



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

Stockport MBC Adoption Service

Looked After Service

1 Baker Street

Heaton Norris

Stockport

SK4 1QQ

28th September 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

Promote improvement in social care

Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors

Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market

Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services

Hold performance statistics on social care

Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services

Register and inspect services against national standards

Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)

3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)

2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)

1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

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

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

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

ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

Stockport MBC Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

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Stockport, SK4 1QQ

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Certificate number of this adoption service

Not Applicable

Date of last inspection

November 2001

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

NA

Date of Inspection Visit		28th September 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Marian Denny	125215
Name of Inspector	2	Maureen Moore	125773
Name of Inspector	3	Not Applicable	
Name of Inspector	4	Not Applicable	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not applicable	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not applicable	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Sue Westwood – Service Manager Fostering and Adoption. Hilary Thomas - Adoption Team Manager.	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

Inspection methods used

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This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Stockport is a Metropolitan District in the North West of England. The council's adoption service falls within the remit of the Children's Services Division, which is part of the borough's wider social services department. At the time of the inspection the service was located in a large, Victorian, detached property in Reddish Green, Stockport. The premises were suitable for their stated purpose.

Prior to the inspection, the adoption service had worked as a joint provision with the fostering service; it now stands alone and had a team manager in charge of the day-to-day business. The service manager managed the work of both the adoption and fostering teams. The adoption service was a member of the Greater Manchester Adoption Consortia, which was made up of a number of local authority partner agencies.

The service's main purpose was to make arrangements for the adoption of children and in doing so provided a comprehensive, recruitment, training, assessment, approval and support service to prospective and approved adopters. It was also involved in matching adoptive parents and children. Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption service was linked with the Greater Manchester Adoption Consortium in seeking and providing placements, as well as the Adoption Register.

The agency also provided a counselling service to adults, who were seeking information about their birth family.

The service maintained a Letterbox Exchange that supported information exchange in adoption placements.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council no longer provided an inter-country adoption service. Those wishing to adopt from another country were given details about the Nugent Care Society's adoption agency.

The agency provided post adoption support services to adopters, children and adults who had been adopted, as well as independent support services to birth parents through its service level agreement with After Adoption.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

The inspection of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption service took place over four and a half days in September 2004 and was carried out by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. This was the first time that the Council's adoption service had been inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000 and against the National Minimum Standards for Adoption, which had been introduced on 30th April 2003. This inspection therefore served as an audit of the Council's adoption service against the new requirements. It was intended that this inspection report would prove helpful to managers and staff as it identified some areas for service development, which were required and provided reasonable timescales for these to be completed. However, the inspectors identified a couple of issues that required addressing more urgently and these matters were raised with the managers during the inspection. They are also highlighted in the report with a relatively short time scale for completion.

During the Inspection, the inspection team received two questionnaires from placing social workers and one from a specialist advisor. Interviews also took place with several prospective and approved adopters. The responses received from these questionnaires and the information obtained from these interviews has been reflected in the main body of this report.

Overall, the inspector's found that Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had made considerable efforts to meet the National Minimum Standards, as illustrated by the recent revision of the service's statement of purpose and the development of various Policies, Procedures and written Guidance relating to the adoption service. The introduction of tracking and management information systems, along with the development of the supervision, reviewing and file auditing systems, formed a good basis to monitor, control and ensure quality performance. At the time of the inspection, these systems were at a very early stage of implementation and as a consequence the inspectors were unable to fully assess their effectiveness. However, the inspectors were of the view that the development of these policies, procedures and systems augured well for the future of the service and would commend the managers for the hard work, effort and commitment they had shown in establishing these systems.

Statement of Purpose (standard1)

This standard was met

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption agency had recently reviewed and updated its statement of purpose, which was comprehensive, extremely detailed and contained all the information outlined, in Schedule 1 of the Adoption Services Regulations 2003.

The adoption service provided the British Association of Adoption and Fostering's booklet, "Adoption, what it is and what it means" to children who were to be adopted. In addition, the agency had produced its own children's guide. This attractive little booklet, entitled, "Explaining adoption to you" presented information about adoption in a child friendly form and effectively communicated the nature of adoption and its processes. There was also a child friendly complaints' leaflet, entitled, "Communicate with Us", which outlined the

service's complaints procedure and this, together with the other two booklets was given to any child or children, who were to be adopted.

The inspectors were advised that both the statement of purpose and the children's guide could be produced in other languages, in Braille and also in audio form.

The service had also recently introduced a form to record when the children's guide had been given to the child; adherence to this practice was monitored through the system of file auditing.

Securing and promoting children's welfare (standard 2)

This standard was assessed and found to be almost met

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had recently completed a written adoption recruitment strategy, which was based on an analysis of the current and predicted need of local children waiting to be adopted. The service had arrangements in place to review and evaluate this strategy.

At the time of the inspection, there had been some new initiatives in the fostering service, for example the recruitment of a recruitment and marketing officer. Consideration was being given as to whether such initiatives could be adapted for use in the adoption services. A CD Rom, entitled "Could you Care" was being used to recruit foster carers and prospective adopters and this had proved effective in the recruitment of some prospective adopters.

The adoption agency had recently revised its permanence, family finding and matching policy and procedures, which provided clear guidance to staff on all aspects of the adoption process, including the pre and post adoption support services that were available.

These policies and procedures also emphasised the importance of children being matched with adopters who best met their needs, however, it was recognised that it was not always possible to achieve this ideal match. In these situations, the agency provided support to the adoptive family so that any gaps in relation to the children's background and needs were met and this ensured the child or children developed a positive self-image.

This documentation also stressed the importance of sibling groups remaining together, although acknowledged that there were some circumstances where the separation of siblings was appropriate. In addition, the guidance stated that it would not search indefinitely for a sibling placement and thereby compromise the children's need for adoption.

Evidence was obtained that in matching a child with approved adopters, the service usually took the views and feelings of the child into account, as was appropriate to their age and understanding. The child's care plan, recent written assessments of the child, the birth family, potential adoptive parents and their children were also taken into account. However, in one file, a shortfall was found relating to one of these matters and in future will be addressed through the service's quality assurance systems. (Please see standard 2, for further details.) A recommendation was made in relation to this.

In addition, examination of these records indicated that in the past, there had been some delays in the completion of written assessments of prospective adopters, which in turn had resulted in some delay for children waiting to be adopted. There had also been some issues in relation to the quality of written assessments of the child. At the time of the inspection, the service had addressed these difficulties through an increase in staff within the adoption service. Training had also been provided to childcare staff to improve the quality of written

child assessments.

Prospective and approved adopters (standards 3 – 6)

1 of the 4 assessed standards were met, two were almost met and one was not met

The adoption agency recruited adoptive parents, without prejudice and they were treated fairly, openly and with respect through out the adoption process. New procedures had been established to ensure initial enquiries made to the adoption service were responded to in a prompt, friendly, helpful and informative manner and these were working effectively.

Following prospective adopters initial enquiries, the service had developed an information pack. This pack was attractively presented, informative and the inspectors were of the view extremely useful in understanding the adoption process. However, its recent introduction into the service prevented the inspectors ascertaining prospective and approved adopters' views regarding its usefulness.

Similarly, the service had only recently produced written eligibility criteria for adopters. In the past, this information had been shared with prospective adopters, verbally. Those spoken with though confirmed that the criteria had been presented in a clear, open manner and as a consequence, had gained a good understanding of this before proceeding.

The adoption service's statement of purpose makes clear that there are systems in place to ensure that priority is given to the assessment of prospective adopters, who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, together with Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and the Boys and Girls Welfare Society jointly offered preparation training, via preparation groups. In working in a collaborative manner with other adoption agencies, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council ensured that preparation groups took place frequently and met adopters' needs within the timescale of the adoption standards.

The assessment process used by the adoption service was based on the BAAF form "F" model and operated within an anti – discriminatory and equal opportunities framework.

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors examined a sample of files and found the quality of assessments were variable, some were of a high quality, thorough and insightful; whereas others were less detailed and did not appear to have addressed all the issues. Some shortfalls were found in relation to these files, which resulted in a requirement and five recommendations being made. (Please see the relevant section of this report, for further details.)

During interviews with prospective adopters and adopters, there were a variety of views expressed regarding the preparation, assessment and approval process. These were fully detailed in standard 4, of this report.

At the time of the inspection, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had made a commitment that when foster carers adopted a child, whom they had fostered, they would receive the same services as other prospective adopters. The inspectors would welcome and endorse such developments in the service given the difficulties that can emerge for foster carers, when they receive a different service to that provided other prospective adopters.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had introduced a system to address the death of an

adopted child, which they were in the process of implementing.

The inspectors' examination of a sample of Adoption records evidenced that careful consideration was given to matching to ensure that good practice and outcomes were achieved, including enabling siblings to live together where possible.

The adoption service had developed an adoption support policy, which outlined the written strategy for working with and supporting adopters. The BAAF adoption support plan was used by the adoption service to help adoptive parents provide stable and permanent homes for their children.

In addition, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had a service level agreement with After Adoption, which was an independent adoption support organisation. This organisation provided access to support groups, as well as a helpline and counselling. This arrangement included the provision of services to adopted children.

The service had also established a consultation group for adopters, which had considered training needs for adopters and various support initiatives for adopters.

In interviews with adopters, several stated that they were visited regularly, received good advice and felt extremely well supported by the adoption service, although one adopter indicated that they had received no support from the adoption team. This difficulty appeared to have occurred, due to staff shortages, though was to be addressed with the recent appointment of agency staff. Some adopters also indicated that they were unsure of the support services available to them. Similarly, some childcare staff were uncertain of the adoption support services available. A recommendation was made regarding this. (Please see the recommendation section of this report, for further details.)

Birth Parents and Birth families (standards 7 – 9)

1 of the 3 assessed standards were met and the remaining two were almost met

The agency had a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and families, both before and after adoption. This strategy was outlined in their policy on involving birth families in adoptions. The policy recognised the important role that birth parents play in the adoption process and actively involved birth parents, as well as their families to contribute to their child's planning process. Those parents unable or unwilling to attend such meetings were kept informed of the planning decisions made regarding their children, through minutes of meetings, court documentation etc. The agency had a clear expectation that the birth parents' views about adoption and contact should be clearly recorded and this was being actively monitored. The agency also aimed where possible to arrange a meeting between the birth and adoptive parents.

The inspectors were advised that birth parents and the birth family were encouraged to provide information on the child's birth and early life through life story work, as well as later life letters. Improvements in information sharing were being effected through a change in practice resulting in birth parents being shown the form "E" and being able to suggest amendments.

The service also maintained a letterbox system, which facilitated the exchange of information between the adopted and birth family and enabled the child to receive up-dated information regarding their birth parents/ family and maintain their heritage.

The Council also had a service level agreement with After Adoption; part of that contract was

to provide a counselling service for birth parents.

