



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**Kingston upon Hull City Council
Adoption Service**

Gleneagles Centre

East Carr Road

Hull

HU8 9LB

8th March 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

Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

Gleneagles Centre, East Carr Road, Hull, HU8 9LB

Adoption Service Manager

Ms Heather Clare

Tel No:

01482 707762

Address

Gleneagles Centre, East Carr Road, Hull, HU8 9LB

Fax No:

01482 712438

Email Address

Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

None

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

8/3/04

Date of Inspection Visit		8th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Helen Norry	127567
Name of Inspector	2	Pat McKay	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Carol Fellowes	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority adoption services are subject to inspection by NCSC, 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 NCSC in respect of **Kingston upon Hull City Council 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 NCSC 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
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

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.

Kingston upon Hull Adoption Service is a Local Authority Service and is based at the Gleneagles Centre, East Carr Road Hull. The Adoption Service of Hull City Council is part of the larger Children and Families Department. The Head of the Children and Families Department is Margaret Dennison; she is also the Adoption Service Decision Maker. Heather Clare is the Registered Adoption Service Manager and she has overall responsibility for the Fostering and Adoption Services.

Carol Fellowes is the Adoption Manager and manages a team of 18 staff, which comprises of 2 senior adoption workers, 7 adoption workers, 1 post adoption social worker and a social worker-adoption support. There are four administrative support workers.

At the time of the inspection there is 1 vacant social worker post and one vacant clerical assistant post. The adoption service arranges for the adoption of children and in doing so provide recruitment, assessment, and training and support service to prospective and approved adopters.

The service currently employs a Marketing and Information officer who works jointly with the fostering service and has responsibility for all recruitment campaigns and publicity material. Approved adoptive parents also have access to independent advice and support up until an adoption order is made. These independent workers offer confidential advice and may be contacted when there are areas of disagreement between adopters and the agency around issues such as financial assessments and allegations or if adopters wish to make a complaint.

The adoption service is a member of two consortiums "Yorkshire Adoption Consortium" and "Humberside Adoption Consortium"

Hull City Council have a service level agreement with a voluntary agency "After Adoption Yorkshire" This agency provides counselling services two days a week to any one who is affected by adoption. This includes adoptees, birth relatives and adoptive families.

The council also has the services of a local authority psychologist for half a day each month.

The psychologist offers consultations to Adoption Social Workers and adoptive families.

The main functions of the Adoption Service is to recruit, prepare, assess and approve adopters, to offer advice to child care social workers in matters pertaining to adoption and to work in partnership with child care social workers to identify suitable placements for children looked after by Hull City Council. The Adoption Service also provides support, guidance and advice to adopted children and adoptive families, and counselling to birth relatives of adopted children. They also provide information and advice to adults who were adopted as children.

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.)

Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service has been inspected for the first time under the terms of The Care Standards Act 2000 Part 111 and against the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services introduced on the April 1st 2003.

This inspection was undertaken in conjunction with the Social Services Inspectorate, lead officer Mr B Morton. The NCSC inspectors joined the SSI inspectors for a pre inspection-planning meeting on March the 4th 2004 and worked along side them during the inspection as they undertook Phase 4 of the National Programme of SSI inspections for Children's Services. To avoid any duplication for the Local Authority during the two inspections it was agreed that where possible information about, case files, personnel files, social services staff and service users would be shared between the two regulatory bodies.

It was agreed with the Head of Children and Family Services, Margaret Dennison that the adoption team would complete separate pre-inspection material so that the focus of the NCSC inspection remained the Adoption Service. It was also agreed a separate report would be prepared on the Adoption Service by the NCSC.

A feedback was prepared at the end of the inspection and given to Heather Clare, Adoption and Fostering Manager and Carol Fellowes Adoption Manager.

The managers of the adoption service completed the Pre-Inspection questionnaire in detail, in a very clear and concise way.

Evidence was provided in the form of policies and procedures, leaflets and other related documentation about the service.

The housekeeping arrangements and hospitality were very good throughout the inspection including, office and interviewing space, car parking facilities, punctuality of personnel attending interviews and the willingness of people to join in discussions about the adoption service.

There is a considerable amount of information gathered throughout an inspection and the inspection of a specific service with in a department means the inspection crosses many areas of a social services department. A feedback was presented to the senior managers of the adoption service and whilst there was many "themes" that run throughout the inspection, some these were discussed at the feedback and an agreement reached that where they were not relevant or directly affected the adoption service these would not be in the inspection report. Examples included some comments received during the inspection about the lack of experience of some managers. It was also acknowledged by the adoption service managers that it had been a period of immense change for the service and that new legislation would bring about further changes. They explained there had been a number of action plans that had immerged from recent inspections and reviews and these had been merged to form one plan of development for the adoption service. They hope to consolidate the adoption service and try to establish the post adoption support service. The managers are also aware that they face challenges in dealing with the demographic changes that have taken place in the city and the need for more adopters of dual heritage and from ethic minority groups.

The Policies and Procedures relating to the work of the Adoption Service and the adoption panel are out of date. It is understood they are being re-written to reflect the changes in the

legislation. The lack of current policies has affected the scoring of some standards since they underpin all aspects of the adoption work and where not available at the time of the inspection.

Alongside the inspection of the adoption service a number of questionnaires were sent to prospective adopters, approved adopters, birth families and the professional advisers to the adoption service. There responses have been incorporated in to the main body of this report.

26 questionnaires were returned from prospective and approved adopters.

3 questionnaires were returned from the professional advisers.

2 questionnaires were returned from birth families.

8 questionnaires were from placing social workers.

The content of these questionnaires were generally very complimentary about the adoption service. The responses have been incorporated in to the main body of this report.

This was a satisfactory inspection of Hull City Council Adoption Services and the service is well placed to ensure they continue to meet and implement the new National Minimum Standards. This report will demonstrate that the adoption service have met the majority of the National Minimum Standards and where they fall short this has been identified as areas of work that continue to require some attention.

Statement of Purpose.

This standard was assessed and found to be almost met.

Hull City Council Adoption Services has a Statement of Purpose. "Making a Commitment for Life" It sets out the functions and services provided by Hull City Council Adoption Service.

The address and telephone number of the commission must be included in the statement of purpose.

Securing and promoting children's welfare.

This standard was assessed and found to be almost met.

The adoption service has a Marketing Strategy for 2004-2005. The document aims to provide a planned marketing and recruitment strategy for Hull's Adoption Service. The document identifies the council's corporate objectives and a service overview. The main aim being to increase the number of adopters for children from 4 to 7 years of age, which reflects the average age range of children for whom the service are seeking adoptive placements.

There are policies and procedures on the "Placement of Children For Adoption" and the "Placement of Sibling Groups" pre-date the new legislation and must now be reviewed to reflect the changes that have taken place.

Prospective and Approved Adopters.

1 of the 4 standards assessed were met the remainder were almost met.

The adoption service has a recruitment strategy in place. The adoption team operates within the current departmental policy guidelines on the "Approval of Prospective Adopters" "Approval of Prospective Adopters" and the "Application by Foster Carers to Adopt a Foster Child" the "Placement of Children For Adoption"

The policies pre-dates the recent changes in the legislation

The adoption service has a range of information for prospective adopters, including a video and written information on "Adopting a Child". The written information is presented in a colourful and easy read format and has an application form attached to it for new applicants to complete. It allows prospective adopters to understand the process and the commitment required of them. The information is in detail and has recently been updated to reflect the changes in the legislation.

It is the opinion of the inspectors that the eligibility criteria in relation to adoptive applicants are not as explicit and as inclusive as it could be. The video does not discuss the need for adoptive placements for children with special needs or for older children and the written

information is not specific regarding the council's policy on same sex applications. There is evidence on the adopter's files of a thorough and comprehensive assessment-taking place. The home assessment show consideration is given to the applicant's capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way. These are signed and dated by the applicants. Case files show that decisions made in supervision are recorded on the adopters file. The adoption service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting adopters.

Birth Parents and Birth Families.

3 of the 3 standards assessed were met.

Hull City Council recognise the life long implications of adoption and recognise this in the "Adoption Policy (Post Adoption Service)" and in respect of this they have a service level agreement with After Adoption Yorkshire to provide advice and support to birth parents and relatives.

Birth parents are offered independent counselling at all stages of the adoption process and they are able to return to the agency at any time for further support. Contact with birth families is also maintained through the administration of the letterbox system.

Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions.

1 of the 4 standards assessed was met, 2 were almost met and 1 was not met.

Hull City Council Adoption Service has a properly constituted adoption panel. It was of serious concern to the inspectors that the agency decision maker does not have a full copy of the panel papers prior to the panel meeting but makes her decision based on the recommendation of the panel and a discussion with a service manager who has attended the panel.

Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency.

1 of the 2 standards assessed was met and 1 almost met.

The adoption team manager Carol Fellowes has a formal social work qualification but no formal management qualification as required by the legislation. Hull City Council has a written recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. The management team have demonstrated throughout this inspection they are equipped to manage the adoption service in an effective way.

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency.

1 of the 3 standards assessed was met and 2 almost met.

The management team have demonstrated throughout this inspection they are equipped to manage the adoption service in an effective way and to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. There is a clear organisational structure in place and clear lines of management and accountability.

There are no written protocols governing the role of the specialist advisors.

It is a requirement that the executive side of the council should receive reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption service every six months.

Employment and Management of Staff.

6 of the 6 standards assessed were met.

Hull City Council has a written recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. Appointment to the team is dependent upon a formal interview and satisfactory statutory references. The local authorities recruitment procedures ensure all staff who are employed in the adoption team are fully qualified social workers and have a background in child care work. There is an appropriate number of social workers in the adoption team to deal effectively with the casework and the planning for children in the looked after system. There is a distinct split between fostering and adoption teams and both teams have a separate manager. There is an appropriate mix of staff employed in the adoption team. They have considerable experience in childcare work and are all qualified social workers.

Records.

4 of the 4 standards assessed was met

The adoption service has appropriate records on prospective adopters, prospective applicants, approved adopters and children.

The organisation of the files was satisfactory, they were neat and tidy and information was easily retrievable.

Fitness Of Premises

1 of the 1 standards assessed was almost met The adoption team and the administrative team have stated that the accommodation is far from ideal and leaves them feeling fragmented.

Achieved files are stored in a central place; an administrator controls access to all files and was able to demonstrate the storage and security systems in place.

The agency does not have a Disaster Recovery Plan.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

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:

NO

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:

YES

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:

NO

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:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

The grounds for the notice are that Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service have failed to meet a number of statutory requirements under the terms of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Adoption Service Regulations 2003. The have been identified in the main body of the report and relate to the managers qualifications, the role and responsibility of the agency decision maker and a number of out of date policies and procedures that do not reflect the recent changes in legislation that governs the work of adoption services.

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first NCSC 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	
			First Inspection.	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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 and recommendations 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	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003. Reg 2(1) and Schedule 1	LA1	The address and telephone number of the commission must be included in the statement of purpose.	31/5/04
2	The Local Authority Adoption Service. Regulations 2003	LA2	The adoption service must ensure their policies and procedures are re-written and reflect the changes to the legislation. The requirement for up to date policies is referred to throughout the text of this report.	31/9/04
3	The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 Reg 12	LA3	The eligibility criteria must be more explicit and inclusive of all prospective applicants.	30/9/04

4	The Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Review) Regulations 1997. Reg 5B (b) (i)	LA4	Applicants must be allowed 28 days to send in any observations they wish to make on their home study assessment (Form F). It is advised the agency record the applicant's responses and or their decision to waver their rights to see or comment on the document.	31/5/04
5	The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 Reg 8 Part VI	LA5	The adoption service must satisfy itself that adoptive parents are prepared to notify the adoption agency if an adopted child dies during childhood or soon after. It is advised the agency formalises this process.	331/5/04
6	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Schedules 3 and 4	LA11	Panel member's files must be in accordance with the Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. All panel members must have an up to date satisfactory CRB check.	31/5/04
7	The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 Reg 11	LA13	The Agency decision-maker must take into account all information surrounding the case alongside the panel recommendations before making a considered and professional decision.	31/5/04
8	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 6 (b) (1)	LA14	The manager of the adoption service must undertake a formal management qualification.	April 2005
9	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 7(1) (b)	LA17	The executive side of the council must receive reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption service every six months.	31/5/04

10	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg16	LA29	The adoption team and the administrative team have stated that the accommodation is far from ideal and leaves them feeling fragmented as a team. This must be addressed.	31/3/05
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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	LA11	The agency should consider a more balanced makeup of the panel and include additional male members and current casework practitioners.
2	LA4	The adoption service should seek clarification on the NSPCC policy on responding to statutory references checks through the agency.
3	LA18	There should be written protocols governing the role of the specialist advisors.
4	LA20	The adoption service should consider implementing a duty system that allows qualified social workers to be available throughout the day to respond to any enquiry.
5	LA29	The agency should have a Disaster Recovery Plan.

- 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	NO
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	08/03/04
Time of Inspection	10:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	66
Number of Inspector days	9
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)	18

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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?

2

Statement of Purpose.

Hull City Council Adoption Services has a Statement of Purpose. "Making a Commitment for Life"

It sets out the functions and services provided by Hull City Council Adoption Service. It is kept under review and revised when necessary. A new document was written in February 2004. At the time of the inspection it had not been presented to the Local Authorities Operational Services and Scrutiny Committee for approval. The inspectors were informed that once the Statement of Purpose had been formally approved it would be reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the National Minimum Standards.

Copies of the document are circulated to interested parties and they are available to members of the public upon request. The Adoption Service has made a commitment to make the copies of the statement of purpose available in alternative formats and which can be translated in to other languages as required.

The address and telephone number of the commission must be included in the statement of purpose.

Children's Guide.

The Adoption Service use the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Children's Guide "Adoption, what it is and what it means", it is given along with other information inserts to all children in the looked after system including the Children's Guide "Living with Foster Carers".

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

NO

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

NO

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

The adoption service has a Marketing Strategy for 2004-2005. The document aims to provide a planned marketing and recruitment strategy for Hull's Adoption Service. The document identifies the council's corporate objectives and a service overview. The main aim being to increase the number of adopters for children from 4 to 7 years of age, which reflects the average age range of children for whom the service are seeking adoptive placements. The appointment of a Marketing and Information Officer to work across the Adoption and Fostering Service was seen by the inspectors as an innovative approach to developing an advertising strategy that will enable the service to recruit more carers a role that has traditionally been undertaken by social work staff alongside their other duties.

When adoption has been identified, the placing social worker completes a "Child's Plan-Adoption". The plan is started where it has been decided to pursue adoption as a possible route to permanency for a child. It is prepared alongside the BAAF Form E and presented to the adoption panel when seeking a "best interest" decision. Concurrent planning for children is also very much the ethos of the adoption service and they work alongside social workers in the planning for families. The adoption plan can be added to during the family finding process and the final version presented to panel when a child/ family match is being considered. It is expected that there will also be additional input on to this form by the adoption social worker. There is a checklist for staff to follow when undertaking a need led assessment.

There are policies and procedures on the "Placement of Children For Adoption" pre-date the new legislation and must now be reviewed to reflect the changes that have taken place.

An Interagency budget allows the adoption social workers to seek placements nation-wide in an attempt to provide appropriate matches for children in respect of their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and the opportunity to live with siblings.

When adoption is considered to be in the best interest of a child their details are referred to the Yorkshire Adoption Consortium and to the Humberside Adoption Consortium to see if there are any suitable families within the region. Senior managers of the adoption service believe that the council contributes effectively to the consortium both as providers and consumers. The details of children are also sent to the National Adoption Register, if no potential match is identified through these means adverts are placed in "Be my Parent" and or "Adoption UK". The service also has a bi monthly booklet with details of children currently waiting for families. New enquiries who express a real interest in any of the children featured in the booklet are seen quickly and put on a "fast track" for preparation and assessment.

The service has been successful in matching children to families, which reflect their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and the opportunity to live with siblings.

The adoption service has a policy on the "Placement of Sibling Groups". It was written in 1999 and should be updated to take in to account the new legislation and standards.

Placing social workers felt the matching process is "thorough because the adoption team

drives the process”

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?	39	
How many children were matched with adopters?	32	
How many children were placed with the service’s own adopters?	19	
How many children were placed with other services’ adopters?	13	
How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?	39	
In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families, which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?	32	
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?	5	
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?	21	

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

The adoption service has a recruitment strategy in place and there are regular meetings between the adoption manager, the adoption team and the Marketing and Information Officer. The adoption team operates within the current departmental policy guidelines on the "Approval of Prospective Adopters" The policy pre-dates the recent changes in the legislation and it should now recognise the legitimate interest in the adoption of children by same sex carers.

The adoption service has a range of information for prospective adopters, including a video and written information on "Adopting a Child". The written information is presented in a colourful and easy read format and has an application form attached to it for new applicants to complete. It allows prospective adopters to understand the process and the commitment required of them. The information is in detail and has recently been updated to reflect the changes in the legislation.

It is the opinion of the inspectors that the eligibility criteria in relation to adoptive applicants are not as explicit and as inclusive as it could be. The video does not discuss the need for adoptive placements for children with special needs or for older children and the written information is not specific regarding the council's policy on same sex applications. In discussions with members of the adoption team there is evidence of good practice and that all applicants are considered without prejudice.

One questionnaire raised the issue of fertility treatment and felt the councils eligibility criteria on the use of contraceptive was unclear, and does not state "what you actually want or expect us to agree to" One adopter spoken to said she the councils policy on the use of contraception had been made very clear during a second time adoption and the assessment process.

The adoption service advertises for adopters in local papers, on the radio and use national adoption week as the focus for their recruitment campaigns. The service is developing a data base to show where they have had the most success in recruiting carers and in 2003 out of 167 show's of interest 48 proceeded with an application, a return rate of 29%. In geographically terms this included 80 from the Hull region and 60 from the East Riding.

All applicants are informed that the adoption service may prioritise some applications particularly where prospective adopters have shown an interest in specific children.

Applicants wishing to adopt from another country are referred to the Doncaster Adoption and Family Welfare Society for information and assessment, via a service level agreement between Hull City Council and Doncaster Adoption Agency. This also includes training.

The department have a policy on the “Application by Foster Carers to Adopt a Foster Child”. This policy pre-dates the National Adoption Standards 2001 and the National Minimum Standards where it specifically states that where the prospective adopters are already foster carers of a child they wish to adopt they are entitled to the same information and preparation as other prospective adopters and that all foster carers applications will be completed within 4 months.

Adopters interviewed felt their application had been responded to in a positive way.

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?****2**

The adoption team operates within the current departmental policy guidelines on the “Approval of Prospective Adopters” and the “Application by Foster Carers to Adopt a Foster Child”. The policies pre-date the recent changes in the legislation and should now updated. The agency run a half-day “Adoption Awareness” information day. The aim of the day is to reiterate some information prospective adopters may have already had access to and to clarify any points they remain unclear about. It also helps prospective applicants to understand the needs of the children waiting for placements, the complexity of some of the problems and special needs the children may have, and the ages and sibling groups who need permanent families. It covers the stages of the assessment, the need to take up statutory references, the home study report, the approval process and the matching and family finding process.

For those interested in taking their application forward they are invited to a 3-day preparation-training course. Single applicants are encouraged to take a friend /supporter to the group and this was confirmed in one interview where a single applicant had found this useful when reflecting on the content of the course at the end of the evening. The preparation-training course for prospective adopters recaps the information shared on the “Adoption Awareness” half day and looks in detail at attachment, loss and separation. Case studies and group work discussion are used to help applicants understand some very complex issues. Guest Speakers are programmed in to the course and most adopters interviewed found their contribution very helpful. The adoption service has also prepared a video as an introduction to the adoption process for use on the awareness day and a shorter version has been produce to use at recruitment events.

Foster carers wishing to adopt a child already in their care are provided with the same written information on adoption and are invited to attend the preparation groups.

The training is evaluated and all participants are asked to complete a questionnaire on the effectiveness of the training. The adoption manager evaluates the information and training is then modified in the light of the feedback received.

Training courses takes place at a central location and are usually in the evening.

A number of responses to the questionnaire sent to applicants suggest that the venue and time of the preparation groups were not always convenient. Some applicants also expressed a disappointment at the delay from their initial enquiry to the time of the next preparation group. One questionnaire commented on the preparation course being “one size fits all”

The home study and references form the basis of the written report, which is presented to the adoption panel. Hull City Council uses the BAAF Form F Format as a means of gathering all the relevant information.

There is evidence on the adopter’s files of a thorough and comprehensive assessment-taking place. The home assessment show consideration is given to the applicant’s capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way. These are signed and dated by the applicants. Case files show that decisions made in supervision are recorded on the adopters file.

Full reference checks are undertaken on all applicants including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB) on any household member over the age of 18. The CRB check is not held on the adopters file but a memorandum from Human Resources indicates it has been returned to the department and is held centrally in line with recommendations made by the Criminal Bureau. All references are taken up before the adoption service proceed to the home study assessment except in the assessment of a foster carer where the reference checks and the home study can be done simultaneous. A risk assessment is

undertaken on all household pets where they are considered a potential risk to any child placed, a health and safety check is also undertaken of the house and living accommodation.

The adoption service do not seek references from the NSPCC, they are of the belief that the NSPCC will only complete reference checks were the applicants have had multiple house and area moves. It advised that the service seek some clarification from the local NSPCC office about this area of work.

The adopters interviewed as part of the inspection process said they were kept informed about their application throughout the process and had access to the Home Study Form F before it went to panel. They confirmed they where able to make any changes to its content if they felt the writer had not got a particular point or issue across in a way they would have liked.

The letters advising applicants of their 28 days to read and respond to the Home Study Form F assessment should be clearer and it is advised applicants sign to show they have read the Form F and returned the document within the 28days and the amendments or comments they wish to make are recorded. Applicants should not be put under pressure to read and return the document in less than the 28 days or informed that if they don't return it earlier they may lose their allocated panel appointment as indicated on one file seen by the inspectors.

A sample of home study reports show that assessments are carried out within the time scales required and that panel are informed where there are delays and of the reasons for the delays.

Some adopters in their responses to the questionnaires they had prepared themselves for "a frustrating process" and that the adoption process was "something to be endured" but that "social workers did there work with dedication" Other responses indicated that the process was "friendly helpful".

One questionnaire stated that "Hull City Council had prepared us well for the adoption"

All re-approvals go back to panel every two years in line with the requirement for adoption medicals every two years. De-registration of approved adopters are also taken back to panel.

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?**

2

The adoption team operates within the current departmental policy guidelines on the “Approval of Prospective Adopters”, “Application by Foster Carers to Adopt a Foster Child” and the “Placement of Children For Adoption” they pre-date the new legislation and must now be reviewed to reflect the changes that have taken place. Information is supplied during the Adoption Awareness half day and is referred to throughout the assessment process. All applicants are given written information regarding the matching, introduction and placement process as well as any support that is needed to facilitate the placement along with information on the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Adopters sign an agreement for their details to be anonymously submitted to the National Adoption Register, Families waiting Booklet and other regional and local adoption agencies. All adopters are given the profiles of children and Form E reports. Adopters have the opportunity to speak to the agency medical adviser if there are health concerns and the comments from professionals and adopters suggest this is a valuable resource. The commitment and support of the medical adviser to the adoption service was complimented on many times throughout the inspection process.

The adoption service use the H1 and H2 Interagency placements forms adopters spoke of being involved in these meetings and that their feelings and views on the introductory plan and contact arrangements were considered. Adopters interviewed said they had been generally satisfied with the matching arrangements made by the adoption service.

Two adopter’s interviewed spoke very eloquently about the matching process and the feeling of rejection when placing social workers “turned you down” it added to a history of failures already experienced through fertility treatment but there was an acceptance that the matching process was crucial in ensuring good outcomes for children and families and that sometimes you were not the right family for a number of reasons. They hoped social workers had some understanding of how the matching process affected families and couples. They stated if social workers were choosing from a number of family’s specific details of when they were visiting other families should not be revealed as it added an element of completion to an already fraught and emotional process.

A matching certificate is provided to enable adoptive parents to apply for statutory adoption leave and pay.

The adoption service said that adoptive parents are asked if they are prepared to notify the adoption agency if an adopted child dies during childhood or soon after. It is advised the agency formalises this process and ensure there are written records of the adoptive parents decision and subsequent action. There were none available at the time of the inspection.

Adoptive parents prepare their own family book/photo albums so that children matched are prepared and have some knowledge of the family before they visit them. There were examples of family books being presented to panel along side the home study.

The adopters who completed the questionnaires commented on the “fantastic” support available and the professional approach of the team.

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?**

3

The adoption service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting adopters. There are a number of policies in place including “Procedures and Arrangements for Providing Support to Adopters and Including Out Of Hours” “Adoption Policy (Post Adoption Service)” “Guidance on Responsibilities of Child Care Teams for the Support of Adoptive Families and Adopted Children” “Assessment and Provision of Adoption Support Where the Child is Adopted” “Adoption Financial Support”

The adoption service has a Post Adoption Social Worker and a Social Worker–Adoption Support. Approved adoptive parents also have access to independent advice and support up until an adoption order is made. These independent workers offer confidential advice and may be contacted when there are areas of disagreement between adopters and the agency around issues such as financial assessments and allegations or if adopters wish to make a complaint. Leaflets for adopters and birth parents are currently in draft form and will be used to advertise the support services available. Post adoption support workers help birth parents to write appropriate letters to children, and help manage over 360 Letterbox contact arrangements. There are also plans to set up a drop in service for birth families, as support groups have failed in the past. Adopters interviewed said the letterbox contact arrangements worked quite well although one birth relative expressed her disappointment that letters and photographs had gone missing.

Hull City Council have a service level agreement with a voluntary agency “ After Adoption Yorkshire” This agency provides counselling services two days a week to any one who is affected by adoption. This includes adoptees, birth relatives and adoptive families. The service level agreement is constantly reviewed and the Hull City Council Adoption Service is satisfied with the 20 hours a week they have. It is monitored through quarterly meetings between the agency and After Adoption Yorkshire.

Applicants wishing to adopt from another country are referred to the Doncaster Adoption and Family Welfare Society for information and assessment, via a service level agreement between Hull City Council and Doncaster Adoption Agency. This also includes training and support. The adoption service run monthly adoption support groups, where specific issues are explored. Post adoption support training is also provided; After Adoption Yorkshire has run a Parenting Strategies course looking at a practical approach to parenting children. Nancy Thomas a Therapeutic Parenting Specialist from the USA has presented a seminar on “I’m not going to do it and you can’t make me” which was available for adoptive families approved by Hull City Council.

During adoption week in 2003 After Adoption Yorkshire also arranged for Nancy Thomas to deliver a number of workshops for group or individuals.

The 3-day preparation course and the home study are used to ensure prospective adopters are aware of the need to safeguard confidential information and to ensure with the support of the adoption service and the child’s social worker they have strategies in place to help the child address racism or any other forms of discrimination they may encounter. The adopters interviewed as part of the process confirmed they found the preparation course very useful and informative.

Written evidence on adopters file, interviews with adopters and the observation of the adoption panel show that adopters are helped to understand child development and the need to help children maintain a positive image. Adopters are encouraged to understand the importance of a child's history and to keep appropriate personal memorabilia.

Where a disruption in placement takes place there is a formal meeting. There have been no disruptions in the last twelve months.

Hull City Council have raised the awareness of the post adoption support service via posters, leaflets, radio broadcasts and letting other agencies know what is available. Leaflets are also sent to placing social workers promoting the service.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	28	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	23	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	19	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	4	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	13	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	0	

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?	3
<p>Hull City Council recognise the life long implications of adoption and recognise this in the “Adoption Policy (Post Adoption Service)” and in respect of this they have a service level agreement with After Adoption Yorkshire to provide advice and support to birth parents and relatives.</p> <p>Birth parents are offered independent counselling at all stages of the adoption process and they are able to return to the agency at any time for further support. Contact with birth families is also maintained through the administration of the letterbox system.</p> <p>After Adoption Yorkshire will also support birth parents in a counselling relationship during contested adoption cases.</p> <p>Birth parents views are sought by childcare social workers at the time of planning and reviews and the adoption service have an expectation that birth families are fully involved in the adoption process.</p> <p>Birth parents are encouraged to contribute to the Life story work of a child and to understand the importance of sharing this information.</p> <p>Two birth family members completed a questionnaire, one expressed their general satisfaction about the adoption process, and the second questionnaire expressed a very deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the adoption process and the decisions taken by Hull City Council possibly over a number of years.</p>		

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?	3
<p>Written evidence on the child's file indicates the views of birth parents and relatives are sought but it is acknowledge the information obtained for Form E's and life story work is variable.</p> <p>The letterbox contact arrangements allow for an exchange of information between the adopted family and birth relatives. The post adoption letterbox system was well organised and had been established for sometime.</p>		

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

Birth families are provided with information about After Adoption Yorkshire and support services provided by the agency via the service level agreement between the agency and Hull City Council Adoption Service.

Birth families can either be referred by a social worker or they can refer themselves. After Adoption Yorkshire provide either individual counselling or support groups.

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?	2
<p>The Policies and Procedures relating to the work of the Adoption Service and the panel are out of date.</p> <p>“The Placement of Children” and “The Approval of Prospective Adopters” policy and the procedures for receiving “Application by Foster Carers to Adopt a Foster Child” do not reflect the recent changes to the legislation.</p> <p>The adoption panel is referred to throughout the department’s adoption policies. There are no specific policies, which relate to the formation of the panel, its constitution, panel members responsibilities, including the appointment of a chair and vice chair.</p> <p>There is a written protocol for panel members and all panel members have a copy of the BAAF publication “Effective Panels”.</p> <p>Emergency meetings can and do happen when necessary and during the panel observed as part of the inspection process arrangements were being made to accommodate an additional panel.</p> <p>The quality of work is discussed in panel and it is the responsibility of the Professional Advisor to reflect any concerns about the content of Form E’s or matching reports back to area child care teams. The adoption team also hold a monthly surgery to help child care workers prepare Form E’s and offer advice on how to present material at the panel so that panel members have a clear picture of the situation and the recommendations to be made to the agency decision maker.</p> <p>Prospective adopters are given the opportunity to attend panel and those spoken to during the inspection confirmed they had attended the panel, they expressed mixed views recognising the need for a formal meeting affording the process the status it required but also admitting to it being “quite scary”. They found the photographs of panel members in the reception area very helpful in preparing them for whom they may meet in the panel.</p>		

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?	2
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Hull City Council Adoption Service has a properly constituted adoption panel. The panel membership meets all the statutory requirements but its makeup is predominantly female with only one male representative and there are 3 senior managers from the department within its membership. In the opinion of the inspectors the agency should consider a more balanced makeup of the panel and include additional male members of staff and current casework practitioners.

The panel members receive regular training and updates regarding significant developments in the field of adoption including changes to the legislation and the introduction of the Adoption Standards 2001 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services. There is however no training records maintained of the training attended by a panel members. New panel members are provided with an opportunity to observe panel before becoming an active member of the adoption panel.

The adoption team and panel members have a joint training day each year. It has been acknowledged by senior managers the ongoing training of panel members is crucial and that it has at times been difficulty for them to adjust to the new ethos of departments in particular the shift from sequential planning to concurrent planning for children in the looked after system.

Each panel member has a personal file, which contains evidence that a Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB) has been undertaken. One-panel members CRB was out of date and there was no evidence a second had been applied for. Panel member's files have a confidentiality statement signed by the panel member. Some panel members file indicate a personal reference had been taken up prior to their appointment but this did not seem to be a standard procedure.

The make up of panel members file should be in accordance with the Regulations and the National Minimum Standards

The panel was observed during the inspection process and members of the panel were able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the legislation their roles and responsibilities, conversations were supportive and enabled all panel member to contribute effectively. Those attending panel were treated fairly and with respect for the work they had done. The chair of panel met prospective adopters in a private room prior to panel to introduce herself and to explain the workings of the panel and what they could expect during the meeting.

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?**

3

The adoption service has a panel, which meets regularly on dates planned in advance. It is organised in an efficient way and is effective in making decisions and recommendations about the placement of children and the approval of prospective adopters. The panel has an appointed chair and vice chair.

Hull City Council formally advertised for the position of chair to the adoption panel, and selected the current chair from a number of applicants. The interview with the panel chair was informative and her views were conducive to the aims and objectives of the council.

There is a dedicated panel administrator and panel assistant. Panel papers are sent to members seven days in advance in sealed bags and by registered post. The panel minutes are clear and comprehensive and the recommendations made are formally recorded.

One questionnaire completed by a placing social worker was very critical of the panel process and felt staff presenting work were interrogated, that the dialogue was not based on the interests of the child and that it was a joyless process for adopters. There was no evidence at the panel observed by the inspectors to support these criticisms or any evidence obtained from interviews with adopters that they found it a joyless process.

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?**

1

The Head of the Children and Families Department Margaret Dennison is the Adoption Service Decision Maker.

The agency decision-maker is provided with panel recommendations within 24hours of the adoption panel meeting. A decision is conveyed orally to the applicants within 24hours and then in writing within seven days.

It was of serious concern to the inspectors that the agency decision maker does not have a full copy of the panel papers prior to the panel meeting but makes her decision based on the recommendation of the panel and a discussion with a service manager who has attended the panel. Just prior to the inspection this process had been slightly amended to ensure the agency decision maker receives the panel minutes before making a decision. There are no written procedures for this process.

The agency decision-maker must have access to all the panel papers and information surrounding the case alongside the panel recommendations before making a considered decision.

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?	2
<p>Kingston upon Hull Adoption Service is based at the Gleneagles Centre, East Carr Road Hull. The Adoption Service of Hull City Council is part of the larger Children and Families Department.</p> <p>The Head of the Children and Families Department is Margaret Dennison; she is also the Adoption Service Decision Maker.</p> <p>Heather Clare is the Registered Adoption Service Manager and she has overall responsibility for the Fostering and Adoption Services.</p> <p>Carol Fellowes is the Adoption Team Manager and manages a team of 18 staff, which comprises of 2 senior adoption workers, 7 adoption workers, 1 post adoption social worker and a social worker-adoption support. There are four administrative support workers.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection there is 1 vacant social worker post and one vacant clerical assistant post.</p> <p>The adoption team manager Carol Fellowes has a formal social work qualification, Certificate in Social Work Qualification (CQSW) She has considerable childcare experience and prior to her current role as the adoption team manager she was the manager of the fostering team.</p> <p>Management functions are shared between the Adoption and Fostering Manager and the Adoption Team Manager.</p> <p>It is understood that at the time of the inspection negotiations were taking place between councils training department and the adoption service regarding appropriate management training for the adoption team manager.</p> <p>All members of the adoption are qualified and have childcare experience. All staff have clearly written job descriptions.</p> <p>Financial management is the overall responsibility of the finance manager of the Hull City Council Social Services Department.</p> <p>It is the opinion of the inspectors that the members of staff involved in the adoption service were suitable qualified and experienced in childcare as well as adoption.</p>		

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?	NO	
Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?	YES	

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

Hull City Council has a written recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. The management team have demonstrated throughout this inspection they are equipped to manage the adoption service in an effective way. The pre-inspection questionnaire, and the self-assessment form were completed in full prior to the inspection and gave the inspection team an over view of the adoption service. The information provided in these documents has also been included in to the main body of this report.

The adoption team manager also prepared two files of evidence to demonstrate how the service meet the National Minimum Standards.

All team members have been recruited through appropriate recruitment procedures, and satisfactory reference checks were undertaken prior to their appointment.

The department have developed a “prompt” system to ensure CRB checks on all adoption staff are renewed every three years.

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

The management team have demonstrated throughout this inspection they are equipped to manage the adoption service in an effective way and to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. There is a clear organisational structure in place and clear lines of management and accountability. The adoption team manager Carol Fellowes undertakes the day-to-day management of the adoption team. In her absence the Senior Social Workers have delegated authority to manage the work of the team.

The statement of purpose further underlines the principles the adoption service operates within and the evidence gained on this inspection suggest the adoption service operates in accordance with its statement of purpose. It has been acknowledged throughout this report the adoption service have a series of policies and procedures that are out of date and must be revised in view of the changes that have been made to the legislation.

All childcare social workers in the adoption team are qualified social workers. One worker is registered and working towards the Post Qualifying (PQ) award.

The adoption team are supervised through weekly team meetings and a formal one to one supervision session with the manager. There is a departmental supervision policy. The team confirmed that supervision is given a high priority. Records are maintained of the supervision process.

Hull City Council have a "Code of Conduct for Employees" which includes a formal declaration of interest, this also applies to panel members who are expected to declare any personal interest they may have in a case they hear at panel.

The City Council have an equal opportunities policy and as qualified social workers the adoption service staff are expected to work in a non-discriminatory manner.

All approved adopters and children are automatically referred to the National Adoption Register following the making of a decision. At the time of the inspection there are no written procedures about the Adoption Register.

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?

2

The adoption service has written policies and procedures that underpin the practice of the service but a number of the documents are out of date and do not reflect the changes to the legislation. All policies and procedures must be updated.

At the time of the inspection an adoption manual was in the process of being drawn up.

Interagency accounts are recorded centrally by the Social Services Finance Department. During the interviews with prospective and approved adopters, it was clear they had an understanding of the payment of adoption allowances.

Reports on the adoption service are provided to the Councils Scrutiny Committee. A report was prepared for the committee in March 2000; an up date on the adoption service was further presented to the Operational Services Scrutiny Committee in January 2004. The report was made available to the inspectors and show the committee are informed about national adoption issues combined with a range of local performance information including the departments shift from sequential planning to concurrent planning. Adoption Statistics are reported as part of the Performance Information Statistics.

Members have engaged as part of the council's recruitment strategy to attend functions and campaigns.

The Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader are both qualified social workers and have an understanding of the needs of children in the looked after system.

It is a requirement that the executive side of the council should receive reports on the management and outcomes of the adoption service every six months.

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

Monthly?

Quarterly?

Less than Quarterly?

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 service has access to medical, legal and professional advisers. Specialist advisers are professionally qualified and drawn from the statutory agencies. The Local Health Authority employs the medical advisor. Hull City Council employs the legal adviser. Hull City Council adoption service is a member of two adoption consortiums Yorkshire adoption consortium and Humberside Adoption Consortium; the agency has access to specialist advice on any related issues. Advice on inter-country adoption is obtained through the service level agreement with the Doncaster Adoption Agency.

The service is also a member of the British Association For Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

A number of staff interviewed raised concerns about the lack of a CAHMS service for all looked after children and this included adopted children. It is also understood that the Psychological services are no longer able to provide direct support to adopters, although advice is available for half a day a month to the adoption team.

The role of the medical adviser and the advice she gives was commented on in a very positive and favourable way by many people throughout the inspection. She will meet with adopters to discuss specific medical issues relating to placement matches.

There are no written protocols governing the role of the specialist advisors.

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?

3

Hull City Council has a written recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. Appointment to the team is dependent upon a formal interview and satisfactory statutory references. The local authorities recruitment procedures ensure all staff who are employed in the adoption team are fully qualified social workers and have a background in child care work. Hull City Councils recruitment policy prevents anyone commencing work before a criminal records check is undertaken. The inspectors were assured that the recruitment procedures are adhered to

An enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check is undertaken prior to any appointment and this includes panel members and a procedure is being devised to prompt future 3 yearly checks. All staff working in the adoption service who have case responsibility were suitably qualified and had at least two years child care experience. They have experience in carrying out assessments and family placement work. During a number of interviews with social workers and adoption managers it is clear their social work colleagues value the adoption team and their specialist knowledge and skills.

A full induction to the adoption service is available for all staff who join the adoption team. The initial programme for week 1 and 2 of the employment period is used for the employee to familiarise themselves with the office, all information relating to the service, files, policies and procedures and working alongside an experienced social worker. It is acknowledged in the induction programme that the process will take sometime and some areas of the programme will be completed before others.

Hull City Council have an "Achievement and Development scheme" which entails twice yearly interviews with all staff, it is a mean of identifying areas of strength and areas for development.

The adoption team demonstrated knowledge of the relevant legislation that governs their work, their role and responsibility and the councils own policies and procedures. The team spoke of receiving appropriate training through the councils own training department and more specialist training courses run through BAAF.

Birth Record Counselling under section 51 The Adoption Act 1976 is undertaken either by the Post Adoption Worker who is an experienced and qualified counsellor or the After Adoption Worker.

It is understood that at the time of the inspection negotiations were taking place between councils training department and the adoption service regarding appropriate qualifications. The service is committed to staff obtaining the Post-Qualifying Award. At the time of the inspection one member of staff has the Post Qualifying Award and a second member of staff is currently working towards the PQSW. The manager of the service is aware that 20% of the adoption agency social workers should have or be in the process of obtaining the qualification by 2006.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

YES

What % of the adoption service's social workers has a PQ award?

8

%

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

The adoption service is managed in an appropriate way; there are team meetings, monthly supervisions and a regular allocation of work. Casework planning and the prioritising of assessments is supervised and monitored by the senior social workers and managers of the team. The levels of management delegation and responsibility are clearly defined. The members of the adoption team have a good understanding of the levels of management delegation, responsibility and decision making with in the service. In discussion with the adoption team and placing social workers there is evidence of teams working together effectively to ensure there are good outcomes for children in need of families.

All assessment reports are read and signed by the allocated social worker and supervising managers. Time scales are monitored and delays reported to the adoption panel. There is a auditing of case files on a regular basis.

A departmental supervision policy underpins the practice of staff receiving a formal one to one supervision with their line manager.

Ongoing staff training is identified in the twice-yearly "Achievement and Development" interviews.

There is an adequate level of administrative support; recruitment is underway to appoint a new clerical worker.

The adoption service runs a duty system each morning and in the absence of a duty social worker the administration team take telephone messages and the adoption social workers respond to enquires the following day. Information leaflets are sent out to any one expressing an interest in adoption.

The inspectors spent some time discussing the service's duty system and were concerned that the adoption team may be missing enquirers by not ensuring there was a social worker available to respond immediately to any adoption enquiry particularly in such an competitive market.

All employees have appropriate job descriptions.

The council have an equal opportunities policy, a complaints policy, a grievance policy and a whistle blowing policy.

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?	3
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There is an appropriate number of social workers in the adoption team to deal effectively with the casework and the planning for children in the looked after system. There is a distinct split between fostering and adoption teams and both teams have a separate manager. There is an appropriate mix of staff employed in the adoption team. They have considerable experience in childcare work and are all qualified social workers. The discussion with the adoption team was lively and informative and their conversations demonstrated an understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the department. There are flexible working arrangements and the opportunity to write home studies (Form F) at home. The team spoke of receiving appropriate training through the council's own training department and more specialist training courses run through BAAF. Child protection training is mandatory and the council offers a rolling programme to ensure staff have a number of opportunities to attend. Other training has included "Face to Face Contact" "Issues in Contact" "The Victoria Climbié Report" "It takes a team" by Nancy Thomas. Birth Record Counselling under section 51 The Adoption Act 1976 is undertaken either by the Post Adoption Worker who is an experienced and qualified counsellor or the After Adoption Worker. The staff team confirm they are appropriately supported through the line management structure. Hull City Council has a recruitment strategy and in discussion with senior managers the council continually looks at ways to recruit and retain appropriately qualified staff.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	12	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	1
Number of social work posts vacant in the adoption service.	1		

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
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Hull City Council operates within the terms of their equal opportunities policy. The authority has a whistle blowing policy, which encourages the employees to raise serious concerns with the council. The staff interviewed as part of this inspection confirmed that they felt the council was a fair employer. The adoption team operate to the council's employment practices. Hull City Council has a 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**

All new employees in the adoption team undertake an induction programme, this includes working alongside experienced social workers undertaking family assessments and observing the adoption panel.

The individual training needs of the social workers in the adoption team are identified during the twice yearly “Achievement and Development” Interviews with their line manager.

Team meetings and the joint panel training days are an opportunity for the adoption team and the panel to keep abreast of any changes in legislation, case law and departmental policies and procedures.

Local authority training is available through the social services training department and more specialists training through BAAF or other organisations that specialise in adoption issues.

The team are confident that they are kept up to date with adoption issues.

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?****3**

The adoption service has appropriate records on prospective adopters, prospective applicants, approved adopters and children.

The organisation of the files was satisfactory, they were neat and tidy and information was easily retrievable. All files contained the relevant information. The files are regularly audited and a front sheet indicates when the initial enquiry was made, when the firm commitment letter was sent and final approval agreed by the agency decision maker. This ensures the managers can monitor that the adoption service keep within the adoptions standards timescale for adoption applications and approvals. Casework decisions made in supervision are recorded on files.

Full reference checks are undertaken on all applicants including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB) on any household member over the age of 18, medical reports and personal references from family, ex-partners, children from previous relationships, friends and current employers. The information is stored in the confidential sections of case files.

Files are secured in locked cabinet in the main office.

The computer system is in the process of being protected “ Fire Walled” to ensure absolute confidentiality for adopters and adopted children.

Panel papers are delivered via internal mail hand delivered or sent by recorded delivery.

Panel papers are collected at the end of each panel so that they can be shredded to ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times.

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
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There is evidence to show that the adoption service has developed satisfactory inter-agency links and use the standard BAAF Form F and Form E's. Inter-agency planning is recorded on the H1 and H2 Inter-Agency Placement Agreement Forms.

The council have a written policy on Case Recording, and the disclosure of confidential information "Confidentiality and Information Sharing" and "Client Access to Personal Information"

Panel members have been asked to sign a confidentiality statement and copies of these are stored on the panel member's personal file.

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?	3
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Hull City Council has a written policy on Case Recording it was revised in December 2000. Human Resources maintain the personnel records of all employees. At the time of the inspection there were no staff disciplinary, allegations or complaints being investigated. On behalf of the NCSC the Social Services Inspectorate who were undertaking an inspection of Hull City Councils Children Services examined staff files and found them to be satisfactory.

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?	3
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Human Resources maintain the personnel records of all employees. The vetting procedures were appropriate (staff recruitment files were viewed by the SSI team as part of the Children's Service Inspection). There were a number of inconsistencies on some files examined in that not all checks were recorded as having been completed in all cases. These gaps appear to relate to a lack of a monitoring system. A checklist was shared with the inspectors that will be used in relation to the recruitment of staff. This checklist is being considered for a broader use across all children's services.

The adoption service maintain files on all adoption panel members they are maintained in accordance with the National Minimum Standards.

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?	2
<p>The agency premises are a secure building with adequate facilities for meetings and interviews. The adoption team are in a separate part of the building and although all together they are in separate team rooms as the shortage of space prevents them from all working in the same room. The adoption manager and senior social workers have their own office space although one senior social worker works in the main office due to a lack of space. He uses a colleague's office for conducting supervision.</p> <p>The adoption team and the administrative team have stated that the accommodation is far from ideal and leaves them feeling fragmented.</p> <p>Achieved files are stored in a central place; an administrator controls access to all files and was able to demonstrate the storage and security systems in place.</p> <p>The agency do not have a Disaster Recovery Plan</p>		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where 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 8 March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

PROVIDER COMMENTS ARE AVAILABLE ON FILE AT THE REGIONAL OFFICE

Action taken by the NCSC 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

YES

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 16 July 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

NO

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>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all NCSC 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 Heather Clare of Kingston upon Hull City Council 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 Heather Clare of Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service 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.