



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

### **Bromley London Borough Council Adoption Service**

**Joseph Lancaster Hall  
Civic Centre, Stockwell Close  
Bromley  
BR1 3UH**

*Lead Inspector*  
Sean White

*Announced Inspection*  
26th June 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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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

<b>Name of service</b>	Bromley London Borough Council Adoption Service
<b>Address</b>	Joseph Lancaster Hall Civic Centre, Stockwell Close Bromley BR1 3UH
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8313 4185
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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Bromley London Borough Council
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Chris Stansell
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Adoption Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

NA

## Date of last inspection

18 November 2003

## Brief Description of the Service:

The LB Bromley Adoption & Adoption Support Service operates from premises within the borough's Civic Centre complex, which are easily accessible by both car and public transport; facilities for people with disabilities are available.

The service is managed within the Children and Young People's directorate of the Council; at the time of the inspection not all of the arrangements to manage this new directorate were fully in place.

The agency is managed by an group manager supported by an assistant team manager; there are five full time and three part time adoption workers (senior practitioners) and one full time and one part time adoption support workers. In addition there is a part time resource development worker, an adoption development worker and administrative support. Adoption panel administrative support is provided by central services.

The agency undertakes the following adoption services:

- Recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents; both domestic and those wishing to adopt a child from overseas.
- Family finding, matching and placement of children with suitable adopters, in partnership with children's social workers and other agencies.
- Support for adopters.
- Support for birth families.
- Post-adoption support.
- Adoption support assessments.

The statement of purpose clearly outlines the whole range of adoption support services and who can gain access to them.

The agency is a member of the Adoption South East Consortium and works closely with other authorities to effect suitable placements for children.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection upon which this report is based was carried out over three days by two inspectors. The agency prepared extremely well for the visit, demonstrating an attention to detail that was impressive. Everyone involved extended every assistance and courtesy throughout the duration of the inspection.

During the course of the inspection the following were undertaken:

- Interviews with key managers and staff;
- Interview with elected member of the council;
- Reading policies and procedures;
- Inspection of case files for adopters and children;
- Inspection of service premises and archive facilities;
- Visits to adoptive families (5);
- Inspection of Human Resources records;
- Observation of the adoption panel;

Prior to the inspection questionnaires were sent to all adopters approved in the last twelve months - and applicants currently in assessment, birth families, social workers, other agencies who had placed a child for adoption with Bromley's families and professional advisors. The response was as follows:

- Adopters/prospective adopters - 14
- Social workers - 10
- Placing authorities - 6
- Birth families - 3
- Advisors - 2

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

The Bromley adoption service is very motivated and committed to the principle that best outcomes for children are at the centre of its philosophy and practice. The manager demonstrated a passionate approach to this principle and it was clear that all workers in the service aspired to ensure that their efforts were aimed at securing the most suitable placements for children placed for adoption.

Recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective adopters was undertaken with due rigour and it was clear that the agency has a developing strategy for finding families for children where there have been difficulties securing

appropriate placements. Assessment reports of prospective adopters were of a good standard, thorough and detailed, and captured the inherent parenting qualities of applicants. Second opinion visits were well recorded and demonstrated a further tier in the approach to thoroughness. There were many positive comments from adopters made about the preparation and assessment process, "Bromley were excellent throughout" and "The preparation groups were very useful to us", being typical examples.

The arrangements for managing the adoption process were well established and everyone in the team, managers and workers, were clear about their responsibilities and had the skills and experience to carry them out. Children were, in the main, placed with suitable families with minimum delay and matching, introductions and placement were conducted well, with effective cooperation with wider children's services. "Bromley placed us in a very strong position to cope with the placement of our child", being said by one respondent. The agency had exceeded its own and PSA targets.

The panel was administered efficiently and most of its operations well conducted – ably facilitated by an effective chairperson and adviser. It also had good medical and legal advice. There are, however, areas for improvement outlined below.