During the course of the inspection, some shortfalls were identified in relation to the involvement of birth parents in the adoption process and life story work, which resulted in two recommendations being made. These matters have been addressed in standards, 7 and 8, as well as in the recommendations' section of this report. (For further details, please see the relevant sections of this report.)

Adoption Panels and Agency decision (standards 10 – 13)

3 of the 4 assessed standards were met, the remaining one was almost met

The agency had a clear, detailed, statement of arrangements in relation to the Adoption Panel's functions, which was effectively implemented. This statement contained all the information required to meet the National Minimum Standards.

The Adoption Panel was properly constituted. The membership of the panel included people, who had suitable qualities, as well as a wide range of differing adoption experience. At the time of the inspection, the inspectors were aware that the agency was planning to recruit a birth parent and an adoptee as panel members.

The inspectors were of the view that the Adoption panel was well organised, operated in an efficient and effective manner and played a significant role in raising standards within the adoption service. The panel was also convened at an appropriate frequency to meet the needs of the prospective adopters and children. Similarly, the adoption agency's decisions were made without delay, promoted and safeguarded the welfare of the child.

The adoption agency had only recently made arrangements for prospective adopters to attend the Adoption Panel. Whilst the initial information pack contained information regarding this, the service was in the process of designing a specific, more detailed and informative leaflet for prospective adopters. In preparing for applicants' attendance at panel, the venue of the panel had been moved to a more appropriate setting. At the time of the inspection, there were plans for the development of a more suitable waiting room in which prospective adopters could wait prior to attending the panel.

A shortfall was identified in relation to the Panel minutes and this matter was addressed in standard 12, as well as in the requirement section of this report.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency (standards 14-15)

2 of the 2 assessed standards were met

The people involved in the management of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption agency had the appropriate management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively. Both managers were well respected and staff were confident in their capacity to raise the profile and standards of the adoption service.

The adoption agency had a written recruitment and selection policy and procedures for the appointment of a manager and staff. At the time of the inspection, the management files examined, contained the necessary documentation. The agency had also recently introduced additional procedures to strengthen these procedures.

Provision and management of the adoption agency (standards 16-18)

2 of the 3 assessed standards were met

The adoption agency had recently been restructured with a view to improving its efficiency. This had resulted in a significant increase in staffing levels within the team.

At the time of the inspection the service was almost fully staffed. This staff team consisted of a small number of permanent staff and a larger number of temporary, agency staff. It was clear that the management team though, were mindful of the difficulties that can emerge in the planning and delivery of a service when staff were employed on a temporary basis and were actively addressing this.

There were clear arrangements in place to identify the person in charge, when the service or team manager was absent. The roles of the managers and staff were clear and there were also well-established lines of communication and accountability between the managers and staff.

The agency informed managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interests, which was clearly set out in Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council 's conditions of service and issued to all staff in commencing employment with the Council.

The Council had an equal opportunities policy and promoted anti-oppressive practice. The staff recruitment procedures reflected this policy and practice, which was reinforced throughout the recruitment, selection and retention of staff.

There were good procedures in place for monitoring and controlling activities of the agency and these were fully detailed in standard 17, of this report. All reports presented to the senior management team and executive committee of the Council regarding the operation of the adoption agency were closely scrutinised to ensure that the adoption agency was effective and achieved good outcomes for the children.

The Council's finance section had the relevant financial information regarding charges for its services, which were itemised and included amounts paid to adopters. This information was available to purchasers of services and others with a legitimate interest on request.

The adoption service did not provide an Inter –country adoption service. Instead those wishing to adopt a child from another country were given details about the Nugent Care Society's adoption agency.

The adoption service had access to a variety of specialist advisors from both within and outside, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, which included an educational psychologist, a legal and medical advisor, as well as other specialists in relation to matters related to culture or race.

The agency had a written policy, procedures and a protocol regarding the roles of specialist panel advisers. Some shortfalls were found in these, which are detailed in standard 18, of this report. Two requirements and two recommendations were made regarding these matters and can be found in the relevant sections of this report.

Employment and management of staff (standards 19 – 23)

3 of the 5 assessed standards were met

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had written recruitment and selection procedures for the appointment of staff, which followed good practice guidelines. They had also introduced an additional system in relation to agency staff, ensuring that the service verified that the agency staff member had been robustly vetted by the agency. The inspectors were advised that a system had recently been put into place to ensure all staffs' Criminal records Bureau check was renewed every three years.

During the inspection, a sample of personnel files of staff working within the adoption service and panel members' files were selected and examined. A shortfall was identified in one of the staff files relating to a Criminal Records Bureau check and in some panel members files. Requirements were made regarding these matters, which were detailed in the appropriate sections of this report.

All staff working within the adoption agency were suitably qualified and had at least two years child care experience. They also had experience in carrying out assessments. Several members of staff had a number of years experience in family placement work; whilst others had limited experience in this area of work. However, the inspectors were of the opinion that the team was rather disproportionate in terms of its experience in adoption work, which required to be addressed as soon as possible. A requirement was made regarding this (Please see standard 21 and the requirement section of this report, for further details.)

During the inspection, it was ascertained that birth records counselling, under section some staff, who were not trained or experienced in this area of work, was providing 51 of the Adoption Act 1976. A requirement was made in relation to this. (Please see standard 21 and the requirement section of this report, for further details.)

The manager of the service was aware that 20% of the adoption agency's social workers should have or be in the process of obtaining the post qualifying childcare award by 2006. A recommendation was made regarding this.

The level of management delegation and responsibility was clearly defined. Staff interviewed had a good understanding of the levels of management delegation, responsibility and decision making within the service.

The adoption agency had a system to prioritise, allocate and monitor staffs' workload. In addition, a tracking system had been implemented, which monitored all applications from prospective adopters, as well as children placed for adoption.

The adoption service was committed to the training and development of staff, as shown by the in- house and external training provided. Training was regularly evaluated and an annual training programme formulated. Workers' individual and professional development was monitored through the supervision system. In addition, a staff development officer was linked to the adoption team, who ensured that the training provided was appropriate to the team' s needs.

In the past there had been a shortage of professional and administrative support in the adoption service. This had now been addressed through an increase in resources, though some difficulties still existed and have been detailed, in standard 20 and 21, of this report. Two requirements were made relating to these matters and can be found in the requirement section of this report.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council was seen as a fair and competent employer and had sound employment practices. A variety of initiatives to attract, recruit and retain staff had been introduced and these were fully detailed in standard 21 of this report.

The adoption service had two adoption champions, who were located in the family support and the looked after children services. These staff were extremely committed their work and made a significant contribution to the delivery of an efficient and effective adoption service in

raising the profile and standards in adoption, amongst the council's childcare teams.

The adoption agency had recently produced literature, which clearly advised prospective and approved adopters of the range of support services available to them. The inspectors were of the view that this literature needed to be publicised more proactively.

Records (standards 25 – 28)

3 of the 4 assessed standards were met

A recording policy was in place, which provided clear guidelines and expectations regarding recording. In the past, the case recording on adopters' files had not been comprehensive, nor had the files been well organised. This had been addressed and remedial action identified. At the time of the inspection, the team manager had started to monitor files on a regular basis. To ensure that the recording standards were maintained the service manager also carried out quarterly file audits.

Subsequent examination of a sample of prospective and approved adopters, as well as children's files demonstrated some shortfalls in recording and the organisation of the files. (Please see standard 25, for further details.) A requirement and a recommendation was made regarding these matters, which were detailed in the appropriate sections of this report.

The adoption service had a policy and procedural instructions to cover arrangements for maintaining the confidentiality of adoption information, adoption case records and their indexes. The inspectors were able to confirm that staff, panel members and specialist advisors understood these instructions. The service had also begun to monitor compliance.

The inspectors were advised that case decisions made in supervision were now recorded and held on the case files. An examination of case files confirmed that the service had recently commenced this practice and examples of case decision records were seen.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had recently up-dated its Access to Records policy to ensure that it was compliant with the National Minimum Standards and the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983.

The adoption agency's confidential records were stored securely and there was a policy on access. The service was of the view that all adoption files were securely stored to minimise the risk of damage from fire or water. A recommendation was made in relation to the enhanced security of all adoption files, which was referred to in standard 25 of this report.

In examining a sample of records, the Inspectors found that not all the written records complied with standard 27.5 and a recommendation regarding this was made. (Please see the relevant section of this report for details.)

The adoption agency had a separate record system for complaints, allegations and child protection in relation to prospective, approved adopters and staff. These record systems were stored confidentially and securely.

Complaints were investigated promptly and the findings evaluated. Learning derived from such investigations, informed service development and was actioned by management. A recommendation was made in relation to the record of complaints, which was detailed in standard 27 of this report.

Personnel files were held centrally. Some shortfalls were identified in the files examined, as they did not contain all the information required, under Schedule 3 and 4 of the Adoption

Services' Regulations 2003. (Please see standard 18,19 and 28, for details.) Two requirements and one recommendation were made in relation to these shortfalls and were detailed in the requirement section of this report.

Premises (standard 29)

This standard was met

The adoption agency was located in a large, detached property in Reddish Green, Stockport. These premises had disabled access to the lower ground floor. The recent increase in staff had resulted in accommodation becoming a little overcrowded, however, the service had plans to address this through the refurbishment and use of some vacant rooms, which were located on the upper floor of the building.

The agency's IT equipment had recently been increased and there was now sufficient, to meet staffs' needs. They were informed that the service had one laptop for home working. There were also arrangements in place to ensure that all staff had access to a personal computer on an individual basis. The inspectors' were advised of the security in place to safeguard all information contained in the IT system.

The service had a variety of other necessary equipment to support staff in the effective delivery of an adoption service, for example, a fax, photocopying machine, a scanner etc. There were also plans for a new switchboard and telephone system to be installed, which would further improve efficiency.

The premises had lockable filing cabinets to secure confidential information, which were kept within a lockable room. In addition, the premises had appropriate security systems in place to prevent inappropriate access to the building.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had adequate Premises and Contents Insurance to promptly replace any lost or damage caused to contents of the building or premises.

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

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

NA

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

NA

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

NA

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

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Not Applicable

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

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

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

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	Schedule, part V11 of the adoption agency regs.1983	LA4 & A25	The manager of the service must ensure that prospective adopters have a full medical examination, as part of the matters to be covered in a report on the health of prospective adopters.	30/09/2004
2	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs.2003 10(b) & 11 (3) (b)	LA6 & LA19	The manager of the service must ensure that a person appointed to the adoption service has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work he or she is to perform.	30/09/2004
3	The adoption agency regs.1983, 14 (2) & the Data Protection Act	LA12	The manager must ensure that where a case record has been set up by an adoption agency, any report, recommendation made by the agency must be placed on the case record relating to that child.	30/11/2004

4	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs 2003 10(b)	LA18 & LA28	The agency must ensure that those working for the service are suitably qualified and competent. In view of this documentary evidence must be obtained in relation to panel members and specialist advisors' registration with the appropriate professional bodies. This evidence must be held on their file.	30/11/04
5	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs 2003 6(2)(c), 11(3)(d), 15(1) & Schedules 3 & 4	LA18LA19 & LA28	The manager of the service must ensure that information is held on all persons who work for the adoption service in accordance with Schedule 3. This must include documentary evidence of qualifications, Criminal Records Bureau checks and applies to all staff, panel members and specialist advisors.	30/11/04
6	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs 2003 11(3)(b)	LA19	The manager of the service must ensure all staff, who carry out birth counselling under section 51 of the Adoption Act 1976 have received training in this work.	30/01/2005
6	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs 2003 10(a) 10(b)	LA19LA20 & LA21	The manager of the service must ensure that there are a sufficient number of competent, experienced social work and administrative staff working for the purposes of the adoption agency.	1/01/2005

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA1	The adoption agency should ensure all staff working in the childcare services are made aware of the service's revised statement of purpose, policies and procedures.
2	LA2 & LA4	The adoption service should ensure that the views of the applicants' children are taken into account re adoption
3	LA2	The adoption service should ensure that assessments are carried out in accordance with the national adoption standard timescales
4	LA2	The adoption service should ensure all staff working in the relevant childcare services are provided with form "E" training.
5	LA3	The adoption agency should consider including some information about the service's eligibility criteria and those children waiting to be adopted, in the information pack provided prospective adopters.
6	LA4	The agency should consider developing its health and safety checklist. This checklist should be applied in a consistent manner in all assessments carried out by the agency.
7	LA4	The agency should consider incorporating in its practice that each prospective adopter be interviewed separately, on at least one occasion, during the course of the assessment.
8	LA4	Foster carers, who wish to adopt should receive the same preparation training, assessment and support services, as those provided other prospective adopters.
9	LA4 & LA12	Prospective adopters should be kept fully informed of their progress at each stage in the assessment and approval process.
10	LA6 & LA17	The agency should be proactive in publicising information about the post placement and post adoption support services available to adopters to all those working for, managing or receiving an adoption service.
11	LA7	The agency should consider providing birth parents with a copy of the form "E". Written evidence should be obtained to confirm receipt of the form, with an acknowledgement that they are in agreement with its contents or have suggested amendments they believe should be made.

12	LA8	The agency should ensure that clear and appropriate information is obtained for the child about themselves and life before adoption.
13	LA11	The agency should adopt a more systematic approach to panel members training with the development of an annual training plan for panel members.
14	LA18	The specialist panel advisors' protocol should be revised to include the modus operandi regarding the appointment of such specialist panel advisors.
15	LA18	Written procedures should be produced to cover the role and access arrangements of all other specialist advisors in relation to the adoption service.
15	LA19	The agency should ensure that 20% of the adoption agency's social workers have or be in the process of obtaining the post qualifying childcare award by 2006.
16	LA22	The whistle blowing policy, together with permission for its use, should be re-launched. This policy should also include the details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, as a source to whom issues can be directed.
17	LA25 & LA27	The agency should risk assess all adoption records to ensure that they are stored in such a manner to minimise the risk of damage from fire and water.
18	LA25	The manager of the service should give consideration to the formatting of prospective adopters files being improved, with a clearer indication given when the roles and status of the adults in the household change.
19	LA25& LA27	It is recommended that to aid the legibility of records, consideration should be given to records being typed, individuals' full names written and their roles identified. The agency should also ensure that all records are signed and dated, by both staff and managers.
20	LA27	The agency should develop their complaints record to include the outcome of the complaint.
21	LA28	It is recommended that a checklist should be used on personnel files to record that all necessary enquiries and statutory checks in relation to personnel have been undertaken.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
Directors of Social services	YES
Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
Interview with children	YES
Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
Interview with birth parents	NO
Interview with birth family members	NO
Contact with supervising social workers	YES
Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	27/09/04
Time of Inspection	13.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	96
Number of Inspector days	7.5
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	NA
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	NA
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	8

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

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

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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At the time of the Inspection, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's Adoption Service had reviewed and up-dated their statement of purpose. The inspectors were advised that the Executive Board of the Council had formally approved this statement of purpose in August 2004. It was intended that this document would be reviewed on an annual basis, in accordance with the National Minimum Standards. The manager of the service was aware that if the statement of purpose were to be revised, the Commission for Social Care Inspection would need to be advised of any such revision within 28 days.

This statement of purpose was comprehensive, extremely detailed and covered all the areas required under Schedule 1 of the Adoption Regulations 2003. The statement clearly outlined the principles, aims and objectives of the Council's adoption service; it's organisational structure, the functions of the service and the procedures in place for recruiting, preparing, assessing approving and supporting prospective adopters. The statement of purpose also provided information as to how operations are controlled, detailing the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the service. A summary of the complaints procedure was provided and included contact details for the Commission for Social Care Inspection

Stockport Council's adoption service provided all children for whom adoption was the plan, with a booklet, entitled "Adoption, what it is and what it means". This booklet, which had been produced by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering, (BAAF) explained what adoption meant and provided full details about the adoption process and procedures. It also provided information about independent advocates and the organisations that can assist a child or young person in contacting an independent advocate. This booklet also contained details regarding the former National Care Standards Commission and the Children's Rights Director. However, the adoption service had ensured that the booklet included up-to-date information regarding the Commission for Social Care Inspection and the Children's Rights Director, including up-to-date contact details.

In addition, the agency had produced its own children's guide. This attractive little booklet, entitled, "Explaining adoption to you" presented information about adoption in a child friendly form and effectively communicated the nature of adoption and its processes. There was also a child friendly complaints' leaflet, entitled, "Communicate with Us", which outlined the service's complaints procedure and together with the other two booklets, was given to the child.

The inspectors were advised that both the statement of purpose and the children's guide could be produced in other languages, in Braille and also in audio form.

The service had also recently introduced a form to record that a child, for whom adoption was the plan, had received a children's guide. It was intended that the completion of this form would be regularly monitored through the file auditing, which was being undertaken by the management team.

The registered manager of the service stated that the adoption service takes account, in both written and oral communication, of any physical, sensory or learning disability of members of the public, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and any professionals involved in the adoption process. The inspectors were advised that the council had access to specialist advisers and interpreters, which could be used as necessary. Thus, all leaflets, as well as other written information, could be made available in other languages, as well as Braille and audio form. The inspectors were informed that the agency expected that where required, arrangements would be made for documents to be read or translated and the contents fully explained to all those involved in the adoption process.

There was evidence that the revised statement of purpose had been issued to staff within the agency, panel members and prospective, as well as approved adopters, though not all childcare staff appeared to have seen the document.

At the time of the inspection, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption service's policies and procedures had been reviewed and where necessary revised, to ensure that they accurately reflected the statement of purpose. The inspectors were aware that many of these policies and procedures had only recently been produced, whilst they had been put on the Council's intranet, not all childcare staff had seen them. The inspectors would recommend that the agency should formally launch the service's statement of purpose and policies and procedures to all staff working in the childcare services.

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

YES

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

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

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

YES

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had recently completed a written adoption recruitment strategy, which was based on an analysis of the current and predicted need of local children waiting to be adopted, as well as those in the Greater Manchester Adoption Consortium. The strategy quite clearly outlined its values and aims, identified the children who needed adoptive placements and the range and diversity of prospective adopters required to meet this need, along with the recruitment process. The strategy also outlined the consultation processes, as well as the monitoring and evaluation systems that had been devised to determine the effectiveness of this recruitment strategy. The inspectors were informed that there were plans for the adoption recruitment strategy to be reviewed six months after its implementation by the Children Services Management Group, that is, in March 2005. Thereafter the managers of the service on a quarterly basis would evaluate it.

In discussing the service's recruitment strategy the inspectors were informed of some of the new initiatives that had developed in the fostering service, for example the recruitment of a recruitment and marketing officer. Consideration was being given as to whether such initiatives could be adapted for use in the adoption services. One of the inspectors was also shown a CD Rom, entitled "Could you Care", which was being used by Stockport to recruit foster carers and prospective adopters. The inspector was informed this CD Rom had proved effective in the recruitment of some prospective adopters.

In addition to the adoption recruitment strategy, the adoption service ensured that all children waiting for adoption were referred to the Adoption Register.

The agency had recently revised its permanence, family finding and matching policy and procedures. These written policies and procedures clearly identified and detailed the issues in the pre – matching and matching process, together with the specified timescales. The procedures provided clear guidance to staff as to when a child/children should be referred to the Adoption Team for family finding, the subsequent action to be taken in the child's care planning and in cases where adoption was the plan for the child, the procedure to be followed in respect of a best interest recommendation or decision. The profiling of the child's needs, the identification of the qualities and abilities required by the adoptive parents to meet these needs were outlined in these procedures. Guidance was provided regarding family finding within and outside the Consortium, visits to prospective adopters, linking meetings and the adoption panel's role and procedures in relation to matching. The inter – agency meeting, the child's move to the prospective adoptive family, commencement of placement, as well as post adoption was also provided in this guidance.

These policies and procedures emphasised the importance of children being matched with adopters who best met their needs. It also emphasised that children, wherever possible, should be placed with a family, which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background,

religion and language. However, the documentation recognised that it was not always possible to achieve this ideal match. In these circumstances and within a realistic timescale, the policy indicated that children should be matched to a family, who as closely as possible met their needs, rather than being left waiting indefinitely within the care system and the child's need for adoption compromised. The inspectors were advised that in these situations, the agency would ensure that support was given to the adoptive family to bridge any gaps regarding the children's background and needs, so ensuring the children developed a positive self-image. The reasons why a child was not ideally matched and the support that the service proposed to provide the adoptive family would be fully recorded in the child's case record. This documentation also stressed the importance of sibling groups remaining together, unless this would prevent the individually assessed needs of children being met.

During the course of the inspection, interviews took place with managers, staff, and prospective and approved adopters in the service. The Inspectors also examined a sample of records. Evidence was obtained that in matching a child with approved adopters, the service takes the views and feelings of the child into account, as is appropriate to their age and understanding. The child's care plan, recent written assessments of the child, the birth family, potential adoptive parents and their children are also taken into account. However, in one file, the prospective adopters' children's views were not taken into account. (Please see standard 4, for further details.)

In addition, examination of these records indicated that in the past there had been some delays in the completion of written assessments of prospective adopters, which in turn had resulted in some delay for children waiting to be adopted. There had also been some issues in relation to the quality of written assessments of the child.

These difficulties were discussed at the time of the inspection. It was confirmed that they had occurred prior to February 2004, the inspectors were advised though that these issues had now been addressed through increased staffing levels within the adoption service. This had resulted in assessments being completed within agreed timescales and in accordance with the National Adoption Standards. Similarly the quality of the written assessments of the child had also improved, as a result of the "form E" training provided to childcare staff. During the course of the inspection, the inspectors became aware that not all childcare staff had received this training and a recommendation was made regarding this.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

33

How many children were matched with adopters?

23

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

14

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

9

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

2

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

23

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

100

%

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

4

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

0

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

10

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The adoption agency’s statement of purpose, recruitment strategy, as well as the permanence, family finding and matching policy and procedures clearly indicated that prospective adopters would be valued, treated with respect and in a fair and open manner. This documentation also reinforced the adoption service’s commitment to ensuring prospective adopters would be welcomed without prejudice. The inspectors’ examination of a sample of adoption records, interviews with prospective and approved adopters, as well as observation of the adoption panel confirmed the adoption service was practising in accordance with this documentation.</p> <p>During the course of the inspection, the inspectors interviewed four prospective and approved adoptive families; of those interviewed, one family indicated that they had found some difficulty receiving a response and indeed had to re-contact the agency before finally receiving a response to their enquiries. However, it would appear that their initial enquiries had been made some time ago and since then new procedures had been put in place to ensure that all adoption enquiries were dealt with promptly. Moreover from interviews with two of the families, it would appear that these new procedures were working effectively, as the inspectors were informed that the initial enquiries they had made to the adoption service had been responded to in a prompt, friendly, helpful and informative manner.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection, the agency had recently developed a procedure and practice guidelines for enquiries, assessment and approval of adopters, including timescales for each stage of the procedure.</p> <p>The service had also recently introduced an adoption information pack for prospective adopters, which was to be sent out within two working days of their initial enquiry. This pack was attractively presented and provided helpful information regarding what adoption means. It also contained a step-by-step guide from the initial enquiry stage to the preparation, assessment and approval process. The guide also provided information regarding the role of the adoption panel, the matching and placement process, the making of an adoption order and post adoption support, including the timescales for each stage of the process. In addition, the pack contained a question and answer sheet, which addressed the most commonly asked questions in relation to adoption, a leaflet on the letterbox exchange, as well as information regarding adopting a child from overseas. This pack had only recently been produced and as a consequence, it was not possible to ascertain prospective and approved adopters views regarding its usefulness. However, one of the inspectors was shown the pack and was of the view that it was in an attractive, user-friendly form, well</p>	2	

written and provided extremely useful information regarding the adoption process for prospective adopters. It is suggested though that the pack could perhaps be further enhanced with the inclusion of the adoption service's eligibility criteria and some information regarding children who are in need of adoption.

During the interviews with prospective and approved adopters, one family stated that they had received the service's statement of purpose, which had contained clearly written eligibility criteria. However, several stated that they had not received the adoption service's written eligibility criteria, though they stated that from the outset the agency had verbally informed them of the criteria in a clear and open manner, as a consequence they had a good understanding of it before proceeding. The inspectors were aware that the service's recently developed statement of purpose, which included written eligibility criteria will now address this and they were informed that this statement of purpose had now been sent to all prospective and approved adopters. Examination of the agency's records, as well as through interviews with managers and staff, confirmed that where prospective adopters are unlikely to satisfy the service's eligibility criteria, they are referred to another more appropriate adoption agency.

The adoption service did not take account in its preparation training of prospective adopters the particular needs of those intending to adopt from another Country, as it referred those wishing to adopt a child from another country to the Nugent Care Society, who specialise in inter-country adoption.

The adoption service's statement of purpose makes clear that there are systems in place to ensure that priority is given to the assessment of prospective adopters, who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted.

The inspectors were able to evidence that adopters had been given information regarding the preparation training and had been given the opportunity to talk to others who had adopted children. (Please see standard 4, for further details.)

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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The inspectors were informed that prospective adopters undergo a thorough comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

With regard to preparation training, they were advised that Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, together with Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and the Boys and Girls Welfare Society jointly offered such training, via preparation groups. These groups were run on a two monthly basis, with each agency taking it in turn to host the group. Regular management meetings were held between the three adoption agencies to ensure there was consistency between them with regard to the preparation training. In working in a collaborative manner with other adoption agencies, the adoption agency ensured that preparation groups took place frequently and met adopters' needs within the timescale of the adoption standards.

Preparation training was evaluated on a regular basis, with trainers from all three agencies reviewing and where necessary changing the content. The inspectors were advised that the service had recently devised a questionnaire with a view to ascertaining how comfortable a

“minority” applicant had been with the content and in attending the preparation groups. The service was also planning to improve the link and learning from Post Adoption Support Services into preparation training. Work was also being undertaken to improve the link between training and individual assessments. In addition, the agency also planned to hold open evenings for prospective adopters, which would enable applicants to meet experienced adopters much earlier in the process. The agency also intended to provide profiles of children waiting to adopt. The inspectors would welcome and endorse these developments, as they were of the view that such improvements in the service would further enhance the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters.

The assessment process used by the adoption service was based on the BAAF form “F” model and operated within an anti – discriminatory and equal opportunities framework. This model ensured that adopters were considered in terms of their capacity to care safely and meet the developmental needs of children. At the time of the inspection, the inspectors were advised that the service, in line with many other adoption agencies in the consortium, had decided not to fully base assessment on the competency based modules.

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors examined a sample of files and found the quality of assessments were variable, some were of a high quality, thorough and insightful; whereas others were less detailed and did not appear to have addressed all the issues. In one of the files, Stockport had commissioned a worker from another agency to complete the assessment. There was no evidence on this file to indicate that the male applicant had been interviewed separately, nor was there any evidence that the older children, who were living in the household had been interviewed and their views ascertained regarding the adoption. These issues were raised with the manager of the service at the time of the inspection. It was readily acknowledged these tasks of work should have been completed and ultimately addressed through the supervisory and monitoring process. The manager of the service will review the supervisory and monitoring process to ensure that if such issues arise in the future, they are immediately addressed.

The inspectors also noted that there was some inconsistency in relation to the health and safety checklist, as not all files contained such a list. Similarly not all files contained a risk assessment, for example in relation to dogs owned by prospective adopters. This was discussed with the manager at the time of the inspection, who advised the inspectors that the agency’s expectations were that all files should contain a health and safety checklist and where necessary risk assessments. It was agreed that this matter would be addressed.

Examination of these files confirmed that the service generally carried out the necessary enquiries, health checks and obtained personal references, as well as enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks in relation to prospective adopters and on all members of their household, who were aged eighteen years or over. However, in one of the files examined the prospective adopters had not had an up-to-date health check. This matter was raised with the manager of the service at the time of the inspection, which immediately agreed to address the matter. In interviewing prospective adopters, several confirmed that they had been informed of the necessary checks that would be undertaken in relation to their application and understood the reasons for these checks.

At the time of the inspection, the adoption agency had made a commitment to ensuring that when foster carers adopt a child, whom they have fostered, they receive the same services as other prospective adopters. With this in mind, a financial support policy had been developed which eliminated the financial disincentive to foster carers wishing to adopt. They were also actively embarking on a programme to improve services to foster carers, with

arrangements being made to ensure foster carers received the same information and able to access the same preparation training, as other prospective adopters. In addition, the service was giving consideration as to whether foster carers required specialist training or whether it would more effectively meet their needs, if foster carers received specific modules on a generic course. The inspectors would welcome and endorse such developments in the service, particularly in view of the fact that examination of one of the files and an interview with one family clearly illustrated the difficulties that can emerge for foster carers, when they receive a different service to that provided other prospective adopters.

In the past year, one application in relation to Inter Country adoption had been processed but subsequent applicants were directed to Nugent Care Society's adoption agency.

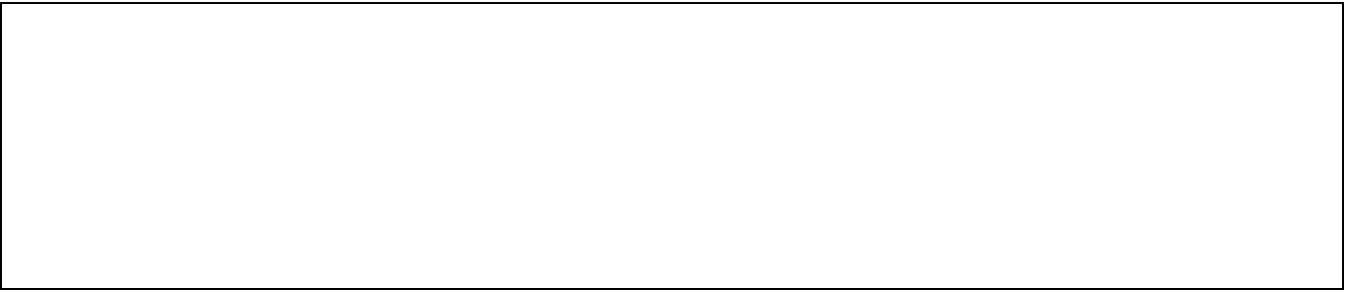
From interviews with several prospective and adoptive parents regarding the preparation and assessment process. Two of those interviewed stated that through out the preparation, assessment and approval process, they were treated with respect and in a fair and open manner.

The inspectors were able to confirm that the agency had a clearly set out preparation programme, which was made available to all prospective adopters. This programme did not address the particular needs of those who intended to adopt from another country, as these prospective adopters were referred to Nugent Care Society's adoption agency.

In discussing the preparation groups, several of those interviewed stated that the service encouraged and facilitated their attendance in the assessment and preparation groups by ensuring that they were warmly welcomed at the groups. They also stated that the preparation groups had been held at convenient times and venues. During the preparation groups, prospective adopters were given the opportunity to talk to others who had adopted children. They commented on this, stating that they had greatly valued hearing about the experiences of other adopters.

Several of those interviewed indicated that throughout the preparation, assessment and approval process, they were kept fully informed of their progress. They stated that they had found the assessment and approval process thorough had been well supported throughout the process and had found it a positive, valuable experience. Indeed, one adopter had been so impressed with the service they had received that they had recommended others to the adoption agency. However, one prospective adoptive family stated that whilst finding the preparation training invaluable, the assessment had been a less positive experience and at times painfully difficult. They also indicated that they had not been kept fully informed of their progress at any stage during the assessment process. The inspector was informed that they had made a formal complaint to the agency regarding this matter. This complaint had been subsequently resolved and had resulted in the service making several changes in its assessment and approval process.

Another family stated that it would have been useful if Stockport had provided written information regarding the adoption process, as this would have given them the opportunity to refer to the written materials, if required. However, they did acknowledge that during the assessment process, their worker had regularly checked out that they understood the adoption process and had kept them fully informed of their progress. The inspectors recognise that the recently completed information pack and children's guide, which is now being sent out to prospective adopters and children, who are to be adopted, should address this particular difficulty identified by the family.



Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

At the time of the inspection, the adoption service had produced an information pack for prospective adopters, which provided written information regarding the assessment, approval, matching, introduction, placement processes and support services available. A matching and placement Policy had also recently been produced, which referred to the adoption worker and their role in the linking process. In addition, this policy contained information regarding the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

The inspectors were advised that in the past verbal information regarding the assessment, approval, matching, introduction and placement processes, as well as support services had been provided prospective adopters throughout the preparation and assessment process. Information regarding the Adoption Register for England and Wales had also been provided. However, during the interviews with adopters, some indicated that they had not had a clear understanding of these processes, the support services available to them or the Adoption Register, whilst others indicated that the verbal information provided them had ensured that they had a good understanding of these matters. The inspectors were of the view that the service's newly written statement of purpose, matching and placement policy and information pack enabled more effective communication with adopters and thereby enhance their understanding about the adoption process, the support services available and the Adoption Register.

The inspectors were advised that accurate, up-to-date and full written information is provided to prospective adopters by way of the BAAF form "E". Prospective adopters also had an opportunity to meet with the foster carers, to discuss the information received with the child's social worker and to meet with the panel's medical advisor, prior to agreeing to move forward to an agreed match between the child and their family.

At the time of the inspection, the service had introduced a system to address the death of an adopted child, which they were in the process of implementing. The inspectors were advised that the service intended to introduce this matter early on in the adoption process, for example in the preparation groups, so that prospective adopters had ample opportunity to consider the issue and if needed, discuss it further in the home study visits. A form had also been developed indicating the adoptive parents decision regarding the matter, which was to be held on the adopters' file. In addition, the adoption agency ensured that the birth family's wishes regarding this matter were fully recorded and held on file. The Letterbox scheme had also been revised to include this information.

The inspectors' examination of a sample of Adoption records evidenced that careful consideration was given to matching to ensure that good practice and outcomes were achieved, including enabling siblings to live together where possible. Information from the two placing social workers' questionnaires received indicated that the child and adoptive parent had been effectively matched by the adoption agency.

Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?	YES	
Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7) Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.		
Key findings and evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The BAAF adoption support plan was used by the adoption service to help adoptive parents provide stable and permanent homes for their children.</p> <p>The inspectors were advised that the allocated adoption worker provided adoption support post placement, where needed, this worker was able to consult and obtain additional advice from the adoption support services adviser and adoption support services officer. The adoption support services adviser and adoption support services officer provided post placement support. The type of support services provided were dependent on need and ranged from educational, financial, counselling and therapeutic services. On – going training was provided to adopters’ post approval and an annual training programme developed.</p> <p>The service had also established a consultation group for adopters, which had considered training needs for adopters and various support initiatives for adopters. The group had been consulted on the service’s draft adoption support policy. At the time of the inspection, work was being undertaken with the group to consider whether an adopters’ association could be established.</p> <p>In addition, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had a service level agreement with After Adoption, which is an independent adoption support organisation. This organisation provided access to support groups, as well as a helpline and counselling. This arrangement includes the provision of services to adopted children.</p> <p>The adoption service’s recently developed adoption support policy outlined the written strategy for working with and supporting adopters. Unfortunately, the long - term sickness of a member of the adoption support team had rather hampered the development of the service, however, the inspectors were aware that there was a contingency plan in place to address this issue.</p> <p>In the interviews with adopters, several stated that they were visited regularly, received good advice and felt extremely well supported by the adoption service. However, in one case no support was provided by the adoption team, though the children’s social worker visited on a regular basis and provided the family with a great deal of support. This difficulty would appear to have occurred at a time when the adoption service was experiencing considerable staff shortages, however, the recent appointment of agency staff will now enable this matter to be addressed.</p>		

During these interviews the inspectors were able to confirm that some adopters were aware of the financial supports available, for example, adoption allowances and understood the criteria for the payment of them, however this was not the case for all those interviewed. One family indicated that they had been unaware of the criteria and indeed had received sparse information regarding their financial entitlement, as a consequence had encountered serious financial hardship. The inspector, with the family's permission, raised this matter with the service and team manager, who readily agreed to investigate the situation. In view of the fact that several adopters were unsure of the financial supports available to them, it is recommended that the service adopt a more proactive stance to publicising the support services available to adopters.

During the course of the interviews, some adopters indicated that they were unsure of the support services available to them. Similarly some childcare staff were also uncertain about the adoption support services available. Whilst the inspectors recognise that the service had only recently produced a written strategy in relation to adoption support services and the development of these services were very much at an evolutionary stage, a more effective means of disseminating information regarding these services was required. It was therefore recommended that the agency should be proactive in dissemination information about the post placement and post adoption support services available to adopters. This information needs to be publicised to all the Council's childcare workers, as well as prospective and approved adopters.

In the past year, the adoption agency had processed one application in relation to Inter Country adoption but subsequent applicants were directed to the Nugent Care Society's adoption agency.

The inspectors were advised that during the preparation and training groups, prospective adopters were informed of the importance of addressing issues of discrimination and helping children deal with racism or other experiences of discrimination. They also learnt of the need for children to understand their history and to develop positive self – esteem through life story work. This training, together with the home study visits, emphasised the importance of ensuring that items of memorabilia and life story work were kept safe. This was revisited and further reinforced during the linking and placing processes, as well as after placement, through the adoption agency's post approval training, support services and letterbox exchange.

At the time of the inspection, the agency made sure that clear arrangements were made with adopters regarding any information or photographs, which were to be provided to parents or other family members. Agreement was also reached on how information provided by birth families, via the agency, would be managed.

The inspectors were informed that a support worker was to be appointed in the adoption team, whose task would be to complete a life storybook for those children who were to be adopted. Whilst the inspectors welcomed such an appointment, they were mindful of the fact that the person appointed should possess the necessary prerequisite skills and experience given the complexity of the task and the potential therapeutic nature of the work. A requirement was made regarding this matter.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had a procedure in relation to Adoption Disruption. Thus, when placements are in difficulty, the adoption support is reviewed and appropriate support sought and provided to the child and family, for example, therapeutic interventions. The Council also had a service level agreement with After Adoption, which provided adoption support to the agency's adopters. In situations where placements breakdown, disruption meetings were held as a matter of course in order that all parties were able to make sense of and understand the nature of the placement breakdown.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	16	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	16	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	14	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	4	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	2	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	1	

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council recognised the important role that birth parents play in the Adoption process and addressed this in their policy on involving birth families in adoptions. The Council also had a service level agreement with After Adoption (see Standard 6); part of that contract was to provide a counselling service for birth parents. This service had been highlighted to childcare staff and there were plans for After Adoption staff to attend service meetings to enhance staffs' understanding of the scheme.

The adoption agency had an expectation that birth parents were involved in their child's Planning process. The inspectors were advised that prior to the second, "looked after children" review, parents are advised that the plan for the child might be adoption (along with other multi - track plans) and parents are provided with a leaflet entitled, "Multi – Track Planning", which explains this process. Whilst all birth parents were encouraged to attend the child's planning meetings and reviews, some parents were unable or unwilling to attend such meetings. In these situations, birth parents were kept informed of the planning decisions made regarding their children by minutes of meetings, court documentation etc. In one of the files examined, the inspector was able to evidence the adherence of this practice.

The adoption agency's planning for permanence policy and their policy on involving birth families in adoptions asserts that the birth parents' views about adoption and contact should be clearly recorded. In one of the files examined, the birth parents' views about adoption and contact were clearly recorded on the form "E" and other court documentation. It was acknowledged though that such information was not always being systematically recorded in case records, although it was always contained in the court documentation. However, the inspectors were advised that this matter was to be addressed with childcare staff, through the planning for permanence and involving birth families in adoption policies, which would standardise practice.

At the time of the inspection, birth parents, whilst being asked to contribute to the form "E", were not being given the opportunity to be shown and read the completed form. The inspectors were advised that this practice issue had been addressed in the policy on involving birth families in adoptions. In future it was expected to be standard practice that birth parents would be shown the form and able to suggest any necessary amendments, with the extent of their involvement in this process being fully recorded. The inspectors welcomed this practice development, however, they were of the view that this practice could be further enhanced, if a copy of the form "E" was given to the birth parents. On receipt they could sign a form to this effect, along with a declaration that they were either in agreement with its contents or the suggested amendments that they would wish to be made. A recommendation was made regarding this matter.

The adoption service may also wish to consider whether the Adoption Panel has a role in

reinforcing this practice, for example, a form “E” would not be accepted by the panel, unless it was evidenced that the birth parents had been consulted about the content and their views appropriately considered.

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspectors were advised that birth parents and the birth family were encouraged to provide information on the child's birth and early life. Improvements in this information sharing were also being effected through the training provided childcare staff on the significance and completion of a form "E", together with regular file auditing by managerial staff. Similarly, the change in practice resulting in birth parents being shown the form "E" and being able to suggest amendments would further enhance this information sharing. Birth parents views regarding the adoptive plans for the child were obtained. The agency also aimed where possible to arrange a meeting between the birth and adoptive parents.

The inspectors were informed that birth parents and families were asked to contribute to life story work, as well as later life letters. Whilst the inspectors were able to evidence that life story work had been completed for some children, this had not been provided for all children and the quality of life story work appeared variable. To address this, a support worker was to be appointed to the adoption team, who would undertake life story work, ensuring a more consistent quality approach. A recommendation was made in this report regarding life story work.

The letterbox system also facilitated the exchange of information between the adopted and birth family. This enabled the child to receive up-dated information regarding their birth parents and family and maintain their heritage.

Standard 9 (9.1)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The adoption agency's policy on involving birth families in adoptions provided a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and families, both before and after adoption. Details of support groups available to birth parents and families were also to be circulated to childcare staff.

The Council also had a service level agreement with After Adoption, who provided support to birth parents and families, prior to, during and after adoption. (Please see standard 6, for further details). The inspectors were informed that this service had been highlighted to childcare staff and as discussed in standard 7, there were also plans for After Adoption staff to attend service meetings to enhance staffs' understanding of the scheme.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The adoption agency had a clearly written policy and procedures in relation to the adoption panel, which had been recently updated and was available to all staff and panel members. The policy and procedures outlined the role of the panel, the constitution and membership of the panel, as well as the appointment of the chair and vice-chair person and their role. This adoption panel guidance covered the tenure of office of panel members and the agency's expectations in relation to their attendance at panel. The duties, functions and responsibilities of the adoption panel, as well as those of the chairperson, agency decision maker, medical and legal advisor. The policy also covered the conduct of the panel, which included such issues as confidentiality, equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. In addition, the policy addressed issues of unanimity, quoracy, complaints, the documentation provided to panel including the submissions to panel, the attendance of prospective adopters, panel minutes, adoption agency decisions, appeals and representations to the agency and the independent reviewing mechanism. The written information advised that the chairperson would provide quarterly statistics, and a six monthly report to the agency decision maker, which provided an update on the adoption agency's work. The chairperson also provided an annual adoption panel report, informed the adoption agency's review. The inspectors were advised that there was strict adherence to this policy and procedures. This was clearly evidenced by one of the inspectors, during the Panel observation.

The service had only recently made arrangements for prospective adopters to attend the Adoption Panel. Whilst there was information in the initial information pack regarding this, the service was in the process of designing a specific leaflet, which contained more detailed information for those prospective adopters wishing to attend the adoption panel.

In preparing for prospective adopters' attendance at panel, the service had arranged for panel members to receive specific training regarding this. They had also altered the venue of the panel to provide a more appropriate setting for prospective adopters and made arrangements for prospective adopters to use a small office, whilst waiting to attend panel. The manager of the service acknowledged that this was not an ideal waiting room and outlined to the inspectors, her future plans regarding the development of a more suitable waiting room, which would provide prospective adopters with a private and comfortable setting, whilst waiting to attend panel.

The inspectors were also informed that from October 2004 the Panel was to be convened, on a three weekly basis.

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The adoption agency had a properly constituted Adoption Panel. The membership of the panel included people who had suitable qualities, as well as a wide range of differing adoption experience. At the time of the inspection, the inspectors were aware that the agency was planning to recruit a birth parent and an adoptee as panel members.

The inspectors were advised that panel members had access to appropriate training and skill development. Panel members were also kept up-to-date about internal policies and procedures, as well as changes in regulation and guidance through the circulation of appropriate documents and training events. There had also been recent joint training with the adoption agency's staff regarding the adoption support regulations and prospective adopters attendance at panel. A panel workshop had also taken place to develop protocols for applicants' attendance at panel. Quarterly business meetings ensured panel members' training needs were identified and addressed. The inspectors were of the view that a systematic approach to panel members training would be beneficial, for example by the development of an annual training plan for panel members.

The adoption agency no longer provided an Inter – country adoption service and as a consequence, it was not intended to provide training to Panel members in the basic principles of the law and eligibility criteria for overseas adoption.

The inspectors were advised that the service was developing an induction programme for new panel members, which would include the opportunity to observe the Adoption Panel. It was anticipated that the programme would be operational from September 2004. The inspectors endorsed the development of an induction programme for new panel members and recommend that an administrative system is devised to evidence this process.

All panel members' files were seen. It was confirmed that a criminal records bureau, enhanced check had been carried out in relation to all panel members and a confidentiality agreement signed by them. Examination of these files provided ample evidence that good practice had been exercised in identifying panel members with very relevant qualities and a rich experience of various aspects of adoption and childcare.

During direct observation of the panel, it was noted that the independent panel chairperson was well organised and chaired the panel in an extremely sensitive, effective and efficient manner. Panel members had read the panel papers carefully and were observed to give

thoughtful and insightful consideration to the matters presented to them.

Interviews with staff, together with an examination of a selection of panel papers, case records and observation of a panel led the inspectors to conclude that the panel carried out its quality assurance tasks in an effective manner and played a significant role in raising standards within the adoption service.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?

NO

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

YES

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The agency's Adoption Panel was convened monthly and the programme arranged on an annual basis. However, the inspectors were advised that there was flexibility to cancel a panel if there was no business or indeed convene additional panels, if there were urgent issues that required to be addressed. This flexibility ensured that the system operated in an efficient manner and ensured that there were no delays in the consideration of adopters and in matching children and adopters.

However, during interviews with adopters, two families stated that their approval had been delayed due to the cancellation of the adoption panel. One of these families indicated that they had only been informed of this cancellation, when they approached their worker, several days later. This matter was discussed with the managers of the service at the time of the inspection, who agreed to address these issues. A recommendation has been made regarding these matters.

During the inspection, one of the inspectors interviewed the administrator, who provided administrative support to the adoption panel. The inspector was informed that the panel agenda and papers were sent out two weeks prior to the panel date. However the late submission of papers meant that on occasions they were sent out just a week before the panel date. Interviews with a selection of panel members confirmed that they generally had sufficient time to read the papers. The inspector was therefore of the view that in the main the arrangements for sending out the panel papers was operating in an efficient manner.

One of the inspectors examined a sample of adoption panel minutes and found that the minutes were comprehensive and informative. They clearly indicated the reasons for the conclusions that had been reached by the panel. The minutes also recorded the adoption panel's recommendation to the agency decision – maker. However, in one of the files the panel minutes related to two children, who were siblings. In view of current legislation, for example, the adoption agency regulations 1983 and the Data Protection Act, separate panel minutes should be kept on each child and held on file. This was brought to the attention of the managers at the time of the inspection, who agreed to address the matter.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

File records, discussions with relevant staff and interviews with a several adopters indicated that the agency decision - maker showed diligence in making his decision, which was made in a timely and considered manner.

The Inspectors were also able to confirm that there were satisfactory arrangements in place for conveying the agency's decision to the child, prospective adopters and parents. In the main, these arrangements operated in an effective manner.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

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

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The senior service manager, service manager and team manager of the adoption agency had a wealth of experience in the childcare and adoption field, both as practitioners and managers. They had all obtained the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and had a managerial certificate. At the time of the inspection, the inspectors were informed that the service manager was completing the NVQ 5, in strategic management and the team manager was completing the NVQ 5 in operational management. It was anticipated that the service manager would obtain this qualification in the autumn of 2004 and the team manager would obtain her qualification in July 2005.

There were clear job descriptions for the manager, which outlined the duties, responsibilities, the level of delegation of the manager in managing the adoption agency and to whom the

manager was accountable.

Both the principal manager of the adoption service and the practice manager adopted a participative leadership style and encouraged the staff in the team to be child focused in their work. In the past nine months systems and staffing within the service had been reviewed and developed to enhance the practice within the team and ensure a more effective delivery of service.

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors interviewed a large number of managers and staff. In these interviews, several peers and staff spoke about the adoption managers' effectiveness in advocating for the service, the enthusiasm, energy and commitment, which they invested in the service and the belief that they had the necessary vision to drive the adoption service forward. From the information obtained in these interviews, the inspectors were of the view that both managers were well respected and there was a great deal of confidence in their capacity to effectively manage the adoption service.

The inspectors therefore concluded that the people involved in the management and operation of the adoption agency were suitable, well qualified staff, who had a wealth of experience in childcare, as well as adoption law and practice. Both managers also had good management skills, financial expertise, as well as the professionalism to manage the agency's work in an efficient and effective manner.

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?	YES	
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Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?	YES	
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Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had written recruitment and selection procedures for the appointment of staff.

Examination of a sample of personnel files confirmed that the adoption agency had obtained a Criminal Records Bureau, enhanced check, in relation to the managers of the adoption service. Two written references had also been obtained.

The inspectors were advised that the Council had recently introduced a procedure for telephone enquiries to be made in order to verify the legitimacy of written references. They were informed that this had occurred in relation to recent staff appointments made by the agency.

The inspectors were also advised that the council had introduced a procedure to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau enhanced checks are renewed on a three yearly basis for all staff working in the adoption agency.

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had recently restructured its adoption service with a view to improving its efficiency. This had resulted in a significant increase in staffing levels within the team. The inspectors were informed though that recruitment had proved difficult and as a consequence, staff vacancies had somewhat delayed the full implementation of the restructuring of the service. They were also advised that this shortage of staff had rather compromised the ability of the team manager to fully concentrate on management issues. However, despite these difficulties the inspectors were able to evidence that there had been a number of important changes to the service, which they believed would prove extremely beneficial in improving the service's overall practice. The inspectors would therefore commend both the service and team manager for the considerable efforts that they had made in effecting such significant changes to the service. Moreover, from their interviews with a variety of managers, as well as staff working in the adoption and childcare teams, the inspectors were of the view that the newly appointed team manager was undoubtedly a real asset to the service, who would promote the managerial efficiency of the service and ensure staff were well supported.

At the time of the inspection the service was almost fully staffed. This staff team consisted of a small number of permanent staff and a larger number of temporary, agency staff. It was clear that the management team though were mindful of the difficulties that can emerge in the planning and delivery of a service, when staff were employed on a temporary basis and were actively addressing this.

Examination of the adoption agency's documentation, including the statement of purpose, together with the inspectors' interviews with a variety of managers, staff working in the adoption and childcare teams, confirmed that the adoption service was now more effectively working to the ethos and principles of the statement of purpose.

The Inspectors identified that there were clear arrangements in place to identify the person in charge, when the service manager or team manager was absent. The roles of the managers and staff were clear. There were also well-established lines of communication and accountability between the managers and staff.

The agency informed managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interests, which was clearly set out in Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council 's conditions of service and issued to all staff in commencing employment with the Council.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had an equal opportunities policy and promoted anti-oppressive practice. The staff recruitment procedures reflected this policy and practice, which was reinforced throughout the recruitment, selection and retention of staff. The inspectors were also informed that the agency had also provided staff training on valuing diversity and anti – oppressive practice. Specialist services were also available, for

example, translation services.

Similarly, anti-oppressive practice was reinforced in all aspects of staff's work in the adoption service, including the adopter recruitment information, response to enquiries and the preparation training and assessment. It was also reinforced in the matching and placement process, in the support provided adopters both prior to and after adoption and in the information given to children and birth parents. The inspectors were able to evidence this through their examination of agency documentation, case files and interviews with adopters.

The adoption service had recently reviewed and revised its written procedures covering the arrangements for the use of services provided by the Adoption register for England and Wales. These procedures were clearly written and comprehensive. The inspectors were advised that the agency referred prospective adopters to the National Adoption Register and the Greater Manchester Adoption Consortium. This was subsequently confirmed through an examination of a sample of adopters' files.

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

4

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

1

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The adoption agency had developed a number of quality assurance and monitoring systems in place, which included the following: -

- The adoption champions regularly tracked the progress of cases and this information was incorporated on a monthly basis into the tracking system detailed below.
- There was a monthly adoption tracking system, which monitored the outcomes for children and adopters.
- The agency's supervision and appraisal systems, which were strictly adhered to, carefully monitored the adoption workers performance.
- The department's senior management team regularly monitored the adoption services' performance.
- Safeguarding Meetings, which had a wider remit than child protection issues, also scrutinised the work of the adoption service.
- The independent reviewing unit had a monitoring role in respect of the adoption service through the chairing of children's reviews. The unit also monitored permanence planning, as outlined in the permanence policy.
- The Panel chairperson regularly met and liaised with the Service manager and agency–decision maker regarding the adoption service.
- There was quarterly monitoring by the Adoption Panel.
- The panel chairperson contributed to a six monthly report, which was provided to the agency decision – maker, to up-date him on the adoption agency's work.

- The panel chairperson contributed to an annual adoption panel report, which informed the adoption agency's review.
- The Children in Public Care Working Party, which involved Executive members of the Council, received a six monthly report regarding the adoption service.
- A sub-group of the Strategic Partnership, which considered the life chances of children in care will regularly consider adoption and post adoption issues.
- An annual adoption report was presented to the Executive Committee of the Council.
- The Executive Committee of the Council reviewed the service's statement of purpose on an annual basis.
- The Children in Public Care Working Party, which involved Executive members of the Council, received a six monthly report regarding the adoption service.
- A sub-group of the Strategic Partnership, which considered the life chances of children in care regularly considered adoption and post adoption issues.

The inspectors were advised that the finance division of the council, maintains on-going and up-to-date information regarding the charges for each of the agency's services, itemised amounts paid for wider services and a statement of any amounts paid to adopters. This information, if requested, would be provided to purchasers of service and others with a legitimate interest.

The inspectors were able to confirm that written reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption service had been presented to the Executive Committee of the Council in the past twelve months. The inspectors were informed that these reports were closely scrutinised to ensure that the adoption agency was effective and achieved good outcomes for the children.

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

Monthly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)

The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The adoption agency had access to a variety of specialist advisors from both within and outside, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, for example, the service was able, when required, to access translators and other specialists in relation to matters related to culture or race.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had a service level agreement with After Adoption. This agreement clearly governed the specialist services that were provided by the agencies. The inspectors were also made aware that the service manager had established a system to regularly monitor and review the service provided by After Adoption.

The agency was also as a member of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), the service was also able to access advice and guidance from them.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council 's adoption agency had a medical advisor, who was a member of the adoption panel. She was a well -qualified and experienced practitioner in her field and clearly committed to her work, as medical panel advisor. She had attended the medical panel advisors' training course provided by BAAF and regularly liaises and meets with other panel medical advisors in the area. She was available to staff for general consultation regarding health issues in relation to children identified for adoption and where appropriate, adopters. She was also able to access further medical specialist advice on behalf of the adoption agency, if required, for example, in relation to Hepatitis C.

The Adoption Panel also had a representative from the Council's legal department and this advisor or other members of the legal team were available to panel members and staff for consultation regarding adoption issues. In addition, the inspectors were informed that the agency was planning to appoint a specific educational advisor to the adoption panel. The inspectors were advised that the adoption agency was part of the Manchester and North West Consortium and could therefore approach these consortia, for any specialist advice required.

The adoption service does not provide an Inter – country adoption service. Instead those wishing to adopt a child from another country are referred to the Nugent Care Society, who specialise in this area of work.

The adoption agency had a written policy, procedures and a protocol regarding the roles of specialist panel advisers. It is recommended though that this protocol be revised to include the modus operandi regarding the appointment of such specialist panel advisers, for example, the specification that a curriculum vitae would be obtained, written references requested and taken up to confirm the specialist advisors' suitability in terms of their experience, qualifications. The documentation also needed to confirm that prior to appointment a Criminal Records Bureau check would be obtained. In addition, documentary evidence of their registration with their appropriate professional bodies, as well as their qualifications must be obtained. (Please see standard twenty-eight of this report, for further details.) The inspectors would also recommend that the agency produce written procedures to cover access to other specialists.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

During the inspection, a sample of personnel files of staff working within the adoption service were selected and examined. From the files seen the inspectors were able to evidence that individuals working in or for the adoption service were interviewed as part of the selection process, had the required written references and with the exception of one file had enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. The inspectors were advised that a system had recently been put into place to ensure all staffs' Criminal records Bureau check was renewed every three years.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had written recruitment and selection procedures for the appointment of staff, which followed good practice guidelines. The inspectors were advised that the procedures had recently been amended to ensure managers now make telephone enquiries to follow up each written reference to verify their legitimacy. The manager of the service illustrated adherence to this practice confirming that telephone enquiries had been made in relation to staff, who had recently been appointed to the service. The inspectors were advised that an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check was undertaken in respect of all staff appointed to the service. They had also introduced an additional system in relation to agency staff, ensuring that the service verified that the agency staff member had been robustly vetted by the agency.

At the time of the inspection, the managers informed the inspectors that this practice had not been followed in relation to a childcare worker, who had recently been appointed to a permanent part-time position with the adoption service. However, the managers had quickly recognised the error and taken appropriate action to resolve the matter. The inspectors were of the view that the managers had acted in a highly professional manner in bringing the difficulty to the inspectors' attention and were extremely impressed with the prompt, competent and satisfactory way the matter had been handled.

During the inspection, a sample of personnel files of staff working within the adoption service were selected and examined. From the files seen the inspectors were able to evidence that individuals working in or for the adoption service were interviewed as part of the selection process, had the required written references and with the exception of one file had an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. (For details relating to the one personnel file, please see the above paragraph.) The inspectors were advised that the service has a system in place to ensure all staff employed have a Criminal records Bureau check every three years.

A sample of panel members files were seen and one shortfall was found in these files. (Please see standard 28, for further details.)

All staff working within the adoption service were suitably qualified and had at least two years child care experience. They also had experience in carrying out assessments. Several members of staff had a number of years experience in relation to family placement work and adoption, whilst others had limited experience in this area of work. The inspectors were of the opinion that the team was rather disproportionate in terms of its experience in adoption work and that this required to be addressed as soon as possible. (Please see standard 21, for further details regarding this.)

The manager of the service was intending to recruit a support worker to undertake life story work with children, whose care plan was adoption. However, the inspectors were aware that the service was not intending to use such a member of staff in any other aspects of the adoption agency's work.

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors became aware that birth record counselling under section 51 of the Adoption Act 1976, was being provided by some staff, who were not trained or experienced in this area of work. (Please see standard 21, for further details.)

The inspectors were able to evidence that the agency was committed to ensuring staff had the necessary training for their professional development and afforded staff the opportunity to obtain the post qualifying award. It was hoped that staff would enrol on post qualification training in the near future. The manager of the service was aware that 20% of the adoption agency's social workers should have or be in the process of obtaining the post qualifying childcare award by 2006. A recommendation was made in the report regarding this matter.

The inspectors were able to evidence that the medical and legal advisor were professionally qualified. They were also appropriately trained to work with children/young people, their families, adoptive parents and had a good understanding of adoption.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?	YES	
What % of the adoption service's social workers have a PQ award?	0	%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)		
Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The Service manager of the fostering and adoption service managed the adoption agency, with day-to-day management carried out by the team manager. Both managers were experienced, qualified and skilled managerial staff. (Please see standard 14, for further details.) From the inspection of the service the inspectors concluded that the service was now organised and managed in a way that ensured the service was delivered in an efficient and effective manner.</p> <p>The level of management delegation and responsibility was clearly defined and commensurate with the experience, skills and qualifications of the relevant members of staff. Staff interviewed had a good understanding of the levels of management delegation,</p>		

responsibility and decision making within the service.

During the inspection, two managers of the family support and the looked after children's services were interviewed and their role of adoption champions discussed. In this role, both managers ensured staff considered all the options available to a child in the care planning process, including that of adoption. In appropriate cases they would act as strong advocates for adoption and carefully monitored the progress of children, who were being twin tracked. Both members of staff were extremely committed to their role as adoption champions and often gave presentations to other teams and agencies on adoption. New staff were also able to consult and obtain advice from them about adoption.

From discussion with these workers, the inspector was of the view that they were passionate about their work and made a significant contribution to the delivery of an efficient and effective adoption service, in raising the profile and standards in adoption amongst the council's childcare teams.

In interviews with adoption social workers and staff from the children and families teams, the inspectors' were able to confirm that these teams clearly understood the importance of working effectively together, to ensure that the child's best interests were served.

The Council had a supervision policy and managers were trained in supervision skills. The inspectors were able to confirm, through an examination of a sample of staff files that supervision was now being provided in accordance with this policy. All supervision meetings were fully recorded with a copy given to the member of staff. Supervision was also provided to staff on a more informal basis, as and when the need arose.

The management and supervision systems in place determined staffs' workloads and assisted in the prioritisation. These systems also ensured that work was monitored, tasks assigned to appropriate staff and delivered to a good standard. The inspectors were aware that on occasions spot purchasing had been used to allocate priority pieces of work.

Training and appropriate professional and skills development was identified through supervision, was considered on an on- going basis through regular supervision sessions and was formally reviewed on an annual basis.

The adoption service had regular team meetings. Staff informed the inspectors that there was clear, open and effective communication in team meetings and their views were elicited regarding the operation of the service.

The service had clear and well - defined assessments and approval processes, which were being monitored quality assured by the team manager. The adoption panel also undertook a quality assurance role in relation to assessments and had a formal system, which was used to feedback to the agency on the quality of cases presented to panel.

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors became aware that the service had experienced some shortage in administrative resources and as a consequence, had made extensive use of agency staff. However, at the time of the inspection, the service had a dedicated administrative office manager, who had made a significant impact on the efficiency of the administrative support provided the service.

In recent months, the service had also developed administrative procedures to ensure those making enquiries to the adoption agency received information promptly, that is, within 5

working days; though usually information was being sent out within 2 days. During the course of the inspection, the inspectors were able to evidence that the enquiries made to the agency were being dealt with promptly and in a polite, courteous and helpful manner.

The inspectors were of the view that the changes, which were referred to in the earlier paragraph, had proved beneficial to the adoption agency. However, they were of the view that given the highly specialised nature of adoption work, a permanent, well-resourced administrative team, dedicated solely to adoption work would further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

The inspectors were informed and able to evidence that the agency had recently produced literature, which clearly advised prospective and approved adopters of the range of support services available to them. The inspectors were aware that adopters had access to medical and legal advice. An educational psychologist, who worked in the social services community psychology team also provided a consultancy and advisory service, one half day per week, to the fostering and adoption team. Further specialist advice could also be obtained from the educational service and CAHMS. The adoption agency's was also links able to obtain specialist advice through the agency's membership of BAAF and the Manchester Consortium.

Examination of a sample of personnel files and interviews with staff confirmed that all employees were provided with appropriate written contracts, job descriptions, as well as clear terms and conditions of service which complied with the General Social Care Council's code of practice.

The adoption agency had an equal opportunities policy, complaints, grievance, disciplinary, as well as various health and safety policies and procedures. Adoption staff confirmed that they had copies of these policies and procedures, including a copy of the adoption agency's statement of purpose.

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)

There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had an adoption service, which consisted of the equivalent of five full-time social work staff, excluding the managers. The inspectors were advised that this increase in staffing was adequate to provide a robust and efficient adoption service.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection, there were four permanent staff; the other four remaining staff were agency staff employed with the Council on a temporary basis. Three of the eight staff employed in the adoption agency worked for the service on a part –time basis. The inspectors were aware that where a shortfall in staffing levels occurred, there were contingency plans to resolve the situation in the short - term through the use of agency workers. The Council had introduced a variety of initiatives to attract, recruit and retain staff. These initiatives have been outlined in more detail, later in this section.</p> <p>All the staff working in the adoption service and with case responsibility were qualified and had considerable experience in the childcare field. Several staff within the team though had</p>		

limited experience in adoption and received mentorship and support in this area of work from team colleagues and their team manager. The inspectors were advised that staff, who were less experienced in adoption work, were provided with specialist training relating to adoption issues. However, at the time of the inspection, some staff undertaking Section 51, birth record counselling were not trained in this field, a recommendation was made regarding this.

The recent increase in staffing levels within the adoption team had ensured that staffing levels were now adequate to meet the agency's needs and in keeping with the service's statement of purpose. At the time of the inspection though there were a number of staff with limited experience in adoption. Whilst the inspectors would acknowledge that they were well supported by the team manager and more experienced colleagues, the inspectors were concerned that such an unbalanced staff team might ultimately impair the effectiveness of the service. The inspectors were aware that the management team were actively seeking to recruit personnel, experienced in adoption, with a view to obtaining an optimum mix of staff within the adoption team and would endorse such action.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council's personnel policies and procedures provide for regular supervision, clear workloads, training through in-house and short external courses, study leave and post qualification study. The Council also had a range of initiatives in place to encourage the recruitment and retention of staff, for example, a trainee scheme, which provided financial sponsorship for those wishing to obtain a professional qualification. There were also a number of other financial incentives aimed at retaining staff, as well as flexible working times. The Department had also recently introduced home based working and the Work/ Life balance. This scheme had been piloted in the Family Support service and enabled staff to work, at times, that were suitable to their personal circumstances, for example, by working only during term times. The council was accredited as Investors in People and worked to the requirements set out in the General Social Care Council's code of practice.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	8	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	X
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	0		

Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)

The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council was considered to be a fair and competent employer by its managers and staff. There were clear, comprehensive and sound employment practices in relation to staff, which included a recruitment and selection policy, an equal opportunities policy, grievance and disciplinary procedures. The Council also had a code of conduct. A whistle blowing policy was in place and available to all staff. The inspectors would recommend though that this policy, together with permission for its use be re-launched. It was also recommended that the whistle blowing policy should include the details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection as a source to whom issues can be directed.		

The adoption agency had Public Liability and Professional indemnity insurance for all staff.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

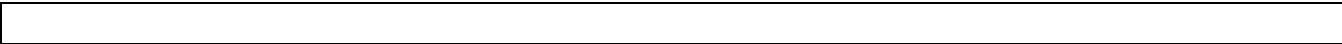
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had an annual training programme, which was designed to provide appropriate professional and skill development for its staff. The training was provided via a rolling programme of courses, which ensured a full range of training was provided for all staff. This training not only reflected the social care aspects of the work, but also the wider organisation's policies, procedures and guidance. In addition, a staff development officer was linked to the adoption team, who ensured that the training provided was appropriate to the team's needs. The inspectors were advised and also able to evidence that training was commissioned according to the service's requirements, for example, for "E" preparation and attendance of applicants at the panel.

All staff received induction in accordance with the induction policy, though agency staff received a more limited induction. The inspectors were advised that the supervision system identified staffs' training and development needs, which were regularly appraised through ongoing supervision. A formal, annual review in line with the supervision policy was also undertaken for staff, which identified any on-going training needs. Managers' training and developmental needs were similarly addressed through an annual performance developmental review. The inspectors were able to evidence that National Vocational Qualification training and post qualifying training were available to staff. There was also evidence that individual training programmes were commissioned, with the outcomes monitored and evaluated through the supervision system

The inspectors were able to confirm that the adoption agency keeps abreast of any changes in legislation, guidance and case law relevant to adoption, for example, through staff briefing sessions and team meetings. Changes in Case Law were also circulated to the adoption team via the legal section, within the Council.

The effectiveness of training was routinely evaluated, with the training programmes reviewed and up-dated on an annual basis, as part of the staff development business planning. The Staff development officer, who linked with the adoption team, was also part of this process and ensured the adoption team's training needs were championed.

Subsequent interviews with childcare staff indicated that the quality of the in-house training provided them was variable and several indicated that due to time constraints, they found real difficulty accessing the training. Adoption staff though confirmed that they received good training and developmental opportunities and that this training, together with information provided at team meetings enabled staff to keep up-to-date with the professional and legal developments in adoption.



Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The adoption agency had a recording policy, which provided clear guidelines and expectations regarding recording. It was expected that clear, concise individual records would be maintained for all children, prospective and approved adopters. Post adoption support staff were also expected to maintain case records.

In discussions with the inspectors, the managers of the service openly acknowledged that in the past, the case recording on adopters' files had not been comprehensive, nor had the files been well organised. The inspectors were advised that the team and service manager had carried out a file audit on all files and specified the remedial action that needed to be taken. They had also clarified the service standards for recording and re-issued the recording policy to all staff. In future, files were to be monitored on a regular basis by the team manager via supervision. Quarterly file audits were also to be carried out by the service manager to ensure that the recording standards were maintained.

Subsequent examination of a sample of prospective and approved adopters, as well as children's files, demonstrated some of the shortfalls in recording and organisation of the files highlighted by the managers. However, it was clear that the managers were now addressing this problem, as evidenced by the Case file audits and identified remedial action. Thus, in one child's and three adopters' files, there had been a significant improvement in the organisation and quality of the recording on file. However, in one of the files, the inspectors were of the view that the organisation of the file could have been improved upon, with a clearer indication given to the changed roles and status of the adults in the household, for example that of foster carers to adopters. Typed records would also have improved the legibility and the recording further enhanced through individuals' full names being used and their roles in the situation, clearly identified. There was also some inconsistency in records being signed and dated by both the worker and manager. Several recommendations regarding these matters have been made in this report.

Examination of adopters' files confirmed that the service generally carried out the necessary enquiries, health checks and obtained personal references, as well as enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks in relation to prospective adopters and on all members of their household, who were aged eighteen years or over. However, in one of the files examined the prospective adopters had not had an up-to-date health check. (Please see standard 4, regarding this matter.)

The adoption service had a policy and procedural instructions to cover arrangements for maintaining the confidentiality of adoption information, adoption case records and their indexes. The inspectors were able to confirm that staff, panel members and specialist

advisors understood these instructions and that the service had begun to monitor compliance.

The inspectors were able to evidence that all files were stored in lockable filing cabinets and kept in a lockable room. The inspectors were advised that archived adoption files were securely stored to minimise the risk of damage from fire or water. It was recommended though that the service should re-assess these risks in relation to all adoption files, including those archived.

The manager of the service advised the inspectors that case decisions made in supervision are now recorded and held on the case files. The inspectors' examination of case files confirmed that the service had recently commenced this practice and examples of case decision records were seen.

At the time of the inspection, there was further work taking place for keeping adoption records congruent with the looked after children's system via the new "My Care First" computer system.

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Inspectors were advised that the adoption service provided information to partner agencies within the consortium and to other adoption agencies in as short a time as possible to effect the placement of a child. Two placing social workers from other local authorities returned surveys to the inspection team. They commented that the information provided had been comprehensive and had been given in a timely way enabling the adoption to take place with minimal delay.

The adoption agency had recently up-dated its Access to Records policy to ensure that it was compliant with the National Minimum Standards and the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983.

The inspectors were able to confirm that adoption panel members had been asked to sign an undertaking of confidentiality. Copies of this confidentiality agreement were seen on all the panel members' files.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The adoption agency had a written recording policy, which covered all the matters referred to in 27.1.

The service had separate personnel files on all members of staff, which were maintained by the Human Resources section of the council. The Team Manager of the service also kept separate supervision records. Separate records were kept of all complaints, allegations and Child Protection matters, which were recorded by Customer Care. These records were held in a confidential and secure manner. The service manager, as part of her quality assurance role, regularly monitored them.

The inspectors were advised that all complaints were investigated promptly and the findings evaluated. Any learning derived from such investigations, informed service development and was actioned by management. This was subsequently evidenced by one of the inspectors through her examination of the complaint files. In perusing the complaint files, the inspectors would recommend that the outcome of the complaint, as well as the action taken, should be clearly detailed and kept on file.

In the past, adoption records had not been monitored by management. The service recognised the need to prioritise this task and at the time of the inspection, all files had been audited by the team and service manager and remedial action agreed. (Please see standard 25, for further details.) The Adoption Panel also carried out a quality assurance function; in monitoring the quality of prospective adopters assessments and feeding this information back to the agency.

The adoption agency's confidential records were stored securely and there was a policy on access. A recommendation has been made in relation to enhanced security of archived files, which has been referred to, in standard 25 of this report.

In examining a sample of records, the Inspectors found that not all the written records were legible and several were not signed and dated, by the person making the entry, nor on occasions, by the Team Manager. A recommendation was made regarding this. (Please see standard 25.)

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The Council's human resource section maintained all the adoption agency's staff records. In the personnel files examined they were comprehensive, up-to-date and with the exception of one file, contained all the information required under Schedule 3 and 4 of the Adoption Services Regulations 2003. (Please see standard 19, for further details)

During the examination of these files, the inspector made a recommendation regarding the formatting of them. A requirement was also made in relation to the omission found on the one staff file.

Files on all panel members were also kept by the agency. These files were generally well maintained, however in some of these files a curriculum vitae had been obtained but there was no documentary evidence of their qualifications on file. These files related to panel members, who had been appointed to the agency prior to the introduction of the National Minimum Standards. This matter must be addressed and a requirement was made regarding this.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The adoption agency was located in a large, Victorian, detached building in Reddish Green, Stockport. These premises had disabled access to the lower ground floor. The building was able to accommodate all staff and had a variety of small and large rooms, which could be used for private interviews and meetings, such as the adoption panel, training groups etc. There were also kitchen facilities for staff. The number of staff in the building had recently increased and at the time of the inspection, had become a little overcrowded. This was raised with the manager of the service during the inspection. She advised that the service had the plans to address this through the use of some vacant rooms located on the upper floor.

The inspectors were advised that the IT equipment had recently been increased in the adoption service and was now sufficient to meet staffs' needs. They were informed that the service had one laptop for home working. There was also new computer programme being rolled out to ensure that all staff had access to a personal computer on an individual basis. The inspectors' were advised of the security in place to safeguard all information contained in the IT system. The service had a variety of other necessary equipment to support staff in the effective delivery of an adoption service, for example a fax, photocopying machine, a scanner etc. There were also plans for a new switchboard and telephone system to be installed, which would further improve efficiency. The premises had lockable filing cabinets to secure confidential information, which were kept within a lockable room. In addition, the premises had appropriate security systems in place to prevent inappropriate access to the building.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council had adequate Premises and Contents Insurance to promptly replace any lost or damage caused to contents of the building or premises.

The adoption agency had a disaster recovery plan, which had been devised as part of their risk assessment programme.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not Applicable

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 28th September 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 16th December 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Stockport MBC Adoption Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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