



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Surrey County Council Adoption Service

**The Runnymede Centre
Chertsey Road
Addlestone
Surrey
KT15 2EP**

Lead Inspector
Rosie Dancer

Announced Inspection
22nd January 2007 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

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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	Surrey County Council Adoption Service
Address	The Runnymede Centre Chertsey Road Addlestone Surrey KT15 2EP
Telephone number	01483 518666
Fax number	01932 565878
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Surrey County Council
Name of Nominated manager (if applicable)	Annie MacIver
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection Last Key Inspection 12th November 2003

Brief Description of the Service:

The Adoption and Permanency Team is part of the Council's Children's Services Division. A major review of all services within Surrey County Council had taken place (September 2006) and significant reorganisation of the adoption services had recently been effected

The Adoption and Permanency Team Statement of Purpose clearly states that the primary role of the service is to provide a comprehensive adoption and permanency service for Surrey children who for one reason or another are unable to live with their birth parents. The range of activities and services the agency provides as detailed in the statement of purpose include:

- The recruitment, preparation and assessment of adoptive parents
- Matching and placing children with their adoptive parents
- An inter-country adoption service
- Step-parent adoptions
- Permanency for children through other legal orders such as special guardianship
- A range of post placement and post order support to adoptive families
- A support service for birth parents and family members including an independent counselling service.
- A service for adult adoptees and birth relatives

The agency is a member of an Adoption Consortium that is made up of 3 Local Authority partner agencies and a Voluntary Adoption Agency. The Consortium aims, through collaborative working, to provide the best possible care for children requiring a permanent placement outside their birth family.

SUMMARY

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

This is the second inspection of the adoption service provided by Surrey County Council. 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 1 birth family member, 14 approved adopters, 7 placing social workers, 2 placing authorities, and 3 specialist advisers.

Two inspectors spent three full working days and two half days each in the agency. An inspection of the fostering service by a second team of CSCI inspectors was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the adoption service and some of the interviews detailed below were carried out jointly with a fostering inspector.

The inspection activity included:

Face to face interviews with four birth family members

Face to face Interviews with four sets of adopters

Interview with two elected members of the council

Interviews with key managers and staff

The panel was observed and the chairperson was interviewed

A selection of files were viewed 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:

Surrey has a good quality preparation programme in place for domestic adopters; this ensures that adopters are well prepared to parent children with a range of needs. Inter-country adopters benefit from training delivered by an agency that specialises in this kind of adoption.

The assessment process in Surrey is based in attachment theories and a competency approach is taken to the assessment of adopters. Practice in this area allows for safe, stable and secure placements to be made and maintained.

There are good matching procedures in Surrey; children's wishes and feelings are taken into account in family finding and matching and careful assessment takes place in relation to placement options for sibling groups.

Evidence was noted that support to adopters was of a good quality and most adopters confirmed this to be the case.

There is a positive approach taken to involving birth family members in the adoption process and it was clear that the staff and managers were keen to further develop the service.

The agency is well managed by an enthusiastic management team and staffed by a skilled and experienced staff team. The service provided is child focused.

One of the specialist advisers wrote:

- "The staff I have met and worked with at the agency are professional, thorough and sensitive and open to discussion."

And another wrote:

- "There is a lot of expertise and commitment within the agency."

An inter-country adopter commented:

"Surrey County council adoption service is exemplary- we have had a very positive experience with them and can only thank them."

One domestic adopter commented:

"We have been exceptionally lucky with our 2 children and love them dearly. We shall always be very thankful for having the opportunity to become parents. Surrey County Council is doing a very good job.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The three requirements and eleven recommendations made as a result of the last inspection had been addressed.

This has led to the following improvements:

All staff advisers and others involved in the agency are subjected to a CRB check.

Some improvements were noted in the arrangements for providing support to birth parents.

There has been an improvement in the recording and monitoring of complaints and their outcomes.

The venue for the panel meetings had been changed; the new venue provides more appropriate accommodation than had previously been the case.

