



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council Adoption Service

**Grosmont Resource Centre
20 Grosmont Close
Redcar
Cleveland
TS10 4PJ**

Lead Inspector
Sean White

Announced Inspection
14th November 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council Adoption Service
Address	Grosmont Resource Centre 20 Grosmont Close Redcar Cleveland TS10 4PJ
Telephone number	01642 495910
Fax number	01642 491630
Email address	joanne_gilroy@redcare_cleveland.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Name of Nominated manager (if applicable)	Joanne Gilroy
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

The adoption service is managed within the Children & Families Division of Redcar and Cleveland Council. The Team Manager is responsible for three adoption and permanency social workers, and two adoption support workers.

The agency undertakes the following functions:

Recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents.

Matching, introduction and placement of children with suitable families – in partnership with children's social workers.

Post approval and post placement support for adoptive families.

Post adoption support to those touched by adoption.

Management of contact arrangements, including 'letterbox'.

The service is located in premises on the outskirts of Redcar, easily accessible by car and public transport – although parking is somewhat limited.

SUMMARY

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

The preparation and arrangements made for this inspection by the agency were of a particularly high standard. Pre-inspection material was completed and returned very quickly, evidence was clearly presented and indexed and the manager ensured that all necessary supporting arrangements were appropriately coordinated. This demonstrated a thorough and efficient approach to organisation and management, and a commitment to the inspection process.

The inspection was carried out over three and a half days by two inspectors.

During the course of the visit the following was undertaken:

- Interviews with senior managers and team manager.
- Interviews with key workers, including adoption staff, children's social workers, independent reviewing officers, chair of the adoption panel and administrators.
- Interview with elected member of the council (lead member for children).
- Observation of the adoption panel.
- Interviews with three adoptive families (one visit being aborted due to family illness) and one birth parent.
- Review of policies and procedures.
- Review of administration, premises and security.
- Examination of case files – adopters, children and adoption support.
- Analysis of survey questionnaires:
 - Adopters: 9
 - Placing social workers: 8
 - Placing authorities: 3
 - Birth families: 2
 - Professional advisors: 1

What the service does well:

This is an agency that does most things well. The strong management of the adoption team encourages commitment and good practice in recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective adopters. It works well with colleagues in children's services to effect the most appropriate matches and demonstrates a well coordinated approach to introductions and placements. The materials used – for recruitment and preparation – are thorough and very well put together, and even further improvements are being made to the preparation courses; these being part of an improvement action plan undertaken in response to a user survey – indicating a strong commitment to inclusion and service development.

In having a discrete preparation course for second time adopters the agency shows its understanding of the contextual aspect of placing children (often siblings) with committed families.

Adopters were very complimentary about the recruitment and preparation practices of the agency, indicating that they were welcomed warmly and without prejudice and enabled to understand the intricacies of adoption through detailed and informed preparation groups.

Assessments were full and thorough and undertaken by very skilled and experienced workers: although sometimes a little 'over detailed' the assessment reports were thorough and rigorous and enabled the panel and decision maker to reach their conclusions in a fully informed way. Adopters were fulsome in their praise of the skills and professionalism of the agency workers and the thoroughness of the process.

The development of the adoption support services in the agency have moved apace in recent times and demonstrated a dynamic, committed and focused approach to the whole range of support opportunities. This cannot be overstated; the quality of assessments was high, services were tailored to need and delivery was aimed at securing best outcomes – and had seen many successes. Conscientious workers undertake complex cases and ensure that service users are at the centre of their practice. The comments made by people who had received support were generous in their praise and records examined showed the lengths workers would go to in order to achieve success.

The infrastructure of the service – up to date, relevant policies, procedures and protocols – demonstrated a sound underpinning of the agency from which the manager of the agency developed its strategic and operational integrity. This includes a well-organised and supported team, very good training history and opportunities, a supportive administrative core and clarity of purpose. The manager ensures that effective relationships are maintained with colleagues in the wider children's services and fosters cooperative working.

What has improved since the last inspection?

All matters raised in the last inspection report have been successfully dealt with.

What they could do better:

The manager and workers were aware of their development position and what they needed to continue with on their journey. The issues that need further work or consideration would be as follows:

- An in-house children's guide or guides rather than the use of an adapted, generic BAAF guide.
- Finer editing of adopters' assessment reports to eradicate unnecessary, extraneous detail.
- Children's Permanence Reports CPRs should provide sufficient detail to enable the adoption panel to reach appropriate and well-informed conclusions – rather than relying on additional material to provide information not presented in the CPR.
- The adoption panel procedures should be amended to include some (minor) missing detail.
- The adoption panel, when presenting its recommendations to the decision maker, should include the reasons why they reached their conclusions.
- Hand-written case notes should be legible – or typed (adoption support files).
- Resources should be available for life-story work and preparation for adoption to be given appropriate priority.
- Case files would benefit from some form of index to enable access to all information to be easier.
- The archives should have better protection from outside intrusion.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The agency safeguards and promotes the welfare of its service users (NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

All the standards in this outcome section were inspected on this occasion.

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

The agency's approach to ensuring children are safe and their welfare promoted is undertaken in a way that demonstrates commitment and good practice by placing them with the most appropriate families.

EVIDENCE:

It was evident that this is an agency that places children's needs and welfare at the centre of its activities and responsibilities.

The recruitment of adopters policy makes clear that families are required to meet the needs of a wide range of children placed for adoption.

Although there is no need for active recruitment initiatives (there are sufficient numbers of people seeking to be adopters) it was clear that the strategies used by the service were clearly focused on ensuring that recruitment was aimed at securing families with the necessary qualities to meet children's needs.

Each child who has a plan for adoption is allocated a family finder whose responsibility it is to provide the child's social worker with a choice of potentially suitable families; the family finder also carries a 'screening' responsibility to enable the most appropriate choices to be considered. It was evident that positive matches are made in the vast majority of cases with appropriate analysis of all available information being undertaken. There was sound evidence of good matching/placement reports to support this. There have been very few disruptions in recent times.

The preparation and assessment of prospective adopters was found to be of a good standard. The preparation material is comprehensive and meets all required standards and adopters were very positive about the quality of the preparation training. Several comments were made – both in discussion and in survey results – that confirm their appreciation of their experiences; typical statements being, "I learned a lot – they didn't pull any punches but they were really honest" and "preparation on both occasions was excellent, straight forward, no surprises". Nevertheless, following a comprehensive adopters survey it was found that some had felt that more information would be beneficial, so in response to this the agency is planning to incorporate a further day into the preparation course to facilitate this. This is seen as excellent practice in responding to user's views in a positive and inclusive way. Also, to ensure a more focused approach, there is in place a second time adopters' preparation course that has a more appropriate emphasis.

There were similarly effusive responses from adopters in respect of the quality of the assessment process; "professional and sensitive" and "clearly knew her stuff" being typical comments.

The assessment reports (Forms F) that were examined demonstrated a thorough approach to assessment. They included all necessary information from which recommendations and decisions could be made and were generally well written, comprehensive and demonstrated parenting capacity. Some reports would benefit, however, from some editing – in some cases there was extraneous detail that added little to the information and which make the reports longer than they need to be. Children's permanence reports (CPRs) were not as detailed as they should be, however; a consequence of this is that the panel is furnished with other information (Court Reports, Care Plans) to make up for the shortfalls in the CPRs leaving members with an inordinate amount of paperwork to read and digest. Development work is required in this area to enable social workers to provide all necessary information in the most appropriate manner.

The adoption (permanency) panel is appropriately constituted and informed by a reasonably comprehensive policy and procedure. There are, however, some omissions that NMS expects (dealing with disruptive behaviour, decision-making when not in agreement for instance). Nevertheless, the panel, in operation, was seen to be thorough in its deliberations and generally well managed. Some consideration should be given to how attending applicants are enabled to have a purposeful experience – it was felt that there was perhaps a tendency towards over-familiarity in discussions; it was noted, however, that attendees were clearly made very welcome. There should also be a more clearly defined policy on what constitutes a conflict of interest when members of the panel have, or may have had, some involvement with presenting cases.

The recommendations that the panel makes are based upon a realistic analysis and scrutiny of presented information and were well considered and appropriate; the recommendations, however, should be accompanied by reasons to enable the decision-maker to be aware of why the panel had reached its conclusions. Decisions are made in a timely way and are based on thorough consideration being given to the comprehensive information that is made available to the decision maker. The administrative arrangements are efficiently managed and support the process well.

The manager and staff of the agency are fit to be involved in the running of an adoption agency. Realistic and effective recruitment practices ensure that all workers are suitably qualified and experienced to do the job; although there were some minor omissions in the records of workers it was noted that steps are in place to overcome these.

All the workers are qualified social workers and have achieved post-qualifying awards and demonstrated considerable knowledge of adoption matters, including legislation pertaining to both adoption in particular and children in general.

The strategic and operational practices of the agency are clearly aimed at promoting the wellbeing of children requiring adoption and geared towards the best possible outcomes. At the time of the inspection there were new (draft) child protection policies and procedures being considered; these included details in respect of children placed for adoption – this information was not seen, but assurances were provided.

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)
- Services are tailored to meet the needs of people affected by adoption (NMS 33)

The Commission considers Standards 6 and 33 the key standards to be inspected.

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

6, 18, 33.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency has a dynamic and committed approach to support and its importance in the adoption continuum; innovative practice and focused, tailor-made support saw very positive outcomes being achieved.

EVIDENCE:

There is a very positive and well-considered approach to adoption support in this agency. There are 1.5 workers who are discretely adoption support workers and they demonstrated a high level of competence and commitment to this task - and outcomes demonstrated a successful approach in all areas where they were involved.

Adoption support case files were well ordered, showed evidence of good assessments and tailor-made support packages, and case recording enabled 'tracking' progress to be undertaken easily – there were some difficult to read hand-written case notes though and it is recommended that these should be typed.

The arrangements for providing support to adoptive placements are usually managed and undertaken by the adopters' assessing social worker – until an adoption order is made - in the meantime the availability of the support workers is made known to families. However, in circumstances where there are complex or difficult situations, support workers will operate in partnership with assessing social workers to provide stable and optimistic placements.

All aspects of adoption support - including enabling placements to continue, helping adoptive families to cope with difficulties, working with birth parents, managing direct and indirect contact arrangements, and birth records counselling – are undertaken by the support workers. In some situations the input of the workers demonstrated significant effort and commitment to service users that went 'the extra mile'. It was evident, though, that there is only limited capacity in the staffing resources available and the agency should ensure it keeps this under review and provides resources as necessary.

The information received about the quality and availability of support, from a range of sources – including service users and Independent Reviewing Officers – was very positive and complimentary. This part of the service is clearly well thought of throughout children's services and the evidence demonstrated during the inspection showed a particularly well-organised and purposeful aspect of the agency. Comments received include, "they are always there for us", and "couldn't have coped without them"; there were some particularly effusive comments about commitment.

Additional resources to support adopters include a newsletter and post-approval training opportunities (which were commented on favourably by approved adopters) – all of which demonstrates a thorough and well thought through approach to providing support services in as broad and relevant way as possible.

The medical and legal advice available to support the agency and adopters was of a very good standard. The information provided to the panel was noted as being very relevant and thorough and it was clear that advice is readily accessible and available to enable workers in the agency to process applications and arrange matches effectively.

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)
- Service users receive good quality services based on their needs (NMS 34)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 8, 9 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.

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

All the standards in this outcome section were inspected.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency demonstrated a positive approach to birth parents, and the importance of their involvement in the adoption of their children, which enabled support, heritage and inclusion to be appropriately addressed.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has in place an up to date protocol on its adoption support services and it was clear that the services provided are in line with this.

The agency has arrangements in place with a local, registered, Adoption Support Agency (ASA) to provide independent support for birth parents. As soon as a plan for a child to be adopted is made and ratified the ASA will contact the birth parents, and the child's social worker to inform them of the support facilities available. The arrangements are clearly well established and provide for an independent facility that is appropriately monitored. It was also noted that the agency provides, through its adoption support service, help and assistance to birth parents who seek the direct involvement of the service. The

work that is undertaken by the agency in such circumstances was found to be of a very high standard – and supported by very strong first-hand evidence.

Wherever possible, birth parents are encouraged to become involved in the adoption of their child; evidence was noted in respect of their views and wishes being sought and recorded and - if appropriate – acted upon.

Similarly, efforts are made to ensure that contact arrangements/agreements are appropriately managed and organised. The 'letterbox' system is robust and well co-ordinated, and direct contact well managed.

Children's social workers are responsible for the arrangements for life-story work and efforts are made to include, wherever possible, birth parents input into providing photographs and other information. However, the competing priorities of social workers sometimes means that life story work is not completed at the earliest opportunity and it became apparent that too much reliance is placed on foster carers to compile information. The agency should consider developing systems or protocols to ensure that this vital aspect of adoption work is undertaken and completed fully and appropriately in every case. Although information provided demonstrated the frustrations of social workers in completing this task there was some evidence noted of excellent later-life letters and well-structured life-story books.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 3, 16, 21, 25 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

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

All the standards in this outcome section were inspected.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency has a very focused management that ensures strategic objectives have operational success through well considered organisational structures and practice monitoring.

EVIDENCE:

A sound infrastructure of up to date policies and procedures and a statement of purpose underpins this well-managed agency. Both strategically and operationally the service demonstrated a high level of managerial competence at all levels. Although there were some lingering issues from a recent restructuring in the fieldwork teams that had created some disillusionment and ill feeling, the adoption service had not been noticeably affected.

It was clear that the agency has a welcoming and inclusive approach to the recruitment of adopters; all members of the community are welcomed to apply and they are provided with a well-presented information pack that gives clear details about the adoption process and who is eligible to be considered.

The strategic and operational management of the agency was very well organised and demonstrated clarity of vision and service delivery. The permanency team manager, who is held in high regard within children's services, manages the service in a manner that has a clear focus on best outcomes for children. She was able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of adoption matters and how they integrate into the wider services for children; she also showed managerial and organisational skills in respect of the core business and its importance in ensuring that children's welfare and safety is protected and promoted. The essential and required components of adoption agency standards, regulations and guidance are clearly understood and managed well. In addition the agency surveys its service users on an annual basis and the results of this creates an action plan for improvement; this demonstrates a clear and impressive approach to both inclusion and service development.

Workers said that they felt well supported and equipped to undertake their responsibilities to the best of their abilities. Supervision is provided on a regular basis and case management is rigorous and focused. Opportunities for,

and attendance at, training events is impressive; workers are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills and it was evident that resources are well deployed in this area. It was clear that all workers were up to date in their knowledge of current issues and had absorbed the detail and spirit of the new adoption legislation. Allocation and workload management is well organised and staff were clear about their responsibilities and targets; a flexible approach to working and work/life balance clearly provides workers with a conscientious and committed approach. Although a discrete service with the adoption team, adoption support is well integrated into the agency and provides for a seamless service and partnership working.

Underpinning the team management is a senior management and executive that is demonstrably interested in and committed to adoption as the preferred outcome for many children and supports the agency admirably, both in terms of support and resources but also in respect of scrutiny and monitoring. Reports are submitted to the executive twice yearly and the lead member for children sits on the adoption panel.

Record keeping, overall, was of a very good standard. Both adopters' and children's files were well maintained and included all required information; case recording was thorough and up to date. It would be beneficial if the files had an index and for panel minute extracts to indicate who was in attendance.

Records in respect of the staff have been improved upon considerably in recent times and, save for some minor omissions, were well organised. The agency may wish to consider how it can ensure that both the month and the year of a worker's employment history can be elicited in its application forms (some did not include the month of appointment which makes calculating breaks in employment difficult).

Administrative support is well organised and it was clear that support staff are well integrated into the service and provide a sound administrative infrastructure. Record management, security and confidentiality is of a good standard overall although the security of the archives would benefit from some strengthening to prevent unauthorised external access.

The premises are located in an adapted building in a residential area of Redcar. Whilst suitable for purpose – and reasonably well equipped and resourced – there were some comments made about the adoption service being separated from the rest of children's services. It was felt by some that this did not positively assist in developing close working relationships with colleagues in the wider children's services.

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
34	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3
4	4
5	3
10	3
11	3
12	3
13	3
15	3
19	4
24	N/A
32	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	4
18	3
33	4

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

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	AD8	More resources should be made available to enable life story work to be given appropriate priority.

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