



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Newcastle upon Tyne Council Adoption Service

**Civic Centre
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE1 8PA**

Lead Inspector
Jayne Ivory

Announced Inspection
13th June 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

| Reader Information | |
|---------------------|---|
| Document Purpose | Inspection Report |
| Author | CSCI |
| Audience | General Public |
| Further copies from | 0870 240 7535 (telephone order line) |
| Copyright | This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI |
| Internet address | www.csci.org.uk |

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.

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

SERVICE INFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of service | Newcastle upon Tyne Council Adoption Service |
| Address | Civic Centre Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE1 8PA |
| Telephone number | 0191 232 8520 |
| Fax number | |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Newcastle City Council Social Services Department |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Deborah Herring |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Adoption Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

N/A

Date of last inspection

23rd September 2003

Brief Description of the Service:

Newcastle City Council Adoption Team is located in the Looked After Children's Service. The Team is part of a wider children and adult's social services department. Newcastle's plan to integrate children's services was still a work in progress. The City Council Adoption Team Manager is based with their team in the Shieldfield Centre, which is close to the centre of Newcastle. The adoption team is responsible for recruiting, training, assessing and supporting adoptive parents. The team also undertake step-parent and inter country adoption work. The team undertake family finding for all looked after children identified as being in need of an adoptive placement. Care planning for looked after children is the responsibility of social workers within the area teams. The area teams are geographically located at offices throughout the city. Newcastle has two adoption panels every month. The same Independent Panel Chairperson chairs both adoption panels. The Adoption Team Manager acts as the adoption agency adviser. Newcastle City Council has approximately 450 looked after children. The percentages for children looked after who have been placed for adoption by the service had fallen over the last two years, however numbers referred for a service from the adoption team in 2005-2006 had increased to 70.

Newcastle has developed specialist posts within the adoption team to provide adoption support services to all those touched by adoption. There is a contact and mediation social worker, birth family social worker and senior practitioner adoption support.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was well prepared for with all required pre-inspection material being forwarded as requested. The agency provided the best facilities available to them and engaged in the process as willing participants. The programme that was arranged was well coordinated and very manageable. This enabled the inspection to be carried out with the minimum of disruption and maximum efficiency.

The inspection was carried out over four days, with one extra-day being allocated to the observation of the adoption panel. During the course of the fieldwork interviews were held with key managers and staff, specialist advisers and an elected member of the council. The Independent Panel Chairperson of the adoption panel was also interviewed. An examination of personnel files was undertaken in the offices of Human Resources.

Visits were made to four adoptive families. In addition to this two adoptive families who were in receipt of adoption support services agreed to participate in telephone interviews. The views of adopters are incorporated into the text of this report. One birth family member was also interviewed as part of the inspection. Completed questionnaires were received from adopters/prospective adopters (18), placing social workers (4), and specialist advisers (2). Two questionnaires sent to birth families were returned.

The case files of the adopters visited were read – and the files of children placed with them. Other case files were also examined. Written materials relating to the operation of the agency were read, including policies and procedures, protocols and information provided for children, prospective and approved adopters and social workers.

The inspection also considered the council's arrangements for adoption support services and interviewed staff involved in the assessment, review and provision of these services. The inspection also took place alongside a full inspection of the fostering and private fostering services in Newcastle. Readers may find it helpful to consider all three reports for a full overview of the Family Placement Service to Looked after Children in the city.

What the service does well:

The adoption service in Newcastle has worked hard to ensure that the action plan from the first inspection, and subsequent follow-up visit has been addressed.

The team manager has been in post since November 2003, with two senior practitioners in the adoption and adoption support team. The senior practitioner in the adoption support team deputises for the team manager when she is away. This development has enhanced the management time available within the team. This had ensured that the Adoption and Children Act 2002 had been implemented in the adoption team and policies and procedures had been updated.

The service has a good recruitment strategy that is reviewed and informed by the needs of children waiting. The constant review of the needs of children waiting allows the adoption service to anticipate the need for placements and to tailor recruitment activity accordingly. As a consequence the service had acknowledged the need to focus recruitment activity for children from blended heritage or black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Where the agency could not place children within their own resources inter-agency placements were sought.