The following were also noted, an improvement in the quality of staff supervision, greater clarity of roles and better communication between teams and workers.

What they could do better:

The agency should ensure that all information about a child and his family or adopters is available before the panel date and that all, including adopters, have time to fully consider the information and discuss any future implications the information may have.

The agency could better assure that adopters are dealt with in a timely way at every stage of the process. Where delays occur the agency should ensure that adopters are provided with clear information about why the delay is necessary and how long it is likely to be.

The agency should ensure that the panel monitoring role is further developed.

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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Staying Safe

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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)
- 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):

2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19, 32

Quality in this outcome area is good.

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

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

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a written plan for recruiting adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. The plan was due for revision and further development. It was stated that in line with the changing profile of children likely to need an adoptive or permanent placement recruitment activity is to be expanded into minority group communities; this will increase the placement choice for children.

Where there are no suitable in-house adopters for a child placement choice can be widened through the use of consortium adopters and the use of the adoption register.

All enquirers are invited to attend an open evening. A home visit is then carried to people who express an interest in progressing further.

All applicants are required to attend a childlessness workshop, a two-day information group and preparation group sessions.

Inter-country Adoption

Prospective adopters who wish to adopt a child from another country attend preparation groups run by an agency that specialises in inter-country adoption. This is a recent development as the twice a year groups Surrey was able to run were not sufficient to cater for the numbers of prospective inter-country adopters.

One adopter who was looking to adopt a child from another country stated:

"The (inter-country) preparation course was excellent."

Domestic Adoption

For adopters looking to adopt a child from the care system Surrey run 4-day preparation courses. A comprehensive range of relevant topics are covered during the preparation sessions and safe and responsible parenting is central to both the preparation groups and assessment studies.

The quality of the groups is evaluated at the end of each programme with adopters' views being a crucial part of the evaluation process. There is twice yearly consideration of the responses from adopters and changes to various aspects of the sessions have been made in line with the adopters' views.

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 has not been born to them and who may have complex needs.

Comments from adopters about the preparation processes included:

"The training was informative and useful."

And

"We feel that Surrey offer a very thorough process of preparation and training but it does feel that staff are over-stretched."

One social worker from another local authority commented:

“Adopter (was) well prepared.”

The agency social workers carry out assessments of both domestic and overseas adoptions. Overall the home study assessments remain of a good standard. Assessment reports reach clear concise conclusions about the applicants’ capacity to parent a child from the care system through to adulthood and beyond. The skilled use of adult attachment interviews with adopters enable potential difficulties to be identified and addressed at an early stage of the process and informs the matching and support planning processes.

Two adopters commented on a lack of information about the attachment style interview. However, it was clear that this had been the experience of adopters when the interview was being introduced into the assessment process. It was evidenced that full information about this interview is now routinely provided to all adopters.

From the files sampled it was shown that a full range of statutory checks are undertaken in each case.

The following would further enhance assessments:

- 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:

- “ It was a very in-depth assessment that addressed all the questions, concerns I had.”

And in response to the question on the survey asking if the assessment focused on the applicants' capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way a social worker stated:

- "This has always been described in detail"

While there was a minority of adopters who found the arrangements the social worker made for carrying out the home assessment unsatisfactory, the majority of adopters were satisfied with the practical arrangements and sensitivity and reliability of their social worker in this area. Comments from adopters about the home study process included:

- "We appreciated setting out the home study in advance and having a panel date to work through." (Inter-country adopters')

And

- "We have enjoyed working alongside our social worker as she is very approachable, whilst keeping professional at the same time." (domestic adopters)

The next stages of the adoption process can for some mean a long and frustrating wait for a placement. The agency does provide approved adopters with clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement processes, which reinforces adopter's knowledge about the next stages. All adopters are referred to the adoption register for England and Wales and their details are shared with the consortium members to establish if there are a child whose needs they could meet.

The family placement social workers are proactive in the family finding for children and work closely with the child's social worker to find the best match possible for the child. Children's wishes and feelings are taken into account in family finding and matching.