Adoption support is an evolving service and support to birth parents has been actively addressed by the appointment of a worker whose main responsibility is in this area; one initiative (birth parents' support group) has been successfully developed. Adopters with children in placement were appropriately supported and access to advice was always available; there have been no disruptions for some years.

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

There were several requirements and recommendations made following the first inspection of the adoption agency in 2003. A comprehensive action plan was produced following this and it was evident that significant progress had been made and improvements introduced. These included:

- A children's guide to adoption.
- Birth parent support.
- Policies and procedures.
- Protocols for specialist advisors.
- Personnel and panel members' records – improved but not complete.
- Reducing delay.

- The needs of children from black and minority ethnic groups.
- Greater emphasis on health issues in preparation groups.
- Greater emphasis on providing full information when matching.
- More information regarding adoption allowances.
- Ensuring birth parents are enabled to see what is written about them.
- Panel to be involved in progress and monitoring of children.
- Training for panel on diversity issues.
- Efficiency of preparing panel minutes.

Other matters are being improved on an on-going basis through developing policies and procedures following the implementation of new legislation.

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

Although the agency has strong leadership, manages the adoption process well in most areas and is committed to best possible outcomes for children, there are some issues that require attention.

Despite the introduction of another management tier in the agency there remains some difficulties in how responsibilities and duties are undertaken. It was felt that too much of the decision-making and oversight is vested with the group manager and that clearer and more workable structures should be put in place to provide more coherence.

Some survey respondents and some adopters who discussed their experiences were critical of some of the agency's approaches – "Unprofessional approach" and "We were not kept informed", being two comments. Although these views were not universal the agency needs to develop consistency across the board to ensure applicants fully understand the process and to provide greater awareness.

The adoption panel sits until late, sometimes very late, in the evening; this mitigates against clear thinking and deliberating when those attending are tired and not at their most alert. There was also some confusion about the constitution and responsibilities of the adoption panel. New regulations govern these and although there has been some training to address, for instance, diversity and equality, the agency should ensure that these are fully and clearly implemented; this should involve further training and more effective action by the chair and adviser. The decision maker does not get reports in advance of the panel; this should change to enable him to be fully informed of the information presented to him upon which he has to make decisions.



Although significant improvements had been made in staff recruitment practices and maintenance of personnel records, there had been a decision made – by persons unknown – to stop the practice of verifying written references. This needs to be re-constituted. Panel members' records, whilst improved, did not contain all required information in some cases.

The handling of complaints and disaffection was poorly managed in some cases and requires managers to examine how best they deal with complex situations where there is conflict.

Case records (adopters) management was not of a high standard. Although most information was maintained on files there were several instances of inadequate case recording, few records of casework supervision and little evidence of formal, regular auditing.

Staff resources are somewhat stretched, in both the operational and administrative side. Further work on the management responsibilities as outlined above may have some positive effect on this, i.e. allocation of second opinion visits.

The premises are cramped, have barely sufficient desks/computers for all workers and storage is limited. They are in an accessible location but there is insufficient information on the large council site for visitors to locate the office. Similarly there are poor resources; no mobile 'phones for safe remote working and poor/insufficient facilities for home working – and no protocols for this activity to protect data/confidentiality. The premises and facilities used for the adoption panel do not provide any privacy for some of those attending, particularly when agenda items over-run.

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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Management

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Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters 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 & 19.

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

The agency provides a service that is aimed at the best possible outcomes for children, but flaws in the adoption panel compromises the overall potential for the safety of children.

## EVIDENCE:

The managers and workers in this agency demonstrated an unequivocal commitment, supported in outlook and practice, to ensuring that the needs of children placed for adoption were at the centre of the service's work.

The recruitment of adopters was very good, supported by a realistic policy and business plan, and effective in practice. PSA targets for placing children had been exceeded and there were sufficient adopters to meet the placement needs of most children. The agency is aware that, although it surpassed its own targets for the placement of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, further work is necessary to secure sufficient resources, and there is an initiative in place to target recruitment to achieve this. This also includes other children where placement opportunities are traditionally

problematic - older children and sibling groups for instance. The agency also plays an important role in the local consortium, which enhances the possibilities of potential placements being found.

Great care is taken to ensure that children are matched with and placed within families who are best able to meet their needs. The agency works well with children's social workers and there are realistic and well-considered processes in place to effect appropriate matches. There is a careful and sensitive approach to matters of diversity; children's ethnicity, cultural and religious needs being an integral aspect of the agency's operation and practice.

The agency's approach to the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters was thorough and pitched in a way to achieve as complete a picture of an applicant's suitability as possible. Assessment reports were detailed and provided the necessary information for the adoption panel to be able to make informed recommendations. Of the fourteen questionnaires received from adopters and prospective adopters, eight were either generally or very satisfied with the agency's preparation and assessment. Comments such as, "Home assessment has been very beneficial to us", and "Found preparation days informative and constructive", being typical responses. These sentiments were also found in discussions with approved adopters. However, six of the fourteen questionnaire respondents and two families visited were either generally or very critical of the agency's approach to preparation and assessment. The lack of workers' professionalism was cited in three cases, application form lost in two cases and erroneous information written in assessment reports in two cases.

These issues suggest some inconsistencies in the agency's approach that needs to be addressed.

The matching of children with adopters and the introductions and placement arrangements were, in the main, very good. It was noted that there is a thorough approach to the matching process throughout the organisation and that everyone involved worked well together. Information exchanges were reported as good and life appreciation days are held in some circumstances. Children's permanence reports were not of a consistently high standard though, and the agency should strive to improve quality in this area.

The adoption panel was noted to be, in most areas, robust and thorough in its operation. The independent chair had clear insight and knowledge of adoption and conducted meetings with due consideration of children's needs. The recommendations it makes are based on a commitment to ensuring children's needs can be met and its deliberations were generally sound and based upon the material placed before it.

There are, however, several issues that the agency needs to address to ensure best outcomes for children. The panel operates during the evening, starting at

7.00pm and often not finishing until after 10.00pm or even later. The panel members and staff who have to attend panel often therefore have to work a 12/13-hour day and may have to make long journeys late at night. Panel members and other workers expressed that they were often tired and hungry by the time they were due to be discussing, and making recommendations about, children's lives. Although the panel operates a monitoring system for children awaiting placement, this is scheduled at the end of the meeting and, it was reported, often does not get the attention required because of the lateness of the hour. This compromises the role of the panel to ensure that progress reports on individual cases are fully addressed. The managers need to review the timing of the panel to ensure the most effective discussions can be had regarding the information that is presented to panel.

The panel did not appear to be properly constituted at the time of the inspection; one elected member of the council was recorded as being an independent member of the adoption panel - this clearly is a breach of the regulations, but this has been subsequently described as an error in recording. There was insufficient evidence at the time of the inspection to make an informed judgement about the qualities and suitability of some panel members, because of a lack of information recorded on their files; this has been supplied subsequent to the inspection fieldwork. There was evidence, written and observed, found of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour within the adoption panel. Current legislation makes provision for all members of the community to apply to be adopters, both domestic and overseas, and that they be judged only on their suitability to adopt a child. Members of the panel abstaining from recommendations based on prejudiced or personal views about matters other than suitability are not within the functions of the panel as directed by regulations. The panel chair and adoption adviser should have a more robust approach to challenging such behaviour and take action accordingly, regardless of the status or influence of the panel member. Panel members' records were not maintained to the National Minimum Standards; key information was missing in some cases, notably CRB checks were not available for two members.

The organisation and administration of the panel was of a very good standard. Papers were circulated efficiently and well written minutes prepared in a timely way. The decision-maker does not get a set of panel papers at the same time as panel members; he receives them at the same time that he is furnished with the recommendations and minutes. It would be more appropriate, to give time for apprising himself of the business before panel, to receive them in advance. Decisions are generally made speedily, although there were some occasions where this had not been achieved within timescales and one occasion where an applicant had not been informed verbally of their approval although the agency manager had apologised for this.

The service was managed and staffed by suitably qualified and experienced workers. Recruitment practices were, in the main, very good and personnel

records showed a robust approach to appointing workers. One issue that requires attention, however, is the failure to verify written references by 'phone; for some reason, and the agency managers were confused that this had occurred, an edict had been passed by someone in Human Resources that this practice should cease.

Nevertheless, workers demonstrated a high level of knowledge, skills and understanding of adoption matters and despite some of the negative comments made in questionnaires, detailed above, it was found that there was a high level of professional commitment amongst the workforce. Comments made by adopters that support this were, for instance, "I feel very lucky that I have the social worker that I have. She is open and clear about what we are doing at every stage", and, "We found [three names] particularly professional and helpful throughout".

# 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, 18.

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

The agency has a positive, active and developing approach to supporting adopters that provides for the ongoing success of placements.

## EVIDENCE:

The systems in place for providing support to adopters are well established and appear to run smoothly. Once approved, adopters retain their allocated, assessing social worker (in most cases) and this arrangement continues throughout the matching, introductions and placement process until an adoption order is made. There have been no disruptions in the last three years, which demonstrates the success of the support offered to placements.

It was evident, in most situations, that adopters felt that their social worker, and the agency generally, provided the necessary levels of support and advice to enable them to develop their parenting roles and overcome any difficulties they may experience. A typical comment from one family asked about what they were most satisfied with in respect of matching and placement of their child was, "Everything"; another was, "Bromley has supported us very well throughout...".

Following an adoption order being granted cases are transferred to the Adoption Support Team. This is a developing and evolving part of the service that is not very well resourced in terms of staffing, although it was clear that the workers involved were committed and knowledgeable about their roles. The agency should monitor the capacity of this part of the service to ensure it can adequately respond to the range of responsibilities it carries in line with new legislation. This is crucial given that the agency undertakes all its own adoption support work and does not contract services out to other agencies.



From discussions with staff and managers it was clear that the agency receives a very good service from its medical and legal advisers. It was reported that both are very accessible and are regular attendees at the adoption panel. Evidence was noted in respect of one case where the medical adviser obtained specialist information with regard to the complex health issues of certain children.

The legal adviser clearly understands adoption and children's matters and was observed providing an effective service to the panel.

Other specialist advice is sought from sources appropriate to the situation, whether it be education, special needs or cultural, for instance. The agency is a member of the Inter-country Adoption Centre from which it can source advice.

## **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, 9.

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

The agency demonstrated its commitment to supporting birth parents and involving them in their child's adoption through positive initiatives.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The agency takes seriously the need to involve birth parents in the planning for their children who are to be adopted. It has appointed a worker (Independent Adoption Development Worker) whose role is to work with birth parents and provide advice and support. One initiative, a birth parent's support group, is developing successfully and has several regular attendees. Another initiative, a drop-in facility, has not had the same level of success but it is clear that some effort and thinking has gone into how best to provide support and it is encouraging that the service has such an active approach.

Three questionnaires were received from birth family members; these varied in the comments made about their levels of satisfaction but there was clear evidence that agencies approach was seen as professional and that there was significant interaction between the agency and birth parents. It was clear from one that the views and wishes of the family had been taken into consideration and this was also reflected in adoption panel discussions.

The agency's permanency policies and procedures are clear about the need to maintain children's heritage and these were generally reflected in practice. It was evident that life-story work is viewed as important, and some good examples of these being achieved were noted. There is some delay in some

cases, because of children's social workers workloads and competing priorities, but the agency is aware of this and monitors matters accordingly.

