



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Reading Borough Council Adoption Service

**Children and Families
Civic Centre
Reading
RG1 7TD**

Lead Inspector
Rosie Dancer

Announced Inspection
30th October 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
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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	Reading Borough Council Adoption Service
Address	Children and Families Civic Centre Reading RG1 7TD
Telephone number	0118 939 0900
Fax number	0118 939 0939
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Reading Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Sandi Dopson
Type of registration	Local Auth Adoption Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: N/A

Date of last inspection Key inspection carried out 9/03/04
Random inspection carried out 11/11/05

Brief Description of the Service:

Reading Borough Council's adoption service is managed within Reading's Children's services. The agency undertakes to find suitable permanent substitute families for children who are unable to live within their birth parents.

The team consists of a full time manager (the post holder was an agency member of staff), a part time assistant team manager (30 hours), a full time post adoption worker, a full time family finder (the post holder had left and a new worker had been appointed but had not commenced work), a full time senior practitioner and two social workers, one working 30 hours per week and the other full time. The main business of the team is the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopters, matching children with adopters and providing some support to families following placement. The agency also undertakes some birth records counselling for people affected by adoption

Reading does not undertake inter country adoption work at this time; all people wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to a local Voluntary Adoption Agency that specialises in this work.

The agency is a member of the Berkshire Adoption Consortium. This is a joint arrangement set up in 1998 and funded by Reading Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The consortium services the adoption panel. The consortium recruits and trains adoption panel members.

The consortium also runs a post adoption forum, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) with representatives from each council. The services provided through this arrangement include:

- Specialist advice and training on adoption matters for adopters and staff
- An independent service to birth parents
- The management of the letter box and direct contact arrangements
- Local support groups for birth parents
- The management of adoption exchange events through which children are matched with families
- The management of the adoption archive
- The organisation an adopter's conference, life appreciation days and disruption meetings.

SUMMARY

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

This is the second inspection of the adoption service provided by Reading Borough Council. Prior to the inspection fieldwork taking place supporting documentary evidence, including policies and procedures, were sent to and read by the lead inspector. Questionnaires were received from two birth family member, 10 approved adopters, 2 placing social workers, 2 placing authorities, and 2 specialist advisers.

Two inspectors spent three working days each in the agency. An inspection of the fostering service by a CSCI inspector was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the adoption service.

The inspection activity included:

Interviews with five sets of adopters, two in person and three over the phone
Interview with an elected member of the council
Interviews with key managers and staff
The panel was observed; the chairperson was interviewed over the phone
A selection of files were read during the course of the inspection.
The premises were also inspected.

The views of adopters expressed through questionnaires and verbally are incorporated into the main body of this report.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation during the inspection and the hard work that they put in when organising both the pre-inspection material and the inspection programme. The openness and helpfulness of staff at all levels enabled the inspection to be carried out efficiently and effectively.

What the service does well:

The preparation group sessions were well received by adopters. One adopter stated the sessions were "fabulous", a second adopter stated that the sessions were "interesting and the facilities were good."

It was noted that there was a clear matching process in place and some good examples of detailed adopter assessments were noted.

The arrangements for the approval of adopters provided adopters with an opportunity to be fully involved in the process, the panel was competently chaired and panel members diligent in their role.

The quality assurance role of panel had been well developed and feedback from panel to the agency ensured that social workers and managers had an accurate record of the things that need to be addressed.

The range of training and support offered to adopters by the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) enhanced the in house support offered from staff in Reading. One adopter described the post adoption support service as "excellent" and a second adopter stated that they had received a "very good (post adoption) service from Reading"

The post adoption support worker follows up all adoptive placements a year after the adoption order has been granted to find out how the child has settled and to identify any unmet needs. This proactive approach is good practice as it allows for support plans to be amended if needed in a timely way.

There is a good range of specialist advice available to advise staff and adopters prior, during and after placement.

The service to birth families is well established.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The appropriate people are informed in writing of the agency decision in a timely way.

Adoption files for children are set up and overall contain the required information.

The agency has developed a written procedure for staff that covers arrangements for the use of services provided by the Adoption Register.

There is now a disaster recovery plan in place.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to develop a clear written recruitment strategy to recruit those adopters most likely to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.

The agency needs to ensure that formal applications to adopt are made by adopters prior to the preparation and assessment processes commencing.

The agency needs to urgently ensure that CP procedures are initiated in all cases where there is a potential child protection issue and that all staff are clear about their responsibilities in such cases.

The agency needs to further develop the staff recruitment policy and procedures and ensure that all staff working for the purpose of the adoption agency have undergone a full range of checks prior to them commencing work.

The agency must ensure that the manager of the service is an employee of the authority and that the overall arrangements for the management of the service and the organisation of staff are secured on a permanent basis.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csi.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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):

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

The preparation, assessment and approval processes were overall adequate and aimed at achieving safe, secure and stable placements for children. However, there were some serious shortfalls identified in safeguarding practices that did not ensure that all children were safe

EVIDENCE:

The agency did not have a written requirement strategy in place to ensure that recruitment is focused on recruiting adopters who are most likely to meet the needs of children for whom the plan is or likely to be adoption. The agency needs to develop a strategy which is child focused and subject to regular evaluation and review. This proactive approach would ensure that resources are used to maximise the availability of adopters most likely to meet the needs of children waiting for an adoptive placement. The agency may like to consider involving the consortia members in this piece of work.

There is a full time family finder post, the post holder had recently left but was continuing some work in respect to a specific child. A new person had been appointed to the post and was due to commence work in early January 2007. The family finder role is to find adopters for all children needing an adoptive

placement. The post holder could be significant in contributing to the development and monitoring of a recruitment strategy.

There is a system in place to prioritise the preparation and assessment of enquirers when it seems they may have the potential to parent children who have more complex needs; this could be usefully incorporated into a recruitment strategy.

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

The agency runs a programme of preparation. These are run over three and a half days and are run three times a year. Each programme is subject to evaluation and review and change and adopters are involved in this process.

Sessions included opportunities for adopters to meet with current adopters and adoptee; some adopters commented how useful this had been in developing their understanding about the life long implications of adoption.

Other comments about the preparation sessions made by adopters were:

- "They were fantastic"

And

- "We felt well prepared"

Some adopters expressed dissatisfaction about what they described as delays at various stages of the preparation and assessment processes. As these were responses from questionnaires which are completed anonymously it was not possible to fully explore this.

The agency was accepting applications from adopters after the preparation courses. Formal applications must be made prior to the formal preparation and assessment process commencing.

Some excellent examples of assessment reports in respect to adopters were noted. Reading is using a comprehensive competence based assessment process. The process focuses on the adopters parenting capacity and ability to meet the needs of the children awaiting adoption and reports clearly showed the capacity of the applicants to parent a child who may have had adverse early experiences. Second opinion visits are carried out; this allows for any gaps or matters for clarification in reports to be addressed.

From the files sampled the inspectors concluded that a range of checks are carried out including an enhanced CRB check in the majority of cases. However, in two cases, the following shortfalls were noted:

- A check had not been positive and the proper system had not been used for signing off this check.
- An assessment was presented to the panel prior to a satisfactory check having received in respect to an adopter. Panel rightly deferred this case.

In neither of the above cases had children been placed with the adopters concerned.

It also needs to be ensured that in every case:

- The employment history for adopters needs to include months in every case to allow any gaps in employment to be fully explored.
- The health and safety checklist would benefit from the inclusion of an assessment of the safe storage of guns or other dangerous weapons and the risk to small children from any hanging cords on window blinds.

Two adopters stated on questionnaires that in their view the matching processes in Reading were not robust. It was not possible to explore the issues further as questionnaires are completed anonymously. All of the other evidence showed that the matching processes in Reading were thorough and that the agency was clearly committed to ensuring that children are appropriately matched with adopters who are likely to be able to meet their needs into adulthood and beyond.

Adopters are provided with information about the matching process. Where adopters are being considered for a specific child the arrangements for providing adopters with full information about the child and his needs are thorough and are well established. These include:

- The child's permanence report is given to adopters; this details the child's history and needs
- A meeting between the adopters, the family finder and the child's social worker is held to discuss the child and his needs
- An opportunity to meet with the medical adviser
- A life appreciation day is held in respect to older children. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity for adopters to meet with professionals who have worked with the child and information about the child and his history to be shared
- There is a formal information giving meeting and an adoption placement planning meeting held.
- Adopters are provided with a copy of the adoption placement report, to which they will have had an input.

Children are informed about their adoptive family through a book of information compiled by the prospective adopters. Social workers will work through this book with children in preparation for the introduction and placement processes.

The adoption panel for Reading, the West Berkshire panel, is a joint panel with two other agencies and is managed and administrated by the consortium. The panel is properly constituted as a joint panel, meets monthly and dates are set well in advance. Additional panel dates can be arranged if needed to avoid delays for children and adopters. The panel has access to medical and legal advice. The medical advisor will meet with adopters to discuss medical implications for the child.

Prospective adopters are given the opportunity to attend panel at the point of approval. Adopters attend all of the discussions excepting where the panel makes its recommendation. This transparent approach to the approval of adopters is good practice. It was stated that consideration was being given to extending the invitation to include attendance at the matching panel; this would consolidate further practice in this area.

There is a "panel member" book, which is shown to adopters, and this provides them with basic information about each panel member. Adopters are asked to complete a questionnaire after attendance about their experience of attending panel and are invited to comment if the experience could have been improved.

A panel was observed as a part of the inspection. The panel was well chaired by an experienced independent professional. The discussion was thorough and all members were given the opportunity to contribute. The professional advisor in attendance was clear in her advice to panel. Panel members had received training and were clearly committed in their role.

Panel addressed quality assurance issues in the paperwork under discussion, as well as the issues surrounding each case. This was recorded in written form to be sent to the agency. This in turn assists the quality assurance process and ensures that social workers and managers have an accurate record of the issues that need to be addressed. The information recorded also included compliments about examples of good practice.

Papers were circulated well in advance of the meeting and the minutes were clear and informative. Each consortium member is provided with the extracts from the full minutes that relate to the agency. These extracts did not include a list of attendees and it would be good practice to ensure that this is added. This would inform adoptees who may read their file at a later date about who sat on the panel and made the recommendation that they should be placed for adoption.

The files of four panel members were looked at during the inspection. The files were of a good standard and contained all of the elements required in the regulations. The files detailed training undertaken by panel members. The advisory service facilitated a series of core training courses each year for staff and panel members. This included panel induction, an update course and legal

training for panel members. Where panel member's qualifications have been viewed it would be good practice for it to be recorded who had viewed the evidence.

The decision making process in Reading seemed efficient. The decision maker receives all of the paperwork before panel. She gets the minutes usually by the following day and makes her decisions based on all of the available information. The decision maker stated that the arrangements for the administration of panel are excellent.

The relevant people are informed about the decision made in a timely way. For children the panel chair has developed a "panel certificate" which can be included in the life story work with the child.

The manager of the adoption and fostering service was employed by an agency. This does not comply with the adoption agency regulations that do not allow for a person other than an officer of the authority to hold this position. The records kept in respect to the recruitment of the manager to her post do not evidence that a clear, thorough and robust process has taken place.

There is a Reading Borough Council recruitment policy and procedure in place. This does not meet the needs of the adoption agency. For example:

- There are no details for verifying references
- There is no requirement about enhanced CRB checks having been satisfactorily completed prior to the commencement of employment
- There are no details for the arrangements for verifying qualifications.

The personnel files for four staff members, including the manager were viewed. There were some gaps in the two permanent members files. For example for one member of staff there was no evidence that references had been verified and for the other member of staff her employment history did not include months of employment. More concerning was the file viewed for an independent worker which had a significant number of gaps.

The agency has in place an updated set of child protection procedures. These include a section about children placed for adoption and a section about historical abuse.

During the course of the inspection it was noted that a potential child protection issue had not been identified as such and as a result the child protection procedures had not been invoked. It was also identified that a key member of staff who was asked about historical abuse allegations did not know there was a procedure in place in respect to these. These issues clearly raise concerns about how effectively the safety and well-being of children is being assured and this needs to be urgently addressed including training in the CP procedures.

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):

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

A clear strategic approach is taken to the provision of the support service. The practice seen was overall of a good quality and the support provided to adoptive families has contributed to the stability of placements.

EVIDENCE:

Support to adopters and adoptees was being provided in conjunction with the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS) and support was being delivered on a shared basis across the Berkshire Unitary Authorities.

Some detailed adoption support plans were viewed and adopters had clearly been involved in the development of the plans.

There was a useful booklet for adopters that provided information about a range of issues such as preparing for a child to join their family and what happens when the child joins their family. The booklet also contained details about the services available within the consortium and nationally.

Adopters received three years paid membership of Adoption UK

There is post approval training for adopters for example the BAAS provide sessions about contact issues such as the letterbox service and sessions about explaining adoption to children. There was also a session for the friends and families of adopters which were aimed at raising their awareness and understanding about issues which may arise for the adoptive family.

Reading had established an adopters support group and a group for adopted children. The group for children was open for referrals from adoptees across the consortium.

The support group for adoptees had been filmed, with the attendees' permission, on one occasion and was being shown to adopters to raise their understanding about how the "adoptive situation" feels for the children involved; this is good practice.

An annual adopters conference, day out for children and a regular newsletter were also provided.

There was also a "buddy system" in place which links adopters who have similar experiences such as adopting a large sibling group. This is a good means of support for some adopters.

The agency employs an adoption support worker. This worker makes contact with all adopters, a year after the adoption order has been granted, to establish how the placement has gone and identify any areas which may require some support. One adopter clearly stated that this visit had helped them to feel able to go back and ask Reading for help when they needed to.

This worker had also set up a parenting support network that provides adopters with the opportunity to discuss with other adopters any issues or problems they were experiencing. There was also a comprehensive reference library from which adopters could borrow books and videos on a range of subjects to further develop their knowledge and understanding about issues they are or may encounter.

There is a daily duty system in place whereby adopters can contact the adoption team for advice during office hours Monday to Friday.

There had been no placement disruptions of Reading children in the twelve months preceding the inspection. In the event of a disruption the BAAS manage and arrange a disruption meeting.

The medical adviser to panel was highly respected; she meets adopters and all children. One adopter stated that the medical adviser had been very helpful and a number of social workers made similar comments about the service provided.

There were some difficulties on occasion reported in respect of medicals being requested at a late stage by social workers. This had led to difficulties in the preparation of a written report to panel in a timely way.

The legal advice provided was described as good, the legal adviser is accessible and either attends panel or on occasions where this is not possible reads the papers and provides advice where there are any contentious issues.

The agency has access to educational advice and it was reported that where children need to change schools, for example due to placement location this is well planned and supported.

The agency also has access to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health services. This was reported a good resource in terms of supporting placements and advising social workers in various areas of the adoption work. However, there were reports from some social workers that this service could be difficult to access on occasion. This situation will need careful monitoring to ensure that all children and families needing a service can access this in a timely way.

There are also good links with the designated nurse for looked after children and an educational adviser.

The specialist advice and support services provided by the adoption advisory service were central to achieving good outcomes for adopted children in Reading.

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):

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

The service to birth families is well established and although there are some areas needing some attention the service provided in conjunction with BAAS was noted as being sensitive and geared towards birth family members needs.

EVIDENCE:

The service to birth parents was provided by BAAS across the six unitary authorities. This ensured that birth parents were provided with a service that was independent of the agency for their child. This arrangement was well established and had been in operation since 2002.

The service had developed comprehensive written information for birth parents, detailing clearly the range of services provided. This information was easily available for social workers to pass on to birth families.

During the previous year, nineteen birth parents had been referred to the independent service from Reading. There had been a fifty five per cent success rate in making contact with those referred from the six authorities in the current year. This was down from the seventy five per cent reported in the previous year. Reasons why this drop has occurred have been considered and the situation is being monitored.

There was a birth mothers support group. This was organised and run jointly by a worker and a birth mother. A leaflet about this group was available for social workers to pass on to birth mothers.

The referral system for parents to be referred to BAAS seemed to work effectively.

The letterbox and direct contact service was managed by the BAAS. There were seventy one children originating from Reading with letterbox exchanges in the previous year. There were four children originating from Reading involved in direct contact arrangements in the previous year. These services helped birth family members to continue to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

The adoption advisory service had a system was in place gather the views of birth parents on all aspects of the services provided. This was used to inform the service development.

In respect to the work that Reading carried out in involving birth families in the adoption process the findings were as follows.

It was noted on all of the reports about children viewed that birth parents views had been recorded and that reports had been written in a sensitive way.

There was less evidence to show that parents have the opportunity to read the contents of the reports. The agency needs to ensure that clear records are kept where a birth parent has read or declined to read what has been written about them.

There was evidence noted that parents were encouraged by children's social workers and BAAS to contribute towards the development of life story work and life story books.

However, there were two cases noted where adopters were waiting for life story work, to be completed before they were prepared to put in their application to adopt. In one of these cases it was reported that the child had arrived in the home with a carrier bag of photographs and these was described as his lifestory work. This is clearly very unsatisfactory and the agency needs to develop a robust system to monitor the quality and timeliness of all life story work.

As stated in the previous section of this report the agency employs an adoption support worker who works with adopters and adopted children but also works with adult adoptees. Post adoption support in Reading does not include a tracing service but the worker does hold a "tracing workshop" for adoptees to inform them about the various means for tracing birth family members.

This worker also carries out the birth records counselling work. There is a useful pack provided to people who request a counselling service and as far as it could be established this was carried out in a sensitive way.

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):

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

The temporary nature of the management team, some of the current management practices and style and the uncertainties about future management arrangements were beginning to impact adversely on the morale of staff and the effectiveness and efficiency of some aspects of the adoption service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a statement of purpose in place. This document sets out the work the agency undertakes, is subject to review and has been approved by the executive. Some amendments are needed to ensure the statement contains all required information as set out in Schedule 1 of the Adoption Service Regulations 2003.

There was a children's guide developed by the advisory service; this was attractively presented. The guide needs to be reviewed to ensure children had information about the Children's Rights Director and the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

All of the above information needs to include the address for the CSCI adoption team in Manchester.

The agency has developed an information pack for prospective adopters; this is in need of some minor review and update. The post approval packs provided to adopters who have been approved provided good information about the processes post approval and the adoption support services. Adopters were well informed about the types of needs children needing an adoptive placement are likely to have through the preparation groups and through national publications which detail specific children waiting for an adoptive family.

At the time of the inspection the arrangements for the adoption service were in the process of review. The interim service manager of the adoption team was skilled, experienced and knowledgeable. At the time of the last inspection she was the nominated manager for the adoption and fostering service. Two people on a job share arrangement undertook the role of head of service. Their employment was temporary, having been brought in to head children's services due to difficulties in recruiting to the post. The nominated manager for the service at the time of the inspection was an agency employee. This is not appropriate for this position as legislation requires that an officer of the local authority manages the agency. The nominated manager had limited experience in adoption work but did have previous management experience. The assistant team manager supervises the social work practice; the post holder is the only member of the management team in a permanent post. A group of social workers commented:

- "The process has taken too long....too many interim managers."

The temporary nature of the management team was commented upon by staff in all teams as having created a culture of uncertainty and lack of confidence in the management and development of the service was expressed by them. One group of workers commented:

- "Moral is not good, we do not know what will happen."

Another group of workers asked the question

- “Who is investing in the service development?”

At the time of the inspection there was uncertainty about the final management structure for the service and although staff had been consulted about this most felt that the consultation processes had been unnecessarily complex and had felt unable to respond.

One worker commented:

- “ The information during the consultation period has been very complex....very difficult for people to comment”

It is essential that the arrangements for the management of the agency on a permanent basis are secured as a matter of urgency to ensure that all aspects of adoption work are effective and efficient and that development of the services are assured.

Social Work staff reported that they felt a level of confidence in their immediate managers who were described as approachable; in respect to more senior managers staff overwhelmingly expressed the view that they were ‘distant’ and that they felt unable to approach them with any difficulties they may be experiencing.

Staff reported that support to them by their immediate managers and peers was good. Support included supervision, both formal and informal, team meetings, and a good level of peer support.

There are procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the agency. These include staff supervision, team meetings, management information systems and management meetings.

The lead councillor for children’s services demonstrated an enthusiasm and commitment to adoption. He is kept informed of the operation of the agency through regular meetings with senior managers and through the receipt of statistical information on a regular basis. Full reports about the various aspect of the adoption work are prepared by the local authority and BAAS; these are presented to the Council.

The organisation of staff involved in adoption work was under review. Issues raised by staff and adopters which need to be addressed include:

- The workload management system which was described as unworkable for some teams
- The staffing levels within the administrative team

- Unqualified workers carrying out tasks which should only be undertaken by qualified workers on the childcare teams
- The use of independent workers to out assessments with cases then being handed over to another worker at the point of approval by panel. (Four adopters expressed disappointment about having a change in social worker following the approval process. Comments were made such as “we don’t feel that our new worker really knows us” and “our worker should have continued until the match.”)
- The referral systems within the children’s teams were not always satisfactory. For example one case was noted where a child had been distressed by a change in worker four months into placement

In respect to the social work staff there was clearly a good level of knowledge and experience in adoption matters both within the adoption and fieldwork teams. Social workers showed a high level of commitment to ensuring good stable placements were made for children.

Adopter’s comments about social workers were mixed. Positive comments included:

“ Social worker was a tower of strength”

And

“Social worker always there to help out. Staff are unfailingly helpful and courteous.”

However, some adopters were less satisfied with one adopter commenting:

“Social worker never arrives on time, there is lots of sickness....things only get done when a deadline needs meeting.”

Staff reported that the training opportunities were satisfactory, it was noted that Reading supports workers to study for a social work qualification and there is a PQ programme in place. However, time to carry out this can be problematic for some workers. Training in the CP procedures is needed for all staff on a rolling basis.

Case files for adopters and children were noted as being well ordered and overall were comprehensive. A few shortfalls were noted in some documents having not been signed and adoption files did not include copies of life storybooks. It would also be of benefit to keep on adopters’ files the notes made during assessment visits to ensure that all discussions with adopters can be evidenced. One adoption support file was viewed; this did not have any evidence to show the decisions made by the social workers supervisor.

There was a clear access to records policy and procedure document that was in the process of being updated in line with new legislation.

Adoption records were archived in Reading in the Berkshire Records Office. This was organised and managed by the adoption advisory service and ensured that records were stored securely and safely for the future.

There is a file audit system in place. It was noted that files viewed had been subject to audit prior to the inspection by the assistant team manager; it would be good practice for another manager to audit files; this would ensure a level of independence in the audit process.

Personnel files viewed did not evidence that a robust recruitment process had taken place in every case; a requirement has been made in respect to this.

The agency operates from premises which are in the centre of Reading and are open during normal office hours. There were good security arrangements in place. The IT system was secure and backed up at the end of each day. The IT systems did not incorporate an adoption module but one was in the process of developed with a plan to introduce this in April 2007.

While there were no interview facilities in the premises there was access to interview rooms in another council office that was located centrally. The agency, in conjunction with BAAS, had developed a disaster recovery plan which provides for the continuation of the adoption work in the event of an emergency situation.

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	1
4	2
5	3
10	3
11	4
12	4
13	3
15	1
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	4
18	3

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	AD4	AAR 2005 25 5 (d)	The manager must ensure that CRB certificates are obtained for adopters and are satisfactory in every case before presentation to the adoption panel. Where convictions are listed on CRB checks senior managers must consider the issues fully.	11/12/06
2	AD4	AAR 2005 Reg 24	The agency must ensure that the application to adopt is accepted prior to the preparation group.	31/01/07
3	AD14 AD20 AD21 AD16	AAR 2003 Reg 5 AAR 2003 Reg 10	The local authority must appoint one of its officers to manage the adoption service and notify the commission in compliance with regulation 5. The arrangements for the overall management of the agency must be secured and consideration of the five bullet points in respect to the organisation of staff must be included in the review.	01/04/07
4	AD19 AD15	AAR 2003 Regs 11 and 15	The agency must ensure that the written recruitment procedures for staff are robust and that personnel files evidence that a	11/12/06

	AD28		clear and robust staff recruitment process has taken place in every case. This is restated from the last key inspection and the last random inspection.	
5	AD2 AD23	LAAR 2003 Regs 9 and 12	The agency must ensure that all CP issues are appropriately dealt with and that staff are trained in the procedures and that this training is updated on a rolling basis.	11/12/06

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	AD2	The agency needs to develop a written recruitment strategy in respect to recruitment of adopters who are likely to be able to meet the needs of children coming through the system.
2	AD4	Dates of adopter's employment history should include months in every case. The health and safety checklist should be amended to include assessment of the safe storage of guns or other dangerous weapons and the risk to small children from any hanging cords on window blinds.
3	AD12	The panel minute extracts should include a list of attendees.
4	AD19	The manager should ensure that references provided as a part of the staff recruitment process have been verified by a telephone call to the referee and that this verification is evidenced in each case. The manager should ensure that a system for ensuring that CRB checks are updated every three years is established. It would be good practice for the records of staff recruitment interviews to be retained on personnel files.
5	AD18	The situation in respect to ensuring medicals are requested in a timely way needs to be closely monitored as does the

		situation in respect to accessing a service from the CAMHS.
6	AD7	The agency should ensure that all parents are provided with an opportunity to read what has been written about them and that clear evidence is recorded that this opportunity has been provided.
7	AD1	The agency must ensure that the statement of purpose and the children's guide meets regulations and that the addressed contained within the documents for the CSCI are correct.
8	AD20	Some consideration should be given to ensuring that assessing social workers remain the adopters case worker at least until a match has been agreed.
9	AD3	The information packs provided to adopters should be updated.
10	AD8	A robust monitoring system needs to be developed in respect to the quality and timeliness of life story work.
11	AD25 AD27	Files for children should contain a copy of the life story book and files for adopters should contain the social workers notes written during assessments visits. Adoption support files should contain the supervisor's decision making discussions. All case recording and other documents should be signed and dated. All case files should be subject to regular audit ideally by senior managers.

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