Overall, the matching processes aim to ensure that the potential strengths and vulnerabilities of a specific placement are identified pre-placement. Careful assessment takes place in relation to placement options for sibling groups and where appropriate siblings are placed together. The matching processes enable and a clear plan of support plan to be developed.

In 3 cases it was noted that new information had been presented on the day of the matching panel; this could impact on the success of the careful matching processes and ultimately adversely effect the placement.

Children are informed about their adoptive family before placement in an age appropriate way. This is generally through a book of information and photographs compiled by the prospective adopters being shared with them. This helps to familiarise the child with the adopters and their home before they

meet. One placing social worker said of an adopters book it "was extremely well done."

There are two adoption panels held in Surrey which meet alternate weeks. Dates are set well in advance. While the two panels comprise of different membership the same independent chair chairs each panel. There are policies and procedures in place that govern the functions of the panels. These consist of documents that the agency has developed and the use of a national publication "Effective Panels".

The agency, in conjunction with the panel chair should consider developing a clear policy and procedure document in respect to the arrangements for the panels monitoring role. These should include details about:

- Deferring matching cases where adopters or panel have been provided with information at a late stage.
- The arrangements for ensuring that actions, as identified in panel minutes, have been addressed

When a panel is considering a recommendation about if a child should be placed for adoption the foster carer also attends this panel with the child's social worker.

Adopters are invited to attend the panel whenever their case is being heard and when a match is being considered. Their social worker also attends, as does the child's foster carer in the case of a match. There is a "panel member" book, which is shown to adopters, and this provides them with basic information about each panel member.

Foster carers attendance at panel is good practice as it enables panel and adopters to hear about the child and his needs from the current caregiver.

Feedback from the majority of adopters about their experience of attending panel was positive, with them having found it to be a useful experience. However, four adopters felt that attending the panel was a very negative experience and all felt that the nature of some of the questions and the style of questioning was unhelpful and inappropriate. One social worker also felt that the line of questioning on occasions could be unhelpful.

The adoption panel held on alternate Tuesdays was observed as part of the inspection and it was noted that the majority of papers were circulated well in advance of the meeting. (Shortfalls in this area have been discussed earlier in this section of the report.)

The panel was well chaired by an experienced independent professional. The discussion was thorough and all members were given the opportunity to

contribute to the discussion. The county adoption adviser was in attendance and provided advice where required.

To ensure panel members are aware of the progress or otherwise of cases they have heard quarterly updates are provided by the agency.

The panels are properly constituted under regulations. There was a vacancy on one panel for an elected member. It was planned that a male member would be recruited to join the panel to achieve a better mix in terms gender. Each panel has as a member an adopter who has adopted a child from overseas.

There are satisfactory procedures followed in the recruitment and induction of new members to panel.

There is a good training programme in place for panel members and they are provided with updates in any areas such as legal changes as and when required. One of the specialist advisers commented that the training sessions "have been excellent."

Additional panel dates can be arranged if needed to avoid delays for adopters. The panel has access to educational, medical and legal advice.

The panel is administered efficiently and minutes are clear and concise; it needs to be ensured that the minutes filed on case files all include a list of attendees. This would inform adoptees who may read their file at a later date about who sat on the panel and made the recommendation that they should be placed for adoption.

The decision making process in Surrey seemed efficient. Due to the high level of business the decision making process is shared between two senior managers. The decision makers receive the paperwork before panel. They get the minutes prior to making their decisions to ensure that decisions are based on all of the available information.

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

There is a system in place to ensure that CRB checks are updated on a 3 yearly basis for all staff.

Staff are suitably qualified, experienced and knowledgeable about adoption matters and it was evidenced that workers were child focused in all aspects of the work sampled.

The agency has a clear complaints procedure in place and the evidence showed that all complaints made had been dealt with in an appropriate way and some changes to practice had been made as a result of some aspects of the complaints.

