



**Making Social Care
Better for People**

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Medway Council Adoption Service

**Compass Centre
Chatham Maritime
Chatham
Kent
ME4 4HY**

Lead Inspector
Maureen Moore

Announced Inspection
29th November 2005 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Medway Council Adoption Service

Address Compass Centre
Chatham Maritime
Chatham
Kent
ME4 4HY

Telephone number 01634 331214

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Medway Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Lesley Penna

Type of registration Local Auth Adoption Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection N/A

Brief Description of the Service:

Medway's adoption service falls within the remit of the council's Health and Community Service. As well as assessing the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan, and working with and supporting birth parents through this process, the agency provides the following services:

- recruitment, preparation and assessment of adoptive parents
- matching adoptive parents to children
- inter-country adoption assessments
- approval of non-agency adopter
- counselling for birth parents
- counselling and support for children for whom adoption is the plan
- support and supervision for prospective adopters
- support for adoptive families pre and post placement and order
- co-ordination of post-adoption contact arrangements
- support and counselling for adults who have been adopted.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection began over three days on 29th and 30th of November, and 1st of December 2005. It was completed on the 12th January 2006, when the operation of the adoption panel was observed and verbal feedback given to the agency.

The methodology for the inspection included following:

- reading of documents provided by the service
- questionnaires received from adopters; birth parents & families; placing social workers and the panel legal and medical advisers
- file reading, including those of adopters, children, complaints and placement disruptions
- an interview with a birth parent
- interviews with adopters
- interviews with staff at all levels across the service
- an interview with two elected members
- the reading of panel papers and observation of the adoption panel.

Medway employs an independent social worker to undertake inter-country adoption work. No assessments had been completed in the twelve months prior to the inspection, so no examples of this aspect of the agency's work were examined.

This was the first time that Medway had been measured against the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2003) (the regulations). As a result, there are several statutory requirements and good practice recommendations, for which the agency must produce an action plan.

The agency prepared extremely well for the inspection, and produced a wealth of material. They organised an effective programme, which was of great help to the inspectors in the carrying out of their work. People across the service welcomed the inspection and approached it in an open and constructive manner.

In January 2006 Medway established its integrated children's service, which has provided a new framework for the provision of children's social care, and with it a new senior management structure. It was evident during the inspection (the fieldwork for which was undertaken just prior to the implementation of the above), that workers across the service anticipated the change with mixture of optimism and trepidation. However, staff reported that communication about the changes had been good, and were generally well motivated in their work.

What the service does well:

The family finding and support aspects of the adoption service is effectively and efficiently managed. The adoption team is staffed by knowledgeable, experienced and child focused social workers. The service had placed 28 children for adoption (14 with their own adopters) in the year preceding the inspection. The commitment and support of these workers have no doubt contributed to the positive outcomes for those children, none of whom had experienced disruptions in their placements. This indicates the effectiveness of the agency's matching procedures, and the value of the post-placement support.

The agency produces very good, easy to read information for those people who enquire about adoption – and in a timely manner. The service responds quickly to applicants, and approved adopters spoke very positively about this part of the service: “[We had] an immediate response”; “...very quick response in writing... team were available for questions”; “[another authority] put us in touch with Medway, who were great” were some of the comments received.

There was evidence that adopters are provided with good support throughout the process; they expressed confidence in the service and spoke positively of the input they received from individual workers and the team as a whole: “Our allocated social worker [is] brilliant. We have felt very supported... by the team”; “Generally, the staff are brilliant”; “We have been very grateful for the time and effort by [sic] Medway” was how some adopters expressed their opinions.

The agency has entered into partnerships with local voluntary agencies, and works closely with the Adoption South East Consortium to ensure that there is a range of services to suit most needs.

There was evidence of skilful work being carried out with birth parents and families of adopted children. The co-ordination of contact arrangements was well organised and efficient.

The adoption panel has an independent and relevantly qualified and experienced chairperson. It operates in a focused but sensitive manner, and undertakes appropriate quality assurance and scrutiny of the reports put before it.

The recently appointed portfolio holder for children's services and his predecessor impressed as being well-informed about the responsibilities of elected members, as corporate parents, to Medway's looked after children. They demonstrated insight into the strategic needs of the service, and said that the commitment of resources to children's services has to be linked to evidence of need. This makes sound business sense, and illustrates a

willingness to listen to managers, and to allocate resources equitably, as long as the officers can produce clear plans for the development of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection since CSCI.

