



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

### **St Francis` Children`s Society**

**Collis House  
48 Newport Road  
Woolstone  
Milton Keynes  
MK15 0AA**

*Lead Inspector*  
Rosie Dancer

*Announced Inspection*  
27th November 2006      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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://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](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	St Francis` Children`s Society
<b>Address</b>	Collis House 48 Newport Road Woolstone Milton Keynes MK15 0AA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 572700
<b>Fax number</b>	01908 572701
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@sfcs.org.uk
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	St Francis` Children`s Society
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Christine Smith
<b>Type of registration</b>	Voluntary Adoption Agency

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

1. The category of registration is:- Domestic Adoption Services only (DA)

**Date of last inspection**            Last key inspection 25/06/2003  
Last random inspection 12/07/2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

St Francis' Children's Society (SFCS) is the registered voluntary adoption agency of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton. SFCS is based on the outskirts of Milton Keynes. The agency operates over a large area, including the counties of Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and the Unitary Authorities of Milton Keynes, Luton and Slough. The agency is not registered to undertake inter-country adoption work.

The majority of the work SFCS undertakes is recruiting, preparing and supporting adoptive parents for children of all ages. While the agency has a specific focus on recruiting catholic families for catholic children this is not in any way exclusive. The agency also welcomes families from any and no faith, and from all cultures in order to provide for children with diverse needs. Due to the Catholic ethos SFCS cannot accept applications from same sex couples but does offer advice to enquirers who are in a same sex relationship about Adoption Agencies in the area that could progress their application.

The children placed with SFCS adopters are in the main referred from local authorities from anywhere in the country. The age range of children placed is from birth to teenagers and may be a single child or a sibling group.

SFCS has developed Anancy Black Families Initiative aimed at meeting the needs of a range of black minority groups and works to raise awareness of adoption and children's needs within the black communities.

SFCS provides an independent counselling and support service to birth relatives where children are being, or have been removed through the care system and placed for adoption. SFCS has service level agreements to provide such a service to residents of Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire.

The agency is a founder member of the Northamptonshire Post Adoption Forum, which is a multidisciplinary consortium of agencies and individuals working to promote quality for adoption services, and the Buckinghamshire Adoption support Forum.

Overall, the agency places a high priority on delivering a comprehensive range of good quality support services to adoptive families, children and young people and birth families.

# SUMMARY

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

This is the second key inspection of the adoption service provided by St Francis Children's Society. Prior to the inspection fieldwork taking place supporting documentary evidence, including policies and procedures, were sent to and read by the lead inspector. Questionnaires were received from 2 birth family members, 7 approved adopters, 7 placing authorities, and 3 specialist advisers.

Two inspectors spent three working days each in the agency. The inspection activity included:

- Interviews with 4 birth parents
- An interview with a young adopted person
- Interviews with 6 sets of adopters, some of these families were receiving an adoption support service.
- Interview with the Chair of the Trustees and the Responsible Person
- Interview with the Director of the Adoption Services (Registered manager)
- Interview with the Director of Business Administration
- Interview with the Operational Manager
- A range of interviews with the social work staff as a group and with social workers who had specific responsibility for the various aspects of the service
- An interview with the Administrative staff
- An interview with the Marketing and Fundraising Officer
- The panel was observed and the chairperson was interviewed by a third inspector prior to the main fieldwork activity
- A selection of files were read during the course of the inspection.
- The premises were also inspected.

The views of adopters expressed though questionnaires and verbally are incorporated into the main body of this report.

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

## **What the service does well:**

The agency has good effective recruitment strategies and is able to provide appropriate families for children who need an adoptive home.

Social workers in the adoption team offer a professional service to prospective adopters. The majority of prospective adopters praised their individual workers. One stated:

- "Our social worker is absolutely excellent and thanks to her we have been perfectly matched with our beautiful daughter."

The careful matching processes ensure that appropriate placements are made and maintained

The adoption support service is well-established and provides an excellent standard of support pre and post adoption. One adopter of a large sibling group stated:

- "We received excellent support leading up to placement and post placement"

There is a good range of specialist advice available for parents and children.

All adopters asked if they would recommend SFCS to anyone wishing to adopt said that they would.

The service to birth parents is well established and is of an excellent quality. Birth parents stated that the service was invaluable to them. One birth parent said:

- "Excellent service" and went on to say "they do not patronise or judge you....they help you and listen to what you say."

SFCS is seen by staff as being a very good employer and staff reported that they have good access to training, supervision and support.

The agency is well managed at all levels.



## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The agency had developed personal specifications, job descriptions and conditions of service for sessional workers.

The agency had amended the complaints procedures to include details about making a complaint about the manager or registered provider and a specific procedure for children has been developed. Staff have been trained in the arrangements for dealing with complaints.

Staff files evidenced a clear and robust recruitment procedure had taken place in each case.

The agency had developed a system for notifying relevant agencies in the event of a significant event; this is in line with schedule 4 of the regulations.

The agency had finalised the children's guide and this was routinely being given to children.

The agency had addressed issues identified during the first inspection about the content and recording of staff supervision. The role of the supervision of a number of social work staff has been moved to a supervising senior practitioner. This has meant the operational manager has been freed up to undertake other management tasks.

## **What they could do better:**

The agency should expand the health and safety checklist to include an assessment of the risk of dangerous weapons and a section to record when any outstanding issues have been addressed. Prospective adopters employment histories should include full details of the months of employment as well as years to allow any gaps in employment to be identified and explored

Signed copies of agreements made by adopters in respect to child protection and behaviour management should be retained on the files.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval processes were overall of a good quality and achieved safe, secure and stable placements for children.

## EVIDENCE:

The agency has a clear written recruitment plan to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption on a national basis. SFCS are proactive in the recruitment of adopters and use a variety of strategies in order to generate interest about adoption within many communities.

Through the Anancy Black Families initiative the recruitment of adopters for black children continues to be successful and the agency is planning to extend the recruitment activity of this project into the Asian community to recruit adopters for children from an Asian background.

The recent appointment of a Marketing and Fundraising officer evidences the commitment of the service to maximising the choice of families for all children waiting for a placement. The post holder was interviewed during the course of the inspection and he was clearly very enthusiastic in his role and had a

number of new ideas for expanding the recruitment and fundraising activities of the society.

Prospective adopters are involved in a thorough formal and comprehensive preparation and assessment process. Enquirers are invited to attend an initial interview. This takes place at the society's offices and two social workers meet with the applicants. The practice of using 2 social workers to carry out these interviews allows a well considered decision to be made by the agency about the suitability or otherwise of the enquirers.

Attention needs to be paid at this early stage to ensure that the applicants' accommodation is adequate before a formal application is accepted. This is, as in one case the adopter's accommodation did not have a spare bedroom. The prospective adopters had formally applied to adopt and completed the preparation course before this was established. They then had to put their application on hold while their home was extended. This caused them some distress.

Enquirers who it seems have potential are invited to submit a formal application to adopt. A working agreement is drawn up which sets out clear expectations of the agency and the adopters. Statutory checks are undertaken and the prospective adopters are invited to attend a preparation course and commence the home study assessment.

The preparation sessions take place over 4 whole days and 2 evenings. Presenters on the course include social workers, past adopters, a birth parent and the Anancy worker is available to support black applicants. A comprehensive range of relevant topics are covered and safe and responsible parenting is central to both the preparation groups and the home study assessments.

The quality of the groups is evaluated at the end of each programme with adopters' views being a crucial part of the evaluation process. Managers are involved in the evaluation of information gathered and changes have been made in various aspects of the course. It would be good practice for a representative from the management team to gain first hand knowledge about the content and delivery of the information presented through occasionally observing the sessions. This has been suggested as three adopters said that one of role-play exercises had been of little use to them in the learning processes.

Overall adopters felt that the preparation groups had been of a good quality and most importantly had helped them develop the skills, knowledge and attitude required to successfully parent a child who may have complex needs and has not been born to them.

Comments from adopters about the preparation processes included:

- Preparation groups provided us with “excellent insight which changed some of our perceptions.”

And

- Preparation sessions were “Well prepared and informative.”

One adopter described how she had put into practice some of the strategies discussed during the sessions in respect to managing behaviour.

The home study assessments remain of a high standard. Assessment reports contain clear concise conclusions about the applicants’ capacity to parent a child from the care system through to adulthood and beyond. A small number of reports did not fully reflect analysis about some aspects of the adopters’ life experiences. However, the case recording on the relevant files showed that analysis had taken place.

In respect to the assessments the following issues should be addressed:

- The health and safety checklists would benefit from the addition of an assessment of the safe storage and use of dangerous weapons and the risk to small children hanging cords on window blinds could have. The checklists should include a section to record when outstanding issues have been addressed.
- All of the prospective adopters employment histories should include full details of the months of employment as well as years to allow any gaps in employment to be identified and explored

Each assessment is subject to a review/second opinion visit. This is good practice as it allows any gaps to be identified and any outstanding issues to be clarified.

Placing social workers comments about the quality of the assessments were positive. Comments such as:

- “The F (the assessment) described the adopters exactly as they were....the F focused on the strengths and how they (the adopters) would meet developmental needs.”

And

- “ F (the assessment) looked at the couples experiences and how they may impact....looked at issues in terms of caring for children with different needs.”

The majority of adopters were satisfied with the practical arrangements and sensitivity and reliability of their social worker in to carrying out the home

study assessments. Comments from adopters about the home study process included:

- “Our social worker was reliable and approachable”

And

- “The home study was very intrusive but the social worker was reliable and sensitive”

There were two not so positive comments. One adopter said that there were long gaps between the social worker visits and in the second case there had been some cancelled appointments that had lead to the adopters concerned using annual leave unnecessarily.

Following the approval process the agency provides approved adopters with clear written information and an opportunity to attend modules about the matching, introduction and placement processes. Representatives from adopters support networks are also welcome to attend the modules. This is good practice as it brings supporters into the process and informs them about what will happen next. It also reinforces adopter’s knowledge about the next stages which for some can mean a long and frustrating wait for a placement.

SFCS social workers are proactive in the family finding process and all adopters are referred to the adoption register for England and Wales

SFCS has developed an “expectations document”. This is supplied to all local authorities which are looking to place a child with the society’s adopters. The document clearly details the expectations SFCS has about what information is needed about the child and his family and what actions are required to ensure that a careful matching process takes place. Evidence was noted that showed the SFCS social workers are proactive in “chasing” missing information.

The agency holds an internal matching meeting prior to the matching meeting held by the child’s local authority. Any specialist advice required is sought at this early stage and is fed into the local authority matching meeting. SFCS has developed a cultural checklist and this ensures that children’s cultural needs can be met.

The excellent matching processes ensure that the potential strengths and vulnerabilities of a specific placement are identified pre-placement and means a clear plan of support plan is developed.

Children are informed about their adoptive family before placement in an age appropriate way. This may be through a book of information and photographs compiled by the prospective adopters being shared with them or via a DVD recording of the adopters in their home being shown to them. This helps to familiarise the child with the adopters and their home before they meet.

There are clear policies and procedures in place that govern the functions of the panel. There are clear systems in place that ensure that the policies and procedures are implemented.

Adopters are invited to attend the panel when their case is being heard; their social worker also attends. Feedback from adopters about their experience of attending panel were overall positive with some reporting that although very nervous they had found it a useful experience. One adopter summed up the experience as:

“Friendly but a little scary.”

The SFCS panel rarely hears a matching case as these are heard at the child’s placing agency panel. To ensure panel is updated about placements a report is written by the social worker and is presented to panel. This is excellent practice as it also informs panel members about the matching and support practices and increases their knowledge about their responsibilities when considering the cases presented to them.

The panel is properly constituted under regulations and there is a good balance of mix in the membership in terms of skills and experience.

There is a comprehensive induction process in place, which includes an opportunity for new members to observe a SFCS panel prior to joining. The agency will also arrange for new members to observe a local authority panel. This is good practice as it provides the individual with understanding about the duties of local authorities in adoption work especially in relation to children being considered, the matching processes, and the planning of support to adoptive and birth families.

There is an appropriate training programme in place for panel members and they are provided with updates in any areas such as legal changes as and when required.

The adoption manager is the adviser to panel. While it is usually preferable for someone more distanced from practice to act as adviser to the panel this is an inherent problem for small agencies. The management of the agency has taken a number of measures to ensure that the risks around conflicts of interests are minimised and it was noted that the current post holder was skilled in ensuring that her role of adoption manager did not impinge on her advice giving role to panel.

The panel meets monthly, with dates set well in advance. Additional panel dates can be arranged if needed to avoid delays for adopters. The panel has access to educational, medical and legal advice.

The adoption panel was observed as part of the inspection and it was noted that papers were circulated well in advance of the meeting. The panel was well chaired by an experienced independent professional. The discussion was thorough and all members were given the opportunity to contribute.

The panel minutes were clear and concise. The minutes need to clearly record the reasons for the recommendation made. The minutes are routinely produced, in draft, on the same day of panel. The decision maker usually makes her decision the following day. The recording of the decision making process was detailed in every case and clearly showed how the decision had been reached.

The managers of the agency had undergone all required recruitment checks. There is a system in place to ensure that CRB checks are updated on a 3 yearly basis for managers and all other staff.

The recruitment process for staff is robust and clearly evidenced on staff personnel files.

The agency has a clear complaints procedure in place and it was evident that SFCS is a learning organisation and welcomes constructive criticism that can be used to improve and develop the services.

There had been no complaints during the 12 months preceding this inspection. While adopters knew how to make a complaint a number said that they felt it would be difficult to complain. This is not an uncommon view among adopters generally as adopters can feel that they are in a vulnerable situation. One adopter suggested that a "comments" box could be strategically placed in the premises and people could post their complaints and compliments anonymously. This could be considered by the agency and may be a good way to encourage adopters and others to put their views across.

The Child Protection Procedures have been further developed in line with a requirement made at the last key inspection. The procedures are clear and concise. They would benefit from an explicit statement about the timescales for initial referral to the local authority and the update of the details of the CSCI. There had been two potential child protection referrals made in the 12 months preceding this inspection. Both had been referred to the respective authorities promptly.



# 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):

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

SFCS provides an excellent range of support service for adopters, families, children and young people. The services provided are of a good quality, geared to individual needs and available if and when required.

## EVIDENCE:

SFCS has long established adoption support services that span over 20 years. The services have been changed, updated and developed over the years in line with changes in support needs and updates in legislation. The service provided is seamless and consists of an ongoing “menu” of support.

Adopters are provided with opportunities to access a range of professional advisers or to link with successful adopters to discuss any worries or concerns they may have on a less formal basis.

Support during introductions and early placement is good, a clear plan of social work visiting arrangements is made and adopters can access their own social worker a manager or the duty system on a daily basis.

The agency has developed, in consultation with users of the service, a range of support groups and activities for adoptive families. These include low level preventative services, which tend to be social events such as coffee mornings and picnics. There is a ‘Mums group’ and a ‘Dads group’ and it was planned to set up a support group for black adopters. These forums enable adopters to maintain contact with the social workers in an informal way and encourage the development of relationships between adoptive families.

Other, more targeted activities provided include, workshops and study days. A range of subjects is covered through these activities and courses range from behaviour management to contact with birth families.

The agency provides support on an individual basis where there has been an identified need for this. Individual support is delivered by the most appropriate person from one of the advisers to the agency, to one of the family support workers. A recent development in the support service available has been the appointment of a qualified Systematic Therapist for 12 hours per week. This post has been funded for 3 years by monies awarded by Comic Relief and the post holder's role is to work with families and young people between the ages of 12 and 20 plus. The post holder also acts as a consultant for social workers; she is additionally preparing an in-house training course in attachment issues. This flexible approach to individual support work allows for individual support to be pitched at the right level.

There is a very well stocked resource library. Adopters were aware of this facility. One adopter stated that while she is using the library it also provides a good opportunity to "have a chat."

The society runs groups for children and young people. There is a group for children aged between 8 and 12 years old. One young person said he enjoyed attending this group.

There is also a group for young people aged 12 to 18 years old. One young person said she had attended this group for about 3 years. She said that this enables her to mix with other adopted people and have a good time. SFCS arranges an annual weekend away for this older age range. The young person who spoke to the inspectors said that all of the young people involved get on well with the social workers. She said that she felt able to talk to the social workers about any issues worrying her and she also said that she enjoyed the weekends away but would like to have a longer holiday with SFCS.

In the event of difficulties arising in a placement the agency is especially vigilant in attempting to support and sustain the placement wherever possible. There are clear procedures in place for supporting placements at risk. These include holding a "lifeboat meeting" during which all involved meet and devise a plan of support. Where it is clear that the placement cannot be sustained SFCS fully supports the adopters and the child where appropriate in ending the placement. SFCS holds an internal disruption meeting and fully participates with the formal disruption meeting held by the placing authority. Evidence was noted that SFCS has used the findings of such meetings to inform practice.

In addition to recent disruptions of placement the society works with young people pre and post 18 years old who have experienced a disruption post adoption order. This work is ongoing and can include practical support such as securing accommodation for the young person and providing emotional support which includes appointments with social workers or the use of the services of the Systematic Therapist.

The agency has the services of a medical adviser who sits on the adoption panel and is a locally based GP. He is able to access specialist medical advice as and when required. Through the agency he has membership to the BAAF medical group. The medical adviser is available for social workers to consult with and he routinely looks at the medical information about children for whom a match with SFCS adopters is being considered.

The agency also has the services of a Legal Adviser. The legal advice was noted as being clear and concise and it was reported that the adviser is readily accessible to the manager and her staff.

The agency also has access to an Educational adviser and a spiritual Adviser. The Educational Adviser had facilitated a workshop, for staff and adopters, about the issues surrounding bullying.

In respect to issues around race and culture the agency is particularly well provided for by the networks SFCS has developed through the Anancy Black Families Project.

There are written protocols in place in respect to the specialist advisers and SFCS ensures verification of the individuals qualifications as a part of the Recruitment and Appointment process.

## **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):**

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

SFCS has a clear and well-established strategy for working with birth family members which is delivered in a non-judgemental, sensitive and flexible way. The services provided support birth families to be as fully involved in the planning for their child and to have a continuing input in the maintenance of their child's heritage.

### **EVIDENCE:**

There is a clear strategic approach taken to supporting birth parents and families and it was noted that the agency takes a flexible approach to ensure people have a choice in the way they access and receive services. SFCS provides a service to anyone affected by adoption, including grandparents and siblings who have remained living within the birth family.

The bulk of the agency's work with birth families is through the two service level agreements with neighbouring local authorities. SFCS is proactive in meeting these agreements. For example, due to a low referral rate from one local authority, it was agreed that a SFCS social worker would offer a monthly consultation service to the fieldwork social workers. This has ensured that the SFCS birth parent support arrangements are well known to the children's social workers.

SFCS offers counselling and support to parents considering relinquishing a child for adoption through the Society, although this is a rare situation.

On occasion SFCS has worked with birth families from other agencies. This is when SFCS approved adopters have had a child placed from that authority and it has been assessed that SFCS has the resources or expertise to carry out a specific piece of work with the birth family members.