The agency is very focused on the need to enable children to be informed and in touch about their backgrounds and racial/cultural origins. This was evident from a range of different sources that made it clear that issues such as contact were given very serious consideration – and decisions made in the best interests of the child, and that adopters were fully informed about racial and cultural issues and their relevance to adopted children.

# 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, 29.

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

The agency had strong leadership but anticipated improvements through the appointment of an assistant manager had not been fully realised and inconsistencies remained. This impacts on the agency's ability to provide an efficient service in all areas.

## EVIDENCE:

To support, direct and inform its work, the agency has a clear, well written statement of purpose backed up with realistic policies and procedures; some of these need revising and updating in light of recent changes in legislation but, in the main, they were seen as good operational tools. The agency has worked closely with other regional services to produce draft policies; these will be finalised and fully implemented in the near future.

The manager of the service demonstrated a clear and well-informed approach to adoption matters, showed a committed approach to securing the best possible outcomes for children and exercised effective leadership. It became clear throughout the visit that he is held in high esteem throughout the department. It was evident that the service was well managed at this level and that the agency had a coherence and outlook that was positive and encouraging; the recruitment of adopters and placement of children with suitable families being at the very centre of the agency's approach.

The agency's approach to the recruitment of adopters is well established and there were sufficient adopters to meet the needs of most of the children requiring a placement. An initiative to recruit more adopters to meet the needs of children where difficulties in finding families have been experienced was underway. Respondents to questionnaires and adopters who were interviewed said that, in the main, the recruitment and information aspects of the process had been very good. Comments being made were, "Good, enthusiastic response, we were made very welcome" and "Information provided was very good".

The management of the service, however, is not without its difficulties. Although the management of the service has been boosted in recent times by the appointment of an Assistant Team Manager, the full benefits of this have yet to be realised. It is acknowledged, however, that the reasons for this have been entirely beyond the agency's control. It was found that too much of the decision-making is still vested with the Group Manager, which has consequences for workload management; the agency should endeavour to speed up transferring responsibilities within the management team to effect a more even spread of micro management duties. Issues that could be improved upon if this were to be achieved are:

- Case recording & file management.
- Formal file auditing.
- Workload and allocation.
- Quality control of assessment reports.

It was evident that the agency was keen to capitalise on the strengthened management team and plans were in hand to devolve responsibilities to create a more even spread of workload.

Workers felt that they were well supported in the main and that workload allocation was fair and equitable. There has been a staffing increase in the team of 2.5 workers since the last inspection (2003) and this has had a positive effect on the service. It was said, however, that workloads were very high and becoming unmanageable. One issue in particular – second opinion visits – were said to be very time consuming. Team social workers undertake these (they were found to be very thorough) but feel it should be a management responsibility. It was suggested that this arrangement might change in the future; the agency managers should give this serious consideration to ensure that workloads continue to be manageable across the service. Given that workers are very busy, although it is acknowledged that there is appropriate use made of bank staff to supplement the permanent staff, the agency should ensure that it continues to monitor its staffing establishment. Although supervision was undertaken at regular and frequent intervals case files did not have sufficient details of supervision decisions to determine the level and quality of management oversight; this is a matter that needs to be addressed in order for the service to demonstrate the quality of the work that is being undertaken and to afford an easy system for tracking case progression.

Access to training and development is fairly good, both adoption and children's social workers felt that they had reasonable opportunities – including PQ (Post Qualifying) awards. Some attention needs to be paid to specialist training, which includes diversity awareness, to enhance the overall performance of adoption.

There had been some complaints made about the service in recent times. Although the service had a complaints procedure, took complaints seriously and investigated them thoroughly, the handling of some had been inefficient and protracted – causing further difficulties; this needs to be improved upon. Also, although evidence was found of applicants being informed of their right to complain, a significant number of survey respondents indicated that they were ignorant of this. The agency should re-examine the way it gets this message across.

Administration resources are barely sufficient. Most of the administration for the panel is undertaken centrally, which is not in direct control of the adoption managers, and general office duties and business support is stretched. Resources are also limited although an extra photocopier has been sourced since the last inspection.

Records and file management, whilst adequate, would benefit from improvement. Case recording was inconsistent in some instances and file contents were somewhat difficult to follow; a more coherent system would allow for better and easier access to information. This should be undertaken with the development of a formal audit system.

Workers' personnel files were, in the main, very good with a few minor omissions. It has already been highlighted earlier in this report about the lack of evidence of written references being verified by 'phone and recorded on files. Panel members' files were less good with many omissions of required information.

Workers' attitudes to the department as a whole were fairly negative in many respects. The issues raised were inequitable salary scales across different social work teams (adoption workers are paid less than colleagues in the assessment team), remote senior managers, poor resources (office accommodation, no mobile 'phones and no protocol for working at home on personal computers). These are matters that the department needs to address to ensure it demonstrates itself as a fair and competent employer. The salary issue clearly could have an influence on recruitment and retention – although it is accepted that the adoption team is one of the most stable in the department - resources were found to be limited and safe home-working protocols are essential to protect data and confidentiality.

Elected members of the council demonstrated commitment to children requiring adoption. They receive quarterly reports on the agency's work and understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. The lead member for children was a recent appointment and at the time of the inspection was developing his knowledge and understanding.

The adoption service is located in offices within the main Civic Centre complex, close to the town centre; this makes it easily accessible although there are no signs to identify the service. The premises are rather small and do not have sufficient space for everyone on some occasions, and students cannot be accommodated. Storage is also at a premium. Security and records storage were adequate and archives are held in secure facilities close by. These, however, are housed in a basement and although there are satisfactory fire precautions in place, basement storage is always liable to flooding; there was a leaking water pipe noted during the visit. The facilities used for the adoption panel are not satisfactory. There are only limited waiting facilities that do not provide privacy for people attending.

# 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>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	3

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>2</b>	3
<b>4</b>	3
<b>5</b>	3
<b>10</b>	2
<b>11</b>	1
<b>12</b>	3
<b>13</b>	2
<b>15</b>	3
<b>19</b>	3
<b>24</b>	N/A

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

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>6</b>	3
<b>18</b>	4

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	3
<b>3</b>	3
<b>14</b>	3
<b>16</b>	2
<b>17</b>	3
<b>20</b>	2
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	3
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	2
<b>28</b>	2
<b>29</b>	2
<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	AD10	Reg. 26 AAR 2005	The agency must ensure that all adoption panel members are aware of the fact that recommendations for approving applicants can only be made on their suitability to be parents.	31/10/06
2	AD11	Reg. 3. AAR 2005	The agency must ensure clarity in the constitution and membership of the adoption panel.	31/10/06
3	AD11	Re.11 LAAS 2003	All members of the adoption panel must have a satisfactory CRB check.	31/10/06

### **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	AD13	The decision maker should receive a set of panel papers at the same time as panel members to ensure he is in receipt of all relevant information.

2	AD8	The agency should ensure that all children placed for adoption have life-story work undertaken.
3	AD16	The agency should develop a strategy to ensure that the delegated management responsibilities to the ATM are coherent and efficient for the running of the service.
4	AD20	The agency should consider expanding its administrative resources.
5	AD20	The agency should take all reasonable steps to provide a consistent service to all applicants and ensure they are all fully informed of the process with which they will be involved.
6	AD21	The agency should make an evaluation of its staffing needs in relation to the volume of work being undertaken; particularly in respect of adoption support services.
7	AD22	The agency should examine the effect the disparity in children's services social workers salaries has in respect of morale and staff retention.
8	AD25	Case recording should be better managed and all supervision decisions recorded clearly. Case files should be maintained more effectively.
9	AD27	The agency should develop a more coherent file management system that includes a formal audit tool.
10	AD28	Personnel files and panel members' records should include all required information.
11	AD29	The agency should consider how it can improve the office facilities and resources to enable all staff to use them, Directions to the premises should be more visible.

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