



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

**Guildhall 1
Children and Family Services
High Street, Kingston upon Thames
KT1 1EU**

Lead Inspector
Sue Nott

Announced
8th, and 12th -14th July 2005

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above.

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Adoption Service
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Telephone number	0208 547 6042
Fax number	0208 547 5846
Email address	famplacduty@rbk.kingston.gov.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jennifer Rigby
Type of registration	LAA
No. of places registered (if applicable)	
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

N/A

Date of last inspection N/A This is the first inspection under the Local Authority Adoption Regulations 2003

Brief Description of the Service:

The adoption team is based within the Children and Family Services for the Royal Borough of Kingston. The office premises are based at the Guildhall in Kingston town centre. The council has formed a new directorate of Learning and Children's Services, bringing together the services previously provided from Social Services and the Education Department. The agency provides a comprehensive adoption service which includes placing children in need of adoptive families; recruiting, preparing, and assessing adoptive families, both for domestic and inter country adoptions; and providing assessments for post adoption support to adoptive children and families; Counselling and support to birth parents and families, assistance and counselling to adopted adults who wish to see their birth records, and intermediary services in indirect and direct contact arrangements are also provided, as are court reports on non-agency adoptions for step parents and relatives. The adoption agency is managed by a adoption manager who also has responsibility for the fostering service in the borough. It is a small service, and places a small number of children each year. The agency is established partnerships with other services to provide consultancy and support services.

SUMMARY

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

This is the first inspection of the adoption service provided by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Two inspectors spent three days in the agency and interviewed childcare and adoption social workers, adoption support workers, managers and administrative staff. The panel chair, the agency decision maker, and an elected member, plus four sets of adopters were also interviewed. The panel was observed by the lead inspector on a separate day. Supporting documents were provided by the agency, and read by the lead inspector prior to the inspection fieldwork, and a selection of files, including personnel files, adopter's and children's files were read during the course of the inspection. Questionnaires were received from five prospective and approved adopters, three placing social workers, and the medical and legal advisers. No questionnaires were received from birth relatives.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and staff for their cooperation during the inspection and the hard work they put into organising both the pre-inspection material and the inspection programme.

What the service does well:

Overall, the service was a well-managed one that endeavoured to place children with the most appropriate adopters.

The agency is welcoming to prospective adopters, but families from different ethnic backgrounds were usually advised to contact other agencies as Kingston has few children from ethnic minorities needing adoptive placements. Due to the small size of the service, staff are particularly aware of their need to prioritise families they are likely to use for their own children.

A number of adopters commented favourably about staff with which they had had contact. Comments included: "We have been assigned an extremely good social worker with warmth, professional skill and empathy", and "Kingston Family Placement team are nice and professional". Adopters felt they had undergone a thorough assessment and generally felt they had a good experience: Comments included: "One to one preparation was very good"; "We are very satisfied with the services provided".

Adopters also felt the assessment process was good – "Preparation meetings were very useful and well thought through"; One adopter commented "once we had decided to go ahead, it all went very quickly". However, another said "The experience was negative as we waited so long". Other adopters commented on delays at different stages in the process, including delays in the allocation of a social worker in some cases.

The adoption team works closely with the looked after children social workers, and the team manager provides regular training on adoption issues to improve practice in relation to direct work with children and attachment issues. Communication across these teams is good, as are working relationships. Placing social workers valued the work of the adoption social workers and said they were "dedicated and thorough in their assessments" and they are "hard working and committed in their approach to achieving the best outcomes for the children who are being placed".

The agency makes good placements and takes into account the cultural, religious and ethnic needs of the child. It does not wait unnecessarily long to try and make a perfect match, but managers need to ensure that systems are in place to make certain that all possible efforts are made to match as closely as possible.

The team undertakes long-term work with adopters and their families to provide support where needed. Individual packages of support are also negotiated with other professionals where necessary. Adopters were aware of the support available: "we always felt someone was there for us for advice and support".

The agency places emphasis on providing good legal and medical advice, although it was noted that there had been some inconsistency in the legal service offered over the past year due to changes in personnel.

The agency decision maker is thorough, and operates within good timescales. She takes her role seriously, and picks up on relevant departmental issues when making her decision.

The agency has experienced managers, providing good leadership, support and communication. However, formal supervision sessions are not always as regular as they should be, due to other work pressures on a small staff group. Staff confirmed that managers were approachable, and valued their knowledge and skills, although felt pressure of work impacted on their availability. Staff are knowledgeable and skilled, as comments from adopters detailed above indicate.

There was a thorough approach to the recruitment and assessment of adopters, the needs of the children being central to the process. Also the adoption panel had a consistent approach to its role in monitoring the quality of assessments.

The strategic and operational management of the service ensured that adoption was now being given a higher profile, and that workers had a clearer sense of the priorities of the service. There was a culture developing of encouraging improvements in the adoption service delivery and managers and staff were responded proactively where shortfalls had been identified.

There were effective systems for information management, with systems for tracking the progress of children to identify any reasons for delay. The adoption service was well supported by efficient and dedicated administrative staff, but again the volume of work sometimes impacted on their ability to carry out all the tasks necessary to improve the service offered.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of this service.

What they could do better:

Recruitment plans to broaden the range of adopters for the children who need families should continue to be extended, and be formalised. Kingston's adoption publicity should be inclusive in attracting families who could match the needs of the small number of children from black and ethnic minority groups who may need adoptive placements in the borough, but also attract families who may be recruited into the national pool of prospective adopters.

The agency has identified that it needs to further improve the quality and consistency of its own services to birth families. The extent in which birth families were engaged in the planning process for their children was variable. This is an area that would benefit from improvement to ensure that all birth families receive a consistently high standard of service. Their involvement in information giving about their own and their child's history needs to be evidenced in the form E. It was disappointing that no views of birth families were obtained during the inspection.

Direct work with children also needs improvement. Again, there are examples of good work, but this is not consistent. Childcare teams who are placing children for adoption have suffered staffing shortages. Some social work staff would benefit from a better understanding of attachment issues in the assessment of a child's present and future needs. Whilst some social workers demonstrated skill and understanding of the adoption process, others lacked knowledge and familiarity with the tasks to be completed. Specialist training opportunities for them in this area need to continue to be developed.

Also child protection training in relation to children placed for adoption should be included in the borough's training programme, and covered by clear policies within the general framework provided by the London Child Protection procedures.

There had been some delays in the allocation of assessments of adopters in the year preceding this inspection due to staff turnover. A number of the questionnaires received from adopters expressed frustration about the delays pre-approval, and the communication at the post approval stage for those not quickly matched with a child had not always been as reliable as should be expected.

Kingston's adoption support service is still in the process of developing. Multi-disciplinary support systems provided with the local CAMHS service were still in the early stages, and it will be important that this service has expertise in the special needs of all the parties involved in the adoption process.

Record keeping in some areas needs improving. Case files should be audited and evidence of supervisors' decisions on case files was scarce. Running records should be signed.

The files of staff, sessional workers and panel members must have all the necessary information as detailed in the regulations. The computerised index of archived records should be completed, and records stored appropriately.

The IT systems are being upgraded to provide better statistical information. The premises which the adoption team occupy are cramped and space for meetings was limited. Efforts had been made to provide a designated waiting area for prospective adopters attending panel adjacent to the family placement team room.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 2,4,5,10,11,12,13,15,19

The agency prepares adopters well to meet the needs of children placed for adoption, and to ensure appropriate placements are made and maintained. The agency has improved its systems to ensure effective and safe planning for children.

EVIDENCE:

The agency had a written recruitment strategy within its Statement of Purpose, but this was rather basic, and needed to be expanded. However, there was evidence that efforts were being made to increase and widen the recruitment of prospective adopters. It was anticipated that six to ten children a year would be approved for adoption. Recruitment had not been part of a targeted long-term strategy, although the placement of children has still been timely. A more detailed evaluation of trends within the service, alongside an examination of any changes in the demography of the borough should be carried out, in order to better project the make up and numbers of adoptive families needed in the future. It was positive, however, that a publicity and recruitment coordinator had recently joined the team, and she was working to raise Kingston's profile amongst prospective applicants. New advertisements had been devised to encourage an increase in enquiries. These did not specifically encourage applicants from different ethnic backgrounds. At present, most of the children

in Kingston requiring adoptive families are from white British backgrounds. For those small numbers of children from different ethnic backgrounds, efforts were made to place children in appropriate placements, which met their cultural and religious needs. This was not always possible, and was balanced within appropriate timescales. The manager stated that the agency took a "broad and pragmatic a view as we can in matching". No Kingston siblings groups had been placed for adoption within the period examined, but every effort should be made to facilitate this where possible. Clear evidence should be provided of the decision making process in relation to the separation of children, and an explanation of this for the child in later life.

There was some evidence of children's views being taken into account and work being done with them to enable them to move on. However, the work being done in this area was variable, and necessary life story work was not always being carried out. This variability may limit adequate assessment of children's needs, including attachment issues, and could affect the long term success of placements. The staffing situation was said to impact on the agency's ability to consistently carry out this work to the level required. It was clearly the case that more needs to be done in this area. Managers and staff recognised this and the adoption team have been involved in carrying out extra work to complete this task in some cases. Placing social workers spoke positively of the very experienced and knowledgeable workers in the adoption team.

The agency has good systems in place to monitor individual care planning. Permanency Action Planning meetings with all relevant managers take place monthly, and written statistics are provided for senior managers.

There was evidence that prospective adopters generally underwent a thorough preparation, assessment and approval process. Preparation courses were run jointly with the South West London consortium members. Adopters made positive comments about the assessment course: "we are very happy overall with the adoption process"; however one set of adopters commented that the preparation had not provide any "parenting" experience for childless adopters. Additional ways of helping childless couples obtain further practical help and advice should be explored. Adopters thought the recording in Forms F's was generally accurate, and inspectors confirmed this, and found form F's to be thorough, although with varying levels of emphasis on competencies. Placing social workers commented that " the information in the Form F's have been very detailed and informative" and "gave a true picture of the couple". Adopters said the assessment was "managed carefully and tactfully", and the worker was "always encouraging and supportive". Adopters said the social workers were good at keeping them informed of their progress and took the assessment at their pace. However, there was evidence that there had been delays in some cases at the early stages of the process, and steps should be taken to ensure these are minimised in future. This is discussed again later in the report

The agency undertakes appropriate checks on adopters to comply with the regulations, including family members and ex-partners where possible. However, one case file was found to have a photocopy of a CRB from the prospective adopters employer rather than one applied for from the adoption agency. There had been an earlier confusion about the portability of CRB's, but this should have been remedied once further clarification was obtained. Also, in one case, where child protection issues were being investigated, an employer reference had not been sought when the family were re-approved for an older child, although the adopter had, since the original approval, been working with children. This may have provided useful information for the panel. Systems were now said to be more robust, and more recent assessments examined had all relevant checks.

This is a small agency, and only five Kingston children had been placed in the last year. Other placements made with Kingston adopters were children from other authorities. Adopters spoken with who had Kingston children, and those that returned questionnaires, felt they received as much information about the child as the agency had. One set of adopters attended a life appreciation day for the children placed with them, who had come from another authority. Kingston does not organise these routinely for their own children. These could be of benefit in providing more first hand, accurate information about the child's life to adopters, particularly when children have had a number of social workers during their time as a looked after child. Adopters with children placed from other agencies were positive about the efforts made by Kingston workers to obtain relevant information from other authorities.

There was no specific system for the notification of adopters and birth parents about deaths in the respective families, although letterbox arrangements did request that the agency be notified of any significant events. Staff were aware of the importance of advising families in these situations, but the issue needs to be made more explicit in agency procedures and guidelines.

The panel has satisfactory policies and procedures in place. It was appropriately chaired by an experienced chair, and was proactive in receiving progress reports on cases. This was evidenced in the panel observed, when panel members expressed serious concern on the delay in one case caused by court timetables. There was also evidence of extra panels being convened to avoid delay. The panel is appropriately constituted, but present membership included three staff members, which limited the opportunities for more independent views. The membership will be reviewed with the imminent changes in legislation. There are informal avenues for the panel chair to feedback on issues and areas of concern to the agency. It is recommended that these are formalised, and are timetabled at regular intervals.

Adopters who attended panel had variable experiences. One person commented that they found it a "stressful" experience; another said it was the

“worst experience of their life”, and felt they had not been adequately prepared for it. The lack of an appropriate waiting room had previously added to the anxiety of a number of adopters, although attempts had been made to remedy this. However, adopters added that the panel chair and members had made efforts to make them feel welcome and at ease, but clearly some had still found it a daunting experience.

The panel meets every 4 weeks. It is well organised and the minutes are full. The decision maker takes her role seriously, and is knowledgeable and child focussed. She reads all the papers and makes her decisions promptly, and formal notification letters are actioned quickly.

Managers have the appropriate checks and references required, as do staff but the personnel files need to reflect this more accurately, as discussed in the management section of this report. All staff are qualified, and registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). A number have done their Post Qualification (PQ) award. Team members were knowledgeable and experienced, although it is recommended that all staff undertake an update in child protection training as most had not undertaken child protection training in recent years. Corporate training and child protection procedures must include issues specifically relating to children placed for adoption, and clarify agency responsibilities in child protection issues, where interagency placements have been made.

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 standard(s) 6 and 18

The adoption agency provides effective support services for adoptive parents to ensure appropriate placements are made and maintained. Staff and adopters have access to specialist advisers which enable the provision of services to meet the needs of the children and their adoptive families. However, the development of a more cohesive approach to support services within the borough needs to continue.

EVIDENCE:

Adopters contacted expressed a variety of views regarding the support that would be available to them at different stages in their child's life. This in part was due to a recognition that Kingston was still in the process of developing its service. One to one support to adopters was found to be generally very good. A strategy to provide a more comprehensive package of adoption support services was being considered within the South West London Consortium, including setting up a "Waiting for Adoption" group.

Also a more cohesive approach to provide support alongside health and educational services within Kingston was also being developed. Structural changes were going ahead within Kingston's children's services to amalgamate a number of teams to provide a "Safeguarding Team". Negotiations with CAMHS had taken place to start to improve access to assessment and treatment services for adoptive families, and increase support to a range of carers. Work was also being done on profiling the educational needs of adopted children in borough. This needed to be done alongside ongoing training for all relevant professionals in building a greater awareness of and expertise in issues specifically related to adoption situations. A multi agency seminar on adoption had recently been held in the borough.

Independent counselling and therapeutic services could be arranged and financed by the Borough if local services were not available. Post placement seminars for adopters were provided with other members of the Consortium, and included "Talking to Your Children about Adoption", "Attachment" and "Communicating with Children through Play". Currently two members of the adoption team job shared to provide post adoption support, and team members all provided support to their allocated adopters up to an adoption order being made.

Kingston NHS Trust provided a consultant paediatrician to act as medical adviser to the panel. The medical adviser took her role seriously, and was an active member of panel, taking a holistic view of the child's needs, as well as highlighting the medical aspects. Adopters interviewed knew that they could seek medical advice in relation to children matched or placed with them, and there was evidence that this had been done in a case where possible child protection issues were investigated. Legal advice was said to have been variable due to changes in personnel caused by maternity leave. However, the previous adviser had now returned to work, and staff were hopeful that the legal section was once again able to provide a more consistent service. Staff confirmed that there was generally easy access to legal and medical advice, and advisers were approachable and accessible. However, a written protocol needs to be developed setting out the role of the specialist advisers used by the agency.

The agency has had no disruptions since 1995. The manager reported that if this situation did develop support would be given to adopters and children during and after the disruption. A disruption meeting would be held, and any recommendations of this meeting used as a learning experience.

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 standard(s) 7,8,9

There was a clear commitment to providing services that enabled birth families to contribute to their children's futures, although the agency was aware that more consistent practice needed to be established.

EVIDENCE:

There was some evidence of good work with birth parents. Staff interviewed expressed an understanding of the needs of birth parents, but acknowledged that they need to do more to develop this aspect of the service to improve outcomes for children. However, the difficulty in maintaining continuity of staff in the department may affect the agency's ability to deliver a good and consistent service.

A number of forms E were seen. Most were not signed by the birth parents, nor provided explanations as to why this were the case, whether or not the Form E had been seen by the birth family and if they had any comments to make on them. Work with placing social workers should be done to try and improve this area.

No birth relatives were seen by the inspectors and no questionnaires returned. Counselling was offered by an independent worker but take up was said to be "patchy", and ways of making the service more accessible were being discussed with the worker involved. The Post Adoption workers and the South West London Consortium is also considering what might be possible in developing services for birth parents in the area. Consideration is being given to setting up a Kingston birth mothers' support group. Birth parents are given information on the Natural Parents Network, and access to an adoption support worker.

The adoption team also assist with arrangements for direct contact between the child and birth family members. The system for indirect contact through the letterbox scheme enables birth families to fulfil their plans for contact.

As already discussed, life story work was not being carried out consistently to a satisfactory standard, and this may impact on the child's future understanding of the reasons for their adoption, and their birth family's situation at the time.

The agency has a commitment to lifetime adoption support and provides assistance to adopted adults through birth records counselling, tracing and intermediary work.

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 standard(s)

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

The adoption agency was found to be well managed, with effective systems of communication that supported workers in developing services to meet the needs of the children.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a statement of purpose, which has been recently been revised and this needs to be developed further. The Statement should provide further clarification on staffing. The complaints section does not give enough detail, or explain the role of the Commission for Social Care Inspection in the process. The Statement is available on the council intranet, and staff spoken with confirmed that they had seen it and thought it was accurate.

The agency uses the BAAF Children's Guide, with one additional typed page on Kingston. The guide stills refers to NCSC in its complaints section. The additional information on Kingston was not provided in a child friendly format. The service is in the process of producing it's own guide. The current practice in the agency is to use a variety of tools to talk to younger children about adoption, but thought needs to be given to the preparation of more than one Children's Guide which will meet the needs of all children for whom adoption is the plan, including younger children and children with disabilities. Some staff spoken to were not aware of the existence of the children's guide.

The new publicity and recruitment officer was in the process of updating information for birth parents, which explains about the process of adoption. The agency has access to translation and interpreting services, which can be used to meet the linguistic needs of children and families involved in the adoption process.

There is satisfactory written information for adopters, which conveys the eligibility criteria and process. However, the new recruitment publicity and information leaflets should be reviewed to include inclusive messages in attracted families from different ethnic backgrounds.

There are mechanisms to prioritise the assessment of adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for families and adopters are "fast tracked" if it is felt they could meet the needs of a particular child. The agency is small, and has systems in place to enable them to know which children are waiting. It has access to a small number of sessional workers to undertake assessments, if the adoption social workers in the team have limited capacity at that time. However, delays have still occurred in allocation, and managers should ensure that sufficient resources are available to minimise any possible future delays. Adopters receive an information pack, which includes reading lists as well as information about the process. They also get the chance to talk to adopters at the preparation groups or on an individual basis if they wish.

The agency is well managed and managers demonstrated effective leadership skills. The team manager is appropriately experienced, qualified and knowledgeable. Lines of accountability are well established and communication is generally good across the teams. However, with growing demand and an

expanding service, managers will need to ensure communication systems keep pace with this growth. For example, in discussion with staff, it was apparent that there was some confusion within the adoption team about the allocation of Section 51 and letterbox work, and that staff were not yet familiar with new Post Adoption Support procedures issued in June 2005. It is recommended that the workload for the team manager, who is responsible for both the fostering and adoption service should be kept under review. Senior managers were said to be approachable, but due to the work involved in instigating the changes in departmental structure over recent months, staff reported that they had been less available to staff on an informal basis.

The practice adviser has direct supervisory responsibility for two adoption team social workers and a number of sessional workers. All staff confirmed that they had supervision, but said it was difficult to maintain regular sessions, due to the volume of work and other demands on theirs and their supervisors' time. Adoption team staff felt their caseloads were monitored by the manager, but there was no formal work load management system in place. Efforts were, however, made to utilise individual skills, experience and preferences.

All staff were very clear about the importance of handling the initial enquiry to the agency in a sensitive and welcoming manner and one adopter commented on how Kingston contrasted favourably with the initial reception she received from another agency, where the response had been poor.

The agency has improving information systems, and these were now providing the tracking tools necessary to follow progress of current cases. The managers also have systems in place for monitoring the work of the agency through regular meetings, statistical information and performance indicators which are regularly reviewed and assessed. The executive side of the Council monitor the work of the adoption agency through a full annual report, as well as regular updates at least six monthly as required.

The agency has sufficient staff to maintain the service, but there had been delays in the allocation of some assessments, due to a staff vacancy. In order to improve timescales, and to develop the service further with regards to post adoption support, and better services to birth parents, this will need to be kept under review. The quality of administrative support was good, but the small staff group sometimes struggled to carry out all the tasks necessary. Also it was noted that not all adoption files inherited from Surrey County council have yet been entered onto the computer index of cases, requiring staff to carry out manual searches. This impacted on staff's ability to do their job efficiently and well. Additional resources should be provided to ensure this work is completed and that the archive system is secure and confidential.

Staff have access to the corporate training which is provided, and the in house training programme includes adoption issues. Team development days are held jointly with fostering. Managers should ensure that specialist staff have

sufficient time to consider the future development of Kingston's adoption work, particularly the impact of future changes in legislation. A number of staff have post qualifying awards, and there is access to external training courses. There is no specific family placements training budget, and each case is considered individually. Most adoption team staff had not done recent Child Protection training to update their skills and knowledge. Consideration needs to be given as to how the training needs of the adoption team can be met in a more coherent manner.

Case records for both children and adopters were on the whole well organised and procedures for case recording and accessing information were currently being updated. However, the file index was only suitable for children, not for adult files. There were also some shortfalls in the recording. Running reports were often not signed, and not all adopters' files include the contemporaneous notes of the visits which contributed to the form F assessment. There was little evidence of a file audit system being operated or of case decisions by supervisors on the case files seen.

Personnel, sessional staff and panel members' files also had shortfalls and all need to comply with schedule 3 and 4 of the regulations, including proof of identity, proof of qualifications, and photographs, and two references. CRB's for all workers, including sessional staff, must not be accepted from other agencies.

Current files were stored in lockable cabinets in lockable rooms. Archived files were kept in fireproof cabinets, but they were located in a general meeting room used for case conferences, and for general meetings by both housing and social services. There was a coded entry system into the room, but this was accessed from a corridor next to a lift where security was poor. Storage of files should be risk assessed in terms of security, fire and water damage. Also clear procedures should be available for sessional workers working from home regarding confidentiality and security issues.

The offices of the adoption service were on the second floor of the Guildhall, and the building was shared with other services. The offices were cramped, and meeting rooms were at a premium, and space to conduct sensitive interviews was limited. Adopters attending panel report to the general reception area on arrival. This is shared with housing. They were then taken upstairs to wait in a room adjacent to the family placement team room. There was disabled access. Suitable accommodation is part of a long term departmental strategy, but it is recommended that this issue needs more immediate attention to ensure the well being of staff, and the consumers of the adoption service.

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	3
8	3
9	3

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

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	2
3	3
14	3
16	3
17	3
20	2
21	2
22	3
23	3
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	2
29	2
30	3
31	3

N/A

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.	2.1	LAA Regs 2003	The adoption agency must develop a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.	28.11.05
2.	1	LAAS Regs 2003 9(1)&(2)	Child protection procedures must include issues specifically relating to children placed for adoption, and clarify agency responsibilities in child protection issues, where interagency placements have been made.	28.11.05
3.	1	LAASR 2003.2 Sch.1	The Statement of Purpose must be developed further to adequately cover all areas listed in Schedule I of the Local Authority Service Regulations 2003.	28.11.05
4.	4.8	AAR 1983 8	The agency must ensure that all appropriate checks on adopters are undertaken to comply with the regulations.	31.10.05
5.	21.1	LAASR 2003 8(1)	Managers must ensure that there are sufficient staff to avoid delay in the allocation of work, and . The staffing situation will need to	28.11.05

			be kept under review with regards to future developments, particularly adoption support, efficient administrative back up, and providing better services to birth parents.	
6.	20	LAASR 2003.10	Managers must ensure that all staff receive regular supervision	31.10.05
7.	28	LAASR 2003 15(1)	Personnel, sessional staff and panel members' files must comply with schedule 3 and 4 of the regulations, including proof of identity, proof of qualifications, photographs, and two references. CRB's for all workers, including sessional staff, must not be accepted from other agencies.	31.10.05
8.	25 & 29	AAR 1983 & Miscellaneous Amendments 1997	The agency should review its arrangements for the storage of records to ensure adequate risk assessments have been made in respect of security, and fire or water damage.	30.11.05

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.	8.2	The agency should ensure that systems are in place to ensure a more rigorous approach to progressing life story work with all children appropriate to their age and ability.
2.	4.7	Additional ways of helping childless couples obtain practical help and advice and experience in parenting skills should be explored.
3.	5.2	Life appreciation days should be considered as part of the placing process to provide more first hand, accurate information about the child's life to adopters.
4.	5.3 10.2	Agency procedures and guidelines should clarify the system for the notification of adopters and birth parents of any deaths in the respective families. It is recommended that feedback meetings by the panel

		chair to the agency are formalised, and are timetabled at regular intervals.
5.	10.3	Appropriate waiting facilities should be provided for applicants attending panel.
6.	23.1	The agency should ensure adoption staff have training in child protection which relates specifically to children placed for adoption.
7.	18	A written protocol setting out the specialist advisers should be produced.
8.	7	The agency should ensure that birth parents see and have the opportunity to comment about what is written about them and their circumstances and that their signature on the form E, or an explanation of why there is no signature, is given.
9.	1.4	It is recommended that thought needs to be given to the preparation of more than one Children's Guide which will meet the needs of all children for whom adoption is the plan, including younger children and children with disabilities. All staff should be made aware of the existence of the Children's Guide.
10.	2	Recruitment plans should be reviewed to include inclusive policies for attracting families from different ethnic backgrounds.
11.	16	Managers should ensure that staff are aware of the system for allocated birth records counselling work.
12.	25	A separate case file index should be developed that is suitable for adult files.
13.	25	Running reports should be signed, and adopters' files should include the contemporaneous notes of the visits which contribute to the form F assessment.
14.	27.3	The agency should ensure that decisions by supervisors are recorded on case files, and that regular file audits are implemented.
15.	25	Clear procedures should be available for sessional workers working from home regarding confidentiality and security issues.
16.	23	Training and development opportunities for childcare workers involved in adoption work should be expanded.
17.	29	The borough's review of office space should be completed as early as possible to ensure the well being of staff working under crowded conditions, and ensure an efficient and sensitive service is provided to the consumers of its adoption service.
18.		
19.		

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