



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## ADOPTION SERVICE

### **North East Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service**

**St James House  
Grimsby  
Nth E Lincolnshire  
DN31 1EP**

*Lead Inspector*  
Lynn Smith

*Announced Inspection*  
11th October 2005      08:45

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.

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	North East Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service
<b>Address</b>	St James House Grimsby Nth E Lincolnshire DN31 1EP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01472 323454
<b>Fax number</b>	01472 323406
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	North East Lincolnshire Council
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Ms Penny Sheardown
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Adoption Service
<b>No. of places registered (if applicable)</b>	0
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

### Date of last inspection

This is the first inspection under the terms of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003

### Brief Description of the Service:

North East Lincolnshire Council operates an adoption service based in Grimsby. The service consists of a Principal Care Manager shared with the fostering service, a Principal Social Worker, five Social Workers and one Fostering and Adoption Assistant. And 3.5 Administrative Assistants are shared with the fostering service. Clinical psychologists are also attached to the adoption service for four days each week.

All Social Workers cover all aspects of adoption work from recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, to family finding for North East Lincolnshire children and the support of adoptive families and the children within these families. The adoption team also undertakes letterbox contact and records counselling for adoptive adults.

North East Lincolnshire is a relatively small geographical area. Many North East Lincolnshire children are placed outside this area. The majority of placements are made through the local consortium or the adoption register.

# SUMMARY

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

This was the first inspection of North East Lincolnshire's adoption service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Two inspectors undertook the inspection over three and a half days. The adoption panel was also observed within the inspection.

The manager produced a detailed self-assessment along with supporting documentation. These were received prior to the inspection fieldwork.

Questionnaires were received from eight adopters, two placing social workers, five placing authorities, one adoption advisor and one birth family member.

The inspectors visited four adopters and read relevant adopters' files and children's files.

Interviews were conducted with the Deputy Director of Children's Services who is also the adoption panel's decision maker, the Councillor who is the portfolio holder for looked after children, the panel chair, a social worker from a placing agency, the Principal Care Manager, the Principal Social worker, 'After Adoption' Social Worker, a Clinical Psychologist, the adoption panel minute taker, a group of placing Social Workers and a group of adoption Social Workers.

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

North East Lincolnshire adoption service has good clear written guidance for staff. The management team prioritise the work well and ensure the adoption service is well run. The adoption team work very well with other social workers and specialists to ensure children's needs are met. The service has committed and dedicated members of staff who are knowledgeable and experienced in all aspects of adoption. One adopter said, "They always did what they said they would and straight away".

The adoption social workers and the children's social workers prepare children for adoption very well. Several examples of workbooks completed by children whose plan is adoption were looked at. These books addressed everything a child needs to know about adoption and also asked for their views.

The adoption panel monitor the activities of the adoption service very well. This prevents delays for children and ensures good placements are found quickly.

By inviting prospective/approved adopters, birth children and foster carers to adoption panels, the panel members are able to get a very clear view of the families and the children that will be placed within them. This promotes good placements.

Adopters are able to talk with specialists involved with the children they are adopting. The support plans that are put in place identify who will give specific support if needed. One adopter said, " My social worker has been very supportive throughout and has always been there with advice and to listen when I needed someone to talk to".

North East Lincolnshire adoption service and children's social workers do engage and support birth family members when possible. The service level agreement with After Adoption, Yorkshire does give an independent service for birth family members

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

This is the first inspection of the adoption service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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

The adoption service's statement of purpose does need to include the address of the adoption service.

The assessments of adopters need to contain information on all checks completed to enable the adoption panel to make clear judgements and decisions. When an assessment is completed for a second adoption, the new assessment should give a clear picture of how the family have developed since the last approval.

Checks on staff member's, prospective and approved adopters should be clearly recorded on individuals files to ensure that all people with access to children have had relevant clear checks.

Copies of letters sent to birth parents informing them of the outcome of the adoption panel should be kept on file. Also the service needs to ensure that birth family members have the opportunity to comment on what is written about them before the information is presented to the adoption panel.

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

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

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

North East Lincolnshire adoption service has a focused approach with early intervention of adoption planning for children. Children are placed with adopters who are able to meet their needs.

## EVIDENCE:

North East Lincolnshire Adoption service has a clear policy statement that reflects the recruitment strategy of prospective adopters.

The small geographic area of North East Lincolnshire impacts on the placement of children with North East Lincolnshire Adopters. The service therefore uses the consortium and National Adopter Register to aid their family finding for children.

North East Lincolnshire adoption service actively seek to match children quickly, this includes children who through their age and gender could be hard to place. The adoption panel monitors at each panel meeting, the progress of each child. Social workers are asked to give a written report to the adoption panel of family finding activities.

A multi- agency team completes the 'assessment of needs form' as well as a 'child observation form'. These aid the understanding of the child's development and placement needs at a very early stage.

Once a possible match is identified, a 'children and family placement proposal form' is completed. This identifies how the adopters will meet the child's needs. A multi-agency team then produces a 'matching report'. The 'matching report' and the 'adopters support plan' identify information that has been given to the adopters. There is also a checklist of information given that adopters sign. Prior to a match being made, adopters are able to talk with specialist advisers involved with the child. This includes psychologists, designated doctor for 'looked after children', relevant consultants, schools and foster carers. One social worker from a placing authority said, when asked for their views on North East Lincolnshire adoption service and the matching process. " Excellent, the child's needs were firmly at the forefront of the placement. The use of a clinical psychologist was very helpful".

The preparation of children for adoption was excellent. One file contained a very good interactive book filled in by the child about adoption. A list of books that had been discussed was also present.

Good assessments are done on prospective adopters but not all indicated what checks had been undertaken. For example Criminal Records Bureau checks (CRB) were not indicated on the assessment but evidence was found that they had been undertaken. Adoption panel minutes indicated that panel members had been informed that suitable checks had been undertaken.

However some files and assessments gave no evidence that school references and employment references have been undertaken. It would be good practice to undertake these checks.

In some cases family members of the prospective adopters who clearly would be very involved with the children once placed, were not CRB checked.

One assessment had clearly not been robustly updated after the first adoption. For example, there was no consistency regarding the age of the birth child, and information about the first adopted child. An addendum at the end of the original assessment was added.

Health and safety checks as well as dog assessments were not consistent in all assessments.

Examples of family books that adopters had prepared for children were examined. They were interactive, well presented and very informative.

Prospective adopters and adopters spoke highly of the preparation groups, one said, "I found the preparation groups very informative and enjoyable, very interesting to meet people who have adopted and been adopted".

Regular evaluation of the preparation groups takes place every six months at 'evaluation meetings'. One comment from a prospective adopter was, when asked what they liked best, "Sharing experiences, fears and meeting other people who have these same feelings".

Prospective adopters are able to attend preparation groups run by consortium authorities if these are more convenient for them.

The adoption panel policies and procedures are clear and accessible to all panel members.

Induction training and information packs are in place but it was not documented once a member had completed it.

There was excellent monitoring by the adoption panel members on a range of things like, children waiting, up dates on children placed, prospective adopters waiting and overall standards of assessments presented. Where amendments need to be made to the assessment, a good system of preparing an 'issues form' is in place which is presented to the social worker after panel.

Corrections are then made by the social worker.

There was good exploration of the cases presented.

North East Lincolnshire adoption service always ask prospective adopters and adopters to the adoption panel. Birth children are also welcomed. One social worker from another authority said, "Although we do not have adopters at our panel for matching, I found the process of adopters being present to be very helpful. I did not have to answer questions on their behalf."

During adoption panel for matching, foster carers are also asked to attend.

After each adoption panel, in-depth minutes are produced without delay.

Adopters said they received a letter from the decision maker very quickly after the adoption panel.

The consultation with adopters and social workers throughout each process of assessment and approval and the evaluation of the information is excellent.

North East Lincolnshire Council has employed the principal care manager for a substantial length of time. Therefore no telephone references were made.

Evidence of qualifications were examined as well as the electronic CRB master checklist. The information saved from CRB checks could be more robust, for example, a name and signature of who validated them.

Staff appointed after January 2004 had telephone checks from references. All had appropriate qualifications and experience.

Children's social workers commented of how supportive, knowledgeable and helpful the adoption team are. "The adoption team are excellent, accessible, approachable and very helpful." Prospective adopters and adopters overall praised the team and individual social workers for their knowledge and professional manner. One said, " Our social worker was excellent, friendly, caring and professional, and made the whole process much easier".

# 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

The adoption support given by North East Lincolnshire adoption service is focussed and committed to the needs of children and their adoptive families.

## EVIDENCE:

Adopters and prospective adopters were aware of the support North East Lincolnshire adoption service provides for adoptive families. The enquiry packs that are sent to prospective adopters explain well how North East Lincolnshire adoption service support adopters and children. Adopters said during the preparation training, support is discussed in depth. After approval further information was given for example, the 'British Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Handbook Book for Prospective Adopters'.

Support meetings take place every six weeks. Also a newsletter is produced three times a year. This gives information to prospective adopters and adopters on subjects like further training and social functions. 'A piece of Cake' training has been offered to adopters.

Adopters said that their social workers often accessed, or informed them of specialists for a range of services for example, education and health.

Evidence was seen of procedure and practice guidance covering support to adoptive families. Social workers had a clear understanding of these procedures.

All adopters said their support social workers remained in touch with them on a regular basis before and after approval. One said, "My social worker has been very supportive throughout and has always been there with advice and to listen when I needed someone to talk to". Adopters said, even if the social worker is off work; someone will contact you from the adoption service to ensure you are kept informed.

Many adopters spoken to do not have North East Lincolnshire children placed with them, but they do feel the adoption service would assist and support them in accessing services for their children.

Before a child is placed with adopters, a detailed support plan is prepared and agreed for adopters and children. Clinical psychologists attached to the adoption service give their views and advice on these plans. One example was a child who had been placed quite a way from North East Lincolnshire and had a support plan for therapeutic input. The local authority where he was placed did not have access to suitable therapeutic services. North East Lincolnshire adoption service purchased private therapeutic services for the child and the adoptive parents.

The clinical psychologists are accessible to the adoption services four days each week. Adopters have direct access to the clinical psychologists. Social workers are able to discuss cases or arrange appointments without delay.

North East Lincolnshire adoption service provides a good level of financial support when needed. Social workers confirmed that when it is identified that the best placement for a child may incur some cost, funding has not been an issue.

The statement of purpose identifies how the adoption support services advisor (ASSA) can be contacted. The ASSA is the deputy director of childcare.

The adopters spoken to were aware of the importance of keeping children's 'memorabilia' safe as well as the need to build on the initial information. Written evidence was seen of work done by a social worker preparing a child for adoption. When asked what he would like in his new home, he said, "A bigger memory box for all my things".

All social workers spoke highly about the specialist advisers, " the medical adviser is excellent". "The legal adviser is very approachable and knows her stuff".

The adoption service has access to a range of specialist advisers from education, health, family mediation, youth counselling and an interpretation and translation service.

# 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

North East Lincolnshire Council recognises the life long role of birth parents by providing good support, but the recording of birth parents views was not consistent.

### EVIDENCE:

The joint working between the adoption team and the placing social workers enables birth parents to receive information and support. Birth parents are allocated a support worker from the adoption team. Evidence was seen where an adoption social worker made several visits to a birth mother to help her with a 'goodbye letter' as well as the face-to-face contact with adopters. The adoption team contact birth parents where previously letterbox contact has been set up but not fulfilled. This is done to encourage them to write. Engaging with birth families early on in procedures and the stability within the social work teams enables good professional relationships to build with birth family members and social workers.

Placing social workers evidenced when they have given information to birth parents in the child's case record. Leaflets about adoption for birth parents are placed in access points, for example, libraries.

Birth parent's views on the adoption of their child are recorded on the forms E but no signature is evident to indicate they agree with these views or that they have seen them.

Excellent birth mother and birth father support plans are prepared, however they do not identify if the birth mother and father have been informed about them.

North East Lincolnshire Council has a service level agreement with 'After Adoption Yorkshire' who gives independent support. This service is regularly monitored but confidentiality is not broken. This service is a growing field in

the North East Lincolnshire region with groups being set-up for birth mothers and fathers.

Placing social workers and adoption social workers are very much aware of the importance of receiving information from birth family members for children's 'life story books'. Placing social workers sign to say the child has their 'life story book' when they are placed with their adoptive families. Good examples of 'life story books' were seen as well as 'later life letters'.



# 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

The strong management leadership enables and supports staff to undertake responsibility to promote good outcomes for children.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose is clearly used as a 'working document' by this service. However the address of the North East Lincolnshire adoption office needs to be added.

There are two children's guides that give information to children about adoption. One is for younger children, which is very interactive. The other is for older children. Although the address of the Children's Rights Director is included, there is not telephone number. Also the address for the Commission for Social Care Inspection needs to be added.

The information that was given to prospective adopters was very good. One prospective adopter said, "We were very pleased with the information we have been given on the whole adoption process". Additional information is then given once prospective adopters have been approved.

Adoption panel members' files and personnel files contained all relevant information. However the CRB recording could be more robust. Letters stating a CRB check had taken place with the date and enhanced status were evident, but need to include the CRB number (not the application number), state clear or not clear, and a signature of the person making the recording. All CRB checks are recorded on the computer system that then identifies when the next CRB check is due. This ensures all personnel working for the service undertake a CRB check every three years.

Through the interviews and questionnaires, prospective adopters, adopters, social workers and higher management said the adoption service is run efficiently and effectively. The management team are approachable, helpful and very knowledgeable. Through the close monitoring of all aspects of adoption work, the team are able to move quickly and in the best interest of children. The Corporate Management Team receives quarterly reports on adoptions of looked after children. A six monthly report is submitted to the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet. The Portfolio Holder has also requested the monthly statistics from the adoption panel.

Staff are extremely well organised and managed efficiently. All are experienced, knowledgeable and build on this through training and the experience within the team. The team as a whole work very well with other staff members from child care teams. The common goal for all is to meet the needs of children.

Through good prioritising and management input from the care manager and the principal social worker, the adoption team covers a vast amount of work. But with the increasing demands of adoption support, more staff will be required in the near future to ensure the high standards are maintained.

Adoption social workers spoke positively about the training opportunities and the good standard of supervision and appraisals they received.

North East Lincolnshire Council has good, up to date accessible policies and procedures for staff.

The adopters' files that were examined would benefit from auditing. Recordings were not always signed by the social worker. Documents were missing, for example, panel minutes and CRB confirmations.

Children's files also need to be audited to eliminate duplication within the file. Some files evidenced mis-spelt children's names and wrong dates of birth for the child.

Notifications to birth parents regarding the adoption panels' recommendations and Decision Makers decision were not evident in the files inspected.

The adoption premises are suitable for the task with good security. Records are appropriately stored, including archive storage, however a risk assessment should be in place for the new archive building.

# 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>	3
<b>9</b>	3

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>2</b>	4
<b>4</b>	2
<b>5</b>	3
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	3
<b>12</b>	3
<b>13</b>	3
<b>15</b>	3
<b>19</b>	3
<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>	4
<b>18</b>	3

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Standard No</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>1</b>	2
<b>3</b>	3
<b>14</b>	3
<b>16</b>	3
<b>17</b>	4
<b>20</b>	4
<b>21</b>	3
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	3
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	3
<b>28</b>	2
<b>29</b>	3
<b>30</b>	N/A
<b>31</b>	N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

N/A

**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	AD13	AA Reg 1983	Birth parents should receive a letter conveying the decision of the agency decision maker.	05/12/05
2	AD1	3	The telephone number of the Children's Rights Director must be in the children's guide as well as the CSCI address.	05/12/05
3	AD25	AA Reg 1983	A risk assessment should be carried out to ensure archived records are fully secured to minimise the risk of damage from fire and water.	07/02/06
4	AD1	2	The statement of purpose must include the adoption service's address.	05/12/05

## 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	AD4	The adoption service should ensure that prospective adopters assessments have all relevant checks to ensure the safety of children.
2	AD11	The adoption panel member's induction training should be recorded.
3	AD28	The recording of CRB checks on personnel files should include status, date, CRB number and the signature of the person clarifying this information.
4	AD7	Birth parents should be asked to sign the Form E or a written explanation provided of why this was not done.
5	AD25	Children's adoption files and prospective/approved adopters' files should be regularly audited.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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