



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Adoption Service**

The Woodlands (FPU)

Manchester Road

Bolton

Lancashire

BL3 2PQ

10th December 2003

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

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

ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

The Woodlands (FPU), Manchester Road, Bolton,
Lancashire, BL3 2PQ

Adoption Service Manager

Mr Nick Robinson

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01204 337480

Address

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Email Address

Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

NA

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

NA

Date of Inspection Visit		10th December 2003	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jayne Ivory	125225
Name of Inspector	2	Patricia McKay	125790
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		None available at this inspection.	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not required.	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Nick Robinson and Paul Biancardi	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

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

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council offers a full range of adoption services through the Family Placement Team. The Principal Officer for Children's Resources, who was directly responsible to the Assistant Director for Children and Families, had overall responsibility for the team. The Assistant Director was the chairperson of the combined Fostering and Adoption Panel at the time of this inspection.

An establishment of two full time managers provided first line management of the Family Placement Team. At the time of the inspection one of the management posts had a part-time vacancy.

Bolton provides the following services for children and adults:

- To match and place children with adopters who can best meet their assessed needs throughout childhood and beyond once adoption has been identified as being in their best interests.
- To prepare children prior to introduction and placement with adopters in an age appropriate way whilst ensuring that the child's own history is understood and preserved.
- To recruit, prepare, assess and approve adoptive applicants who can meet the needs of children needing adoption both locally via the Greater Manchester Consortium and nationally. This includes the recruitment of adopters for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- To provide a range of adoption support services, either directly or through contractual arrangements with other agencies for adopted children and their families. This includes financial support where appropriate.
- To offer a range of services and information to birth parents in order to make effective plans for their children, where adoption has been identified as being in the best interests of their child.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This was the first time that Bolton MBC's Adoption Service had been inspected against Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards. The inspection confirmed that Bolton offers a very good service to children. The authority also offers a good service to prospective adopters and adopters, but has the potential to improve. At the time of the inspection the service was considering the best way to plan for and resource the Family Placement Team for the changes in legislation concerning post-adoption support.

Statement of Purpose

The statement of purpose meets the requirements. Bolton have used the BAAF guide to adoption as their initial children's guide. Further work needs to take place to ensure that the children's guide meets the National Minimum Standards.

Securing and Promoting Children's Welfare

There is a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of recruitment strategies. There is a strong and positive relationship between the adoption and childcare social work teams, which is reflected in the very good practice found during the inspection.

Prospective and Approved Adopters

The adoption service states that it welcomes potential applicants without prejudice. The inspection found that the service could develop their information for adopters to reflect the quality of the work that the team offers.

Adopters and prospective adopters confirmed that there is a formal, thorough and comprehensive preparation and assessment procedure.

Birth Parents and Birth Families

No birth parents were interviewed as part of this inspection, although a number completed and returned their questionnaires. Birth parents confirmed that they were treated fairly by the service and that they were consulted and involved in making plans for their child. The service has an agreement with After Adoption to provide independent support and advice for birth parents. Bolton Adoption Service intend, as a part of their service action plan, to ensure that more birth parents knew about and benefited from the service that After Adoption provides. The service was looking at other ways to support birth parents and birth families at the time of the inspection.

Adoption Panel and Agency Decisions

The panel is properly constituted and comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people. The panel has access to excellent medical and legal advice. A good standard of practice was observed during the observation of the panel, however the service should consider the need for more comprehensive adoption panel meeting minutes to ensure that the reasons for recommendations are well recorded and understood. In addition to this the service may benefit from having a representative from the education department as a panel member.

Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency

All managers of the adoption service are suitably qualified, knowledgeable and experienced. The manager of the service demonstrated strong and effective leadership but must show how they are to meet the National Minimum Standards for NVQ in Management (or equivalent) by 2005.

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency

The service is run in an effective manner, and in accordance with the statement of purpose. The adoption service monitors its activity appropriately, but needs to develop additional policies and procedures in relation to this.

Employment and Management of Staff

All social workers are appropriately qualified and experienced. There are appropriate systems in place to support the effective work of the team. The inspection found evidence of a highly motivated management and staff team. The service has recognised that training needs should be linked more closely to learning and good practice outcomes as part of their own service improvement plan.

Records

There are separate, appropriate records kept for prospective and approved adopters. The service must develop separate adoption case files for each child. The service needs to review its personnel and panel member's records to comply with Regulation 14 (3) (d) of the National Minimum Standards. The inspection confirmed that the post adoption letterbox was managed in excess of the standards and that all other matters regarding the safekeeping of adoption records, including a disaster recovery plan was also of an exceptionally high standard. The hard work and commitment of the social work and administrative staff in ensuring the high standard of all adoption record keeping should be commended.

Fitness of Premises The premises were fit for purpose, appropriately secure and insured.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's adoption service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Please see main body of the report

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

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

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

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3.2 (C)	LA1	Bolton MBC should develop a children's guide for every child (subject to their age and understanding) who may be or who has been placed for adoption by the service.	10.12.04
2	8.2 (d)	LA4	The service must ensure that adopters are given the opportunity to sign an agreement that they waive their rights to consider the assessment over 28 days before their Form F is referred to panel.	10.12.04
3	7.2(a)	LA25	The service must set up and maintain a separate adoption file for the child in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Service Regulations (1983) amended 2003.	10.12.04
4	11.2 (b)	LA28	The service must ensure that if temporary or agency staff are being employed that Bolton must undertake their own Criminal Records Bureau check to meet National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.	10.12.04

5	11.3 (d)	LA28	Full and satisfactory information concerning Panel members, in accordance with Schedule 3 of Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 must be available before they take up their responsibilities as panel members	10.12.04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA4	Social workers should retain copies of the notes collected during the assessment visits on file so that judgements made can be evidenced.
2		The service should develop clearer information for prospective adopters around the issue of their referral to the National Adoption Register.
3		Bolton Adoption Service should amend policy and procedures so Form Fs can be updated to ensure that information for any match reflects the adopter's current situation.
4	LA6	The service should develop their Adoptive Carer Agreement to further define and agree the level of support and contact each prospective adoptive parent requires before the adoption order is made.
5	LA10	The policy and procedures document should be amended to cover all of the points under 10.2 of the National Minimum Standards.
6	LA11	Bolton Adoption Service should ensure that panel members have the opportunity to participate and attend training events, which cover all of the issues listed under 11.4 of the National Minimum Standards.
7	LA12	The minutes of the panel, although concise, should provide a more verbatim account of debates, deliberations and panel recommendations.

8	LA14	Bolton Adoption service should demonstrate how the Team Manager would be supported to attain their NVQ Level 4 in Management or equivalent by April 2005.
9		The service should ensure that records of telephone enquiries on written references are made and recorded on staff personnel files.
10		The service should demonstrate how 20% of staff working within the service would have the PQ Child Care Award by April 2006.
11		The service should ensure that initial enquiries are managed efficiently and effectively, and that telephone receptionists have had some training in managing adoption enquiries.
12		The service should develop a system to address training needs from PDP' s with learning and practice outcomes.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	NO
• Interview with birth family members	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	NA
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	10/12/03
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	72
Number of Inspector days	10
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	NA
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	NA
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	10

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

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

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Bolton's Adoption service has produced a statement of purpose and function that complies with the requirements of Schedule 1, in relation to Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003. The service currently uses the BAAF children's guide, however the management of the service is aware of the need to develop of children's guide for all children for whom the plan is adoption in accordance with National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually?
(Record N/A if the information is not available)

NA

Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?

NO

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?

NO

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The adoption service does have a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

The strategy is found in the Service Improvement Action Plan, which is kept under review.

The relationship between the permanence team and their childcare counterparts was seen to be very positive. Team members from both parts of the service demonstrated knowledge and understanding of each other's roles. Discussions with both teams revealed a constructive and child focused approach to matching issues. The workers in both disciplines took the matching task extremely seriously: "placing a child for adoption is one of the most part challenging and responsible parts of my job" is how one childcare social worker put it.

When children are placed with prospective adopters, reviews are held to monitor the progress of the placement.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

36

How many children were matched with adopters?

33

How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?

2

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

31

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

9

In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families, which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?

33

What percentage of children matched with the adoption service's adopters does this represent?

100

%

How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?

6

How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made about adopters approved by this adoption service?

X

On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?

9

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
<p>Bolton's adoption service has a clear recruitment strategy that can be found in the Improvement Action Plan. The service takes a national, regional and local approach to recruiting prospective adopters, which maintains that potential applicants will be welcomed without prejudice. All information seen as part of the inspection reflects this stance and discussion with approved adoptive parents confirmed this to be the case. Monitoring systems ensure priorities are highlighted.</p> <p>Requests for a service from prospective adopters wishing to adopt a child from overseas are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>The service recognises that the preparation and training for overseas adopters needs to be developed.</p>	3	

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
<p>Discussion with the Family Placement Team Manager, adoption social workers and approved adoptive parents showed the assessment and preparation process to be formal, thorough and comprehensive. Examination of forms F, training and preparation materials, adoptive parents' files, and observation of the family placement panel supported this view. However, it is recommended that social workers retain copies of the notes collected during the assessment visits on file so that judgements made can be evidenced.</p> <p>In addition to this the service must ensure that adopters are given the opportunity to sign an agreement that they waive their rights to consider the assessment over 28 days before their Form F is referred to panel.</p> <p>Evidence of their agreement to sign a waiver should be recorded and kept on the carers file.</p> <p>The service recognises that the preparation and training for overseas adopters needs to be developed.</p>	2	

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Bolton Adoption Service recognises the Adoptive Parent Agreement should be developed to ensure that all adopters have a clear indication of the support they can expect from the service during matching, introduction and placement. Any development of this agreement should also include the need for Form Fs to be updated to ensure that information for any match reflects the adopter's current situation.

The service had clear policies and procedures, which were implemented in practice on disruptions of adoption placements. The service had developed a reciprocal arrangement for the management and chairing of disruption meetings with other partners in the Greater Manchester Consortium.

The service should develop clearer information for prospective adopters around the issue of their referral to the National Adoption Register.

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

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)
Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Key findings and evidence	Standard met?	2
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Discussion with the social work teams indicated that there was a commitment to working together to provide stable and permanent homes for children. The majority of those adopters who expressed a view said that they felt supported and well prepared in advance of a child being placed with them.

There was a small minority who did not think this was the case, and who cited difficulties associated with being kept informed about the progress of their cases as the main cause for their concerns.

The service should develop their Adoptive Carer Agreement to further define and agree the level of support and contact each prospective adoptive parent requires before the adoption order is made.

The service was aware that services should be developed to meet the needs of children and adopters post adoption.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	15	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	17	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	2	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	10	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	16	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	2	

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
<p>Bolton Adoption service recognises the lifelong implications of adoption and seeks to support Birth parents in making effective plans for their children. One birth parent commented, that although they did not agree with the plan for adoption, that the service had treated them fairly and that they had been consulted and involved throughout their child's adoption. Papers submitted to panel will have been read by birth parents, who have the opportunity to comment.</p> <p>Bolton commissions After Adoption to provide independent social work services for birth parents but had recognised that this service needed to be developed.</p>	3	

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
<p>Through out the inspection there was evidence that Birth Parents were encouraged to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage. The reading of files and case tracking interviews confirmed that the service ensured that information for children from their birth parents and families was preserved and maintained.</p> <p>Childcare social workers confirmed that despite the difficulties for birth parents in working with social services that some effective work could be undertaken at the conclusion of legal proceedings. Letters on file and comments from birth parents confirmed this.</p>	3	

Standard 9 (9.1)

The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Bolton Adoption Service provided evidence of some good practice concerning work with birth parents. The social workers within the Family Placement Team support Birth Parents to participate in post adoption contact through the letterbox system. The service, as has already been mentioned, commissioned After Adoption to provide independent support and social work advice to birth families.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The Bolton Adoption and Fostering Panel was observed as part of the inspection. It has a dual function, however the inspectors only observed the adoption business on the panel. The policy and procedures document should be amended to cover all of the points under 10.2 of the National Minimum Standards.</p> <p>Prospective adopters were encouraged to attend the panel and panel members were given the opportunity to consider the implications of attendance before the policy was introduced. The panel had developed a poster to inform applicants of the appearance, role and responsibilities of each panel member. The poster included a brief professional and personal history of panel members. The Inspector's commend this thoughtful approach to applicants and consider that the poster could be developed into a leaflet, which could be sent out to applicants before they attended panel.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)
 The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Bolton Adoption Panel was properly constituted and comprises qualified and experienced people. The Inspector’s recommend that the managers of the service consider how the involvement of a representative from Bolton’s Education Service would assist panel in their recommendations.

New panel members received induction training and have the opportunity to observe panel prior to commencement. The panel also receives regular and frequent half days’ training. Bolton Adoption Service should ensure that panel members have the opportunity to participate and attend training events, which cover all of the issues listed under 11.4 of the National Minimum Standards. Additional training and updates for panel are provided at the end of business.

At the time of the inspection, there was evidence that panel members had signed a confidentiality agreement. The Criminal Records Bureau had cleared all panel members.

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

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)
 Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Bolton’s Fostering and Adoption panel meets monthly and considers the avoidance of unnecessary delay for children as a high priority. Panel members receive the papers one week prior to the panel date to prepare for panel business. Extra panels could and had been arranged to avoid unnecessary delay for a child.

The effectiveness of panel was borne out during the inspection. From the observation of the panel it was clear that each panel member had carefully considered all papers. Discussion was seen to extremely child-focused and very sensitive to all involved. Questions were insightful and carefully put.

The minutes of the panel, although concise, should provide a more verbatim account of debates, deliberations and panel recommendations.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The Director of Social Services takes the agency decision. It is usually made within three working days of the panel's recommendations, and follows a meeting between the director and the panel chair.

Systems are in place for the oral relaying of decisions by and to the appropriate people. The Inspectors found evidence on all files of approved adopters that the agency decision had been communicated in writing to the applicants within the statutory timescale.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All managers of the adoption service were suitably knowledgeable, experienced and qualified for the task.

However the Adoption service should demonstrate how the Team Manager would be supported to attain their NVQ Level 4 in Management or equivalent by April 2005.

From discussion with the adoption service social workers and the childcare workers, the manager of the service demonstrated strong and effective leadership of the staff and operation.

There is an open door policy and several staff spoke of being able to seek advice at any time.

The Inspection found considerable evidence of effective working relationships between the Family Placement and childcare social workers.

The team manager and service manager have clear written job descriptions, which clearly identified their duties, responsibilities and level of delegation.

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

NO

Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?

YES

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The manager of the service was confirmed at the time of the inspection as suitable to work in an agency concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

The manager has an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure and the Team had developed a system to ensure that Criminal Records Bureau checks were renewed every three years in line with National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The adoption agency was managed effectively and efficiently at the time of the inspection. The managers ensured that the service was run in accordance with the Statement of Purpose. Roles were clearly defined and communication within the service was good. All staff within the Family Placement Team understood whom they are accountable to. Discussion with staff confirmed this. The Family Placement Team managers deputise for one another and co-ordinate leave arrangements accordingly. The service manager provides additional support and guidance for the team managers and social work staff. There is regular supervision of staff at all levels of the service. Anti-discriminatory practice is addressed and monitored in several ways, including in the Statement of Purpose, supervision and training.

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

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

X

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)
There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The adoption service monitors its performance in several ways including the supervision of staff, file audits and quality assurance checks on files every three months. The service provides quarterly reports on performance in addition to an Annual Report to the Council's Executive, the Director of Social Services and the Assistant Director of Children's and Families Services.

Although there are some written procedures, it is recommended that these be extended to cover all monitoring and controlling activity. The adoption agency uses the Form H to monitor and control any inter-agency financial arrangements.

How frequently does the executive side of the council receive written reports on the work of the adoption service?

Monthly?	
Quarterly?	YES
Less than Quarterly?	

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)
The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The adoption service has access to excellent specialist advisors and services. The medical advisor is a member of the fostering and adoption panel. The legal advisor ensures that panel members receive up to date information on adoption issues.

The service has access to other sources of specialist advice, however there are no written policies and procedures for staff to follow. It is recommended that this be corrected.

The adoption service should set out a written protocol governing the roles of specialist advisers.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

All social workers are professionally qualified. Two of the social workers hold the PQ1 award. By April 2006 20% of the social workers should hold the full PQCC award and the service should demonstrate how they will meet this Standard in the Action Plan.

From discussion with managers, staff and approved adopters as well as examination of relevant files and training materials, social workers were seen to have appropriate knowledge and skills in relation to adoption work. There is access to appropriately qualified and experienced advisors as necessary.

Bolton's Adoption Service must ensure that all staff employed to work for the adoption agency on a temporary or sessional basis have a satisfactory standard or enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau.

In addition to this the service should ensure that records of telephone enquiries on written references are made and recorded. This standard is cross-referenced with Standard 28 Personnel Files for Members of staff and members of the adoption panel.

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

YES

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

10

%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)**Staff are organised and managed in a way, which delivers an efficient and effective service.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Bolton's adoption service is managed in a way that enables an effective service. There are appropriate systems in place and a highly motivated, knowledgeable and experienced management and staff team. Administrative staff were efficient, courteous and friendly. The inspection found some evidence that making initial contact with the adoption service could be frustrating. When the team moves to a new building the service should ensure that receptionists have some training in forwarding telephone messages and enquiries to the adoption team.

Once a message or enquiry had "got through" the receptionists, the team dealt with enquiries promptly. A number of the social workers in the Family Placement Team expressed concern about inputting information concerning an enquiry or application on to the services client information system. Despite the best efforts of the manager to provide information on inputting, the service should provide all staff within the Family Placement Team with access to additional training and ongoing support to ensure their competence and confidence in managing enquiries and inputting data.

The Family Placement Team were in the process of considering a team restructuring at the time of the inspection. The managers and staff had consulted at length and had concluded that the team would have to be developed into separate fostering and adoption teams if they were to meet the challenges of new legislation and National Minimum Standards.

If the service decides to implement these changes the Inspectors would recommend that the adequacy of staffing and administrative support for the adoption team is discussed and kept under review.

This issue should also be addressed in the next standard.

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)
There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Family Placement Team was carrying one part time manager’s vacancy at the time of the inspection. There was little evidence that this had impacted on the quality of work of the adoption team at the time of the inspection.

The service had employed agency staff when necessary, however the service were in the process of reviewing staffing roles and numbers for the adoption service given the need to develop post adoption services.

The managers of the adoption service will review the adequacy of staffing, including administrative support as part of the overall effectiveness and development of the service. See Standard 20.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	10	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	1
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	1		

Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)
The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council has sound employment practices. Staff had been given information on the whistle blowing policy, and were aware of how to implement the policy if required.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)		
There is a good quality-training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>All staff have a Personal Development Plan (PDP), Bolton were in the process of reviewing their training plans in light of the changing legislation and the planned changes in the structure of the team. In acknowledgement of the specialist work involved in adoption, staff confirmed that they attended a number of external training and consortium events.</p> <p>There was evidence of staff having attended a variety of training events during the twelve months prior to the inspection.</p> <p>The Inspection found evidence that the service should develop a system to address training needs from PDP' s with learning outcomes.</p>		

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)		
The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
<p>Bolton Adoption Service ensures that comprehensive and accurate records are kept for prospective and approved adopters. The service has a policy of not creating a separate adoption file for the child. The manager advised the inspectors that it was their responsibility to check the contents of the adoption file before a child could access it. The Inspectors consider that the service must set up and maintain a separate adoption file for the child in line with National Minimum Standards and Adoption Service Regulations (1983) amended 2003.</p>		

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)
The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The adoption service provides relevant information to other adoption agencies at the earliest, appropriate opportunity.
 Bolton has a clear and well-understood system for authorising the access to adoption case records and their indexes and for authorising disclosure of adoption information in line with Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)
There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There is a written policy on case recording, a copy of which was supplied to the inspectors. No one outside of the adoption service can gain official access to any records relating to children and prospective adopters unless the team manager gives permission. All forms F that leave the adoption service are clearly marked indicating that they are confidential documents. Separate records are kept for staff, complaints and allegations. The team manager signs case files in supervision and the quality assurance checks on files and on the contents of supervision are completed on a regular and frequent basis.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)
Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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The inspection of Staff Files confirmed that there were comprehensive files with all the necessary checks and references completed.
 Personnel files at the time of the inspection did not have a record of written references being followed up by telephone enquiries, although the Team Manager advised that this system was in place.
 Whilst the service may have developed two systems, the service must ensure staffing records meet National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 across the board. The Team Manager advised that there was a system in place within the team to renew police checks every three years via supervision. However this information must be cross-referenced with central staff records held by Bolton's Human Resources Service.
 The service must also ensure that if temporary or agency staff are being employed that Bolton must undertake their own Criminal Records Bureau check to meet National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

Examination of Panel member's files confirmed that confidentiality agreements were in place, however some panel members were going through the process of Criminal Records

Bureau checks at the time of the inspection. Panel member's files must be brought in line with National Minimum Standards and Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 as part of the services Action Plan.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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There are identifiable office premises to which staff and others with a legitimate interest have access during normal office hours.

The service has excellent provision for the secure storage of adoption records, which are safe from fire and flood. All adoption records are put onto microfiche. The service has developed a disaster recovery plan, which includes the provision of premises and safeguarding of records.

The IT system is backed up at HQ. The premises were secure and were insured appropriately.

The inspectors were impressed by all aspects of records, including the management and ownership of the post box system which was set up and maintained in excellent order and which exceeded National Minimum Standards.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Local authority manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 10 December 2003 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible
Details available on file kept at the North West CSCI Regional Office

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

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

YES

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the local authority adoption manager, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 7 July 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Lynne Jones of Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name L L Jones
Signature _____
Designation Assistant Director
Date 23.7.04

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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