



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

London Borough of Newham Adoption Service

**Placements Services
16 Wordsworth Avenue
Manor Park
London
E12 6SU**

Lead Inspector
Lynn Smith

Announced Inspection
27th September 2005 09:15

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 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

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

Name of service London Borough of Newham Adoption Service

Address Placements Services
16 Wordsworth Avenue
Manor Park
London
E12 6SU

Telephone number 020 8430 2000

Fax number 020 8430 5813

Email address adoption.teamduty@newham.gov.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Newham Social Services

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Jenny Barville

Type of registration Local Auth Adoption Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

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:

Newham is a Borough of London but not classed as part of inner London. It has a high population of children and young people aged between 0 and 24 years. Also the most ethnically diverse population in the country. This diversity is reflected in the range of children and young people needing adoption placements. The service vision is to deliver a service that recognises and is sensitive to the wide diversity of the children's heritages.

The Newham Adoption Service is based in Manor Park in the east of London and consists of nineteen staff posts. The adoption team is split into two groups, recruitment and assessment and adoption support.

SUMMARY

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

This was the first inspection of Newham's Adoption Service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Two inspectors undertook the inspection over three days. The adoption panel was also observed separately.

The manager produced a self-assessment along with supporting documentation. These were received at the start of the inspection fieldwork. Questionnaires were received from four adopters, eight placing social workers, one placing authority, two adoption advisors and one birth family member. The inspectors visited four adopters and read relevant adopters' files and children's files.

Interviews were conducted with a birth mother, the assistant director of children and young people's service, who is also the adoption panel's decision maker, service manager, the councillor who is the portfolio holder for looked after children, the panel chair, team managers, the recruitment and development officer, adoption panel minute taker, a group of placing Social Workers and a group of adoption Social Workers.

What the service does well:

Newham adoption service has been able to recruit prospective adopters from the local community that reflects the wide diversity of cultures and nationalities of the children waiting for adoptive placements. Adopters spoke positively about the service the adoption team has given them. One said, "I feel the preparation group was a great insight to adoption".

Good, up to date policies and procedures are available to all staff to reflect upon and follow. Staff members are committed to improving the quality of the service they provide and are qualified and experienced in the work they undertake.

The staff team spoke very positively about the training opportunities Newham Borough Council has on offer.

The adoption panel is well run, with dedicated members who have a good insight into adoption matters. Consistent consideration is undertaken to ensure the best outcomes for children are achieved.

Staff spoke positively about the specialist advisors available to them and agreed they would pursue re-engaging the psychologist for CAMHS for regular meetings with the team to discuss cases.

A service level agreement is in place to give birth parents independent counselling.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection under the terms of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

What they could do better:

The adoption agency needs to develop a statement of purpose and children's guide to provide thorough and detailed information to staff and users.

There are major staffing issues within the adoption service at Newham. The appointment of an adoption manager to oversee the day-to-day running and monitoring of the agency is imperative. To enable the support service to develop, an adoption support manager is needed. The adoption team needs a permanent management team to raise standards and embrace the new legislation.

Clear written information needs to be available to prospective adopters, inter-country adopters and approved adopters to enable them to make clear decisions about adoption issues and placements.

A strategy needs to be in place to enable support and the giving and receiving of information to take place with birth family members.

A review of records is required to ensure children's, adopters and general service records are up to date, relevant and clearly written.

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 or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

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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)
- 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 & 19

The agency prepares and trains prospective adopters well to meet the diverse and cultural needs of children requiring adoptive placements to ensure appropriate placements are being made and maintained. There is inconsistent practice and the agency must improve its system to ensure there is effective and safe planning for all looked after children and to prevent delays in assessing prospective adopters.

EVIDENCE:

Newham has a large ethnical diverse looked after children population. Recruitment is targeted at the different ethnic communities through specific publications, religious meeting places and social gatherings. The recruitment officer has approached different embassies to gain further information on how to access specific cultures and nationalities and promote adoption to people. The adoption social workers feel the links between the recruitment officer and the team could be strengthened as the adoption team reflect the diversity of the Newham area. Stronger relationships could be built with certain groups within the community that reflect the culture and ethnic origins of many of the children waiting for adoptive placements.

The agency do very well at meeting the ethnic origins and cultural needs of the children. The team are making good placements however, a large number of children are still waiting for adoptive families.

There is evidence of 'drift' where children are kept waiting for long periods prior to placements. The panel being observed raised concerns regarding a best interest decision for a sibling group made twelve months ago which appeared to have been changed without being re-presented to the adoption panel. The manager has taken it upon herself to investigate this case.

The procedures in place to determine how the agency responds to the first contact from prospective adopters are unclear. Delays and lost information have been evidenced. One prospective adopter showed an interest in adoption in Jan 2004, a home visit was not undertaken until July 2004. There are concerns regarding the answering service being used. Prospective adopters and prospective inter-country adopters are not getting relevant information when they make their first contact with the agency. The system of allocating callers must be more robust.

The initial information given to prospective adopters needs to be reviewed. For example it addresses the references and checks that will take place but also needs to indicate that previous children and partners maybe contacted. It must be made clear in the information that the adoption panel recommend and do not approve adopters. Also the role of the National Adoption Register and the Independent Reviewing Mechanism should be explained. Information regarding the process and fees for inter-country adoption needs to be included for inter-country adopters.

Some prospective adopters and adopters said they feel they have received a good service from some of Newham adoption services social workers however not all practice is the same. For example a few said they have had very little contact, they have had to chase social workers and have been let down on a number of occasions. The constant change of social workers has been very difficult and disconcerting for prospective adopters to work with during what is a very personal and often intrusive process. Prospective adopters need to be able to build up a trust and working relationship with the assessing social worker in order to feel safe in sharing personal life histories. Social workers need to make full and detailed assessments in order that children can be matched appropriately to the right carer/s. The practice at the agency lacks a consistent and coherent approach to assessing prospective adopters.

Prospective adopters and adopters spoke positively about the preparation training. One said, "I feel the prep group was a great insight to adoption. The group leaders were fantastic and all the staff put us at ease". Unfortunately one prospective adopter said, " I did not receive preparation training due to me being a foster carer with children in placement. It would

have been useful to have received information in regards to local authority procedures. Have been very disappointed with the service”.

Many prospective adopters were unhappy about the length of time they had to wait for the preparation group. Prospective adopters said that they were not able to speak with adopters at the group.

The standard of the assessments was mixed, with some very good in depth analytical observations as well as unexplored issues.

Good evidenced based references were obtained but theses were lost in some cases by the social workers brief interpretation.

Staff could benefit from refresher training in evidenced based assessments.

Matching reports are presented to panel that address the positives of the match. A support plan could accompany this matching report that would address how the agency would support the placement.

The assessments on children given to prospective adopters must be up to date and contain all relevant information. There was evidence were adopters were not informed about a health matter. Prospective adopters must be informed and given full information about children to enable them to meet the child's needs.

Panel policies and procedures are up to date and relevant.

The panel that was observed was timely and conducted well. The panel chair ensured all members agreed with recommendations made. The panel members asked relevant questions and had clearly read all documentation presented. Due to new legislation coming in to force in the near future, Newham were advertising for an independent panel chair.

The panel do monitor previous cases however a full update should be presented of all children waiting for adoption to ensure no child suffers un-avoidable delays in finding a family.

Panel minutes are of a good standard however do not clearly reflect the reasons for the recommendations. All adoption panel minutes for individual files should identify the panel members present to ensure the panel was quorate.

Children and adopters' files indicate delays have occurred in letters being sent conveying the decision made. These letters indicate that the panel made the decision when in fact it should be the agency decision maker.

Staff have relevant qualifications and some are in the process of achieving their qualification. The adoption team has good experience in all aspects of childcare work.

Policies and procedures are in place for the recruitment of staff but need to indicate that telephone references will be made.

Not all staff had up to date criminal record bureau checks but files indicated that they had been requested. The manager was aware of this situation.

Staff without qualifications said they were supervised directly by qualified senior staff.

Staff feel training is accessible and relevant and are aware they will be attending training on the new legislation.

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 support service needs to be developed to ensure there is a more cohesive and consistent approach available to all adopted families to ensure children are able to fulfil their potential within their adoptive placements.

EVIDENCE:

There have been no permanent adoption support team managers in post since March 2004. This has had an impact on the service available to adopters. The senior practitioners and social worker do not have a full complement of staff so are unable to fulfil the support needs of all the adopters approved by the agency.

Newham adoption service has clear policies and procedures in place for supporting prospective adopters and approved adopters. All staff have access to these on the intranet only. This enables up dates to be made and ensures there are no out of date policies or procedures being followed by agency staff.

Adopters were not sure of the support services Newham offered. One said, "not really heard from our social worker since placement". Another said, "quite difficult in receiving adequate support/guidance".

Some adopters spoke positively about their support package and felt confident that it was flexible to the child's needs. Others had children placed and had no idea of contact arrangements, financial packages or any additional support that may be available to them. The agency need to positively promote in a timely way the range of support services available to adopters to ensure they are fully aware of the services they can access to enable them to continue to provide and maintain placements.

Matching cases that are presented to panel could benefit from including support plans for children, adopters and birth family members. This would prevent situations occurring were children are placed without support plans being in place.

Newham have an agreement with the Post Adoption Centre however very little information was evident of how successful and accessible this service was to adopted families.

Specialist advisors are accessible to child in need and the adoption team. Staff said legal and medical advisors are approachable.

Adoption social workers said that in the past they did have a monthly consultation service where they would be able to discuss any case issues with a psychologist from the CAMHS department. Unfortunately this service was not used to its full potential and consequently stopped. Every effort should be made to reinstate this valuable service that could form part of the adoption support provided by Newham adoption 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

There is a commitment from the adoption agency to provide support services to birth parents to enable them to continue to contribute to their child's future but it is a service that is not sufficiently developed to be effective. This effects the information available to children as they grow up.

EVIDENCE:

Children's social workers said their role is to support birth parents. One said, "The support we give varies". The forms E from the last three months indicate that some birth mothers had been offered counselling but none had taken this up. No Forms E had comments or signatures from birth mothers or fathers, and no explanation why. On case was a relinquished baby but the mother's signature was not on the Form E.

Some Forms E did indicate that documentation had been sent out to birth mothers.

One birth mother felt there was very little information she said, "the process is not explained. I can not access the service until the adoption order is through, then I will be given six sessions".

Newham adoption service does have a 'service level agreement' with 'Adoption support'. The manager said she regularly receives a monitoring report.

Children's social workers said it was difficult to complete life story work for the children due to work pressures and lack of co-operation by birth family members. Some adopters said that foster carers put the storybooks they have together. The adoption agency must be more proactive in involving birth

families, to ensure that they are able to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

When asked how they think the service could improve. One birth family member said, "not all parents lose interest in their children, keep parents properly informed with written information at every step, give regular updates on the children's progress and development".

A strategy needs to be in place to enable support, the giving and receiving of information to take place with birth parents.

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 & 29

The lack of strategic and operational coherence was affecting the staff morale and the ability to manage the work of the adoption service effectively and efficiently.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose needs to be reviewed to include the name and address of the agency, a summary of the complaints procedure, the

Commission for Social Care Inspection address and how Newham adoption service is monitored. The full details of staff experience and qualifications needs to be up dated also past employees need to be removed. Once the review has been finalised, it needs to be ratified by the council.

The children's guide needs to be specific to Newham Adoption Service and include a summary of the statement of purpose. In redrafting the guide it must be made accessible to a range of children with differing needs and abilities.

The initial information packs sent to prospective adopters and inter-country adopters were limited and need to include information on the needs of children who require adoptive families and the fees for inter-country adoption. The information on the assessment process needs to be up dated and include the national adoption register, independent reviewing mechanism and possible checks that maybe required. This knowledge for prospective adopters will enable them to make informed choices.

The agency is in need of a stable social work and management team. The service manager is suitably qualified in both management and working in a childcare setting however, the lack of a permanent adoption team has impacted on the efficient running of the agency and consequently children waiting for and in adoptive placements.

It is a positive move forward that a permanent team manager for the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters has been recently appointed however with no overall adoption manager to oversee the day to day running of the service as a whole and no manager to oversee the support services for adoptive placements, there are great concerns for the overall running of the service and the impact this is having on service delivery. The service manager did inform the inspectors that the present system of one large team with two managers was not proving to be effective. As a result restructuring was imminent.

Previous temporary managers have made changes to the work practice of the social work team. The team appear reluctant to consider any more changes without the security of a permanent management team to follow them through.

The inspection found evidence that there are reporting and monitoring systems in place concerning the management of the adoption service for example reports to the cabinet, reports to the mayor and children's services committee however, the lack of simple systems to control and monitor the day to day business of the adoption service, for example care planning for children and the progressing of assessments in a timely manor means that children are experiencing unnecessary delays. The ethnic diversity of children waiting does give Newham specific challenges in finding adoptive placements for children. The monitoring of children waiting for a placement and those placed awaiting an adoption order could be more robust for example, regularly addressed through the adoption panel to ensure children do not have unnecessary delays and placements receive suitable support.

Staff spoke positively about training and the opportunities Newham has given them, for example three staff members are doing professional training, part time or away on placement. Staff said Newham Borough Council is a good employer with competitive staff incentives. Unfortunately insufficient staffing does impact on the teams' ability to fulfil the adoption task for all children waiting for adoptive placements.

Recording of information needs to follow the agencies policies and procedures. Evidence of crucial documentation missing, mis-filing, not up to date and inconsistent recording practice were found in children's and adopters files. The adoption agency needs to develop a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and take remedial action where necessary. Separate records for complaints and child protection incidents need to be set up to enable regular monitoring by the manager to ensure that themes or trends arising from these matters are used to inform future practice. Personnel files were of a mixed standard. Not all staff had up to date criminal records bureau checks (CRB). Evidence that they been sent for was present. It is strongly recommended that administration staff have CRB checks done as they do have access to sensitive information on children and adoptive placements.

Clear recruitment procedures need to be in place when staff are re-deployed within Newham Borough Council to ensure all references are received and files up dated. All newly recruited staff should have telephone references completed. Adoption panel members' files and locum staff files need to be audited against the requirements for personnel files to ensure children's safety.

The premises used by the adoption team are 'fit for the purpose'. The staff team felt that they have suitable IT equipment and sufficient secure storage for records, however a review of both archived and current records is recommended to minimise the risk of damage from fire and water. Newham Borough Council does have in place a major incident plan. There is also a service continuity plan for placement services. All policies and procedures are produced electronically to ensure all staff are familiar and are able to access up to date policies and procedures.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	1
3	2
14	2
16	1
17	2
20	2
21	2
22	3
23	3
25	2
26	3
27	2
28	1
29	3
30	N/A
31	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	AD1	LAA Reg 2003	The adoption agency must have a written statement of purpose including all matters listed in schedule 1	31/03/06
2	AD1	LAA Reg 2003	The adoption agency must produce a written children’s guide, which includes all the matters listed in schedule 2. The agency must provide a copy of the children’s guide to every prospective adopter with whom the authority has placed a child for adoption and every child who may be placed for adoption by the authority.	31/03/06

3	AD20AD21	LAA Reg 2003	The agency must have sufficient numbers of staff and management, suitably qualified, competent and experienced working for the purpose of the adoption service.	01/06/06
4	AD19	LAA Reg 2003	The adoption agency must ensure that it obtains information required in schedules 3 and 4 for all staff working for the purpose of the adoption service (including all adoption panel members, locums and sessional staff) and that this is maintained on the individuals personnel file.	31/03/06

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	AD3	Clear written information about the law, fees, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters and inter-country adopters should be available at the point of interest from the prospective adopters.
2	AD4	The adoption agency should ensure that prospective adopters are assessed in a sensitive way that addresses the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strength they have or will need to develop.
3	AD5	Approved adopters should be given clear and accurate information about children.
4	AD6	The adoption agency should ensure that it has sufficient resources to fulfil its policies and procedures regarding working with and supporting adopters once they have been approved and had children placed with them.

5	AD7	Birth parents should be asked to sign and comment on the Form E or a written explanation should be provided of why this was not done.
6	AD8	Every effort must be made to obtain appropriate information from the birth parents and birth families for the child.
7	AD17	Rigorous monitoring and controlling of the day-to-day activities of the adoption agency should be undertaken by a adoption manager.
8	AD21	The adoption agency should ensure that where a shortfall in staffing level occurs, there are contingency plans to resolve the situation in the short and long term.
9	AD25	The adoption agency should ensure that a review/assessment is carried out to check the security of case records of children and prospective and approved adopters (both current and archived) records are fully secured to minimise the risk of damage from fire and water.
10	AD27	The adoption agency should ensure that there is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records and that remedial action is taken when necessary.
11	AD27	The adoption agency should ensure that separate records are kept for complaints and allegations.

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