



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**Worcestershire County Council
Adoption Service**

The Pines (Looked After Children)

Bilford Road

Worcester

WR3 8PU

27th October 2004

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

Worcestershire County Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

The Pines (Looked After Children), Bilford Road,
Worcester, WR3 8PU

Adoption Service Manager

Jean Pickering

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01905 752830

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Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

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

Date of Inspection Visit		27th October 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Lynn Smith	094143
Name of Inspector	2	Viv Slyfield	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Jean Pickering	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority adoption services are subject to inspection by CSCI, 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 CSCI in respect of Worcestershire County 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 CSCI 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.

Worcestershire County Council Adoption Service is based in two offices, one in the south of the county and one in the north, however the adoption service is divided into four groups, adoption support, recruitment and training and the north and south teams.

There are 14 social workers, 3 senior practitioners and 3 team managers in the adoption service. All have a social work qualification and a minimum of 4 years post qualifying experience in children and families work. The staff team are a stable group with 12 workers with over 10 years experience in adoption work.

Additionally there are 6 social workers undertaking adoption and fostering recruitment preparation and training, based in the recruitment and training team. This includes a team manager and one adoption worker who undertakes priority assessments and one disability specialist post (currently vacant).

Worcestershire adoption service is part of the West Midlands Consortium.

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.)

Two inspectors inspected Worcestershire County Council Adoption Service's over four days in October 2004; unfortunately the inspectors were unable to observe the panel until January 2005.

The inspectors received a total of 34 questionnaires back from prospective adopters, adopters, placing social workers, Advisors and birth parents.

Placing social workers said " Very through and match the adopters with the child's needs". "Have always found the social workers in adoption extremely helpful". " We found the agency very professional, focused, able to work as a team to ensure that the children stayed central to the process. We would be happy to work with the agency again". " The agency has a proactive attitude to finding homes for children with disabilities". " The enthusiasm and commitment of the adoption social worker was great –There was excellent liaison with myself as placing social worker and she offered support and guidance to adopters, their children and wider family members". "The agency has a co-operative and positive approach to inter-agency working".

Adopter's gave comments like " Support is always given above and beyond the social workers duty". "The process is very long-winded. It's the waiting in between the stages that is frustrating and difficult to handle however, our social worker was fantastic and kept us informed. She gave us support and encouragement to continue when it felt like nothing was happening". " We have had to wait 21 months from enquiry to panel". "We felt the preparation process was very through, staff took the time to ensure issues were well covered". "We have been very happy with our experience with social services and the social workers who have helped us adopt. The service has always been very clear, fair and friendly".

The inspectors felt that the service offered by Worcestershire County Council Adoption Service was a good standard.

Statement of Purpose – standard 1

Met

The agency has a comprehensive and readable 'statement of purpose', which meets the requirements of this standard and the associated regulation. The inspector's spoke with staff who were aware on the 'statement of purpose' and felt that it is a true reflection of the agency. The inspector also observed the 'statement of purpose' on Worcestershire County Council's website.

Information for young people was comprised into three parts, however they need to be specific to Worcestershire.

Securing and promoting children's welfare – standard 2

Met

The recruitment and training team have in place a team plan. The team is countywide and linked to both fostering and adoption. Their aim is to recruit 25-30 prospective adopters and target minority ethnic groups, as well as those who may be able to care for siblings, disabled children and older children. The recruitment and training team have a specific social worker who undertakes priority assessments.

Worcestershire County Council has excellent procedures and guidance for permanence planning. At the earliest opportunity a 'matrix of need' is completed. This identifies clearly the child's needs, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. The matrix of need is used to ensure appropriate matches are made. It identifies how the matched families can meet the child's needs.

Prospective and approved adopters – standards 3 to 6

three met, one part met

The information packs sent to prospective adopters contain BAAF information as well as specific information from Worcestershire Adoption Service. Information regarding why the agency may prioritise prospective adopters is available. A complaints leaflet is included within the pack.

Information regarding overseas adoption is also available with a follow-up visit from an adoption social worker who specialises in overseas adoptions.

The manager informed the inspectors that information leaflets could be translated into different formats. Worcestershire County Council uses the 'Ethnic Access Link'.

The 'statement of purpose' and Worcestershire County Council website clearly identifies the process of recruitment, assessment and training prospective adopters.

Adopters indicated on the questionnaires that initial contact was informative.

After approval adopters receive an excellent pack containing useful leaflets and information on a range of services. The support service for adopters is a developing service in Worcestershire. Post order support is being developed. It will include six monthly contacts with adopters, support for indirect and direct contact with birth relatives, ongoing training, newsletters, helpline, social events and links to WASGAP.

Birth parent and birth families – standards 7 to 9

Two part met and one not met

The service recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for birth parents, adopted children and adopters

The agency has an adoption support team as well as a service level agreement with 'West Midlands Adoption Support', an independent organisation. The adoption support team can offer a direct service to birth family members or 'West Midlands Adoption Support' can give face to face or telephone counselling. No support groups were available for birth family members at the time of the inspection.

Adopters spoken said the children that were placed with them had very little life story information with them. Inspectors found no evidence of life story information in young peoples files.

The agency does have a clear strategy for working with birth family members. At present their appears to be a expectation that children and families social workers will offer services pre-adoption order and adoption support team will offer support post adoption order.

'Midlands Adoption Support Service' will offer independent support. The questionnaires received indicated that no support had been offered.

Adoption panels and agency decisions –standards 10 to 13

One commendable, one met and two part met

Polices and Procedures regarding the panel functions were not in place. The manager is

aware these need to be written. All panel members are issued with the BAAF handbook on panel functions.

Prospective adopters are given an excellent booklet explaining the panel process and identifying the panel members. Up-dates need to be included within the booklet regarding Independent Reviewing Officers.

The panel consists of adopted parents, birth mother, an adopted young person and suitably qualified professionals. The inspector found the panel to be independent of the adoption agency.

Whilst the inspector observed that panel, a new panel member was also observing. The chair ensured all people present at on the panel signed a confidentiality agreement.

The inspector observing the panel received the relevant documentation one week in advance. Panel members clarified this is normally the case. All relevant documentation was present for each case.

Panel minutes are very good. They clearly identify the discussions that take place before the social worker and prospective adopter enter the meeting and then document well the questions, answers and recommendations.

Worcestershire Adoption Service continually monitors children through their panel. Minutes evidence dates children were placed, when adoption orders are granted and general updates on pre and post adopted children.

Evidence was viewed of adopters awaiting placements having annual reviews through the panel.

The regular monitoring of children and adopters by the panel is excellent.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency – standards 14 to15

Both met

All managers of the adoption service are suitably knowledgeable, experienced and qualified for the task. They have undertaken management training through Worcestershire County Council staff development programme.

The recruitment and selection process identifies the need for managers of the adoption service to have appropriate skills, knowledge and experience in childcare. The current manager meets these requirements.

The manager had a satisfactory enhanced CRB check on file.

Provision and management of the adoption agency – standards 16 to 18

Two met, one part met

The evidence gathered during this inspection confirmed that the structures in place ensure that the adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Staff are appropriately trained and qualified for the roles they undertake and are aware of the equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice policies of the County Council. Staff who work with children and birth parents showed compassion, understanding and sensitivity when interviewed about the needs of children and birth families. The adoption social workers showed a good understanding of the issues in relation to adoption. The role of co-worker enhanced their skills of working with children and birth relatives. .

The development monitoring of the service is done through the team and service plans.

The cabinet member with social services responsibility receives regular performance management information on the outcomes to children. A six monthly agency activity report is also sent.

Although both the medical and the legal advisor have employment contracts that address adoption, they should have written protocols governing their role within the adoption service.

Employment and management of staff – standards 19 to 23

All met

Supervision and training does take place regularly. All staff files viewed contained contract and job descriptions. Staff informed inspectors that they had registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Staff received information on equal opportunities, complaints, health and safety etc via the intranet.

Workloads are regularly monitored through supervision, databases and a tracking process that monitors timescales.

Team meetings take place regularly. The administration team also attend.

Staff spoke highly of the medical and legal advisors and felt they were accessible.

The integrated service for looked after children (ISL) provide access to educational, medical and psychological advice for both adopters and children. The inspector's felt this service was an excellent adoption support.

Records – standards 25 to 28

One met, two part met and one not met

A written policy and procedural guidance needs to be in place for adoption records.

The agency holds comprehensive case files on prospective and approved adopters and the adoption files for children for whom “adoption is in their best interests” decision has been made. These files were well organised and contained evidence of case discussions held in supervision, which were signed by the supervisor.

The inspectors found some files had documentation missing like panel minutes.

The agency did not have separate files for complaints identifying details of any investigation, conclusion reached and action taken.

The inspector viewed staff personnel files and panel member's files. Personnel files contained all relevant information required in this standard. It was clear that telephone references had been obtained for the more recent members of staff however recruitment policies need to reflect that this process now takes place.

Panel members personnel files need to address all aspects of standard 28.

Fitness of premises – standard 29

Part met

The adoption agency is operated from two offices, one in the north of the county, Bromsgrove and one in the south, Pershore. The buildings are secure but accessible during office hours. Files are kept in lockable cabinets but the rooms are not lockable.

Staffs spoke very positively about the IT systems and feel they have been given adequate training on these. The systems are backed-up, off the premises daily and security is via password.

The manager states the County Council has made arrangements regarding adequate insurance.

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:

NA

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:

NA

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:

NA

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:

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first CSCI 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 Commission for Social Care Inspection 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 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	11	LA28	All staff and panel members must have all information required in Schedule 3 and 4 of The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003	1/6/05

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	LA5	Information should be available regarding the role of the adoption register.
2	LA7	Birth parent's views about adoption, contact and what is written about them needs to be clearly recorded.
3	LA8	Stronger efforts need to be made to obtain information from birth families.
4	LA9	Birth families should be informed of the services on offer to them.
5	LA10	Policies and procedures regarding the panel function should be in place.
6	LA18	Protocols should be in place for specialist advisors.
7	LA25	A written policy should be established for the adoption agency that covers issues in standard 25.2
8	LA27	Separate files should be established for allegations and complaints. Identifying details of any investigation, conclusion reached and action taken should be included.
9	LA29	Adoption files should be kept in lockable rooms.
10	LA29	A Disaster, Recovery Plan should be in place for the adoption service.

- 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	NO
• 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	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	NO
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	27/10/04
Time of Inspection	0900
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	73
Number of Inspector days	7
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)	26

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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?

3

The agency has a comprehensive and readable 'statement of purpose', which meets the requirements of this standard and the associated regulation. The inspector's spoke with staff who were aware on the 'statement of purpose' and felt that it is a true reflection of the agency. The inspector also observed the 'statement of purpose' on Worcestershire County Council's website.

Information for young people was comprised into three parts, however they need to be specific to Worcestershire. The information is clear to young people who are able readers however younger, not so able children could possibly find it difficult. Complaints procedures are addressed in a separate leaflet; this information could be addressed within the young person's guide.

The manager informed the inspector that the guide can be produced in different formats.

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?

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

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

YES

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?

4

The inspectors viewed evidence of recruitment strategies. The recruitment and training team have in place a team plan. The team is countywide and linked to both fostering and adoption. Their aim is to recruit 25-30 prospective adopters and target minority ethnic groups, as well as those who may be able to care for siblings, disabled children and older children. The recruitment and training team have a specific social worker who undertakes priority assessments.

The inspector viewed leaflets and posters used in advertising. The agency uses attractive, informative information both locally and nationally. The team manager monitors the evaluation of recruitment strategies.

Worcestershire County Council has excellent procedures and guidance for permanence planning. At the earliest opportunity a 'matrix of need' is completed. This identifies clearly the child's needs, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language. The matrix of need is used to ensure appropriate matches are made. It identifies how the matched families can meet the child's needs.

Children's views were evident in the Looked After Reviews viewed in children's files. When adoption is identified for a child, an adoption co-worker is assigned and works along side of the placing social worker. Both adoption social workers and placing social workers feel this arrangement is clearly focused and produces good working relationships. Placing social workers informed the inspector that adoption co-workers could do direct work with children and birth relatives. Adoption workers informed the inspector that this system enables them to ascertain children's and birth families views on a number of issues including contact. The supervising social worker for the co-worker also attends the first planning meeting to establish the workload.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

31

How many children were matched with adopters?

29

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

19

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

10

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

4

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

32

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

94

%

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

3

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

0

On the date this form was completed, how many children were

14

waiting for a match to be identified?

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?

3

Worcestershire County Council has an excellent informative section on its website regarding all aspects of adopting in Worcestershire.

The information packs sent to prospective adopters contain BAAF information as well as specific information from Worcestershire Adoption Service. Information regarding why the agency may prioritise prospective adopters is available. A complaints leaflet is included within the pack.

Information regarding overseas adoption is also available with a follow-up visit from an adoption social worker who specialises in overseas adoptions.

The manager informed the inspectors that information leaflets could be translated into different formats. Worcestershire County Council uses the 'Ethnic Access Link'.

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?****3**

Adopters are informed at the initial interview of the adoption process. The preparation groups fit within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Adopters gave mixed views on whether the times for the preparation groups were convenient. One stated that he was disappointed that the preparation training took place over four weekdays as this forced him to take un-paid leave and explain that he was considering adoption to work colleagues at such an early stage in the process. The 'statement of purpose' and Worcestershire County Council website clearly identifies the process of recruitment, assessment and training prospective adopters. Adopters indicated on the questionnaires that initial contact was informative. The questionnaires highlighted delays prospective adopters faced between initial visit and the start of preparation training. Adopters said the preparation course was excellent. The course is regularly reviewed and feedback is requested from prospective adopters and the adoption panel. The manager informed the inspectors that specialist work for inter-country adoption is provided on an individual basis. Inspectors were informed that the West Midlands Consortium is looking into the possibility of running a specialist inter-country preparation course. Adopters interviewed spoke highly of the home study process and did not find it overly intrusive. The forms F which were inspected were generally analytical and of a high standard, although there were some variations in this. It was evident that competency based assessments were being introduced. The culture of the agency is to provide a professional and high quality service. This is confirmed by the questionnaires received from placing social workers. Adopters spoken with and the questionnaires received indicated that the contacts with the service were professional – the only issue of concern raised was that of delays. The inspector observed that these delays occurred between 'first contact' and the start of the home study, before the application was made.

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
<p>The procedures for permanence planning identifies that a 'matrix of need' regarding children should be completed. This does support matching as it gives a clear indication how prospective adopters meet the child's needs. The role of the Adoption Register and the process for its use within Worcestershire needs to be established. The manager was aware of the recent changes.</p> <p>Adopters are given full information about the child who may be matched with them and this includes the child's social worker and present carer having a face-to face discussion if appropriate.</p> <p>Evidence was viewed of an addendum to the form F that covers post adoption contact arrangements including notification of the death of a child.</p> <p>See recommendation 1</p>		
Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?	NO	

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?	3
<p>After approval adopters receive an excellent pack containing useful leaflets and information on a range of services.</p> <p>The agency has a contract with 'West Midlands Adoption Support' who offer post placement support, training and support groups. The adoption agency needs to monitor this provision. The agency has a dedicated social worker that undertakes all aspects of overseas work. Adopters seen during the inspection demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the significance of information provided by birth families, unfortunately none had received life story information.</p>		
Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	25	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	19	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	25	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	20	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	13	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	1	

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>The service recognises the lifelong implications of adoption for birth parents, adopted children and adopters</p> <p>The agency has an adoption support team as well as a service level agreement with ‘West Midlands Adoption Support’, an independent organisation. The adoption support team can offer a direct service to birth family members or ‘West Midlands Adoption Support’ can give face to face or telephone counselling. No support groups were available for birth family members at the time of the inspection.</p> <p>Staff are specifically trained to undertake section 51 counselling and letterbox contact. The forms E viewed on the inspection and from previous panels did not have any parents’ signatures, indicating they had not viewed the document. No explanation was given as to why they were not signed.</p> <p>See recommendation number 2</p>	2	

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>Adopters spoken said the children that were placed with them had very little life story work with them. Inspectors found no evidence of life story work in young peoples files. Forms E did give history and background information.</p> <p>See recommendation number 3</p>	1	

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?**

2

The agency does have a clear strategy for working with birth family members. At present their appears to be a expectation that children and families social workers will offer services pre-adoption order and adoption support team will offer support post adoption order. 'Midlands Adoption Support Service' will offer independent support. The questionnaires received indicated that no support had been offered.

The agency plans to further develop an independent service for birth families within Worcestershire's existing resources in the following year.

While this is clearly a difficult area of work where a number of factors may influence how the service is seen, there is also a clear need for further development in providing the best possible service.

See recommendation number 4

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>Policies and Procedures regarding the panel functions were not in place. The manager is aware these need to be written. All panel members are issued with the BAAF handbook on panel functions.</p> <p>Information for social workers attending the adoption panel is in place.</p> <p>Prospective adopters are given an excellent booklet explaining the panel process and identifying the panel members. Up-dates need to be included within the booklet regarding Independent Reviewing Officers.</p> <p>The inspectors received positive feedback from adopters and social workers about their panel experiences.</p> <p>Adopters are also given an evaluation forms to fill-in about their experience of the panel process. The outcome is regular discussed and evaluated with panel members.</p> <p>See recommendation number 5</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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The adoption panel is properly constituted and members are clear about their roles. Unfortunately the majority of the panel members are female which can create an un-balanced panel.

The panel consists of adopted parents, birth mother, an adopted young person and suitably qualified professionals. The inspector found the panel to be independent of the adoption agency.

Whilst the inspector observed that panel, a new panel member was also observing. The chair ensured all people present at on the panel signed a confidentiality agreement.

There were two training days for panel members in the twelve months prior to the inspection. One on “Competency based assessments of applicants” and a second entitled “Development of adoption support services”. Further more training days are planned for 2005, permanence planning guidance, adoption & Children Act 2002”, reviewing the learning at panel, planning process for children and integrated services. The inspector was made aware that panel members have undergone joint training with social workers.

Panel members personnel files need to contain all aspects of standard 28.2

All panel files viewed did contain up to date CRB checks.

See requirement number 1

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?	4
<p>Panels are held monthly and scheduled one year in advance however they do have reserved panels booked in case of overloads. . The inspector observing the panel received the relevant documentation one week in advance. Panel members clarified this is normally the case. All relevant documentation was present for each case.</p> <p>Panel minutes are very good. They clearly identify the discussions that take place before the social worker and prospective adopter enter the meeting and then document well the questions, answers and recommendations.</p> <p>Worcestershire Adoption Service continually monitors children through their panel. Minutes evidence dates children were placed, when adoption orders are granted and general updates on pre and post adopted children.</p> <p>Evidence was viewed of adopters awaiting placements having annual reviews through the panel.</p> <p>The regular monitoring of children and adopters by the panel is excellent.</p> <p>The venue of the panel meeting is very good; it reflects the importance of the panel however, not in an intimidating way for prospective adopters. Great consideration has been made in the layout of tables; nameplates identifying members and the friendliness prospective adopters and social workers are greeted with.</p>		

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
<p>The decision maker is the adoption manager. This situation needs to be closely monitored to ensure no conflict of interest arises.</p> <p>Documentation is sent to the decision maker prior. On the day of the panel she meets with the chair and makes the decision. No delays occur however; the manager is looking at ways to ensure she receives the minutes before the decision is made.</p> <p>The decision is conveyed to the child and birth parents by the child's social worker and to prospective adopters by the adopter social worker. Written confirmation then follows in a timely way.</p>		

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 are suitably knowledgeable, experienced and qualified for the task. They have undertaken management training through Worcestershire County Council staff development programme.

Financial management is supported by the directorate's financial department.

The adoption manager has a CQSW and is currently undertaking a diploma in Health and Social Service Management (NVQ4/5 equivalent). This course should be completed in March 2005.

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

Evidence was viewed of recent staff members having telephone references made. The recruitment procedures need to reflect this practice. The recruitment and selection process identifies the need for managers of the adoption service to have appropriate skills, knowledge and experience in childcare. The current manager meets these requirements. The manager had a satisfactory enhanced CRB check on file.

The manager informed the inspector that CRB checks are renewed every three years.

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?

3

The evidence gathered during this inspection confirmed that the structures in place ensure that the adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently. Staff informed the inspectors that they felt the agency was run in accordance with the 'statement of purpose'. Provisions are in place for a manager to deputise in the absence of the adoption manager. The Staff team communicate formally through regular team meetings as well as informally. 'The staff code of conduct' requires staff to declare any conflict of interest. Staff are appropriately trained and qualified for the roles they undertake and are aware of the equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice policies of the County Council. Staff who work with children and birth parents showed compassion, understanding and sensitivity when interviewed about the needs of children and birth families. The adoption social workers showed a good understanding of the issues in relation to adoption. The role of co-worker enhanced their skills of working with children and birth relatives. .

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

5

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

1

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 'statement of purpose' outlines the systems in place for monitoring the adoption service. The databases were being reviewed to enable them to be relevant to adoption processes as well as looked after children.

The development monitoring of the service is done through the team and service plans. The cabinet member with social services responsibility receives regular performance management information on the outcomes to children. A six monthly agency activity report is also sent.

There is clear written information about any charges which the agency imposes and these are in line with the BAAF standard fees. Adopters receive written information about any financial allowance they receive and how this is calculated.

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

Monthly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than Quarterly?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES

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 agency has access to a legal and medical adviser; both are suitably qualified and well thought of by the team. The medical adviser also sits on the panel. The legal advisor attends children's reviews when a plan for adoption is made. Although both the medical and the legal advisor have employment contracts that address adoption, they should have written protocols governing their role within the adoption service. The manager informed the inspectors that the agency has good access to education advisers and CAMHS.

See recommendation number 6

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?

3

The staff working in the agency are qualified and experienced in childcare. The agency and the staff team are pro-active on achieving the 20% of adoption staff having Post Qualifying Care Award by 2006.

Through previous experience and continually training, the staff team have the appropriate knowledge and skills. The manager is aware that a refresher course in child protection would be useful to all staff members. Training in the new adoption legislation is scheduled to take place in the near future.

At the time of the inspection competency based assessments had been introduced. Staff had received training. One staff member informed the inspector that assessments have always been competency based, they have just been taught to record it differently.

Staff felt they were able to maintain their skills with children by co-working with the placing social workers. They felt this role enabled them to promote the needs of the child more proactively.

The manager informed the inspector that the social workers undertaking birth records counselling under section 51 have received relevant training.

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?

13

%

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?	3
<p>Clear management structures are in place. Staff were aware of the structure of the adoption service and felt supported by the team.</p> <p>Supervision and training does take place regularly. All staff files viewed contained contract and job descriptions. Staff informed inspectors that they had registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Staff received information on equal opportunities, complaints, health and safety etc via the intranet.</p> <p>Workloads are regularly monitored through supervision, databases and a tracking process that monitors timescales.</p> <p>Team meetings take place regularly. The administration team also attend.</p> <p>Administration staff informed the inspector that they feel well supported by the adoption team and receive relevant training. The social workers spoken to felt there was enough administration staff at present, however they are aware the adoption support service will require more staff as it becomes established.</p> <p>Staff spoke highly of the medical and legal advisors and felt they were accessible.</p> <p>The integrated service for looked after children (ISL) provide access to educational, medical and psychological advice for both adopters and children. The inspector's felt this service was an excellent adoption support.</p>		

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	
<p>At the time of the inspection the adoption agency had one vacant social worker post. Questionnaires received suggested that over the last two years the agency did have staffing issues as delays were evident. Many adopters had one or two different social workers through the assessment period, many waited several months for preparation training and home studies to start.</p> <p>The directorate has introduced a recruitment and retention policy. Flexible working, training, supervision, study leave, manageable workloads with clear terms and conditions in place. The inspectors feel that workloads need close monitoring, as the role of the social worker is quite large as co- working, supporting and assessments are large and variable pieces of work.</p>			
Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	19	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	0
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**

Worcestershire County Council is a fair employer with appropriate employment practices and procedures including whistle blowing. Staff are aware that policies and procedures are available on the intranet.

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?****3**

Evidence was viewed that staff have received regular, suitable training. External and internal training appears to have been accessible to all staff. Inspectors were informed that Worcestershire does access some training via the West Midlands Consortium. Staff review and development takes place annually. Staff informed the inspectors that they have regular practice meetings led by senior practitioners. The inspector viewed the induction programme that consists of one month of structured tasks with close supervision. Staff informed the inspectors that joint training has taken place with panel members and placing social workers. Training on the new legislation will be taking place in December 2004.

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?	
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The agency holds comprehensive case files on prospective and approved adopters and the adoption files for children for whom “adoption is in their best interests” decision has been made. These files were well organised and contained evidence of case discussions held in supervision, which were signed by the supervisor.

The inspectors found some files had documentation missing like panel minutes.

There was good evidence of Criminal Records Bureau checks, status checks, written references and so forth in the adopters’ files inspected.

A written policy and procedural guidance needs to be in place for adoption records.

See recommendation number 7

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?	
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There was evidence of some good practice by family placement social workers and placing social workers. All the adopters who responded to the questionnaire felt they had received full and appropriate information about the child being placed.

Leaflets about ‘Access to Records’ were viewed. The leaflets were available in other formats and languages. A separate leaflet addressed access to birth records for adopted people.

The leaflets included relevant information from the Data Protection Act and request forms but will need to be up-dated to include the relevant parts of the Human rights Act.

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?**

2

The inspector viewed the Children’s Services Handbook – Recording.

This policy did cover many aspects of recording in the adoption services however, not all, no reference was made to adopter’s files.

The agency did not have separate files for complaints identifying details of any investigation, conclusion reached and action taken.

The adoption files viewed identified management in-put as signatures were present.

Overall the adoption files were suitable but consistency could be improved with regular auditing Extra care is needed on siblings files, as individual information was evident on files not pertaining to that young person.

See recommendation numbers 7 & 8

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

The inspector viewed staff personnel files and panel member’s files. Personnel files

contained all relevant information required in this standard. It was clear that telephone references had been obtained for the more recent members of staff however recruitment policies need to reflect that this process now takes place.

Panel members personnel files need to address all aspects of this standard.

See requirement number 1

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?	2
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The adoption agency is operated from two offices, one in the north of the county, Bromsgrove and one in the south, Pershore. The buildings are secure but accessible during office hours. Files are kept in lockable cabinets but the rooms are not lockable. Staffs spoke very positively about the IT systems and feel they have been given adequate training on these. The systems are backed-up, off the premises daily and security is via password.

The manager states the County Council has made arrangements regarding adequate insurance.

The adoption agency does not have a Disaster, Recovery Plan in place.

See recommendation numbers 9 & 10

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 27th October 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 10th May 2005, 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	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI 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 Jean Pickering of Worcestershire County 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	Jean Pickering
Signature	
Designation	Service Manager, Looked After Children
Date	9 th May 2005

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ 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.

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