in retaining a suitably skilled stable staff group over recent years, and this has had an impact on the quality of work in all areas of service delivery. The ratio of agency workers was high, although there was more stability at management level. Executive members were very aware of the problems around staff recruitment and retention, and were working on various initiatives to improve this area. There was an active and interested corporate parenting group.

Senior management have operated a "command and control" method of management until recently, but a more consensual style of management is now being initiated.

A tracking system for monitoring children's progress through the adoption process had been in place since August 2004, but the main elements of the

system had only been operating since May 2005. There was evidence that cases were now being appropriately monitored, with monthly meetings chaired by the Assistant Director with senior management oversight of where delays in cases were happening. The numbers of LAC had fallen over the past year. A similar system to track the progress of prospective adopters was being developed, but was not yet fully operational.

Staff commented that that they received regular supervision, both formal and informal. Staff in the adoption team felt they worked in a supportive setting where they valued sharing ideas and skills with colleagues. New workers felt they had been protected, and staff commented that there had been a noticeable improvement in induction and supervision of new staff during 2005. However, some staff in the child care teams were confused as to whether a workload management system operated within their teams or not. This situation should be clarified for all workers.

The number of workers in the adoption service with PQ qualifications was small, and needed to be improved. Staffing levels impacted on training opportunities for ongoing courses. Staff were positive, however, about the range of internal short courses on offer.

It is recommended that team days are programmed at least annually so staff can share ideas, feel involved in future initiatives, and discuss practice issues, and implications of changes in legislation. More opportunities through joint training events to improve communication between child care teams and adoption workers should be planned.

The agency had all relevant staffing policies, although not all staff were aware of the Whistle blowing policy. Managers were said to be flexible to the child care needs of staff, and there were good schemes to help working parents. The number of agency staff employed by the department created some tension between staff regarding salaries and conditions of service.

Those case records examined were on the whole well organised and structured. There was evidence of audits taking place, although evidence of supervisor's decisions being recorded was more limited. Most ongoing recording and reports were signed and dated. As discussed earlier, there was a lack of evidence of CRB checks on some files although staff confirmed that they had been obtained.

Staff files held most of the information required. CRB checks are kept separately. However, there were gaps in panel member files. All files must be checked to ensure they meet the necessary requirements.

The adoption archives are located in council premises in a basement beneath a block of flats on a housing estate. The building is staffed during office hours, and is linked to a security system during the evenings and weekends. Records are kept in filing cabinets, in a locked room. There are fire alarms fitted.

However, a full risk assessment must be carried out to ensure the premises have satisfactory protection against fire and water damage, vandalism and criminal damage. The filing system was not in order, and required manual searches to locate individual records not yet indexed. Resources should be provided to ensure this system is operating efficiently as soon as possible.

Those complaints seen were dealt with appropriately, but in questionnaires adopters indicated that they were unsure of the process, and had not been given relevant information when making their application. This should be rectified.

There had been an improvement in the working environment for the adoption team, and office premises had recently been renovated, and were considered fit for purpose. There was no wheelchair access above ground floor. All adoption staff had their own desk and computer, although a system of hot desking had been instigated for child care teams. Adoption team members did not yet have access to the Swift IT system in operation. It was planned to progress this in 2006, and a consultant was working with staff on the implementation and application to best suit their needs. The IT system had an appropriate back up system in place.

A Disaster Recovery Plan had not been completed at the time of the inspection.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
3	2
14	2
16	2
17	2
20	1
21	2
22	3
23	2
25	3
26	2
27	3
28	2
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	AD2	AAR 7(2)(b)	The agency must ensure consistency and accuracy in the quality of the reports produced. This is essential in ensuring clear and accurate information is available for the child in the future.	01/04/06
2	AD3	LAASR 15(1)	The system for taking up CRB checks in the agency must be reviewed to ensure it links more effectively and efficiently with the system for foster carers, and that information is recorded in the appropriate file.	01/04/06
3	AD11	LAASR 2003 15(1)	The agency must ensure that all panel members have up to date CRB checks.	01/05/06
4	AD19	LAASR03,6&11 Sch3&4	The agency must ensure that it obtains information required in schedules 3 and 4 for all staff working for the purpose of the adoption service, including all sessional staff, and that this is maintained on the individual's personnel file.	01/05/06

5	AD29	AAR83&Misc Amends97	A full risk assessment must be carried out to ensure the premises have satisfactory protection against fire and water damage, vandalism and criminal damage. A Disaster Recovery plan must also be completed.	01/05/06
---	------	---------------------	---	----------

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	AD1	The Children's Guide must include all details listed in Schedule 2.
2	AD2	It is recommended that referrals to the concurrency project operated with Coram Adoption Service are monitored via the adoption team manager, so that there is a closer overview of the work being carried out.
3	AD2	Systems should be developed to record information on the responses received on specific advertising to inform future practice.
4	AD3	It is recommended that the number of information meetings are increased.
5	AD4	It is recommended that all workers attend training on diversity issues, particularly on working with gay and lesbian carers, and that managers monitor individual assessments to ensure an equal and consistent service for all users.
6	AD8	Training in writing and understanding the purpose of the new Child Placement Forms should be provided in the annual training programme on a regular basis, particularly while there continues to be a high turnover of staff.
7	AD4	Procedures regarding references should provide clarification on whether all ex partners are approached, regardless of whether there were children of the relationship or not.
8	AD4	The Health and Safety check form should be updated to include firearms.
9	AD5	Life appreciation days should be considered as a means to ensure all available information on children is shared and recorded.

10	AD6	Disruption meetings should be held within designated timescales, and cases taken back to panel for discussion.
11	AD17	It is recommended that all adoption support services purchased should be regularly evaluated to ensure best value.
12	AD6	The agency should ensure that all post adoption cases are dealt with appropriately by staff who understand issues specific to adoption.
13	AD2	All child care and adoption staff should be encouraged to attend up to date training on life story work.
14	AD6	Communication and joint working relations with education should be improved to aid quicker access to relevant services for children placed for adoption.
15	AD20	Leaflets regarding adoption should be easily accessible for all child care staff.
16	AD1	The Statement of Purpose should include the address for CSCI offices in Manchester, which deals with the inspection of adoption agencies.
17	AD20	It is recommended that the structure of teams both within adoption and child care planning are reviewed to ensure they provide the best service possible in achieving good outcomes for children requiring a permanent family.
18	AD16	Clear arrangements and guidelines are in place to identify the person in charge when the manager is absent.
19	AD20	Clarification should be provided for all workers on the situation regarding workload management systems and their operation.
20	AD23	It is recommended that time is made available for team days so staff can share ideas, feel involved in future initiatives, and discuss practice issues, and the implications of changes in legislation.
21	AD23	More opportunities through joint training events to improve communication between child care teams and adoption workers should be planned.
22	AD22	All staff should be made were aware of the department's Whistle blowing policy.
23	AD26	Resources should be provided to ensure the filing system for the archives is completed and operating efficiently as soon as possible.
24	AD24	Adopters should be given the relevant information on how to make a complaint during the early stages of the process

Commission for Social Care Inspection

North West Regional Office

11th Floor

West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI