



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

**London Borough of Redbridge Adoption  
Service**

**Station Road  
Barkingside  
Ilford  
Essex  
IG6 1NB**

*Lead Inspector*  
Marian Denny

*Announced Inspection*  
16th May 2006      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Martin Halsey
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Adoption Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

**Conditions of registration: Not Applicable**

**Date of last inspection** 7<sup>th</sup> October 2003 carried out by the National Commission for Social Care Inspection.

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

The London Borough of Redbridge has established a comprehensive Children's Trust, which encompasses all of the children's social services, including the primary care trust services for children and a wide range of education services for children; other than those services directly provided to support schools. The children's Trust is led by a Managing Director and operates its own adoption agency, which is located in two fostering/adoption teams. These teams form part of the children living away from home service within the Children's Trust. The adoption agency's office premises are situated at Barkingside and are easily accessible by car or public transport.

At the time of the inspection, the senior management post for the fostering and adoption service was vacant. A recent appointment had been made to this post and the staff member was due to commence work shortly after the adoption inspection ended. In the interim, the head of the children living away from home service was undertaking both the strategic and managerial responsibility for the fostering and adoption services. Work relating to these services was spread across two teams with social workers carrying a mixed caseload of both fostering and adoption cases. Two team managers, one of whom was part-time, shared the day-to-day management of both the fostering and the adoption service. However the two teams had a specific remit in relation to the adoption service, with one team being responsible for providing the recruitment, training and assessment of adopters, whilst the other supervised the post approval stage of adopters, including the matching, placement of children, training for adopters' post-placement and support both pre and post adoption. In addition, the team provided an inter country adoption service, which prepared, assessed, approved and supported those wishing to adopt a child from abroad. Birth records counselling was also provided.

The agency also offered an adoption service to step-parents and relatives wishing to adopt. A letterbox scheme, which supported the information exchange in adoption placements, was also provided and maintained. The agency had also arranged for an independent counselling and support service to be provided to birth parents and their families via a service level agreement with Barnardo's.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection was well prepared for with all required pre-inspection material being forwarded as requested. Arrangements made for the inspection were thoughtful and enabled inspectors to make effective use of their time. The facilities and resources provided were of a good standard and everyone involved in the inspection were most helpful and courteous.

Prior to the inspection, the pre-inspection material and the questionnaires, which had been returned to the inspection team were read and analysed. The information obtained from these documents has been incorporated into the inspection findings.

The inspection, itself, was carried out over three and half days and involved two inspectors. In addition, one inspector observed one adoption panels for half a day. Interviews were undertaken with the Managing Director of the Children' Trust, the head of the children living away from home service, other senior personnel, team managers, adoption and childcare social workers and administrative staff. An elected member, who had lead responsibility for children's services, was also interviewed, as well as the adoption panel's medical advisor and chairperson. A sample of children and adopters' files were read and four adoptive families were visited. A variety of agency records were inspected, administrative resources examined and the agency's office premises were also seen. Security issues relating to both record keeping and the premises were also considered. In addition, the inspection team received three questionnaires from prospective and approved adopters, one from birth family members, five from placing social workers and one from a specialist advisor. The responses received from these questionnaires, together with the information obtained from interviews with adopters have been reflected in the main body of this report.

## **What the service does well:**

The London Borough of Redbridge had developed a Children's Trust, which encompassed the vast majority of services provided to children in the borough, so resulting in a seamless service being provided to children and families.

The Council had an excellent understanding and demonstrated a real commitment to the corporate parenting role. The executive member of the Council with lead responsibility for children's services was a good advocate of children's services and clearly supported the development of good practice and outcomes for children.

The agency's new management team had a clear vision for the future development of the adoption agency. They also had the necessary experience and skills to manage and organise the service in an effective and efficient

manner. The managerial team was enthusiastic about service developments and staff were committed to improving their practice and achieving a high standard of work.

Adopters stated the agency's initial response to their enquiry was very helpful and information sent to them speedily. The preparation training provided was regarded as being of "excellent quality" and an "excellent grounding for adopting". Foster Carers were fulsome in their praise for the preparation groups specifically designed for "foster carers who adopt". Adopters were generally positive about the assessment indicating that it had been "thorough" and handled in a "sensitive and skilful manner".

There was a clear well structured preparation programme, which was evaluated and changes implemented, where necessary. Adopters generally considered the preparation training was "very good, "excellent" and stated that it enabled them to explore the implications of and issues surrounding adoption.

Similarly, adopters were extremely positive about their assessment indicating that it had been "very thorough" and "sensitively," "professionally" handled. Two adoptive couples said that they would refer Redbridge to other adopters and one the service was excellent and that on a scale of ten, "they would give the agency ten out of ten".

The adoption panel was properly constituted, well organised and demonstrated a good understanding of adoption. The administrative support provided to the panel was of an exceptionally high standard. Decision-making was thorough and timely. The Panel's medical and legal advisers were "extremely knowledgeable" and provided a "very good service."

The life-long implications of adoption were recognised and an independent counselling service was commissioned from Barnardo's.

The agency had not experienced any disruptions in adoptive placements, during the past twelve months.

The council was considered to be a fair and competent employer.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

A written recruitment strategy had been produced.

The agency had developed a Children's Guide.

The agency had developed tracking systems to monitor the progress of adopters' applications and those children with an adoption plan.

The care planning processes for looked after children had improved. Assisted by various monitoring and quality assurance systems and managerial/staff training.

Staff were working hard to obtain accurate information regarding adopters and children to enable effective matching took place.

There were plans to develop a separate adoption team, which would be resourced to meet the needs of the adoption service.

The agency had established and was maintaining Panel Members files.

A written protocol had been devised for the Panel's medical and legal advisor.

Written reports on the adoption service were now being presented to the executive side of the Council on a six monthly basis.

### **What they could do better:**

The agency's recruitment strategy required development and a mechanism designed to evaluate its effectiveness.

Adopters found the agency's preparation training "extremely valuable". However, its effectiveness could be further enhanced if the agency in collaboration with another or other agencies provided a preparation groups for second time adopters.

Adopters' assessments were generally good, though there were exceptions to this, which could be addressed through a more robust quality assurance system. The agency could improve their practice if the current pet and health/safety checklists were expanded upon. The agency also needs to ensure these are used consistently. In addition, the agency should ensure, where applicable, that the ten - day waiver notice in respect of the adopters' written assessment is held on file.

The agency had carried out a great deal of work with childcare staff to improve the quality of children's assessments, however they continued to be of variable quality and this needs to be addressed. Birth parents' views about the information presented in the children's assessments should also be consistently recorded.

The agency had adoption panel policies and procedures, however these should be revised, if they are to meet the Adoption National Minimum Standards (ANMS) and current legislation. The agency had a properly constituted, well-organised and effective adoption panel. However, the agency may wish to broaden future panel membership. Panel minutes could be improved upon with panel members' role clearly identified.

Adoption support was a developing aspect of the agency's work, however if this is to be effective and the services developed, issues of capacity within the adoption team should be addressed.



The agency should develop a coherent strategy for working with birth parents and their families. In addition, the independent counselling and support service provided by Barnardo's should also be actively promoted.

A children's guide had recently been produced, however revision of this was required if they were to meet the ANMS.

The managerial team should ensure contingency plans are in place in situations where staff shortages impair the delivery of the adoption service. Moreover, in view of the likely future demands that will be made on this service, the resources allocated to the adoption agency should be kept under constant review. A strengthening of the agency's managerial team might also prove beneficial in enabling the agency to fully realise the ANMS.

Further work is required to improve the quality of form E's and all birth parents should be given the opportunity to receive a copy of this document. A greater emphasis should also be placed on the development, management and monitoring of the adoption records, as some of the files were not maintained in accordance with current legislation and regulations.

The agency now needs to urgently obtain and put the adoption policies and procedures produced by PAN London.

Consideration needs to be given to the improvement of communication and relationships between the childcare and fostering/adoption staff, so facilitating a child-focused approach to adoption issues.

The procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff must be more robust. Personnel files and panel members' files were not kept in accordance with the adoption regulations and this must be immediately addressed.

The adoption services records were held securely however, the agency should risk assess the premises where these records are held to ensure they are stored in a manner to minimise the risk of damage from fire or water. There was evidence that some of the agency's adoption records were not effectively safeguarded through an appropriate back up system and attention should be given to this. The agency should also develop a disaster recovery plan.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

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

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

The agency had effected successful placements. However, robust monitoring and quality assurance systems must be developed to ensure the child's welfare is promoted and safeguarded.

## EVIDENCE:

The agency had completed a written recruitment strategy, which was based on the needs of local children waiting to be adopted. However, this recruitment plan required development so that a clearer, more detailed, inclusive and proactive recruitment strategy was produced. In addition, the agency should regularly evaluate its recruitment activity to ensure the recruitment methods used are effective and the desired outcomes achieved.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had developed an electronic tracking system to monitor the progress of prospective adopters' applications and all children who had an adoption plan. There were plans for this information to be shared on a monthly basis with managers and staff. This system clearly had the potential to ensure the agency's recruitment activities were effectively targeted and together with managerial monitoring was likely to be a useful

mechanism to prevent the drift of children in the care planning process. However, the agency needs to consider cleansing and developing the current information systems available to ensure they are fit for purpose. The agency had positive links with the North East London Adoption Consortium (NELAC) and there was evidence of the consortium, as well as other national facilities, such as "Be My Parent", "Adoption UK" and the "National Adoption Register" being used to meet the needs of children, who had an adoption plan.

A formal preparation, assessment and approval process was carried out in respect of adopters. Whilst several adopters indicated attendance at the preparation groups, along with their assessments and approvals had been carried out speedily; other adopters commented on the delays that had occurred in commencing the preparation groups and their assessment. Several adopters stated that the agency had maintained good contact with them and kept them well informed of the reasons for these delays. However, two adopters suggested the opposite stating that they had been the ones to initiate and maintain contact with the agency, in order to keep themselves informed of the progress of their application. It would appear that these difficulties occurred at a time when there were staff shortages within the adoption team and a senior managerial position in the agency was vacant.

The agency's preparation course was clear, well structured and evaluated, with changes implemented where necessary. Adopters stated that the preparation programme was well organised and presented. A number of adopters indicated that the introduction to the groups had been "warm and friendly" and the programme "helpful", "informative", "enjoyable"; others stated that it had afforded them the opportunity to explore a variety of adoption issues, which had proved "enlightening", "stimulating" and an "invaluable" experience. Several Adopters indicated that the preparation groups were held at convenient times and at appropriate venues. One adoptive family, who were adopting a second child, stated that they had not been invited to attend a preparation group. In view of the fact they adopted their first child over eleven years ago and given the considerable changes that have occurred in the adoption field in the intervening years, the couple should have been provided with the opportunity to attend a preparation course. The agency may wish to consider whether in working collaboratively with another or other agencies second time adopters' preparation groups can be introduced to the service.

Adopters spoken with, together with information obtained from returned questionnaires, indicated that the assessment process had been "clear" and "well structured". They stated that the assessment had been "thorough" and personal issues handled in a "sensitive" and "considerate" manner. Adopters commented on the "knowledge", "skills" and "professionalism" of the adoption worker. They also stated that they had found the report to be accurate and a realistic portrayal of their family. Adopters spoken with had all received a copy of their written assessment and given an opportunity to comment on its contents. However, several indicated that they had not been aware that they

were required to send any observations regarding their assessment in writing to the agency, within a specified timescale.

Placing social workers presented a similar picture, as adopters, about the quality of the assessments with a number commenting on their "thoroughness" and "accuracy".

Examination of a sample of adopters' files indicated that adopters' assessments were of good quality with most assessments seen detailed, analytical and insightful. However, it was noted that the agency does not request a family references from applicants in order to effectively safeguard and promote the stability of a child's adoptive placement, this matter should now be urgently addressed. Good written support plans were found on several of the files, however not all had been signed by the relevant parties. In the sample of adopters files seen there was also no evidence of a 28-day (now 10 day) waiver notice relating to the prospective adopters' report. This should also be addressed.

In one adopter's file, the inter country assessment was not as thorough or analytical as those previously seen. Consequently not all the necessary issues had been addressed, for example, one of the applicants' had previously been married; whilst this fact was quite clearly recorded in the assessment, there was no further information, analysis or contact effected with the applicant's previous partners. Consequently, when the application was considered at the Adoption Panel, the matter was deferred pending this outstanding task of work being completed. Subsequently, the work was completed and resulted in a panel recommendation and the agency decision made that they should be approved as adopters. Contact with the adopters indicated that they had been extremely distressed by this experience, particularly as they had chosen to attend panel and immediately hear the panel's recommendation. Whilst the matter has now been positively resolved, such practice should not reoccur. It is therefore recommended that a protocol in relation to checking previous partners should be developed.

There was evidence in some of the files that the agency considered the adopters' capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible manner. However, not all the files contained health and safety checklists or risk assessments in relation to adopters' pets. It has therefore been recommended that such assessments should be consistently carried out and recorded. The agency should give consideration to enhancing this aspect of their work by developing the assessment tools currently used.

In view of the shortfalls found in some adopters' files it is recommended that managerial scrutiny of the assessment process should be increased, so ensuring all relevant matters in relation to the adopters' application have been addressed.

Adopters stated that the agency had not provided them with any written information about the matching, introduction, placement process and support services available. However, they indicated that they had received very full and helpful verbal information, which had enabled them to gain a good understanding of the adoption process. The inspectors were advised that written information about these processes was to be made available and would be provided at various points through out the adoption process. This matter now needs to be urgently addressed.

The importance of children being matched with adopters, who met their needs, was clearly outlined in the agency's policy statement. Evidence of careful, thoughtful and effective matching taking place was seen in some of the files, for example, children matched with adopters, who were of the same ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. There was also evidence of a commitment, where appropriate, for brothers and sisters to be placed together with sibling assessments to support the planning processes seen on several files. However, such evidence was not always apparent in some case files examined, for example in one file, the child's written assessment was out of date and in a second file, the matching report could have been enhanced with a detailed assessment of the child's needs, the adopters' attributes and an analysis indicating whether the adopters had the necessary qualities and abilities to meet the child's needs.

Redbridge had made efforts to address this in providing training to childcare workers regarding the assessment of children's needs and the contents required in a child's form "E". Training had also been provided staff on the Children and Adoption Act 2002. A number of staff indicated though that the training provided had been somewhat limited and several remained unsure of the information required in a child's permanence report. A variety of quality assurance systems had been introduced to address these issues. The major re-structuring of children's services in Redbridge with the development of a children's trust; together with recent managerial, staff and legislative changes though had clearly impacted on these systems and made it difficult to assess their long term effectiveness.

There was also evidence to indicate that not all children, who had an adoption plan, were being placed with an alternative suitable family within a realistic timescale. Consideration therefore needs to be given to strengthening the care planning processes to ensure a child's need for adoption is not compromised.

In view of the fact that children sometimes have a number of social workers whilst being a "looked after child", the adoption agency may wish to consider the use of "life appreciation days". This would ensure adopters benefited from first hand, qualitative information about a child's life.

The children's records examined confirm that the children's wishes and feelings regarding their adoption plan had been taken into account, however this was

not the case in every record. Similarly, in some children's records there was clear evidence that work was being undertaken to prepare and enable them to move into their adoptive placement, though in others where children had the same needs, such evidence was absent or there were delays in the work being carried out. The agency should ensure direct work, where appropriate, is carried out in a timely manner to ensure placement stability.

At the time of the inspection, the agency did not have a system to address the death of an adopted child; there were plans though to address this. It is recommended that this be now urgently addressed.

The agency had written Adoption Panel policies and procedures. However, this documentation did not contain all the information required under the Adoption National Minimum Standards (ANMS) and the Children and Adoption Act 2002. To achieve full compliance with these standards and legislation, a revision of these documents is now necessary. It is also recommended that once completed these documents are circulated to panel members and staff.

The constitution and membership of the adoption panel was in accordance with the adoption regulations, though the agency needs to give some consideration to increasing the number of independent members, those with personal experience of adoption and members from ethnic minority groups. The imminent departure of several long-standing panel members will also have a major impact on the adoption panel's constitution and functioning, which requires to be urgently addressed.

Panels were convened frequently to avoid any unnecessary delay in the approval of adopters or the matching of a child. Additional Panels could also be convened if necessary. Observation of the panel demonstrated that it was well organised, chaired and operated in an efficient and effective manner. Panel members had a good knowledge and understanding of the complexity of adoption work and paid a great deal of attention to the details of the cases presented. Their thoroughness of scrutiny ensured relevant concerns were noted and effectively addressed.

Prospective adopters were invited to attend panel and provided with information regarding the process. Adopters also had an opportunity to see a panel book with the names and photographs of panel members. Several Adopters' commented positively on their experiences of attending panel stating that although initially "extremely nervous" found the panel members were "welcoming", "friendly", "quickly put them at their ease". They stated that the questions asked were "appropriate" and the panel meeting was "well chaired". However, one adoptive couple said it had been a difficult experience and had felt the questions "inappropriate".

In the selection of panel members' files seen not all contained a CRB check or documentary evidence of their qualifications. There was also no evidence to

confirm new panel members observed adoption panels and received induction training. Panel Members had though been provided with regular and appropriate training for their roles, for example, The Adoption and Children Act 2002. Since the agency provided an inter country adoption service, specialist inter country adoption training had been provided to panel members. This training now needs to be up-dated though in accordance with the new legislation.

Panel members received information on adopters and children in advance of the panel date so ensuring panel members had the necessary time to read the documentation. The panel minutes seen were generally of a good standard and clearly indicated the reasons for the panel's conclusions and recommendations. However, in one set of panel minutes seen the panel regarding the types of children the applicants may be suitable to adopt made a recommendation. New Legislation only allows the panel to provide advice to the adoption agency. This practice must cease and a requirement has been made regarding this matter. The agency may also wish to consider whether the minutes could be improved upon, if the roles of panel members were clearly indicated, e.g. Independent member. This would immediately enable an individual such as the agency decision maker an opportunity to check that the Adoption Panel was quorate.

The agency decision – maker took his responsibilities very seriously with all panel papers and minutes received and examined, prior to the agency's decision being made. However, whilst the agency's decision was made without delay, this decision was not quickly communicated to the prospective adopters, child and birth parents, for example, it was noted that some letters were not sent out until 14,16 and 21 days after the agency decision had been made. This clearly is not good practice and needs to be urgently addressed.

There were clearly written recruitment and selection procedures. However, the personnel files examined did not contain all the information required by regulation, for example, in some files there was no evidence of written references, whilst in another there was only one written reference. In other files, there was no evidence of telephone enquiries being made to verify the legitimacy of references. Several files did not have recent photographs and documentary evidence of Staff's qualifications. These matters were discussed with the head of the children's services at the end of the inspection, who agreed to ensure that they were addressed.



# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

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

6 and 18

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

The agency provided support and specialist advice for adoptive families with a view to maintaining placement stability for children. Capacity issues within the adoption agency and the lack of a clear, comprehensive and coherent support strategy though; compromised the quality of this support.

## EVIDENCE:

Redbridge adoption agency was relatively small in size and this clearly impacted on its capacity to provide a comprehensive package of support services. However, despite their size, the agency had demonstrated a commitment to the development of their support services with the appointment of a post adoption support worker. The agency was also in the process of commissioning a voluntary agency to provide some adoption support services.

At the time of the inspection a number of support services were provided, which included financial support packages for adopters, a quarterly adoption interest group, an annual social event, a course run in conjunction with a worker from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) on trauma/ difficulties in early life and how this can affect attachment, as well as various other in-house and external post adoption training. Adoptive families and children also had access to CAHMS. In addition the agency was able to spot purchase therapy packages from independent sources to support an adoptive family, where there were difficulties in placement. Inter country adopters were also provided support from staff within the agency, in line with statutory requirements. They were also able to access advice from the Overseas Adoption helpline. The agency also undertook assessments for support in relation to adoptive families and their children, who had adopted over three years ago and were residing in the authority. Procedures regarding this aspect of the work needed to be developed though, as several staff in the

family advice centre were clearly unaware how they should address such a request.

Adopters spoken with presented a mixed picture regarding the information they had received in respect of the support service available. A similarly mixed picture was presented regarding the support services received; for whilst some adopters stated that they had been "well supported", "the worker was always ready to listen and assist," "support was excellent"; other adopters were not as positive, "it was difficult to speak to a worker, due to staff shortages," "psychological support was difficult to access." One adopter indicated there had been a lack of clarity regarding the services provided. Clearly written information regarding adoption support services would address this later point. To ensure adoption support services are developed and of a qualitative nature, there is a need for current staffing levels within the agency to be reviewed. There is also a need for a comprehensive and cohesive support strategy to be developed, which will have an emphasis on multi –agency working. This task may perhaps be made more easy as a result of the creation of the newly formed Children's' Trust.

There was evidence that the agency's preparation training, assessment and matching process provided adopters with information about a child's history and its relevance in enabling a child to develop a positive self-image. It also enabled adopters to understand the need and to develop strategies in assisting a child to address all forms of discrimination. The importance of keeping safe information provided by birth parents and families was clearly addressed through out the preparation and assessment process.

The agency had access to a legal adviser and medical adviser. Staff confirmed that the advisers were available for consultation, if required and were described as being "extremely helpful, "knowledgeable" and provided "an excellent service". There was evidence that the adoption agency had procedures in place to access other specialist advisers, according to their needs. The agency also had written protocols governing the role of the legal and Medical adviser.

# Making a Positive Contribution

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

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

7,8 and 9

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

The adoption agency had a commitment to developing and improving support to birth parents and their families. The agency needs to develop a coherent strategy for working with birth parents and families, if the outcomes of these standards are to be fully achieved.

## EVIDENCE:

There was evidence that the service recognised the life – long implications of adoption. Placing social workers were encouraged to involve birth parents and families in the care planning processes for their child. In several files, there was evidence of the birth parents' views about adoption and contact being clearly recorded, though this was not evident in every file examined. In addition, the agency had a service level agreement with Barnardo's to provide independent counselling and support to birth parents, however to ensure maximum up-take of the service, a more proactive stance was required in its promotion. The introduction of a qualitative monitoring system in relation to this service would also be beneficial.

Birth parents were encouraged to contribute to information included in the child's written assessment. There was also an expectation that birth parents were made aware of the form's contents and able to comment upon the information contained in it. In several of the files examined evidence of this practice was seen, though it was not evidenced in every file, for example, some children's assessment forms were not signed by parents and neither were there any reasons recorded to account for this. Improvement in the quality of these reports is required and has been discussed earlier in the report.

Birth parents and their families' were encouraged to provide information and photographs about their child to contribute to the child's heritage. However, whilst childcare staff recognised the importance of life story work, workers provided a variety of reasons that they were unable to complete such work, for example, a lack of knowledge, skills, training and work pressures. These difficulties were clearly reflected in the sample of children case tracked, as several did not have a completed life storybook despite the fact they were in adoptive placements. Since the completion of this work is of vital importance for the child and greatly assists in placement stability, this work should be given priority and carried out by appropriately trained staff.

Birth parents and families were given further opportunities to maintain and update their child's heritage through direct or indirect contact via the agency's letterbox system. Inspection of letter box scheme confirmed it was a robust, well organised and an effectively managed system, providing birth parents and their families a real opportunity to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

The Commission received one birth family members' questionnaire. Arrangements had also been made to interview a birth family member but this interview was not effected. Clearly, the very limited response from birth family members has prevented any definite view being formulated. The agency though may wish to consider some of the comments made, for example, the birth relative indicated that it had been eight weeks before learning of the child becoming "looked after". The birth family member also indicated that they did not feel adequately consulted or involved in the care planning process. They did, however, feel they had benefited from the counselling and support services subsequently offered through the adoption agency.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

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

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

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

At the time of the inspection, the agency's managerial team was in the process of being established; early indications suggested this managerial team would manage the agency in an effective and efficient manner. However, robust, policies, procedures, quality assurance/monitoring systems need to be developed, if the agency is to ensure a good quality service and positive outcomes for children and adopters.

## EVIDENCE:

The agency had a statement of purpose, which had been revised in September 2005. However, this statement required developing in order to meet the requirements under the Adoption Services Regulations 2003. Once revised this statement should be circulated to all those working in the adoption agency. At the time of inspection, the agency's policies, procedures and staff guidance was being revised in the light of recent legislation. In the revision of these documents the agency should ensure that they accurately reflect the agency's revised statement of purpose.

The agency had developed a children's guide for children with an adoption plan. This guide though did not contain all the information required under the Adoption Services Regulations 2003. The guide also needs to be produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. In revising this guide the agency may wish to consider whether it could be presented more attractively and in a child friendly format.

The agency provided information to all those who made enquiries about adoption. This information though was not attractively presented and required a much more welcoming, positive and encouraging approach in discussing the implications of adoption and processes involved. The information pack would also benefit from some anonymous profiles of the kind of children requiring placements and clearly specify the range of people that the agency wishes to recruit.

Adopters indicated that the agency responded in a "pleasant" and "helpful" manner to their initial adoption enquiries. Adopters also stated that the information pack had been sent out "promptly." However, several adopters commented that they thought some of the information presented was unduly negative. There was evidence that the agency ensured that all foster carers, who applied to adopt, received the same information as other adopters.

Since the last inspection, the adoption agency had been located in the children living away from home service, which formed part of Redbridge's Children's Trust. A recent appointment had been made to cover the vacant senior management post for the fostering and adoption service and this staff member was due to commence work shortly after the adoption inspection ended. In the interim the head of the children living away from home service had been undertaking the strategic and managerial responsibility for the fostering and adoption services. Work relating to the adoption service was spread across two teams with social workers carrying a mixed caseload of both fostering and adoption cases. Two team managers, one of whom was part-time, shared the day-to-day management of both the fostering and the adoption service. There were plans though for the establishment of a separate fostering and adoption team, which would be managed by a team manager. The senior manager would have overall responsibility for the management of both the fostering and adoption services.

All the managers in the fostering/adoption unit had a wealth of knowledge in the child-care field and two of the managers' considerable experience and skills in adoption. Managers were visible amongst their staff and appeared to have an open and accessible management style. Staff interviewed confirmed this and stated that they felt well supported by their managers. However, they indicated that for some time senior management's attention, energies and focus of work had been directed on the development of the Children's Trust. They believed this had impacted on the development of their service and cited the senior management post, which had been vacant for some months and the loss of a part-time team manager post, as examples of this. Staff though were positive about the recent senior management appointment and the plans to develop a small, adoption team feeling that such "foundations" would enable them to build upon and develop their adoption practices and service.

There was evidence to confirm that the agency operated in accordance with its statement of purpose. Early indications were that the managerial team would manage the agency in an effective and efficient manner. However, this can only really be fully assessed once the new managerial team has established itself and been in operation for some time.

There were written job descriptions available for the managers and managerial arrangements were in place to identify, who was in charge when the manager was absent. There were clear roles for managers and staff, with established lines of communication and accountability. The agency had a supervisory and appraisal system, which was used to monitor staff's performance and ensure a quality of service. There was evidence that staff were now being supervised and appraised in accordance with the Redbridge's policies.

There were a number of procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption service, which included a tracking system to monitor the care planning process for the child and adopters. This system though requires further development and review. (Please see comments made earlier in the report regarding this.) There were also supervision and appraisal systems in place, which monitored the adoption workers' performance. Team managers had established a file auditing system to monitor the agency's case records and to ensure they met the required standard. However, in some of the files examined, no evidence was found of such file auditing. Redbridge had also established a Case work Panel which met every month and scrutinised cases with a view to improving the quality of decision-making and social work practice. Reviewing officers, who chaired looked after children's reviews, carried out a monitoring and quality assurance role in respect of the adoption service. Similarly, the adoption panel carried out a quality assurance role in relation to the cases presented to the panel, as did the agency decision-maker. Information regarding the performance of the agency was presented to the Director of the Children's Trust. The elected member, who had lead responsibility for children's services, was also regularly up-dated on the adoption service. Six Monthly and an annual adoption report was presented to

the executive Committee of the Council. Interviews with members of the senior management team, as well as the elected member confirmed that councillors took their corporate parenting role seriously and carefully scrutinised all information presented.

Staff working within the teams had the necessary experience and qualifications, to undertake the agency's work effectively. Adopters made a number of very positive comments regarding workers' practice, for example, they were described as "knowledgeable", "very professional," "extremely committed", "reliable", "sensitive" and "skilled in their approach to the assessment".

The childcare social workers, who were interviewed, showed a real commitment to providing a good, qualitative service to the children and their families. However, whilst some staff stated that they "worked well" and that there was "good communication" with staff in the placement team, others were less positive. On the whole, relationships between the placing social workers and family placement staff appeared very much determined on an individual basis. Similar views were also expressed in the returned social work questionnaires returned to The Commission. The senior management team may wish to consider how the working relationships between these services could be promoted and enhanced.

The administrative support provided to the adoption team was of a good standard and assisted staff to carry out their work in an effective and efficient manner. This was also reflected in the positive comments made by adopters, who described the administrative staff as "friendly", "helpful" and efficient. However, in view of recent legislation and the increased demands likely to be made on the service, the agency needs to review the current administrative resources provided the service.

At the time of the inspection, the post adoption support worker had left the Authority and a worker, who carried out the assessment of adopters', was off sick. These staff shortages had clearly had a considerable impact on the agency's ability to initiate new assessments and in the support provided adopters. In view of the relative small size of the adoption agency, staff shortages can have a major impact on service delivery. Clearly, the staff team need to be extremely mindful of this and ensure that where a shortfall in staffing occurs, there are contingency plans in place to resolve the situation in a timely manner. Moreover, in the light of current changes in adoption legislative and the future likelihood of increased demands being made on the adoption service, consideration needs to be given to ensuring sufficient staff with appropriate skills and experience are recruited to the agency.

The managers and staff interviewed generally considered the Council was a fair and competent employer. The agency enabled staff to access internal and external training and post qualification study, as part of their professional development. Adoption staff generally felt the training was of good quality and



effectively met their needs, though all staff indicated that they would benefit from increased training on the Children and Adoption Act 2002.

There were written policies and procedures in place for case recording, as well as the maintenance and formatting of adoption case records. Examination of a sample of records indicated that these policies and procedures were being followed with the records seen generally well organised and in good order. There were some shortfalls in the adopters' files though, for example, in one file the case decisions arising from the worker's supervision meeting did not cover the whole period the agency had been responsible for the case; in a couple of other files there were no case decision records/supervision notes. In several files the case records had not been signed by the worker, nor the manager and in others such signatures were inconsistently applied. In one file there were no panel minutes; in another file there were panel minutes, which related to all the cases considered by the Panel and in a couple of files, the Panel agenda was present. Clearly these files did not comply with the Data Protection Act.

Similarly, with regard to the children's files some shortfalls were found, for example, in one file, the case decisions arising from the worker's supervision meeting did not cover the whole period the service had been responsible for the child, in another file, there were also some documents missing, for example the copy of the care order. In one file, the recording would suggest that the statutory visits did not appear to have been carried out according to legislative requirements. In another file, there was no later life letter. A similar difficulty also emerged with regard to two children's life storybook.

The agency had a system in place to ensure confidentiality, which was in accordance with current legislation. Staff, panel members and specialist advisors were fully aware of this system and strictly adhered to it.

The Council had a written policy and procedure in relation to access to records, which met the requirements of the adoption national minimum standards and current regulations.

The agency had a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, however this system required developing and a recommendation has been made regarding this.

Separate records were kept of complaints, allegations and staff. There was evidence to confirm all the agency's adoption records were stored securely in locked cabinets.

The agency should risk assess all adoption records to ensure they are stored in a manner to minimise the risk of damage from fire or water. This should also include the archived records.

Whilst the London Borough of Redbridge had a disaster recovery plan, the adoption agency had not developed a specific disaster recovery plan for their agency. Some attention should now be given to this.

Personnel and panel members' files, as discussed earlier in the report, did not comply with the adoption regulations and this must be addressed.

The adoption agency had identifiable office premises, which were fit for purpose.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption have been met and uses the following scale.

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

“X” in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion  
 “N/A” in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>7</b>	2
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	2

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

<b>ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>6</b>	2
<b>18</b>	3

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>1</b>	1
<b>3</b>	2
<b>14</b>	3
<b>16</b>	3
<b>17</b>	3
<b>20</b>	2
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	2
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	2
<b>28</b>	1
<b>29</b>	3
<b>30</b>	N/A
<b>31</b>	N/a

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

### **STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD19	Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regs. 2003, 10(a) & 10(b).	The manager of the service must ensure that there are a sufficient number of competent, experienced social work and administrative staff working for the purposes of the adoption agency.	01/10/06
1	AD20	As above	As above	01/10/06
1	AD21	As above	As above	01/10/06
1	AD4	As above	As above	01/10/06
2	AD4	A.A.R.2005, S.I.2005/389,Part 4, reg. 25 (8).	A 10-day waiver notice in respect of the adopters' written assessment should be held on file, where this is applicable.	01/10/06
3	AD4	A.A.R.2005, S.I.2005/389,Part 4,25, (3)(b).	The agency must ensure prospective adopters nominate three people to act as character referees and provide a personal reference for	01/07/06

			him or her.	
4	AD4	LAAS Reg. '03, 7(a)(b)	The agency must implement and maintain robust quality assurance systems for all aspects of adoption service.	01/10/06
5	AD11	LAAS Reg. '03 6(2)(c), 11(3)(d), 15(1) & Sch 3 & 4	The manager of the service must ensure that information is held on all persons who work for the adoption service in accordance with Schedule 3 and 4. This applies to all staff, panel members and specialist advisors, who provide services to the agency.	01/10/06
5	AD28	As above	As above	01/10/06
6	AD12	A.A.R.2005, S.I.2005/389,Part 4,26 (3)(d)	The agency must ensure that where the adoption panel makes a recommendation to the adoption agency that the prospective adopter/adopters are suitable to adopt a child, the panel may only consider and give <b>advice</b> to the agency about the number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background.	01/07/06
7	AD25	A.A.R.2005, S.I.2005/389,Part4, 22(1)	Where the adoption agency is considering a person may be suitable to be an adoptive parent, the	01/10/06

			manager of the agency must ensure a case record is set up. This case record must contain the information specified in the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 and 2003.	
8	AD25	A.A.R.2005, S.I.2005/389,Part 3,12 (1)(a-i)	The manager of the agency must ensure a case record is set up for a child, where the adoption agency is considering adoption for a child. This case record must contain the information specified in the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 and the guidance provided in the local government circular.	01/10/06
9	AD25	Data Protection Act 1998.	The agency must ensure that the documentation held on file relates to that person	31/07/06
10	AD1	LAAS (England) reg. 2003 2 (1) & Schedule 1	The manager of the service must ensure that the Statement of Purpose contains all the information required in the Adoption Services Regulations, 2003.	01/10/06
11	AD1	LAAS (England) reg.2003 3(1) & Schedule 2	The manager of the service must include in the children's guide, all the information contained in the Adoption Services Regulations 2003.	01/10/06
12	AD1	LAAS reg. '03 4(a)(b)	The manager of the service must keep under review and	29/10/06

			where appropriate revise the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide. The Commission must be notified of any such revision within 28 days.	
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## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD2	The agency's written recruitment strategy should be developed and its recruitment activity regularly evaluated.
2	AD2	The current information systems used by the agency need to be developed and kept up-to-date.
3	AD2	The tracking systems used in relation to adopters and children should be monitored on a regular basis to ensure the adoption agency's recruitment activities are effectively targeted and that prescribed timescales and performance targets are met.
4	AD4	Consideration should be given to agency working in collaboration with another agency/agencies to provide a second time adopters' preparation groups.
5	AD4	The agency should consider devising a protocol regarding checking prospective adopters' previous partners The agency should consider developing its health and safety checklist. This checklist should be applied in a consistent manner in all assessments carried out by the agency.
6	AD5	The agency should produce written information regarding the matching, introduction, placement process and support services available.
7	AD5	Consideration should be given to the introduction of life appreciation days into the service.
8	AD5, AD8 & AD25	The agency should ensure that clear and appropriate information is obtained for the child about themselves and life before adoption. This information should be provided in a timely manner and in accordance with their needs.
9	AD5	The agency should develop a system to address all the issues contained in standard 5.3 of the Adoption National

		Minimum Standards
10	AD6	A clear, coherent and comprehensive strategy should be developed in relation to the agency' support services.
11	AD10	The Adoption Policies and Procedures should be revised in accordance with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and current legislation.
12	AD11	Consideration should be given to broadening panel membership. This needs to be undertaken in accordance with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and current legislation.
13	AD11	The agency should ensure the observation and induction received by new panel members, is fully recorded and held on their file.
14	AD11	Specialist inter country adoption training should be regularly provided to panel members to ensure they are kept abreast of the various legislative changes.
15	AD12	Consideration should be given to the enhancement of panel minutes in identifying the precise role panel members are fulfilling by their attendance at panel.
16	AD13	The agency should ensure adopters, children and birth parents/family members are notified of the agency's decision in a timely manner.
17	AD6	Written procedures should be produced regarding adoption support assessments.
18	AD6	In the provision of adoption support services, the agency should consider partnership and collaborative work with other agencies outside the authority.
18	AD7	The agency should consistently evidence that a birth parent has been provided with a copy of the child's permanence report and their views regarding the contents recorded.
19	AD8	The independent and support service provided to birth parents and their families should be more actively promoted. Consideration should also be given to the development of a qualitative monitoring system being introduced in respect of this service
20	AD9	The agency should develop a clear strategy for working with birth parents and their families.
21	AD3	The information provided prospective adopters should be revised.
22	AD20 AD21	Consideration should be given to a strengthening of the agency's managerial team.
23	AD23	Further Children and Adoption Act training should be given to all child care staff.
23	AD25	The agency should risk assess all adoption records to ensure that they are stored in such a manner to minimise the risk of damage from fire and water.



24	AD25	The agency should ensure all statutory visits to children are fully and clearly recorded.
25	AD27	The system to monitor the quality and adequacy of adoption records should be developed.
26	AD27	A disaster recovery plan specific to adoption should be produced.
27	AD27	The manager of the agency should make provision for the safeguarding and back up of all the agency's records.

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