A significant number of adopters stated that they either did not know how to complain or felt unable to make a complaint. This is not an uncommon view among adopters generally as adopters can feel that they are in a vulnerable situation. One adopter stated, "We were unaware of complaints procedure and too scared to complain." A second indicated that they had not been told about how to make a complaint.

It was evident that the managers of the service are open to constructive criticism and use this to further improve and develop the service. As this is the case the manager may like to consider how to enable adopters to raise issues with the reassurance that this will have no impact on the service they receive.

The agency has clear written policies and procedures in respect to dealing with child protection issues. It was noted from records viewed of all such allegations that these had been appropriately responded to. There is a rolling programme of training in this area for 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)
- 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 good.

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

The agency provides families with access to a good range of specialist services. This in conjunction with social work support ensures that overall placements are well supported.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a clear strategy to provide adoption support services. The support service includes social work support from the family placement and children's social workers from when a link is identified through until an adoption order had been made.

Before placement a post adoption support planning meeting is held and a support plan devised. Following placement there is a "menu" of support services available. Adopters are also provided with 3 years membership to a registered adoption support agency which operates on a national basis and provides families with a range of services.

The "Menu" of support includes:

- A post adoption support group which meets on a quarterly basis

- A post approval training programme. Relatives and supporters of approved adopters are invited to one of the sessions. This is good practice as it informs the adopters support networks about the various difficulties which may be encountered by the family.
- There is a very successful parent and toddler group run on a fortnightly basis. A number of adopters said that this group was an invaluable source of support.

Where a match has been proposed for adopters with a child from overseas, the social worker who carried out the assessment will carry out a visit to the adopters and continue to support them through the placements process. Medical information is reviewed by the medical adviser and is passed to the adopters.

There is a good range of specialist advisers available and social workers interviewed felt very positively about the availability and accessibility of these services. The medical adviser was said to be approachable, dedicated and makes herself available to speak to adopters about any medical issues in relation to their child. The legal adviser was similarly available for advice to staff. There is access to a psychotherapist who provides adopters and staff with a range of consultation, treatment and support services.

Advisers commented that they were used appropriately. While there are written protocols in place for accessing specialist advice not all advisers were aware that these are in place. In relation to medical advice there are ongoing discussions between the agency and the primary care trust regarding roles, responsibilities and the commissioning arrangements; this is with the aim of formalising the work with looked after children including those for whom permanency is the plan.

There is a multi-disciplinary panel that provides a consultation service for adopters, carers and social workers specifically for working with children with more complex needs. The work of the panel is firmly based in attachment theories and the aim is to help the development of secure attachments and stable placement for children in a variety of ways. The panel can be accessed at various stages of the adoption processes including at the family finding stages of the process. This work informs assessments about placement options. This panel is an excellent resource and the multi disciplinary approach allows for all dimensions of a child or families needs to be considered.

In the event of difficulties occurring in a placement there is a menu of support available to try and sustain a placement. The agency had a service level agreement with a 2nd adoption support agency in addition to the range of internal support available.

Where it is not possible or appropriate to sustain the placement the agency has a clear procedure in place to ensure that that the impact on the child is kept to a minimum.

Adopters spoken with and who responded with written questionnaires, in most cases felt they received good support from their social workers. The following comments were made:

“Our support from Surrey SSD has been very good.”(Inter-country adopter)

“The post adoption support service we are having access to has happened very quickly and we are hoping will be successful.” (Domestic adopters)

A placing social worker commented:

“Support workers have been consistently good.”

A minority of adopters felt less supported, one inter-country adopter commented:

“We have been disappointed with the support we have had. It has been tough for all of us.”

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):

7, 8, 9, 34

Quality in this outcome area is good.

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

Surrey has a clear strategy for working with birth family members. The agency is committed to supporting birth parents and involving them in their child's adoption as fully as is possible.

EVIDENCE:

The service provided to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption and the need to involve birth parents in the planning for their children who are to be adopted.

One questionnaire was received from a birth family member and four birth family members were interviewed. Overall the views about the services provided to them were positive and there was clear evidence that the approach to the family members was seen as professional.

It was clear from one case that the views and wishes of the family had been fully taken into consideration; a favourable assessment had been made of a family member. This involved the child being placed overseas. The planning and support in this case was of an excellent quality.

There is an independent birth families project which can provide a service to all birth families whose children may be placed for adoption. Referrals can be made to this service on behalf of families or self-referrals are also accepted. Birth family members who had been seen during the inspection, all felt they had received a good service.

An independent counsellor for birth parents is available at a central venue on a monthly basis. Birth parents are informed about this service when a decision is made that adoption is to be the plan for the child.

Support is also available to birth parents via the child's keyworker and the adoption and permanency worker.

Written information for birth parents about the services Surrey provide and about national organisations which offer services to birth family members are available on the Surrey website and in the form of leaflets.

It was noted that there had been some improvements made since the last inspection in promoting the services available to birth parents and that there were plans to further develop systems to attempt to engage parents at the earliest stage possible.

Evidence was noted of birth parents being enabled to provide their views for inclusion in the child's permanency report and parents are provided with an opportunity to read what has been written about them and their family.

The agency's permanency policies and procedures are clear about the importance of maintaining children's heritage and this was generally reflected in practice. Life-story work is viewed as important, and some excellent examples of this being achieved were noted.

There is an efficient and effective post box service in place through which the indirect contact arrangements between birth family members and adopted children are administered. Birth family members are able to access the services of an assistant social worker to support them in writing letters.

There are also a number of direct contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth family; these are well supported by the agency.

The counselling and intermediary service provided to people affected by adoption was noted as being of a good quality. The cases viewed showed that work had been well planned and carried out in a professional but sensitive way.

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):

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

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 staff are well supported in providing a good standard of service to children and families.

EVIDENCE:

There is a clear statement of purpose that reflects the work of the agency and its policies and procedures. The statement is reviewed on an annual basis and ratified by the executive.

The agency uses the BAAF Children's Guide to which has been added local information. The agency has also developed two other guides that cater for the younger age ranges.

The agency has a full range of policies and procedures which have been updated in line with new legislation.

There is clear information available for both domestic and inter-country adopters which outlines the process and eligibility criteria. The agency website is informative is easy to navigate and provides users with links to other relevant organisations and websites.

Prospective adopters are enabled to talk to approved adopters where it is felt this would be helpful. This can be arranged via the adoption support agency mentioned in the enjoying and achieving section of this report. Prospective adopters are made aware of the types of children needing families at various stages of the process.

There is a system in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting. In one case it was noted that the system may not have been fully implemented and some "short cuts" had been taken. It should be assured that all required checks and assessment work is carried out satisfactorily in every case before presentation to the adoption panel.

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced in adoption matters. There are clear lines of accountability throughout the agency and the agency is very well managed by an enthusiastic and committed management team. Social work staff reported that communication between them and the management team was good.

The recent changes due to the re-organisation of council services which have impacted on the adoption and permanency team in particular include, the loss of one management post, the integration of the three teams into two teams, a move to a new building, some change in the management arrangements and areas of work for some staff, a reduction of administrative support services and some changes in business processes. Staff felt that despite these upheavals the impact of these on outcomes for children had been kept to the minimum; the available evidence supports this view.

Some adopters, both domestic and inter-country adopters, expressed a high level of frustration about delays at various points of the process. Some adopters also felt that in the family finding and matching processes the agency was not always proactive on their behalf. This is a difficult situation to address, as clearly the needs of the children for a placement have to take priority over the needs of the adults in the process. As the majority of these were responses from questionnaires, which are completed anonymously, it was not possible to fully explore these issues with the adopters concerned but it was clear from some that the delays had been a result of poor communication and response from the agency, staff sickness or delays in allocating a worker.

One domestic adopter summed up the range of views expressed by these adopters when they commented:

“Very long process we are therefore frustrated with the length of time it is taking and how little information we are given at the moment.”

A recommendation has been made about monitoring timescales at each stage of the process; this could link into plans to take a more formal approach to establishing adopters’ views at various stages of the process.

There are procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the agency at all levels. These range from the supervision of staff to the management information systems, and regular involvement of the executive and clear reporting procedures. It was clear that all levels of the management structure right up to the executive took a proactive approach in the monitoring and controlling aspects of their work. In respect to some aspects of monitoring practice some further development is needed. For example the monitoring role of the panel should be further developed. This has been commented on elsewhere in this report.

All of the staff met with during the inspection were knowledgeable skilled and enthusiastic about their work.

The link worker role was cited by some children’s social workers as having a key role in supporting the child’s social worker in progressing the child’s case through the adoption process. Some of these workers commended the adoption team; one commented that adoption team staff were:

- “Very professional, very knowledgeable”,

Positive comments from adopters included:

- “Wonderful social workers. They are helpful, compassionate informative and above all clearly have our son’s best interests at heart.” (Inter-country adopters)

And

- "Our social worker is fantastic is always happy to spend time talking about any issues we have or to enjoy hearing about the lovely things that happen." (Domestic adopter)

The administrative staff were also described as being "efficient" and "helpful."

Not so positive views from adopters in the main were around the various delays in the process as detailed earlier in this section of the report. However, 3 adopters felt let down by their worker with one stating:

- "Social worker let us down with our assessment. She was always late and cancelled meetings at the last minute." (Domestic adopter)

Staff felt that overall Surrey was a good authority to work for and reported that overall they felt valued and supported by their managers and each other. Within the adoption service there are good opportunities to specialise in specific areas of adoption work. This appears to have contributed both to the feeling of well-being expressed by staff and to the innovative practice in various areas of the service. For example, in the development of assessment and "treatment" work around attachment issues.

It was noted that the support for staff and the training opportunities in Surrey were particularly good. There is an annual appraisal scheme in place which links to the business plan and the children's services plan. A clear professional development plan is devised for each staff member through the appraisal process and this ensures that training relevant to the needs of the staff and the service is delivered. Further evidence of the considerable investment made in staff training is the annual sponsorship of up to 15 social work trainees.

Staff reported that they receive regular supervision, that team meetings are held regularly and that there are a range of other forums for them to discuss current practice and changes in legislation.

Case files on children and adopters were comprehensive and well ordered. It just needs to be assured that all of the extracts of Panel minutes include name and position of attendees.

There are written procedures in place for accessing adoption records. A file audit system is in place but had not been implemented on all of the files inspected. The manager was planning to further develop the file audit system

Separate records are maintained of allegations and complaints. These were viewed and it was noted that complaints are dealt with in line with the agency's policies and procedures.

The archive arrangements are good. All records are archived in purpose built premises and there are clear arrangements for the access to and return of files

in place. There are clear risk assessments in place to ensure that damage from water and fire is minimised.

Personnel files on permanent staff and panel members are satisfactory.

The premises are identifiable, accessible and secure. There are appropriate security systems in place for access to the building. The records are securely stored and the IT systems are appropriately safeguarded. There is a disaster recovery plan in place.

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	4
8	3
9	3
34	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	3
4	4
5	3
10	3
11	3
12	2
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	3
18	4
33	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
3	2
14	4
16	3
17	3
20	2
21	3
22	4
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	AD4	The manager should ensure that additions are made to the health and safety assessments as detailed in the main body of the report and ensure that in all assessments the dates of adopters' employment histories include months.
2	AD5 AD12 AD3	The manager should ensure that all information is gathered in a timely way and is fully incorporated into assessments of adopters and children. This recommendation also relates to where adopters are being prioritised for a specific child.
3	AD10	The manager the panel chair and the agency adviser should ensure that the monitoring role of the panel is further developed and the arrangements documented.
4	AD20	The manager should ensure that close monitoring of timescales for adopters at each stage of the process takes place and that adopters are kept informed about the

		reasons for and likely duration of any delay.
5	AD27	The manager should progress the planned developments in the file audit system and ensure that this is implemented for all files.

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