What they could do better:

Although Medway develops annually a plan for the recruitment of potential adopters, it would benefit from a more targeted approach, linked directly to the needs of children who have adoption as their plan. This would increase the prospects of children being found suitable families more quickly.

Some adopters commented that the preparation training was held at inopportune times: "...during the week, which is not always convenient", was how one person put it. The service should give due consideration to the feasibility of holding some preparation programmes at other times, which might attract a higher number of participants.

The length of time from adopters making an initial enquiry to being approved by the agency averages out at 18 months, and the number of home study sessions averaged 11 visits. This is too long, and the process needs to be streamlined, so that potential adopters receive a more efficient service.

The service as a whole needs to develop tighter quality assurance processes: many of the children's Form E assessments were not of an adequate standard due to a combination of factors, including staffing difficulties in fieldwork teams, and the inexperience of some social workers. Some of the adopters' Form F assessments were weak in relation to the analysis of applicants' life experiences, and opportunities were missed to highlight the strengths and areas for development of adoptive applicants.

There was evidence that the service needs to engage more with birth parents and families in the care planning for children, so that vital information regarding a child's heritage is preserved.

Medway should reconsider its approach to permanency planning for children, in order to develop a co-ordinated service, in which the strategic management is coherent with the delivery of the service. This would serve to achieve more positive outcomes for children who have adoption as their plan.

The service must develop protocols with colleagues in human resources, to ensure that the policies procedures and practice relating to the recruitment and selection of staff are watertight, and comply with the NMS and the regulations.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

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

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

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

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

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

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

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

Medway has good matching policies and procedures, but the poor quality of some of the assessment of children's needs puts in doubt the ability to achieve consistently good outcomes for children who have adoption as their plan.

EVIDENCE:

The agency produces an annual plan for the recruitment of adopters. However, this process would benefit from a more strategic policy; the assessed needs of children should inform recruitment activity. It is recommended that the service undertakes an analysis of the needs of children waiting currently in Medway, and of those coming through the system, in order to target and recruit potential adopters best suited to meet those needs. A more dynamic, marketing based approach to recruitment would be advantageous to the service as a whole, and improve the chances of children finding successful adoptive families more quickly.

There is a thorough preparation process, which includes an optional "parenting and loss" group session, which is held prior to the formal preparation training. The majority of adopters were positive about the content of the training course: "[it was] full, giving all the information needed for you to make a decision" was one comment received. Others spoke of the professionalism of

staff and the clarity of information. However, some adopters remarked that all courses are held midweek, during the day, which caused practical difficulties in attending. The agency should reconsider the viability of holding evening, and or, weekend training, to ensure that the service reaches the optimum number of potential adopters.

Consideration should be given to the coverage of diversity matters during the preparation training, and subsequent assessments, as there was evidence of a lack of awareness and confidence among staff when dealing with issues such as sexuality.

There were some excellent accounts of adopters' participation in the preparation training, which were incorporated well into the assessment reports. This enhances the quality of information available to the panel for their deliberation.

Preparation training for those applicants wishing to adopt from overseas are commissioned to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre. Assessments of these adopters are undertaken by an independent social worker employed by Medway.

Observations regarding the length of the assessment process were less positive, with the majority of adopters stating that it was far too long. One person said that the home study was spread over 15 sessions, some of which took four hours. Of the cases looked at during the inspection, the average number of visits was found to be 11. The manager should consider how this aspect of the work could be undertaken more efficiently.

Medway should consider how it measures the service to adopters: timescales for the approval process are currently measured from the point "an application is accepted", which is often long after the initial enquiry and following the preparation training. Cases seen during the inspection indicated that it took an average of 18 months from initial enquiry to approval. This is too long, and the agency should seek ways of streamlining the process.

The standard of Forms F was variable; some were very good, others less so. In the weaker reports there was too little analysis into the effects of applicants' life experiences, and no weight given to the quality of information gleaned from referees. Although the service uses the competency-based model of assessment; adopters complete this part of the process themselves. This work is not evaluated, or integrated into the wider assessment, which means that opportunities are missed to clarify adopters' strengths and areas for development. Despite the good practice of second worker opinions prior to completion of the assessment, there was evidence of insufficient quality assurance. Managers should consider how these issues can be addressed within the service.