During the course of the inspection four birth parents met with the inspectors and two birth parents returned completed questionnaires. From the interviews and the questionnaires it was clear that the support provided to SFCS had been and continued to be invaluable to these people. One birth parent said:

- “They have always been there”

SFCS facilitate a birth mothers group during which birth mothers meet for a set number of sessions and are provided with the opportunity to meet with others in the same situation as themselves. The mothers spoken to said that they found the groups useful. One birth mother said:

- “They provide an opportunity to chat with people in the same situation and have a laugh its not all doom and gloom”

Another birth mother stated that the groups provided her with

- “A safe arena to vent anger at the systems, social workers and the courts.”

One to one support offered to birth family members includes counselling and help with practical tasks such as support with writing letters for letterbox contact.

The birth family members who were involved in the inspection process said they would recommend SFCS to other birth parents.

The agency places high importance on ensuring that birth parents views about the plans for their child and about contact plans are explored fully and documented. And wherever possible the agency works towards ensuring that birth parents have seen and understood information provided about them to others, for example the adoption panel. SFCS will support parents to comment on this information and correct any inaccuracies.

SFCS administer and support a number of post adoption contact agreements between children and birth relatives. The society also prepares and supports birth parents in meeting adoptive parents.

The agency also carries out birth records counselling work and offers support in tracing and reunions. The work carried out in these areas was of a good quality and had been carried out in a sensitive way.

It was noted that SFCS is especially vigilant in ensuring that life story work with children continues after placement and that life story books are updated. The reports of visits to families post placement but pre-order were especially detailed and informative. This work will ensure that adoptees, who in the future wish to access their records, will have good quality and detailed information about the early days of their placement with their adoptive family.

# 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):

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency is well managed at all levels and the well-developed monitoring processes ensure that the agency is run very effectively and efficiently. Staff are valued by managers and are well supported in providing an excellent adoption service to all affected by adoption.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency has a clear statement of purpose in place which reflects the work of the agency and its policies and procedures. This is subject to periodical review and approval by the Trustees. The staff in the adoption team were aware of the statement and its contents.

Although not required by legislation the agency has produced a guide for children. The guide contains good basic information about the Society and the services provided. The guide also provides children with details about how they can make a complaint or compliment.

The policies and procedures have been subject to update in line with the new legislation.

The agency has developed clear written information for adopters which outlines the process and eligibility criteria. There is a system to prioritise prospective adopters who were most likely to meet the needs of children waiting. Prospective adopters are able to talk to approved adopters at the preparation group or through a pre arranged meeting, for example if they wish to adopt a larger sibling group, they will be put in touch with someone with a similar experience. Prospective adopters are made aware of the types of children needing families, through information at the initial meeting, the preparation groups and from publications made available to them.

The agency has a specific responsibility for Catholic children and adults within the Diocese. The agency does however welcome applications from a range of people from different backgrounds and has a very proactive approach to the recruitment of black families through the Anancy Black Families Initiative. As stated earlier in this report while the Catholic ethos meant that SFCS could not progress applications from same sex couples advice and support is provided in helping them to access an agency able to progress their application.

The agency is well managed at all levels. The Director of the Adoption Services (Registered manager), the Director of Business Administration and the Operational manager have suitable professional and managerial qualifications and experience. There are clear lines of accountability throughout the agency and sound arrangements are in place for the management of the agency when the manager is absent. The agency is run in accordance with the Statement of Purpose.

The agency takes a robust approach to monitoring and controlling the agency at all levels. There are clear written procedures in respect to this.



The Chair of the Trustees and the Responsible Person demonstrated an enthusiasm about the work of the society and a commitment to development of the services. The Trustees meet 6 times a year and reports about the work of the agency are provided to each meeting. The chair of the Trustees attends the monthly management meetings and a second Trustee is a member of the adoption panel. These arrangements enable members of the Trustees to maintain a day-to-day role in the Society and its functions.

The agency has sufficient qualified skilled and experienced staff to meet the expectations of the Statement of Purpose and the Business plan. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by staff in their respective roles was impressive as was their loyalty to their employers. The good quality of the services provided further evidenced the high calibre of the staff.

Comments made by adopters about the staff at SFCS were in the main very positive. Adopters made the following comments about the staff and organisation:

- " We have found that the staff at St Francis have been professional and sensitive to our needs."
- "St Francis go that bit further for their clients....I would highly recommend them as an adoption agency."
- "Different ways in which the child and adopters social workers deal with the time from placement to order has been confused and long....St Francis is a very caring and professional organisation."

The administrative team were described by social workers as being "brilliant" and adopters and birth family members felt welcomed by these staff when they attended the premises.

Without exception all adopters and birth family members who were asked if they would recommend St Francis said that they would. One adopter said that she had already had recommended the agency to others wishing to adopt.

Staff reported that they have access to all of the agency's policies and procedures, including the whistle blowing policy and CP procedures.

Staff felt that SFCS was an excellent organisation to work for. The working environment, employment conditions, support from managers and each other, the training opportunities and the acknowledgement of managers of each individuals contribution to the services were cited as being key to their satisfaction in their employment. One social worker stated "managers care for us." Another social worker who had recently joined SFCS described the culture of the organisation as being one that focused on promoting the workers well being

There are good and clear written procedures in place in respect to recording and access to records. The case files for adopters and children were well ordered and easy to negotiate. There was evidence noted of case file audits. There was clear recording of decisions of supervisors on the case files inspected. There were however, a few gaps in the signing of some documents. For example, the child protection and behaviour management agreements on file had not been signed by adopters in every case and some of the case recording had not been signed.

The manager kept separate records of allegations and complaints.

The archives arrangements were not inspected on this occasion but were found to be satisfactory during the last key inspection.

Personnel files for staff were sampled; these evidenced that a clear and robust recruitment process is followed and that the recruitment and appointment procedures follow good practice in safeguarding vulnerable children and adults.

The premises from which SFCS operates were purpose built in 2000. The premises are situated in a pleasant area on the outskirts of Milton Keynes and are exceptionally well equipped. The building is accessible to all and there are security systems in place. The agency will provide transport for any person with a legitimate need to visit the premises, as it is difficult to reach via public transport. There are appropriate security systems in place for the storage of records. There are efficient IT systems in place which are safeguarded from external and internal threat. The IT systems are backed up on a weekly basis. The premises and its contents are adequately insured. The society has developed a disaster recovery plan that addresses the requirements of the adoption agency, including the premises and the safeguarding and back up of records.

The financial viability of the society remains secure and evidence was noted of a rigorous approach to internal and external audit. The financial systems were well developed and continued to be well maintained.

# 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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>7</b>	4
<b>8</b>	4
<b>9</b>	4

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

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

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>6</b>	4
<b>18</b>	4

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>1</b>	3
<b>3</b>	3
<b>14</b>	3
<b>16</b>	4
<b>17</b>	4
<b>20</b>	3
<b>21</b>	4
<b>22</b>	4
<b>23</b>	4
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	3
<b>28</b>	3
<b>29</b>	3
<b>30</b>	4
<b>31</b>	4

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

**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

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD4	The social workers should ensure in every case that the applicants' accommodation is adequate before a formal application is accepted.
2	AD4	It should be considered if a representative from the management team should observe the preparation groups as a part of the evaluation of this aspect of the preparation of adopters.
3	AD4	The health and safety checklist should be amended in line with the comments in the main body of this report and the months of adopters' employment histories should be obtained in every case.
4	AD12	Panel minutes should clearly detail the reasons for the panel recommendation.
5	AD25	It should be ensured that the signed copies of agreements made with adopters around child protection and behaviour

		management issues are placed on files and that all case recording is signed by the writer with a full and legible signature.
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## **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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

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