



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

Oxfordshire County Council Adoption Service

Yarnton House

Rutten Lane

Yarnton

Oxford

OX5 1LP

31st January 2005

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

Oxfordshire County Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

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Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

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

Date of Inspection Visit		31st January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Sally Woodget	113975
Name of Inspector	2	Lynn Smith	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Gwen Grossman	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Oxfordshire County 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 CSCI regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

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

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- 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.

Oxfordshire Social and Healthcare, Family Placement, Adoption Service is not a stand-alone service but is a part of the larger team of family placement services. Staff in the family placement services work with children and young people for whom respite, short-term and long term fostering, kinship care or adoption has been identified as their plan. Recruitment and assessment of carers and adopters is also undertaken by the family placement service. Staff in the Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service are carrying a mixed caseload in fostering and adoption work. This inspection has not included any of the fostering work, as this is inspected under different regulations and by the area C. S. C.I. regulatory inspector.

Oxfordshire Social and Healthcare, Family Placement, adoption service contract services from PACT to provide a service for assessing, approving and supporting adopters who wish to adopt from overseas.

The adoption service provides recruitment, assessment, preparation, management and training service for all prospective adopters and prepares and supports them to meet the needs of the wide range of children referred to them. The agency is a member of an Adoption Consortium with Surrey, Hampshire and PACT, which provides a service to local waiting adopters and to children needing adoption. This broadens the choice of adoptive families available to children.

The agency aims to provide ;

- training for adopters including parenting training
- training for staff
- placement finding for all children and young people, including children with disabilities
- arranging and making adoption placements
- adoption counselling
- birth records counselling
- post adoption support
- letterbox and face-to-face adoption contact
- newsletter for adopters
- social events for adopters
- information for adopted children

The adoption service aims to ensure through thorough assessment and support that children and young people are protected from harm, individually respected and valued, placed in families where their needs will be appropriately met and matched with families who reflect their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language.

The adoption service recognises that some children come from troubled backgrounds and that they have a responsibility to provide support for adopters which includes;

- practical, emotional and financial assessment
- full account of the adopters own needs
- provision of professional and peer support
- accessible and appropriate training.

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.)

Summary of inspection findings Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement Adoption Service

This service has been inspected for the first time against the National Minimum Standards introduced from the 1st April 2003. As a result, this report may contain a substantial number of recommendations and requirements. If so, the number of these should fall significantly at the next inspection. This inspection found that the service needed to make a number of changes and additions in order to comply fully with the Standards and Regulations. Inspectors found the service was fully committed to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children.

Standard 1

Statement of Purpose

This standard was nearly met.

The adoption service have provided documents to a good standard but they need to make a few additions and amendments to the Statement of Purpose and develop the Children's Guide to ensure that it is appropriate to the needs of young children, to fully comply with the Regulations and Standards. The Statement of Purpose broadly reflects the service provided by the agency.

Standard 2

Securing and Promoting Welfare

This standard was nearly met.

The adoption service needs to evaluate their strategy to ensure that they are recruiting adopters to meet the needs of children waiting.

Standard 3-6

Prospective and Approved Adopters

Three of these standards were nearly met, one was met.

The adoption service provides some useful information for adopters however information regarding the assessment process and the sort of children available locally needs to be updated. Recent changes in the provision of adoption training and information evenings had proved successful. Further work is required on developing analytical assessments which evaluates adopters skills, competences and abilities. Information for adopters about a child to be placed, including meetings with adopters and psychologists were well received and appreciated.

Information and support to adopters following approval and following placement was variable. Other adoption support services were being developed, some innovative services

were being devised such as the buddying scheme for adopters.

Standard 7-9

Birth Parents and Birth Families

These three standards were not met.

Services to birth parents were not well developed and further evaluation and scrutiny is needed to ensure that recent developments fully meet the needs of birth parents as required by the Standards and Regulations.

Standards 10-13

Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions

Three of these standards are nearly met, one is met.

The adoption service have 3 joint fostering and adoption panels and it is planned these will be split later on in the year. The panel policies and procedures need some amendments to fully comply with the standards. Panel membership, induction and training are operating well. The panel chair should ensure that the reasons for recommendations are fully summarised and recorded in the panel minutes.

Standards 14-15

Fitness to provide all manage and adoption agency

These standards were nearly met.

Inspectors are of the opinion that the structure of Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service did not provide the necessary leadership of the staff and operation of the adoption agency. A number of staff were "acting up" into more senior positions and some of the work of the adoption service, such as; counselling of birth parents and assessing the needs for adoption support was spread across children's services.

Standards 16-18

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency

All of these standards were nearly met

The adoption service needs to improve the management of the agency in order to fully comply with these standards and ensure a quality of service is provided and appropriate levels of leadership are evident.

Standard 19-23

Employment and Management of Staff

Three of these standards were met, one was nearly met, one was not met.

The adoption service needs to ensure that it has sufficient staff to carry out the operation of the adoption agency in line with its targets and ensure a quality of service provision. The adoption agency needs to comply with all the relevant status checks and CRB checks for staff members. The supervision and training of staff was seen to be of a good standard.

Standards 25-28

Records

Two of these standards were nearly met, one was met and one was not met.

All of the policies and procedures pertaining to the access, compilation and retention of case records were in place, complying with Data Protection and the Children's Rights Act. The adoption service must ensure they take up appropriate status checks including CRB checks, on all staff.

Standards 29

Premises

This standard was nearly met

The adoption service is presently incorporated within the larger family placement service for Oxfordshire. It operates from four different local offices situated around the county. Concerns were expressed about the security arrangements for confidential files and this needs to be addressed.

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:

NA

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

NA

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

NA

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

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

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

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

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

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulation 2 (1) schedule1.	LA1	The Statement of Purpose of the adoption service must include; the systems in place that are used to monitor and evaluate the provision of services; a summary of the complaints procedure.	31st July 2005
2	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulation 3 (1). Schedule2	LA1	The adoption service must ensure the Children's Guide contains a summary of the Statement of Purpose and that the guide is produced in different formats and styles to meet the needs of children and young people of different ages and abilities. The guide must contain a summary of the complaints procedure.	31st July 2005
3	The Adoption Agency Regulations 1983, Regulation 7(1) (a)	LA9 LA8 LA7	The adoption service must ensure that they provide a counselling service for birth parents. The adoption service must develop a strategy of working with and supporting birth families and birth parents both before and after adoption, including helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.	31st July 2005

4	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulation 11 (3) (d).	LA28	The adoption service must ensure that all the elements of Schedule 3 are fully complied with when recruiting staff and employing persons to work for the purposes of the adoption service	31st July 2005
5	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulation 10 (a) (b).	LA21	The adoption service must ensure that it recruits a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent, and experienced persons to work for the purposes of the adoption service.	31st July 2005

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA2.2	The adoption service should evaluate their recruitment strategies to ensure they have sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption.
2	LA2	The service should ensure that regular meetings are instigated with relevant professionals within the legal services to ensure the welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.
3	LA3.1	The adoption service should update the information on the assessment process provided to prospective adopters.
4	LA3.6	The adoption service should consider ways in which it can provide clear and accurate information about children in need of family placements to prospective adopters.
5	LA4.5	The adoption service should ensure that the policy relating to the training and the assessment of foster carers wishing to adopt and their entitlement to the same information and preparation as other prospective adopters is comprehensively detailed in a written protocol.
6	LA4.6	The adoption service should ensure that health and safety checks and animal checks are consistently undertaken during the assessment of prospective adopters.
7	LA4.1 LA4.6	The adoption service should ensure that prospective adopters are involved in a thorough and comprehensive assessment which identifies their competencies and strengths as well as any areas for development which needs to be addressed
8	LA4.9	The adoption service should ensure that prospective adopters are kept informed throughout the process of the assessment, preparation and following approval prior to a link being made.
9	LA6.2	The adoption service should ensure a thorough evaluation and scrutiny of the adoption support assessment process and develop protocols to ensure the consistent and regular support of adopters following a placement.
10	LA7.4	The adoption service should ensure a thorough evaluation and scrutiny of the Independent support service for birth parents.

11	LA7.5	The adoption service should ensure that birth parents have the opportunity to comment on what is written about them or their circumstances prior to the adoption panel.
12	LA8.2	The adoption service should ensure that arrangements are made to support birth parents and birth families in providing information about the child's birth and early life in order for them to contribute to the maintenance of the child's heritage, and to ensure that they are fully assisted to take part in the contact arrangements.
13	LA9.1	The adoption service should ensure that it has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents both before and after adoption. This should include providing information about local and national support groups and for services for birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.
14	LA10.2	The adoption service should ensure they have update panel policies and procedures in place.
15	LA10	The adoption service should ensure that a joint meeting with adoption workers and panel members is held to formally review the themes and trends arising from any disruptions of adoption placements and that an action plan is drawn up to inform future practice.
16	LA12.3	The adoption service should ensure the panel chair summarises the reasons for the recommendations reached by the panel including the positive aspects as well as any areas of difficulty or potential risk.
17	LA14.5	The adoption service should ensure the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation of the adoption agency and that it is managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible outcomes for children.
18	LA15.2	The adoption service should ensure that telephone enquiries are made to verify each written reference and the evidence of this is included in the human resources file for each member of staff.
19	LA16.7	The adoption service should ensure that it has clear and concise written procedures that cover the use of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.
20	LA17.1	The adoption service should ensure that there are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and for ensuring quality performance.
21	LA17.2	The adoption service should ensure that it provides information on adoption allowances to prospective adopters.
22	LA18.5	The adoption service should ensure that a written protocol governing the role of specialist advisers is devised.

23	LA19.5	The adoption service should ensure that all social work staff should have an enhanced CRB check carried out before commencing work.
24	LA19.6	The adoption service should ensure that all administrative staff who have access to confidential information about children in the looked after system should have a Standard CRB check carried out before commencing work.
25	LA19.14	The adoption service should ensure that all support workers involved with birth parents have the knowledge and understanding of the adoption process.
26	LA20.5	The adoption service should ensure that there are structures and systems in place to ensure that assessment and approval of prospective adopters is managed and implemented effectively.
27	LA25	The adoption service should ensure that a thorough risk assessment is undertaken to determine whether the present arrangements for the storage of archived files meets the fire and waterproof requirements.
28	LA29.3	The adoption service should ensure that the adoption premises have facilities for the secure retention of records.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	YES
• 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	31/1/05
Time of Inspection	9.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	162
Number of Inspector days	8
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)	42

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

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

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Oxfordshire's Social and Health Care, Family Placement, adoption service have produced a comprehensive Statement of Purpose which is both accessible and useful, this includes a pullout section providing information and an easy reference guide, on all the support services for adoptive parents and adopted children.

A few amendments need to be made, for example; some of the information about relief caring and short breaks is relevant to fostering services and this could be misleading to prospective and approved adopters. The section covering monitoring issues needs to include the range of systems in place such as; the quarterly meeting to the executive, scrutiny committee, corporate parenting group etc.. It also needs to include reference to the adoption panel.

The section dealing with the panel process needs to make clear the panel only recommends decisions to the agency and also needs to mention the role of the agency decision maker.

The section dealing with complaints needs to include a summary of the complaints procedure, referring to the different levels and stages of investigation.

The adoption service has two children's guides, one produced by BAAF. These are for children in an older age group, and neither include a summary of the Statement of Purpose as required by the regulations this needs to be addressed. Inspectors suggest a children's guide is produced for younger children, in different formats and styles, for example, in a video or DVD format and which is also appropriate to the needs of children with communication and language difficulties.

Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, family placement, adoption service have produced a useful guide for children in the looked after system called "Our Voice" and a complaints guide these are helpful and informative. However both of these are only suitable for older children. A complaints guide suitable to the needs of young children to be placed for adoption should be produced. Inspectors were informed that other booklets and brochures were used with very young children to inform them about the adoption process, and that foster carers and social workers were involved in spending time helping them to understand these issues.

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually? (Record N/A if the information is not available)	<input type="text" value="YES"/>
Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?	<input type="text" value="YES"/>
Is there a children's guide to adoption?	<input type="text" value="YES"/>
Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?	<input type="text" value="NO"/>

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
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The inspectors were informed that the agency's "Adoption Recruitment Targets" had been identified and that this mirrored the profile of Looked after Children. This was used as a basis for the recruitment profile of adopters. Inspectors found that the adoption recruitment targets were set in each locality. Inspectors were concerned that due to the constant flow of self referrals from prospective adopters the agency had not been involved in targeted recruiting of the sort of adopters they required. There was evidence in the questionnaires and case tracking to suggest that some prospective adopters had felt "compelled" to accept older children or sibling groups otherwise they would not be considered. There was also some evidence of adopters approval status being altered in order to meet the needs of children to be matched with them. Interviews with adopters and returned questionnaires from adopters evidenced inconsistencies across the county about priorities in relation to recruitment and the take-up of applications.

The joint fostering and adoption service includes the post of recruitment officer but at the time of the inspection this post had been vacant for some time. Staff interviewed felt that this post was useful but that the priorities had been heavily influenced by the need to recruit foster carers rather than adopters who tended to self-refer. Inspectors advise the adoption agency to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategy in recruiting specific adopters to meet the needs of those children in Oxfordshire who require adoptive placements.

Managers informed inspectors that there were a number of policy documents informing staff how to best match children with adopters, which ensures that the ethnic origin, cultural background and religious and language needs of the child are taken into account. Inspectors noted that the agency also sought to identify any risk factors relating to placements of sibling groups to ensure that children could live with their brothers and sisters if this met their individual needs.

In matching children with approved adopters, the adoption agency states that it takes into account the views and feelings of children as far as these can be ascertained based on age and understanding. Some evidence of this was seen in the Form E reports presented to the panel. The agency informed inspectors that children are encouraged to make written submissions to the panel were appropriate, inspectors were pleased to have the opportunity to observe this practice both from a young person on "why I want to be adopted" and also from the birth child of an adopter on "why I want to adopt...".

Inspectors found that the linking forms, linking reports for panel and family finding reports were useful documents for exploring the decision making process in matching the child to adopters.

Inspectors were concerned to hear that there had been some serious delays in planning for some children. Inspectors were informed that one of the reasons for this were to do with the

legal processes. Inspectors advised senior managers to work with legal advisers, local guardians and officers from the courts, to discuss the departments twin tracking/contingency planning for children, and to look at the particular cases where there have been serious delays in adoption plans being realised. It is advised also their regular meetings held with this group of professionals to ensure good working relationships are maintained to improve the outcomes for children.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?	25	
How many children were matched with adopters?	26	
How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?	25	
How many children were placed with other services' adopters?	1	
How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?	20	
In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?	24	
What percentage of children matched with the adoption service's adopters does this represent?	92	%
How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?	8	
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?	9	

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service recruit and assess suitable and eligible adults to become adoptive parents. The adoption service has a family placement duty system in place to ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents have the opportunity to discuss the situation with the family placement social worker. Information packs are sent out following the enquiry, and this includes information on becoming adoptive parent and of what is expected of adopters. The information includes the systems that the agency has in place to prioritise prospective adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive parents. This information is accessible and interesting, including case studies of the sorts of children requiring placement. Inspectors noted however that the Oxford "Be My Parent" book provided by the agency as a way in which they gave clear and accurate information to prospective adopters about children who need families locally, is not kept up to date. The service need to consider ways in which they can provide such information to applicants in a regular and satisfactory manner. The adoption service's eligibility criteria, chooses to dispel the myths that prospective applicants may have about the sort of people who are able to adopt and provides a list of the sort of people they would consider as suitable adopters. The information given to prospective adopters regarding the assessment process written by BAAF in 1998 is outdated, further information on the recommendations of the serious case review in Brighton and Hove and about the Independent Review Mechanism need to be included.</p> <p>An overseas adoption service is provided by PACT (Parents and Children Together), a voluntary adoption agency, on the basis of a service level agreement. All preparation and home studies are undertaken by this organisation including the panel process.</p> <p>The statement of purpose sent to all prospective adopters parents includes an A-Z of useful information for adopters on support services provided by the agency and other organisations locally. Informal arrangements are used to provide opportunities for prospective adopters to talk to others who have adopted children.</p>	<p>Standard met?</p>	<p>2</p>

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

In May 2004 the Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service held a review of the preparation and assessment of adopters. The outcome of this has led to a separate and discreet preparation and training course for prospective adopters. A number of the questionnaires received from adopters by inspectors, had been through the previous process of joint training on fostering and adoption. These adopters had indicated that they had found this confusing and distracting and would prefer a discreet course and one on adoption issues and with the opportunity to meet experienced adopters. Clearly the family placement service has listened to the views of those attending their courses and implementation of separate training courses has already commenced. Those who had attended the new discreet adoption course had found it interesting, satisfactory and helpful and had valued the opportunity to meet with experienced adopters. It is planned that these new dedicated adoption courses for will be reviewed in terms of content, timing and venue within the coming year.

During the process of the inspection, inspectors were able to observe an information evening for prospective adopters, which included an opportunity for them to meet with, experienced adopters and to meet some adopted young people. Inspectors noted that applicants found this particularly stimulating, interesting and helpful.

Managers of the family placement service were clear that there were opportunities for foster carers to adopt children who they cared for, when this was in the best interests of the child. Policies relating to the training and assessment of foster carers who wish to adopt are not fully developed and this needs some attention.

Inspectors were concerned to note that the health and safety checks and animal (dog) checks were not consistently undertaken during the assessment process of prospective adopters and this is recommended. Inspectors noted that prospective adoptive applicants were involved in writing their own "assessments", whilst inspectors were pleased to see that applicants were fully involved in the process they were concerned that this practice led to a lack of evidential, analytical and investigative assessment. Often opportunities were missed in obtaining evidence of competencies, experience and skills of the applicants. The evidence should be evaluated and recorded in the assessment document under the various headings, so that the panel are fully informed and able to exercise their quality assurance functions to the full. The assessment also needs to identify the competences the applicants will need to develop so that these gaps may be addressed in any support plan once a possible match is identified.

The case tracking sample and returned questionnaires from prospective and approved adopters revealed that a number were unhappy about the process, one adopter described it as a "flawed system" and another stated "we at the mercy of the system rather than working in partnership". A couple of replies reported that the process was for too long and that they had had to chase for appointments to keep the process going. A number of adopters also informed inspectors that following approval they were not informed about what was going on, which was undoubtedly distressing. Clearly the agency need to take these views seriously, and consider ways they can improve the system to ensure their workers have the time to undertake assessments of prospective adopters in an organised, sensitive and timely manner.

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service provides clear written information to approved adopters in a leaflet called "When You Were Linked with the Child". A further leaflet for foster carers called "Moving Children on to Adoption" is a useful tool for foster carers and also provides approved adopters with much-needed information about what the child may experience during the process of a move to live with a new family. Information is also provided about the role of the Adoption Register and the local adoption consortium (Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Surrey County Council's).

Approved adopters felt that they were given accurate and up-to-date information about the child to help them understand their needs and background. The adoption agency invited adopters linked to a particular child to meet with the medical adviser, members of the "Attach" team (a team of psychologists and social workers supporting young people with attachment difficulties), the foster carers and any other relevant professional involved with the child in order that they gained a full understanding of the child situation and implications for them and family.

Inspectors saw good evidence of introductions to adopters, which were fully discussed and recorded. Inspectors were informed that the system was in place to ask adoptive parents to notify the agency in the event if adopted child dies. Inspectors met with adoptive parents who were fully conversant with the importance of assisting adopted children to understand their past and to pass information to birth parents who wish to have it.

Inspectors saw evidence that prospective adopters had developed information in the form of photograph albums tailored to the age and understanding of children who may be linked with them, and this was used to assist children, foster carers and social staff in the introduction process.

Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)**Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.****Key findings and evidence****Standard met?****2**

The Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service 's provision of support services to adoptive parents and children placed for adoption are still very much in the early stages of development.

There is a part-time adoption specialist support services adviser with responsibility for offering a direct service to adopters and adoptee's. Part of the role is to offer advice and support to those families who cannot meet the threshold of other services, for example; advice and support to families in assisting a referral to the most appropriate services; support to adoptive families in developing self-help groups; consultation and education to colleagues and other agencies on attachment and other emotional difficulties associated with the adoption and joint work with other colleagues and agencies on targeted pieces of work.

Each local family placement team have more recently obtained their own adoption support worker, whose role is to assist the adoption specialist support adviser in her remit, as well as undertaking some specific pieces of direct work with individuals children and families affected by adoption. The staff now form part of the adoption support team and they have developed their own A-Z guide of support services for adopters. A number of initiatives are under way including the "new buddy scheme" for adopters. This is a pilot scheme whereby experienced adopters will learn the skills of "parent mentoring". This project has been developed in partnership with Oxford's Family Nurturing Network.

Inspectors were informed that the assessment teams in the local areas would receive referrals for adoption support. Training had been provided for front-line social work staff to carry out the assessments for adoption support. Following assessment if specific work was identified this could then be referred to adoption support workers. Inspectors expressed concern that the specific, and difficulties experienced by adopters may not be fully understood by social workers without specific experience in adoption work and the implications for adoption that these referrals would not be considered a priority when compared with the nature of other work that is coming in to the assessment teams, such as, child protection work. Managers of the adoption service felt however that these issues had been fully considered and discussed with staff and that a review of the outcomes of this procedure would be fully evaluated in due course. Inspectors recommend that this process is thoroughly scrutinised including consultation with those using the service. It is also advised that the adoption panel are fully involved and informed about this area of work.

The adoption agency facilitate a "Post Adoption Forum" which inspectors noted was well attended by professionals, councillors and adoptive parents. This Forum had a useful consultative and information sharing purpose within the organisation.

Approved adopters had the opportunity to attend a special parenting course run by the Family Nurturing Network, whereby those attending could learn about child development. Most adopters interviewed found that this course was especially helpful in helping them to provide a firm foundation for bringing up their adopted children. This practice has been referred to in recent publications issued by the DfES.

The Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service encourages a number of adopter support groups throughout the county and seminars and training

opportunities were provided through this network. Oxfordshire Social and Health Care have an "Attach" Team and inspectors have the opportunity to meet with a psychologist and a specialist social worker who work in this team, their aim is to provide therapeutic support for children. The team was initially set up to offer a service to all Looked after Children, however the amount of adoption work has increased rapidly in the last year. Referrals can be received directly from social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents and young people themselves. Staff in this team are involved in working directly with young people who have experienced early trauma and neglect. They also assist, where necessary, in the linking and matching stage to ensure prospective adopters fully understand the implications of the attachment difficulties for the child and to help them in developing behaviour management strategies. It is the remit of this team to offer information, advice and support to adoptive families up to three years post order. There are close links between this team and the local CAMHS team and they have developed protocols for working together. It was clear to inspectors that social work staff in the adoption service, field social workers, adoptive families and members of the adoption panel, that they found the work of this team invaluable. Inspectors were concerned however that this service could easily become overwhelmed in the future by the increasing demands made upon it, and advise the management to consider carefully how they intend to address this.

Inspectors were impressed to note that the adoption agency had developed useful leaflets for teachers; one written by adoptive parents and the other by agency staff; to increase the level of understanding and awareness in schools and to identify the particular difficulties and specific behaviours that adopted children might present in schools.

Despite all the arrangements described above that had been put in place to support adopters, the feedback received from adoptive parent questionnaires indicated that some adopters still felt that they were "left to get on with it after the placement". Family placement social workers who undertook the assessment of the adopters normally "remained involved" with those adopters following placement and up until 12 months after the order is made. The adoption agency need to consider what form this "involvement" should take and whether protocols need to be developed to ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities and adopters are fully aware of what to expect.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	30	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	17	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	25	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	20	
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?

1

Inspectors evidenced that birth parents views were not always fully recorded on the Form E's by the child's social worker, scrutiny of this process was evidenced through the work of the Professional Advisor and the Adoption Panel and efforts were being made to try and address this using the new panel newsletter which is sent out to all field social work teams. Inspectors are of the opinion that not all the birth parents had the opportunity to comment on what was written about them or their circumstances, before the information was passed to the adoption panel or on to adopters.

Questionnaires received from birth parents indicated that they were not happy with the present service. None had been told about local or national support groups, one reported feeling abandoned another that she had not been listened to or treated fairly.

Children's services managers have set up an arrangement between the Looked after Children's teams whereby the birth parent can have access to an independent support worker. This is a new initiative and as yet few referrals have been received. Inspectors do not believe that this was the most sensitive way of offering independent support work to birth parents nor that this discreet piece of work would receive the attention that it required when competing with the needs of other service users, nor did they consider that this service was fully independent. Inspectors were reassured however, that this issue had been fully considered and discussed and an evaluation of the take-up of this service would be undertaken in due course. Inspectors recommend thorough scrutiny of this service including consultation of the service users.

The agency informed inspectors that they are able to give consideration to external counselling for birth parents where necessary i.e. in the event there is a dispute with the agency.

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?	1
<p>Family placement social workers have the responsibility for individual adoptive families that they are involved with, regarding indirect contact arrangements following placement. However, no-one has the clear responsibility for facilitating and supporting direct or indirect contact arrangements post adoption for birth parents. The arrangements set up to provide independent counselling for birth parents with a Looked after Children's social work team does not include assisting the birth families with this process. It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to obtain information from birth parents about the child's life before adoption. Inspectors found that this area of work lacked cohesion and consistency.</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?	1
<p>The Oxfordshire Social and HealthCare, Family Placement, Adoption Service does not have a clear written strategy for working with birth parents and this needs to be addressed in the light of their responsibilities and the Adoption Agency Regulations 2003.</p> <p>Birth parents are not given information about local or national support groups. Inspectors recommend that when considering the child's support plan, a section should be included on support services to be provided to birth parents in relation to contact which identifies their particular needs. This plan should also identify who will be responsible for providing the service to them in this area.</p>		

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>Oxford Social and Health Care , Family Placement, Adoption Service presently operate three joint fostering and adoption panels.</p> <p>The adoption agency adviser has developed a draft written policy and procedure(November 04) detailing the functions of these panels. These had not yet been fully ratified by senior managers. Inspectors found that these policies and procedures did not fully comply with Standard 10.2 and further additions were required to ensure that they included the policies and procedures to deal with;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appointment of the chair and vice panel of the chair; • declaring an interest in the case and consideration; • emergency procedures for the adoption panel to meet before the next planned meeting to deal with urgent placements; • the method of providing feedback to the agency on the quality of cases been presented to the panel; • the promotion of good practice and consistency of approach and fairness by panel members in assessing cases ; • for receiving progress reports on individual cases. <p>Whilst presently a number of these issues, mentioned above, are recognised and managed by the panel chair and the professional advisor very ably, inspectors found that in one case negotiations were taking place directly between panel chair and applicants regarding the urgent hearing of a case, outside the panel process. Clearly this is not appropriate and it emphasises the need for policies and procedures to be clearly written and understood by all panel members.</p> <p>Inspectors were informed that there had been a number of staff changes of the panel administrator which it was thought had been caused through lack of recognition and understanding of the importance this role. Senior managers have now agreed to undertake the job evaluation of this position and it is hoped that the salary and status of this job will be recognised and attract the right applicant in the future.</p> <p>It is suggested that the parts of the panel policy and procedures relating to practice issues for social workers ie; "Booking Applicants a Panel Date" and "Once the Assessment Has Been Completed," should be addressed elsewhere.</p>		

The Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service employs a professional advisor to the panel whose job involves the screening of all papers coming to panel, ensuring that proper advice including medical and legal advice is obtained beforehand to clarify any arising issues and chasing up any documents that are required as evidence for panel members. An "easy guide" to panels has been produced for social workers which outlines the process of the panel and gives guidance on which documents need to be included in any submission for the panel's consideration, including pro forma documents and checklists. This document is linked to the staff adoption handbook, which gives detailed guidance on assessments for children and prospective adopters being presented to panel.

The professional advisor has recently devised an adoption and fostering panel newsletter which is sent to all children's and adoption social workers providing updates and feedback on many issues relating to panel. These measures are helping to drive up standards in the quality of work undertaken and presented to the panel.

Prospective adopters are now invited to attend the adoption panel. A useful guide has been recently produced (December 2004) for applicants, which explains the panel process and introduces members to the three different panels. This is good practice.

There had been three adoption disruptions in the year prior to the inspection. Whilst each of these cases have had a disruption meeting which was minuted, inspectors were concerned that the themes and trends, including the lessons learned had not been pulled together to inform future practice. Inspectors advise that members of the panel and the adoption team have a joint training day where all information from the disruptions can be pulled together and an action plan drawn up which will inform future practice.

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The adoption agency uses the services of PACT, a local voluntary adoption agency, under a service level agreement to ensure that those wishing to adopt from overseas are provided with a detailed and comprehensive service, including assessment, approval and support.

The adoption agency's panel is a shared one with Oxford's Social and Health Care's, Family Placement, Fostering Service, and as such the Panel's policy and procedure for its constitution and membership complies with the Regulations and Standards for both fostering and adoption agencies. It was noted that at the present time they did not have a councillor on the panel but the panel chair was addressing this matter. It has been recognised by the managers of the adoption service that the arrangements of a joint fostering and adoption panel, need to be altered to take into account new legislation in adoption and it is planned that the fostering and adoption panel will be split later on in 2005.

The Inspectors sampled recruitment records of 8 panel members and were found to be satisfactory. Application packs have been produced that contain details of panel tasks, a job

description, selection criteria and an application form. The records sampled evidenced that all members had been checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. There was one omission of proof of qualification from a panel member.

The panel chair undertakes responsibility for the recruitment of panel members and she informed inspectors that informal interviews are undertaken and Oxfordshire's Social and Health Care, Human Resources Department undertake checks and references.

Panel chair indicated that she tried to ensure that all new panel members have the opportunity to observe all of the three different fostering and adoption panels before commencement as a panel member. She plans to introduce a buddy system so that the panel members can support and inform each other. She informed inspectors that there would be an informal review of each panel member (probationary period) after three panel meetings as an active member. It is intended that an appraisal system for panel members will be set up in the future.

Panel members have the opportunity to undertake any of the training provided by Oxfordshire's Social and Health Care Department as well as being provided with the training programme each year. It is planned that the panel members undertake training in; the attachment issues, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, medical issues and fostering/kinship placements in the coming year.

The adoption panel policies and procedures include reference of the need for panel members to maintain confidentiality and have measures in place for the collection of panel papers at the end of each session.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO	
Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	YES	

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
Inspectors had the opportunity to observe the panel process, interview a professional advisor, the panel chair and the agency decision maker.		
As stated earlier in the report the adoption agency has three joint fostering and adoption panels known as panel A, B and C. They each meet once a month. In order to ensure consistency of approach, if one of these panels has been involved in the recommendation of approval of a prospective adoptive parent, then in the matter of a match with that adoptive parent the same panel would be involved. This means if the case has to be deferred for any reason that there can be a delay in the recommendation process. Inspectors noted in one case this delay caused considerable stress and anxiety for prospective adoptive parents in the planning of the match with them. As stated in Standard 10, a procedure to deal with emergency procedures for the adoption panel to meet before the next planned meeting to deal with urgent placements needs to be addressed to avoid delay in children's plans.		

Inspectors were assured that consideration would be given to convening an extra Panel if this was necessary to prevent delay in planning for children's needs however, inspectors were unable to evidence that this was happening.

Members of the Panel receive all the necessary information in advance of the Panel and this was handled in a confidential manner.

The Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service's professional advisor has devised an "easy guide" to panels for all social work staff and has commenced a panel newsletter for social workers in order to keep them informed of any changes made and to provide guidance and assistance to ensure that all necessary paperwork is received by the panel administrator to avoid any delay in considering cases.

The panel minutes are checked for accuracy at the beginning of each panel meeting and it clearly provide details of the panel's discussion. Inspectors noted however the panel chair needed to include reasons for the recommendations reached by the panel and advise that someone should include the positive aspects of any applicant or match and as well as any areas of difficulty or potential risk.

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?	2
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The agency decision maker is a senior manager within Oxford's Social and Health Care Children's Services Department who carries a broad brief of Quality Assurance within this role. The agency decision maker undertakes responsibility for all three of the Fostering and Adoption Panels as well as the Kinship Care Panel. Inspectors felt that this was a huge time commitment and were concerned that with future goals and targets to increase the number of foster carers and adopters, as well as the impact of the new legislation the Agency Decision Maker would soon find it difficult to carry out this task in a timely manner.

It is advised that senior managers of the adoption agency undertake evaluation of this role in order to ensure the agency decision maker can continue to make decisions on behalf of the agency in a thorough and timely manner.

The agency decision maker receives all the panel papers and minutes after panel meetings. In order to make a decision in a timely way, the minutes of the panel meetings are not, at this point, corrected or checked by the panel members when they are received. The quality of the minutes was raised as a concern by the agency decision maker and it was noted a possible cause for this is the lack of experience and skills of the panel administrator. (As already stated in this report senior managers have recognised the need for job evaluation of the post of panel administrator and it is hoped the quality of the panel minutes would improve once this has been addressed and an appropriately skilled person is in post.)

During the last year of the agency had their first case where adopters, not approved by the agency decision maker, referred their case to the Independent Review Mechanism. The agency had learned a lot from the process and were developing more robust systems for dealing with the outcomes and recommendations made by the Independent Review Mechanism information provided by the medical advisers for the panel meeting.

Inspectors were informed that the adoption agency has arrangements in place to convey its decision to prospective adopters and birth parents.

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>At the time of the inspection one of the family placement unit/team managers was "acting up" as Service manager for the fostering and adoption service. Inspectors understood that the reason for this was due to a review of Oxfordshire's Social and Health Care Children's Services Department's out of county placements of looked after children being undertaken by the service manager with responsibility for fostering, adoption and residential placements. It was not clear how long these arrangements for covering the management of the service would be in operation. The organisational chart for 2004 Social Care for Children: Family Placement, devised in December 2004 does not mention that any of the arrangements are temporary.</p> <p>Both the service manager and the temporary service manager have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and adoption practices as well as the management skills to carry out the operation of the adoption agency in a professional manner. Both had relevant professional social work qualifications and significant experience in working in childcare setting. The permanent and temporary service manager had the relevant management qualifications.</p> <p>The nature of the arrangements for management, had also resulted in a number of other members of staff also temporarily "acting up" in different positions.</p> <p>A number of other senior managers and team managers in Oxford's Social and Health Care Children's Services Department were also carrying responsibility for part of the adoption agency's services ie; the counselling arrangements for birth parents and the adoption support assessments and a number of senior managers were also involved in decision making about adoption development issues. (Please see comments made in Standards 6 and 7).</p> <p>Service managers and Unit managers of fostering and adoption team's were responsible for carrying out the work of both fostering and adoption agencies and this was managed differently in each local area.</p> <p>The adoption support workers were situated in different offices across the county and were line managed by the different unit/team managers of the family placement teams and not by</p>		

the adoption support adviser. Whilst these members of staff meet occasionally to discuss practice issues it was felt that this could be managed more effectively to build up expertise and skills in this area.

Staff reported that the fostering work outweighed the adoption work in numbers and that the nature of the work undertaken in supervising foster carers (responding to crises) meant that the adoption work was not always a priority. Inspectors are not of the opinion that there was a clear and effective leadership of the staff, operational and strategic development of the adoption agency or that the present arrangements would be able to ensure the effective, comprehensive and cohesive changes required by new legislation in the near future. (Please also cross-reference Standard 4 and Standard 6, comments made by adoptive parents.)

Inspectors understand that the New Head of Children's Services had been asked to undertake a review of fostering and adoption services and it is suggested that the above comments are taken into consideration.

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

YES

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?

2

Human resources files were inspected and fully complied with the regulations. Inspectors were however unable to evidence that referees were routinely telephoned to clarify points within a reference or confirm that they were the writer of the reference. It is recommended therefore a pro forma document be created to evidence that this is being done and this is held on human resources files for each staff member.

Inspectors were informed that CRB checks are reviewed every three years for each member of staff.

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?

2

Inspectors evidenced that all staff members interviewed were fully aware of the Statement of Purpose and that they felt that it reflected their service delivery.

Inspectors were informed that clear arrangements were in place to identify the person in charge when the manager was absent, and that leave is co-ordinated by the children's management team.

As already stated there are four unit managers (one of the managers is the manager for the Children with Disabilities Team who has responsibility for the Short Break Service) of the family placement teams covering 4 local area offices across Oxfordshire. Inspectors heard that a lot of effort and time goes into ensuring regular contact and uniformity via the monthly Unit Managers Family Placement Meetings. Whilst clearly this is a useful way of ensuring communication and consistency, this is time-consuming due to the distances involved. Inspectors noted, (as stated in Standard 14), that there was no identifiable person with ultimate responsibility for the development of the adoption service and that adoption matters were less of a priority due to the nature of the demands made on the fostering service.

The agency informed inspectors that application forms required candidates and employers to identify any conflict of interests and where conflicts were identified risk assessments were carried out .

The Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service needs to ensure that as it has clear procedures to cover the arrangements for the use of services provided by the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

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

7

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

0

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

Oxfordshire Social and Healthcare, family placement, adoption service and children's services department have a number of measures in place to ensure the monitoring and control of the activities of the adoption service. However there are no clear written procedures, which describe these measures comprehensively.

As already stated the unit managers of the family placement service meet monthly to discuss various issues relating to fostering and adoption policies and practices. Children's managers meet regularly for the children's management team meeting and adoption issues can be raised here. There is a Children's Panel, which considers such issues as; the percentage of allocated children; the percentage of social work posts held, across the various children's teams.

Oxfordshire's Social and Healthcare Scrutiny Committee, which includes the executive member with portfolio for us children's services, meet quarterly and adoption agency information is provided verbally for this meeting by the service manager. Written reports are submitted six monthly on the work of the adoption service to the executive side of the council.

Other methods of monitoring the activities of the adoption agency include the family finding forum, which prioritise the assessments of adopters and evaluation/feedback sheet received from participants of the adoption preparation group and from applicants and staff attending panel.

The adoption agency is a member of the local family placement consortium and any placements made within the consortium are at the agreed BAAF inter-agency fee levels. It has been noted that the number of placements made with Oxfordshire's approved adopters exceeds the number of places provided by the consortium for Oxford's looked after children. Inspectors suggest that it would be useful to review the management of placements via the consortium in order to ensure that best possible outcomes and services for children and adopters for whom they have a responsibility.

Information is provided for staff on the adoption support allowance scheme which outlines the criteria used and the process and procedures for obtaining such an allowance. Information about the scheme should also be provided to prospective adopters and this is a recommendation.

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 Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement, Adoption Service has access to specialist advice, each of the three panels has the medical adviser who undertakes and advises on medicals of both children and applicants. The legal adviser considers the information that adoption is in the child's best interests and if unable to attend panel ensure that up-to-date written legal advice is available. As already stated (Standard 2) the adoption agency has had some real concerns about delays in children's planning for adoption and court processes, and it is advised that a meeting is held regularly with other professionals involved in the legal processes, to ensure good outcomes for children are achieved in a timely manner. The adoption agency has links with other agencies such as CAMHS and the "attach" team to provide specialist advice in relation to emotional, psychological and educational needs.

There is a draft written protocol governing the role of specialist advisers, it had not been implemented at the time of the inspection but it is recommended.

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

Inspectors were informed that all unit managers and service managers who are involved in the recruitment and selection of staff have had training in this area. There are full, clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff, which follow good practice guidelines, and safeguarding children and young people.

All staff reported that they had been interviewed as part of the selection process. Inspectors were unable to evidence the practice of taking up telephone enquires to verify written references as outlined in Standard 19.3. (as already discussed and recommended in Standard 15).

The Statement of Purpose indicated that all social workers working for the adoption service have a relevant professional social qualification however, whilst all the information required by Schedule 3 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2003 were evidenced in human resources files the documentary proof of qualifications were absent. This is a requirement in Standard 28.

Inspectors were informed that February 2005, 28 percent of the staff in the family placement service will have completed the Child Care Award . A number of family placement staff have many years of experience within the family placement team and child care services in general, more recent staff have had the opportunity to undertake courses in carrying out assessments of adoptive applicants.

The manager of the service assured the inspectors that all staff of the family placement teams had recently had the opportunity to attend a briefing on the complaints procedure.

Social workers involved with birth parents do not necessarily have knowledge of and understanding of the adoption process training is recommended in this area (cross-reference Standard 7.)

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

YES

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

50

%

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?

2

Inspectors noted that unit managers of the family placement service were experienced, dedicated and skilled in managing the vast plethora of different areas of work within their teams. Inspectors were impressed with the work undertaken by the professional adviser and her job description carried an explicit quality assurance role. This post was clearly having the desired affect and was beginning to improve the standards of report writing within the agency, and ensure better accuracy and timeliness of reports. Inspectors were disappointed to note that there was no specific staff member who carried responsibility for policy and practice development, it was felt that such a role would ensure that the service is kept up to date with all the new changes in legislation due in the adoption arena.

Social work staff are supervised regularly by unit/team managers, they had devised their own method of monitoring the workload of each member of staff. This is recorded on the family placement caseload/work load form and transferred onto a family placement monthly management information form. In some teams unit managers had delegated specific specialisms to senior practitioners relating to aspects of the adoption service. All staff had agreed a contract with their manager, and a recently revised (January 2004) supervision policy governed the practice of supervision sessions. Some staff expressed concern about managing such a wide range of work and being able to keep abreast of new changes in legislation and practice in both the fostering and adoption arenas. Staff were clearly working to full capacity and it was evident from the feedback from approved adopters that they were pushed to find time to carry out assessments and support of adopters in a consistent and managed way. Some of this was due to the amount of work that needed to be undertaken and some, staff reported, was due to the inherent tensions between carrying out both adoption and fostering work.

The manager informed inspectors that the service had effective structures and systems in place to ensure assessments and approvals of adopters are managed and implemented effectively, however feedback from adopters did not provide a consistent picture in this area.

The service reported having some difficulties with the lack of adequate administrative support in the recent past, inspectors were informed that this had now been rectified and that a job evaluation is intended for some of the administrative staff in the near future to ensure better retention of staff and increased job satisfaction. Administrative staff were developing some administrative systems which were beginning to impact on the efficiency of the overall work.

The adoption service has access to a range of advice needed to provide a good service for children as reported in Standard 18.

All staff reported having a job description and inspectors were provided with copies of these in the inspection material. Staff also reported having seen the Statement of purpose and having access to all policies and procedures and staff conditions of service. There was evidence that social work staff were complying with the General Social Care Council codes of practice. Staff informed inspectors that they either had a copy or knew how to access, staff guidance and the relevant policies and procedures.

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?	1
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It was evident to inspectors that all staff were fully committed and working to capacity, however with the increased demands that will be made upon the service by; the new adoption legislation; the need to increase the number of adoption assessments to meet the needs of children referred to service and the need to improve services generally to ensure that adopters receive an efficient and supportive service, inspectors are of the opinion that the adoption agency do not have an adequate number of staff. The Adoption Recruitment Targets paper written in December 2004 records a “resources crisis” and endeavours to present some solutions. Clearly senior managers within the adoption health and social care to services department need to seriously consider how to ensure they recruit sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption service. This is a requirement.

The adoption agency has established a limited group of former employees available to undertake sessional work when a shortfall in staffing level occurs.

Staff reported that they were happy with their conditions of service. Inspectors evidenced staff were supported and encouraged to undertake training and study leave. Oxfordshire Social and Health Care provide a corporate staff care service and leaflets are available to staff offering advice about managing stress and support with regard to their physical and psychological well-being.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	46	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	5
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	6		

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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Inspectors were informed that the agency had the appropriate Public liability and professional indemnity insurances.
 Good training opportunities were apparent, and all staff were aware of policies, procedures including the whistle blowing policy, locally known as "Raising Concerns at Work" which is available on the corporate intranet.

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**

Inspectors have evidenced a good quality-training programme available for staff in the adoption service to develop and enhance their individual skills and to help them keep up to date with professional and legal developments.

Oxfordshire Social and Healthcare Department have a detailed and comprehensive, corporate training and qualifications programme for the year, which includes for example; practice teaching awards, post qualifying awards, child protection issues, promoting diversity, case recording, data protection, legal seminars, complaints training, supervising contact, as well as a number of IT courses and courses on stress management.

Managers informed inspectors that other training and development opportunities were available for staff via team events/away days, through the continuing professional development group, and via research in practice workshops.

Staff reported that training issues are discussed during supervision and appraisal sessions with their managers and objectives are set and plans are made for the coming year. All new staff are given a thorough induction training orchestrated by unit managers, and via the directorate induction events and also through the induction group.

Inspectors were informed that staff are kept abreast of any changes in legislation, guidance and case law relevant to their job through the use of legal seminars, presentations, team meetings and by the departmental subscriptions to BAAF.

Staff are asked to complete evaluation forms following all training events, and discuss the effectiveness of each course attended at their supervision session.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

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

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

Inspectors had access to the number of detailed and comprehensive policies and procedures on case recording and access to information such as: "Case Recording: Policy and Practice Guidelines", "Client Paper Record Management Protocols", "IT Security and Privacy Guidelines", "Confidentiality and Information Security: Advice for Employees", "File Retention Policy", and "Your Personal Records: What You Need to Know". These are available to all staff.

There is a clear and understood method for putting together the case files of prospective and approved adopters and adoption files for children once the best interests decision has been made. A file monitoring and auditing form for adopters and one or children's files has been developed and is in operation.

All decisions made by managers at supervision sessions are transferred to and held on the case files and this is good practice.

The adoption archives were held in a lockable room with metal storage cabinets. Smoke detectors were in operation, but inspectors did not consider that these cabinets were sufficiently water or fireproof. Inspectors advise that a risk assessment is undertaken to determine whether further work needs to be done to ensure the safety of these archives in relation to the requirements.

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

Oxfordshire Social And Healthcare have a number of corporate policies and procedures on the management of case recording and maintenance of case files, these take into account the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and of the Human Rights Act 1998. Oxfordshire Social and Healthcare Directorate also have a comprehensive Access to Personal Records policy and procedures.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

This report has already referred to the policies, which establish the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of case files including information on access. Inspectors found that separate records were not being kept for complaints and allegations, and this needs to be addressed. Inspectors were pleased to note that complaints were being dealt with in a timely manner, and responses were sensitive and helpful. A separate complaints file need to be established however, which should contain a summary of each investigation, any action taken in consequence and should ascertain at what stage of the process the complaint was resolved, this is required by Regulation 17.

Inspectors saw the new proforma documents to be used for auditing the case files of adopters and children, and heard that case files were audited regularly at supervision.

Inspectors were pleased with the standard of recording in the case files, which were legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and signed and dated.

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?

1

Inspectors looked at the Human Resources files of staff working for the adoption service and have noted that they lacked some information required by the regulations in particular Standard CRB checks for all admin staff, CRB checks for sessional workers and documentary evidence of qualifications for all staff.

All human resources files indicated that CRB checks had been undertaken and when appropriate renewed regularly however this was not the case for one sessional family placement worker and this matter needs to be addressed. The adoption agency informed inspectors that staff waiting for the CRB check would be able to work for them providing risk assessment had been undertaken and signed off by the Head of Service, this is not good practice and inspectors advise against such a process. (This has been confirmed by the CRB in recent publication). It is not current practice to undertake CRB checks on administrative staff that have access to confidential information about children and looked after system. All staff working for the agency must have an appropriate CRB check.

Files of Panel members had improved considerably since the previous years fostering inspection. (See Standard 11).

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 Oxfordshire Social and Health Care, Family Placement , Adoption Service is spread over four different local offices around Oxfordshire. None of these buildings were identifiable as an adoption office. Whilst inspectors heard that there had been an improvement in the provision of IT equipment in some offices this was not consistent across the adoption service, in one office six members of social work staff were sharing one computer. This needs addressing.</p> <p>Inspectors were concerned that not all premises were able to secure their confidential records in a lockable room, some offices were open plan and in one office files were kept in a corridor. Whilst inspectors evidenced that the buildings had appropriate Security Systems in place they did not believe that the storage of records complied with the Standards or Regulations. Inspectors were informed that at the present time there was no system in place to record which member of staff was using a particular file/record at any given time and this needs to be addressed.</p> <p>Inspectors were informed that all computers are password protected and a separate password was needed to get into the social services departments database.</p> <p>Inspectors were informed that there was a corporate buildings and contents insurance in place. A disaster recovery plan is currently being drawn up in consultation with Oxford health and social care's project officer.</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 31st January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

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 26th April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Oxfordshire County 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 _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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S0000056777.V207676.R01

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