There was evidence of CRB and other checks being undertaken on applicants. The pro-forma for the recording of CRB disclosures needs to be standardised, as some disclosure numbers were not retained. Also the procedure for dealing with any disclosed information should be clarified. The service should ensure that previous partners are contacted as appropriate; in one case during the inspection this had been overlooked.

The service placed 28 children for adoption in the twelve months preceding the inspection (50% of whom were with the agency's own adopters) and there were no disruptions within those placements. Discussion with adoption team social workers demonstrated their knowledge and experience in this area of work, and there was evidence of children's views being taken into account during the process. Medway has a good written policy for matching adopters to children. Placing social workers commented positively on their experiences of the matching procedure. One social worker commented: "Great care was taken... careful discussions took place before placement"; another said: "I have always received an excellent service".

The standard of children's Forms E assessments was generally poor, and in need of quality assurance from the outset of the assessment. Children's views are not recorded, and none that was seen had been signed by a birth parent. Attempts had been made to support inexperienced childcare social workers in this aspect of their work. The adoption team has increasingly taken on additional work in recognition of the pressures faced by child care teams; culminating in the appointments of specialist workers in the adoption team to mentor fieldwork colleagues, and undertake other adoption related work. This might be a short-term solution, but managers need to consider its sustainability in the longer term, as it disguises a more fundamental shortfall in the knowledge, skills and capacity of children's social workers in all areas to do with permanency planning.

Medway has a properly constituted panel, which is chaired by a person who is independent of the agency. The panel comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people, and all have CRB clearance. All panel members undergo annual appraisals; this is good practice as it allows the service to monitor performance and identify any developmental needs, as well as elicit feedback on operational matters.

The panel that was observed was well chaired, very child-focused and sensitive to all involved; insightful questions were asked and there was evidence of panel undertaking appropriate quality assurance. The Adoption & Children Act had been fully implemented some two weeks earlier, and there was evidence at this panel of its application into practice, underpinned by an apparent grasp of its meaning.

Adopters who attended panel and commented, were positive about the experience. Some commented that they were reassured following the

manager's second opinion visit, during which the process was outlined in full to them. The service has recently produced an information leaflet for adopters that outlines the role and function of the panel, and includes photographs and pen-pictures of members. This should further alleviate anxieties felt by applicants who attend panel, and help to demystify the process for those who do not.

The administration of the panel is very well organised. The minutes are detailed and reflect very well the content of discussions and how recommendations are reached. However, individual minute items on files should include the names of the people who discussed the case, for future reference.

The agency decision maker changed between the beginning and the end of the inspection, due to the reorganisation of the service. Cases looked at during the inspection indicated that decisions were taken in a timely manner, and that the agency decision maker informed relevant parties in writing. This is good practice and should continue.

Matters relating to the staffing of the service are discussed the management section of this report.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

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

6, 18.

Medway provides good quality, flexible support for adopters and has access to sound specialist advisers, which means that there are increased chances for children to enjoy a secure family life.

EVIDENCE:

Medway has good written policies and procedures in relation to adoption support, and adopters spoke well of the assistance given by the adoption team social workers. One said it was “second to none”.

Medway has established an adoption support team comprising a senior practitioner (part-time), a full-time social worker social worker and social work assistant (part-time). The workers have access to a part-time business support person also. This team has responsibility for the co-ordination of post-adoption contact arrangements, support for adopters and birth families as well as Section 51 counselling for adopted adults. Clearly the agency has monitored the development of adoption support work, which had expanded greatly prior to the inspection, and continues to do so. It is doubtful whether the current establishment will be sufficient to meet the anticipated further increase in demand following the implementation of recent legislation. It is recommended that Medway continues to monitor this area of work closely, to ensure that the service is not overwhelmed.

The agency has service level agreements with two voluntary agencies for the provision of additional support such as workshops and local surgeries for adopters to access. The service also recently commissioned the setting up of a “buddy” scheme, whereby adopters are linked with one another for their mutual benefit. The adoption support team produces regular newsletters that keep adopters informed of events and developments in the service.

The variety of services on offer from partner agencies and Medway ensures that adopters have options as to the service, and providers that best suits their needs. The agency is developing a system to monitor the uptake and outcomes of the commissioned services, to ensure service user satisfaction and value for money. This is good business practice, and should inform service development.

Medway has also made use of its positive links with neighbouring authorities and the Adoption South East Consortium to further enhance its provision to those in need of support services.

Adopters spoke very appreciatively of the efforts made by adoption social workers to ensure that they and their children received information such as life-story work and later-life letters. Difficulties in this area had been encountered not only from other agencies, but Medway also (reference to which is made elsewhere in this report).

Medway has recently reviewed its financial support policy and procedures and is piloting the DfES periodic financial support means test. The agency's new guidelines reflect the new legislation, and adopters can request an assessment or re-assessment of their overall support needs at any time.

The agency has membership BAAF and a service level agreement with a local voluntary agency, from whom they can elicit specialist advice as required. There are also links with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health services who they use for professional consultation or specialist assessment. There is appropriate legal and medical advice available to the service.

Medway should develop a suitable written protocol governing the role of specialist advisors.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

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

7, 8, 9.

Medway needs to review its approach to working with birth parents and families to ensure that they are engaged in the care planning process, and that the child's heritage is maintained as well as it can be.

EVIDENCE:

Medway as an agency recognises the life-long implications of adoption for birth parents, and it was evident from discussion with adoption team workers, and the information produced by the service, that this is the philosophy. The agency always considers permanent placements within a child's own family, and to this end, the service is planning to develop further the practice of family group conferences. This means that it should be possible to ascertain early on in proceedings if there are any existing family members who could offer a permanent home to a child, and to minimise delay in finding an alternative family placement if this is not possible.

Birth parents are offered counselling and support from the adoption team, and there was evidence of good work being undertaken by these workers, especially in the maintaining of direct and indirect contact arrangements. Some sensitive work was seen in relation to supporting birth families to write letters to their adopted children.

Birth parents can also receive support from drop-in surgeries from a locally commissioned voluntary agency. There was no evidence of how this service is evaluated, and some child care social workers were unsure about how, when, or from where, this provision is available. Therefore, many birth parents and families may be missing out on services that could be of great benefit to them, and their children, particularly in later life.

There was evidence that some social workers from the Looked After Children team struggled with the planning for permanency work and did not know, for example, that they were supposed to share the Form E assessments with birth parents. Birth parents' comments about the content of the reports are not recorded, and no evidence was seen of parental signatures. Child care social workers said that they lacked specific training in this and other aspects of permanency planning, such as life-story work. There was evidence of unacceptable delays in the provision of life-story work, and in the production of later life letters; matters which should be addressed with some urgency.

One birth parent spoke of the positive support they were receiving from the adoption support team (who "are very good and supportive"). This person said that they did not still fully understand the adoption process, and that they had never been asked to contribute to their child's life history. An example was given of when a meeting was arranged at very short notice and the parent could not attend; and another where the reviewing officer and social workers never arrived.

Medway should consider seriously how the shortfalls in working with the families of children who have adoption as their plan might be redressed. If the agency is unable to engage with birth parents and families at the onset, and valuable information is not gathered early enough, by the time the support worker becomes involved vital information is already lost – and with it a part of a child's heritage.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

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

1, 3, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.

The adoption service is generally well managed, but the agency needs to implement a more integrated approach across the service, and to tighten up its quality assurance processes, to ensure consistent and safe practice.

EVIDENCE:

Medway has a clearly set out statement of purpose that complies with the NMS and the regulations, and has been approved by elected members. The agency recently developed an adoption guide for younger children, to replace the BAAF booklet, which is still used for older children (albeit with local information).

There are plans to produce a more specific guide for older children, which will be available in the coming months.

The agency has recently commissioned the updating of its policies and procedures, to ensure compliance with new legislation. The service must revise its child protection procedures to safeguard, explicitly, children who are placed for adoption.

Medway has a very good range of information that is sent out to enquirers; it is clearly written, and includes details on all aspects of adoption. Information from adopters indicated that responses to initial enquiries were "prompt and appropriate" and that information was "clear and relevant". This means that adopters had confidence in the service from their earliest contact with the agency. However, the agency should make more explicit its eligibility criteria for adopters to ensure that people who are, for example, divorced, gay or disabled are aware from the beginning, that they could be considered to adopt in Medway.

Although Medway has a system to prioritise adopters who specifically meet the needs of children who are waiting for adoptive families, the service needs to become more strategic in its recruitment of potential adopters, based on the analysis of children's needs, so that families for "harder to place" children might be more readily identified.

The service and team managers are professionally qualified and have a wealth of experience in adoption work. They demonstrated via the pre-inspection documents and through discussion, that they know the service well; its strengths as well as the challenges it faces. The team manager had recently been appointed to the post permanently, following a spell "acting-up" in the role. In addition to the CQSW, the manager has an MA in social work and will commence a relevant management qualification course in 2006. Staff in the adoption team reported that they felt well supported by their manager, who they said was easily accessible, and from whom they receive regular supervision.

Managers of the children and families teams also demonstrated good knowledge and experience in adoption matters, their staff less so. It is recommended that the agency considers seriously how best to improve the knowledge and skills of child care social workers in all aspects of permanency planning, so that assessments, life-story work and direct preparation work with children are completed in a timely manner, and to a consistently good standard.

Tighter quality assurance systems need to be developed for the completion of children's and adopters' assessment reports so that shortfalls are identified earlier in the process, as many forms E and some forms F, were not of a good enough standard. The implications of poor quality assessment reports include potential difficulties in the matching process, and the subsequent placements.

There was evidence that the roles of the childcare and adoption social workers had become blurred as a result of the inexperience and heavy workloads of some of the field workers. The training needs of children's social workers in relation to planning for permanency need to be considered as a matter of urgency. The adoption service as a whole would benefit from a review of its approach to permanency planning, and consideration should be given to its developing a "whole systems" model, which would help ensure maximum efficiency and minimum delay, resulting in good outcomes for children. The strategic planning and management of the service should be explicitly linked to the delivery of the service.

Managers across the service should consider mapping out the tasks involved, so that resources can be better targeted and tiers of accountability identified more easily. This would help managers to develop workload management systems that reflect the true scope of the work in terms of complexity and quantity, and so identify any capacity issues more readily. This should also include the role of the independent reviewing officers (IROs), as there was evidence that there is not enough of them to cover all children looked after by Medway. IROs should play an important part in the quality assurance of permanency planning work, as well as formally monitoring the progress of children's cases, so that delays are minimised. There was evidence that some children's reviews are chaired by team managers, not only is this not good practice, but it contravenes the Review of Children's Cases Regulations, and so should cease immediately.

There are various methods of reporting on the activity of the adoption service, such as the annual report that goes to the scrutiny committee, and a quarterly report for the portfolio holder and the corporate parenting group. The adoption team manager has also begun to produce statistics for the panel and there are plans for the further development of this very recent innovation. However, the monitoring and reporting of activity is seriously hampered by the inability of the current management information system to produce data on the adoption service. The manual collection of data is arduous and could lead to inaccuracies. Managers confirmed that the computerised system will be adapted to include the adoption team's business within a few months; it is crucial that this project is completed as soon as possible, and monitored closely, so that more integrated ways of working can be achieved.

The agency decision maker should consider holding regular meetings with the panel chair, as they would provide independent insight into the quality of work undertaken by the agency. Meetings between the portfolio holder and senior managers should regularly include adoption activity, to ensure that service development is continually reviewed.

20% of adoption team staff have the PQ award, and the agency offers access to the externally accredited "Adoption & Attachment" course once the PQ has been achieved. Those workers who are undertaking this course spoke very

highly of it. This approach to training and development should serve to improve outcomes for the service.

Adopters' files were not well ordered; papers were filed in wrong sections and potentially very useful checklists were not completed. Notes were handwritten and not always legible. At the time of the inspection, the adoption team manager was undertaking a review of the file-auditing system. This is timely, as the adopters' files seen, contained no evidence of examination, and only one file had evidence of case discussion from supervision. Any auditing should take into account the quality of the work as well as the maintenance of the files. All notes should be typewritten, and any signatures on documents should be dated, and supplemented by the author's full name and designation.

The purpose and content of children's adoption files should also be reconsidered, as they appeared to be little more than a duplication of case files. It is of utmost importance that children's adoption files reflect an accurate record of all work undertaken in relation to the adoption, which will be readily understood by the adoptee at any future date.

Administrative staff were seen to be hardworking, knowledgeable and sensitive to the nature of the work, and reported feeling valued by the adoption team. Any review of the approach to permanency planning in Medway should include this section, as there was evidence of their being pushed to capacity, as their workloads have increased.

Staff personnel files in Medway are mainly computerised, and to the uninitiated, very complex to navigate. Because photographs cannot be scanned, a separate paper file is retained, within which identification details are kept. One worker did not have current CRB clearance, despite repeated appeals to a former manager. This is clearly a serious matter, to which the current manager responded immediately and appropriately. The agency has only recently adopted the practice of following up written references with telephone enquiries, and this practice should be included in printed policies and procedures. The managers of the service must liaise with their colleagues in Human Resources to ensure watertight systems and protocols are in place in relation to the regulations governing staff selection. Schedules 3 & 4 of the regulations must be complied with in all cases, including those staff who transfer within the department.

Equally, the service should ensure that panel members' personnel records comply with the NMS and schedules 3 & 4 of the regulations, because although all had CRB clearance, other information was lacking.

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	1
8	1
9	1

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? NO

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	AD2AD5AD7	7 (1) (a) (b) 1983	The agency must ensure that its work with children and their birth parents complies with this regulation, and that such work is accurately recorded.	31/03/06
2	AD7AD8AD9	7 (2)(b) & (c) 1983	The agency must ensure that reports on children for whom adoption is the plan, include all information as required by Parts I and III, through to V of the schedule.	31/03/06
3	AD2	9 (2003)	The agency must revise its child protection procedures to safeguard, explicitly, children who are placed for adoption.	31/03/06
4	AD15AD19AD28	11 (2003)	The agency must liaise with the HR department to ensure that watertight systems and protocols are in place, and that Schedules 3 & 4 of the regulations are complied with in all cases. as well as the corresponding NMS.	01/03/06

			The agency must ensure that the panel members' personnel files are compliant with the regulations and NMS.	
5	AD19AD21AD23	10 & 12 2003	The agency must ensure that all current and subsequently appointed social work staff receive comprehensive training in all matters relating to permanency planning for children.	31/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	AD2	<p>The agency should ensure that a child's wishes and feelings are taken into account, and recorded, in any reports, as appropriate.</p> <p>The agency should review its approach to its strategy for the recruitment of adopters, so that it is underpinned by the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.</p>
2	AD4	<p>The agency should consider the feasibility of holding preparation groups during the evening or at weekends.</p> <p>The agency should consider the training and development of staff in relation to the broader aspects of assessing potential adopters, who are from diverse sections of the community.</p> <p>The agency should consider ways of improving the efficiency of the assessment process.</p> <p>The agency should ensure that previous partners of applicants are contacted during the assessment process, as appropriate.</p>
3	AD4AD5AD7AD20	The agency should develop and implement robust quality assurance systems in respect of children's

		and adopters' assessments.
4	AD12	The agency should ensure that individual panel minutes on files include the names of the people who were in attendance.
5	AD6	The agency should continue to monitor the expansion of adoption support work to ensure there are sufficient resources to meet demand. The development of the system to evaluate the work undertaken by commissioned agencies should be completed and implemented.
6	AD6AD8	The agency should develop a system to monitor the existence and quality of life-story work and later life letters.
7	AD18	The agency should develop a written protocol governing the roles of specialist advisors.
8	AD7AD8AD9	The agency should finalise and implement the intended practice of holding family group conferences.
9	AD3	The agency should make more explicit its criteria regarding the eligibility of people who can apply to adopt.
10	AD14	The adoption team manager should undertake a relevant management qualification.
11	AD17	The agency should ensure that adoption data is linked to the wider management information IT system as soon as possible. The agency decision maker should meet with the independent chair of the panel at regular intervals. Meeting with the portfolio holder and senior officers of the service should regularly include the development of the adoption service.
12	AD25	The agency should complete and implement its review of the file auditing system for adopters. The agency should review the purpose and content of its children's adoption files, to ensure they are fit for purpose. The agency should ensure that all case notes are typewritten, and that any signatures on documents are dated and supplemented by the author's full name and designation. They agency should ensure that there is evidence on adopters' files, of any case decisions taken during

		supervision.
--	--	--------------

Commission for Social Care Inspection

North West Regional Office

11th Floor

West Point

501 Chester Road

Old Trafford

M16 9HU

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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