Adopters confirmed that they had received a prompt and sensitive initial response to their initial enquiries. Prospective adopters appreciated the quality of information evenings provided by the service. Preparation training was also considered to be informative and benefited from a session with birth parents who spoke to adopters about the significance of post adoption contact. The majority of adopters' assessments are undertaken in a timely way and in partnership with adopters.

An adopter said "The preparation group meetings were invaluable." and "the preparation days were very, very informative, with lots of real life experiences."

Newcastle has an inclusive approach to all those interested in adopting a child through the service and welcomes applicants from a fifty mile radius of the city centre.

Services to birth parents remain an area of very good practice. The birth parent social worker offers individual support to birth parents and birth families based on their assessed need.

One birth parent spoke about the significance of the support that they had received from the birth family social worker. They said "there is not a day goes by without me thinking of the children, but I am beginning to get my life together. My social worker supported me to get a job, and I'm going back to

college...I've seen photographs of the children through the letterbox and I can tell they look so happy and well cared for."

Adoption support services were well developed and continuing to grow in Newcastle. There were good arrangements for accessing support services and evidence of good multi-agency working in children's assessments and in assessments for adoption support services.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has compiled a Statement of Purpose that covers all of the matters listed in the regulations and standards. The Statement of Purpose has been agreed by the executive side of the council, and has been made available to staff and service users. The Statement of Purpose is available on the council adoption web site and is sent out in information packs to prospective adopters and birth family members. The distribution of the Children's Guide is ensured by inclusion in the agenda during the review of children's cases. The adoption policies and procedures have been reviewed and were now available on the council intranet.

A format to ensure that prospective adopters are given 10 days to comment on their Prospective Adopters Report (form F) or waiver the right to do so has been devised. This is now in use in all cases and is quality assured by the adoption manager.

A system has been developed to track the undertaking of visits to adopters as agreed at the time of placement. The reviewing officer for adoption placements checks that visits have been done within the agreed timescale. If the visits have not been carried out this is reported to the team manager and raised at the team managers business meetings.

Following the first inspection an educational psychologist was appointed to the adoption panel. The expectation of becoming an adoption panel member has been included in the job description for this role and will ensure that an education representative is readily available.

The room used for records storage in the adoption section at the Shieldfield Centre has been fitted with a secure entry system. The code is available to adoption staff only.

The agency has established files for adoption panel members. The files now contained all of the elements required within the regulations. A tracking system has been developed to identify children with an adoption plan at the earliest opportunity. A spreadsheet is produced and quality assured by the adoption team manager in consultation with fieldwork managers.

Information has been updated and separate information packs have been devised for prospective adopters, relinquishing parents, step parents seeking to adopt, foster carers seeking to adopt and those seeking to adopt a child from overseas. This pack also includes a leaflet detailing charges.

An information booklet for birth parents has been prepared. This includes very comprehensive information and details about support services.

A system for gathering the views of adopters and prospective adopters at all stages of the process has been developed. This includes the opportunity for applicants to comment on the timing of the preparation course. To date no negative comments have been received. The adoption manager monitors this.

An animal ownership questionnaire is now in use in all cases as appropriate.

Information about the Adoption Register is sent to all adopters when they are approved. Adopters are asked to acknowledge they have received this.

Life appreciation meetings are now used in the more complex cases, before the case is presented to adoption panel for matching consideration.

The minutes for the adoption panel have been expanded to include consideration of declarations of interest in every case. Panel members also receive letters as a reminder of this important feature of their task.

The Looked After Service manager, professional advisor to panel and the panel chair meet on a quarterly basis. The decision maker joins them once a year.

The venue for the adoption panel has been changed to a better location, however more will be said about this in the main body of the report. Joint training for members of the adoption panel and the adoption team has taken place on three occasions every year since the last inspection. A quality assurance system for the paperwork for adoption panel has been partly achieved.

Issues about quality are discussed at the quarterly meetings and quality checks are described in the procedures.

A system to renew CRB disclosures every three years has been established. Staff are advised about their responsibility to declare conflicts of interest in the staff code of conduct and a whistle blowing policy is now in place.

A written protocol for the role of advisors has been included in the adoption policies and procedures as well as a system for monitoring and reporting on the activities of the adoption agency to the panel, head of service and ultimately the executive of the Council.

The senior practitioner in the adoption support team deputises for the team manager when the manager is away.

Staff training opportunities have been extended to include Adoption and Children Act training from BAAF.

A disaster recovery plan has been written. This links the adoption service to the more detailed major incident plan for the council.

What they could do better:

The agency has introduced a number of tracking systems to identify children with an adoption plan at the earliest opportunity. A spreadsheet is produced and quality assured by the adoption team manager in consultation with fieldwork managers. Independent reviewing officers also notify the adoption team manager of children who have a plan for adoption after the legal decision making conference.

The adoption service may be aware of the children who require a plan for adoption at an earlier stage, however staff shortages and high staff turnover in some teams contribute to unnecessary delay in care planning for a number of children. As a panel member suggested "The quality of work that we see is very uneven. We get some excellent children's assessments, but some very poor ones. The quality of prospective adopter's reports is always of a good standard." This is a wider issue for the service; however good outcomes for children, can only be provided by a stable, competent and confident workforce. Newcastle may offer equitable terms and conditions to neighbouring agencies, however more must be done to equip staff in the area teams with the practice knowledge and support to deliver consistently better outcomes to children with a plan for adoption. Improved training and access to mentoring may improve staff retention. Surgeries offered by members of the adoption support team were a start, however extra resources must be identified to ensure that placing social workers are skilled at supporting, preparing and counselling children and their birth families for adoption.

The agency should consider extending the quality assurance systems across the adoption service. This would ensure that the agency adviser and adoption panel were scrutinising children's and adopters' assessments without being involved in the early stages of quality assurance. The arrangements for an independent check of the paperwork before every panel need to be enhanced across the service.

The new matching policy and procedure should be reviewed to ensure that children's identified needs inform the process. Matching should be a jointly owned activity between the child's social worker and the family finding social worker.

Matching meetings should be independently chaired and should demonstrate the reasons why one adoptive parent/parents has been chosen, and why others have not been selected who may have been short-listed. The justifications for this decision making process should be informed by anti-discriminatory practice and core social work values.

The service should review the adequacy of administrative support for the adoption team. The numbers of social work staff have grown in the adoption team; however there has been no corresponding increase in administrative support.

The service must resolve the inadequate office accommodation for the adoption team. The arrangements and facilities for the venue of the adoption panel may have improved, but they are still not adequate. Prospective adopters and visiting professionals have no designated waiting space before they come into panel. Social work staff must "move out" of their offices whilst panel takes place in order to give those individuals attending some reasonably private facilities.

The overall judgement for the adoption and adoption support service was assessed as poor, given some of the concerns identified in the quality of assessments for children in need of adoption.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adopters are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Standards 2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15,19

Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement has been made using available evidence, which identified that Newcastle has a number of skilled and experienced staff in the adoption service, however inconsistencies in the assessment of children's needs must be addressed in order to ensure that all children with a plan for adoption stay safe and secure and are placed with their adoptive families in a timely way.

EVIDENCE:

Newcastle had developed and kept under review a recruitment strategy to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption locally. The service had recognised that they needed to attract a broader range of adopters, and had to recruit for children from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and large sibling groups.

Staffing problems in the area teams had contributed to mixed practice in care planning for children. The quality of children's permanence reports was also inconsistent, although it is acknowledged that the change in format in the child's permanence report (CPR) has been challenging for many child-care social workers. Some children received a good service from their social worker,

which was thorough, child focused and timely. Other cases that were seen during the inspection provided evidence of children who were unacceptably delayed in Newcastle. Some social workers and their managers did not seem to appreciate or understand the life long implications of adoption and post placement contact, whilst others provided little or no evidence of children being counselled about their plan for adoption. This has serious implications for a small number of children. The service must develop a whole systems approach to enhancing the quality of children's assessments and reports. This will ensure that all children with a plan for adoption are appropriately prepared and supported.

In the twelve months prior to the inspection Newcastle had placed 36 children for adoption, with 9 children waiting for an adoption placement. A new matching policy and procedure had been implemented. Some placing social workers and their managers expressed concern about being marginalised in the new matching process and of being presented with little or no effective choice about the appropriate adoptive family for "their child or children". The policy had been introduced to ensure that Newcastle's own approved adopters would be considered first, where appropriate.

There were some justifications for the change in policy to ensure that Newcastle's own adopters were considered first and delay in placing children was minimised. However best practice in matching must involve an effective partnership between the child's social worker and the family finder. There is an urgent need to review the new policy to ensure that matching is a shared activity informed by which approved adopters are able to meet the assessed needs of children. This must form part of the service's action plan.

Prospective and approved adopters confirmed that they had access to good, informative preparation training that had helped them to understand the full range of issues surrounding adoption. Some single prospective adopters expressed a view that the training may benefit from being more inclusive. Many adopters confirmed that the home study had been completed with skill and sensitivity by the assessing social worker.

The service ensured that the majority of prospective adopters were subject to the full range of checks and safeguards that were evidenced on file. However in one case the social worker had not sought checks from a prospective adopters previous partner where they had been involved in parenting. The relationship had ended a significant time ago, however, as this information was used to evidence parenting capacity in the adopter's report, the social worker or the manager should have given some account of efforts to seek a supporting reference. The need for the service to apply strenuous efforts to ensure that all prospective adopters are evidenced to be safe must form part of the action plan.

Social workers in the Adoption Team had accessed training in completing prospective adopters assessments. The quality of the assessments varied with some workers being far more able to analyse information and identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of prospective adopters. The need to identify prospective adopters strengths and vulnerabilities should be part of every social work assessment. The service would benefit if the adoption panel also considered using this practice in making their recommendations.

Expectations regarding support and contact between prospective and approved adopters were clearly defined. Adopters considered that their social workers were responsive to their needs for support and information.

Newcastle had a system in place to record whether prospective adopters waived their rights to consider their assessment for 10 days prior to panel.

Newcastle has an Adoption Panel that meets twice every month. The panels have clear policies and procedures and are well supported by the professional agency adviser. The panels ensure that all adoption business is thoroughly scrutinised. The Adoption Panels have training three times a year, and have the opportunity of attending joint training with agency staff. Minutes of the panel were very clear and recorded the reasons for any recommendations made. However Newcastle has developed a practice of panel members retaining anonymity in the minutes of the meeting. Best practice would suggest that there is no need for this practice to continue. Minutes should provide a concise and accurate account of the adoption panel members' deliberations and discussions before reaching a recommendation. Any disagreement in panel, or performance issues may be missed in an effort to preserve panel members' anonymity. Further to this although adoption panel members introduced themselves to those attending the panel, attendees may find it helpful if the panel had name plaques in front of them.

Some independent members of the adoption panel participate in preparation training. Whilst the service emphasised that this was not a conflict of interest due to the short time that the independent member attends the training, during the observation of panel the independent member was asked to give their view and impressions on the "performance" of the applicants under consideration. On balance this compromises the independence of this panel member. The service should consider the need to preserve the independence of panel members by not involving them in adoption preparation training. Panel administrators were efficient and effective in their role and had received specialist training.

The Agency Decision Maker was committed to their role and tried to ensure that the decision was made in a timely way.

Newcastle must develop and implement a system that ensures that all those affected by the agency decision are provided with written notifications of the outcome in a timely manner.

The service must ensure that safe staff recruitment and selection procedures are implemented and evidenced for all staff working for the purposes of the adoption service. The inspection confirmed that all staff had received a CRB check, however other safeguards were not in place. The service must ensure that all social work staff provide proof of their GSCC registration, and that an up to date photograph is kept on their personnel file. All staff had two written references and these references were followed up by telephone verification.

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):

Standards 6,18,33 and 34

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence that Newcastle has a developing and integrated adoption support service which ensures that children and the their adoptive families are supported throughout childhood.

EVIDENCE:

Newcastle had recognised the need to develop their own post placement and post adoption support service, in addition to commissioning services from other agencies.

Practices concerning assessments for post adoption support were well developed in the service.

Families in receipt of adoption support services stated, "Our social worker has always been there for us. Sometimes things can get very difficult and they do their best to support us... We have really struggled to get proper educational provision for our child and the adoption support social worker comes with us to any meetings at school."

The Adoption Support Workers played a key role in ensuring that children and their adoptive families accessed ongoing support services. There was evidence that the specialist social workers in these posts had developed networks in the area and region to ensure that children and their adoptive families received ongoing support.

Post approval and post adoption support groups were well established and developing in partnership with a local adoption support agency.

Newcastle's adoption service benefits from excellent access and support from the medical adviser who ensures children's and adopter's medical reports are

scrutinised before panel. They are also available to offer advice and support to adopters concerning any proposed match. Legal advice to the service is also accessible.

The support services are very effective within the available resources with good access to a range of multi-agency support.

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 adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence that some birth parents and birth families are very well supported by the service and some are not.

EVIDENCE:

Newcastle has access to an excellent service for birth parents and their families. The service has created a specialist post to ensure that birth parents and their families received support for the time when adoption was being considered as the plan for their child or children. The birth parent social worker ensures that families are provided with advice and information as well as access to ongoing support services. This was an area of good practice three years ago and the service and workers should be commended for how this post has developed and become an intrinsic part of the adoption and adoption support services offered by the city. The service acknowledged that more needed to be done to ensure that birth parents and their families were involved in adoption plans.

Referrals to the birth parent social worker from placing social workers remained at approximately 50%. This was a standing item on the agenda in the management meetings of the children's service. However the low internal referral rate may be a result of the lack of understanding that some placing social workers have with regard to Newcastle's responsibility to counsel birth parents and birth families.

Some children's permanence reports did not give an account of birth families views on their child's assessments. In addition to this not all reports were signed or provided evidence of when birth parents had been told about the plan.

Newcastle must ensure that they have systems in place to ensure that all birth parents and birth families can access the excellent support services and counselling at the earliest possible stage.

The adoption and adoption support team played a key role in ensuring that life story work was undertaken and completed in a timely way. There was an expectation that adopters would meet birth parents before the placement of a child. The service had restarted life appreciation days for older children and some adopters spoke of the real benefit of this for them and the child.

The adoption team manager and adoption support team worked hard with their colleagues in the child-care teams to ensure that staff were aware of the need to preserve and maintain a child's heritage. However more must be done at a strategic level to ensure that life work is completed within the child's timescale and birth parents and their families are enabled to contribute to their child's plans for adoption.

There was evidence from staff groups that the quality of training for social work staff completing life story work was not of a high enough standard. The training on offer provided an opportunity for staff to share their practice but did not provide them with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills to complete this important work. The need to identify and access good training in life work for all social workers involved in preparing and counselling children for adoption must form part of the service's action plan.

Further to this the service must ensure that life story books are available for children when they are placed for adoption. One child was still waiting for their life story book after the adoption order had been made.

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):

Standards 1, 3, 14, 16,17,20, 21, 22,23,25,26,27,28 and 29

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement was made given that management systems are improving in the adoption service. However, the agency needs to ensure that social workers have the training, support and supervision to ensure that good outcomes for children are achieved in a timely manner.

EVIDENCE:

There was a statement of purpose in place that had been reviewed in 2005 and had been formally approved by the executive of the council. It clearly outlined the aspirations and operations of the agency and was written in an easy to read style. The children's guide to adoption was well presented and gave a realistic overview of the issues involved; it also provided contact details of other relevant agencies and explained how a child could complain. The policies and procedures of the agency, many of which had been recently reviewed and revised, supported the statement of purpose and most indications were that the agency operated in line with these.

The information provided for prospective applicants is of a very good standard; it gives a clear indication of all the implications and processes of adoption, including profiles of the kind of children requiring placements, and it also specifies the range of people that the agency wishes to recruit. It is a well - presented pack that is welcoming and clearly aimed at providing all relevant information in an accessible and encouraging format.

The adoption team reported that they were well supported by their manager, and the managers involved in the adoption service reported that they were well supervised and supported by the acting service manager.

All managers involved in the adoption service were suitably qualified and experienced. The inspection found evidence that the Adoption Team worked well within the wider constraints of the service and that the relationship between the team and placing social workers was generally positive.

The team manager dealt with the few complaints made against the agency sensitively, efficiently and effectively. Withdrawals and de-registrations were also managed well.

Staff in the adoption service had accessed training in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the placement of children from black and ethnic minority origins and the implications for inter-country and domestic adoptions. All staff said that they were familiar with the council's personal development and annual appraisal system. Staff reported that they received regular professional supervision from the adoption team manager and from the senior practitioner in the adoption support team.

The service should establish, without delay, a robust system of file auditing: children's adoption files showed little or no evidence of any management oversight, and the quality of some of the paperwork was poor. It is of utmost importance that children's adoption files reflect an accurate record of all work undertaken in relation to the adoption, which will be readily understood by the adoptee at any future date.

Adopters' files were generally well ordered, with many files keeping a copy of contemporaneous notes from the assessment. However these files too, lacked management oversight. Decisions made during supervision should be recorded on all files and any signatures on documents should be dated and supplemented by the manager's or social worker's full name. The service should develop and implement effective quality assurance systems which evidence the supervision and management decision making process of children's and adopters' assessments.

Administrative staff were seen to be hardworking and sensitive to the nature of the work of the service. However, the agency should consider the adequacy of its provision.

The Adoption Team and their managers are located in a large council office on the edge of Newcastle City centre. The offices have limited staff and public parking but are easily accessible by public transport. The offices themselves are cramped and not fit for purpose. Meeting rooms are scarce, and although the building has a general reception area there is no designated waiting room for the adoption team for adopters, birth families, children or visiting professionals.

The adoption manager has developed a disaster recovery plan that forms part of a wider service plan.

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 | 2 |

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

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

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

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

No

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 | AD2 | 13.1 a,b,c, 1,2,3 A & CA 2002 | The service must develop a whole systems approach to enhancing the quality of children's assessments and reports. | 28/02/07 |
| 2 | AD2 AD5 | 31.1,2,3,4 A & CA 2002 | The service must review the existing matching policy to ensure that matching is a shared activity between child- care and family finding staff. | 30/10/06 |
| 3 | AD4 | 25. 2. Schedule 4 Part 1 , Schedule 4 A & CA 2002 | The service must apply strenuous efforts to ensure that all prospective adopters are evidenced to be safe. This includes seeking references from previous partners when there were children in the household. Decisions not to seek a reference should be recorded on file by the manager. | 30/10/06 |
| 4 | AD2 AD21 | 10,a,b AAR 2003 | The service must ensure that there are sufficient staff with the right skills and experience to meet the needs of the adoption | 28/02/07 |

| | | | | |
|---|--------------|---|---|----------|
| | | | service. | |
| 5 | AD13 | 27.3 A&CA 2002 | Newcastle must develop and implement a system that ensures that all those affected by the agency decision are provided with written notifications of the outcome in a timely manner. | 30/10/06 |
| 6 | AD19 AD28 | 15.1 Schedule 3 and 4 AAR 2003 | The service must ensure that staff personnel files provide evidence that all staff working for the purposes of the adoption service are suitable. | 30/10/06 |
| 7 | AD8 | 13.1 A&CA 2002 | The service must identify and access good quality training in life work for all social workers involved in preparing and counselling children for adoption. | 28/02/07 |
| 8 | AD7 AD9 | 14 A&CA 2002 | Newcastle must ensure that they have systems in place to ensure that all birth parents and birth families can access support services and counselling at the earliest possible stage. | 30/10/06 |
| 9 | AD29 | 16 AAR 2003 | The service must identify suitable alternative premises for the adoption and adoption support team. | 30/10/06 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

| No. | Refer to Standard | Good Practice Recommendations |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| 1. | AD12 | The agency should consider one quality assurance point for panel paperwork that includes a system to monitor progress made. The existing systems should be enhanced to ensure the effective quality assurance and supervision of adoption assessments by all Team Managers |
| 2. | AD29 | The agency should complete the task of identifying |

| | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| | | alternative premises for the adoption service. |
| 3 | AD4 | The service should consider how to evidence prospective adopters strengths and vulnerabilities in every social work assessment. The service would benefit if the adoption panels also considered using this practice in making their recommendations. |
| 4 | AD4 | The service should consider how to make preparation training more inclusive for single prospective adopters. |
| 5 | AD12 | The service should consider a revision of the existing practice of panel members retaining anonymity in the minutes of the meeting. Minutes should provide a concise and accurate account of the adoption panel members' deliberations and discussions before reaching a recommendation. |
| 6 | AD8 | The service should ensure that life story books are available for children when they are placed for adoption. |
| 7 | AD20 | The service should ensure that there is an adequate level of clerical and administrative support to enable all staff to carry out their duties in an efficient and effective manner. |
| 8 | AD25 AD27 | The service must ensure that existing file audits are utilised consistently, and that decisions made by managers in supervision are evidenced on case files. Decisions should be signed and dated. |

Commission for Social Care Inspection

North West Regional Office

11th Floor

West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI