



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

North Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service

**The Grove
38 West Street
Scawby
Brigg
North Lincolnshire
DN20 9AN**

Lead Inspector
Lynn Smith

Announced Inspection
1st June 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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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 North Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service

Address The Grove
38 West Street
Scawby
Brigg
North Lincolnshire
DN20 9AN

Telephone number 01724 296401

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

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

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Adoption Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th July 2003, however a follow-up inspection took place on the 5th January 2006.

Brief Description of the Service:

The agency provides the full range of adoption services to the people of the community served by North Lincolnshire Council. This includes recruiting, preparing and assessing potential adopters and to bring their application before the Adoption Panel. The service works closely with children's social workers, and the audit & review team to enable children to be matched appropriately with their adoptive parents. Support is provided within the legal processes of adoption.

The adoption service is located in pleasant premises in a village setting, other services provided by the council are located elsewhere. Transport links by road are good although public transport is rather limited.

SUMMARY

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

This was the second inspection of North Lincolnshire Council's adoption service. Prior to the inspection fieldwork, excellent supporting documentation was provided for the inspector.

Questionnaires were also received from 8 adopters/prospective adopters, 2 birth family members, 3 placing social workers and 2 placing authorities.

Two inspectors carried out the inspection fieldwork over 3.5 days.

The panel was observed and the panel chair and the decision maker interviewed.

Interviews were also held with:

- Service manager
- Psychologist
- Placing social workers
- Team manager
- Adoption social workers
- Adoption Support Services Advisor
- Elected member, lead member for children
- Panel administrator

Four adoptive families were selected to be case tracked and this involved reading their files and the files of children placed with them, as well as interviewing them at their homes.

Other documents, which included personnel files, panel members' files, adopters and children's case files were read during the fieldwork and the premises and archives were inspected.

The inspectors would like to thank the managers and the staff for their cooperation during the inspection. The timetable was well organised and the inspectors were made welcome and given access to everything they required. All staff interviewed were honest and open, enabling the inspection to be carried out efficiently and effectively. The standard of documentation provided for the inspection was of an extremely high standard.

What the service does well:

The adopters who gave feedback all felt the service was "very professional and thorough". They felt North Lincolnshire was not discriminatory in any way and embraced diversity.

Clear systems enabled children to be matched with the best possible adopters in a timely way and adopters felt the adoption social workers went to great lengths to ensure all relevant information available on the children being placed was present. Family finders work closely with children's social workers from an early stage to ensure no delay.

The service monitors all aspects of adoption work, from the adoption panel receiving overviews of children whose plan maybe adoption, those waiting, placed and receiving an adoption order, to the councillor receiving regular up dates.

The adoption panel ensures the new welfare checklist is considered for each child before recommendations for adoption are made. Good adoption support plans were in place to ensure adopters and children receive the best services as and when they needed it.

Birth parents are consulted and views taken into account regarding adoption and many examples of excellent work were seen.

The adoption managers and social workers are extremely hardworking, experienced and dedicated to the children and the families they are placed with.

The statement of purpose and the children's guide are clearly working documents. Children's social workers found the guide an excellent tool when discussing adoption with children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

All matters that were raised as requirements or recommendations at the inspection on 28th July 2003 were followed up on 5th January 2006. The findings were that all requirements and recommendations had been attended to satisfactorily or were in the process of being finalised.

North Lincolnshire adoption service has clearly embraced the recent legislation. New policies and procedures are now in place addressing the changes and staff are well trained in the new Adoption and Children Act 2002.

What they could do better:

The service has clearly worked very hard to embrace the recommendations and requirements from the last inspection report as well as the new act.

On the whole the main area where the service could do better is in the development of services highlighted in the new legislation. The support to adopters is very good at present however this is achieved through the good will of the social workers. Development is necessary to enable the service to be available to all. This can only be achieved with more staff resources.

The recording is of a good standard overall, however regular file auditing in line with legislation is necessary to ensure a high standard is reached in all files, adopters, children's and staff personnel files.

Social work staff and adoption panel members receive training and induction however the recording should be clearer. Child protection training should be given at regular intervals to ensure all staff practice is up to date.

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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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)
- 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 the following standard(s):

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

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

The agency's practices ensure that children are placed with adopters who are able to meet their needs and have been well prepared and trained.

EVIDENCE:

North Lincolnshire Council does have a clear adoption recruitment strategy. It makes clear the council celebrates diversity and will not act in a discriminatory manner in relation to issues of age, gender, sexuality, disability, race or religion. It identifies that at certain times those applicants most likely to match the specific needs of children waiting for adoptive placements maybe prioritised. However North Lincolnshire children on the whole are not regularly placed with North Lincolnshire adopters due to the small geographical area.

Clear systems are in place with members of the local consortium to share information about children waiting and adoptive families. Regular strategy meetings take place where children across the consortium are discussed and the type of families needed.

This enables appropriate matches to be made as quickly as possible to minimise delay.

All adopters spoken to and those who responded to the questionnaires commented favourably about the preparation process. One said, "The courses provided were very useful and answered many of the questions we had". The manager said the preparation course underwent a full and comprehensive evaluation in December 2005 based on the feedback from adopters.

Assessment reports were competency based and were in the main, of a high standard; they were analytical and gave the clear impression that all necessary care had been taken to determine applicants' suitability to adopt. The new adoption assessments were causing some confusion regarding the chronology of individuals however this was being addressed with all social workers. Very good safety checks were in place to ensure the safety of children once placed.

Excellent procedures are in place to ensure that the best possible matches are made for children. Family finders work closely with children's social workers from an early stage to ensure there are no delays in finding suitable adopters and making good placements. Adopters receive information at each step of family finding and the matching process.

Evidence was seen where North Lincolnshire social workers had gone to great lengths to ensure all relevant information about children from other local authorities was received by adopters. Adopters said they felt their social workers had done everything possible to gather as much information about the children.

Adopters spoken to took great pride in the family books they were encouraged to prepare for the children. The books seen were very good and age appropriate to the children being adopted.

The adoption panel policies and procedures are comprehensive. The panel is properly constituted and there is an induction process for new panel members; this includes the chance to observe a panel. Panel members are also provided with training relevant to their role. Unfortunately the recording of this induction was not evident.

Adopters spoken to said they feel welcomed and are put at ease by the adoption panel members.

The adoption panel receives an overview of children whose plan may be adoption, those waiting, placed and receiving an adoption order.

The adoption panel observed was timely and professional. The new welfare checklist was considered for each child before recommendations were made.

Thought was put into the layout of the room to ensure visitors to the adoption panel could see each member and read name boards to ensure it was clear who was asking questions.

The minutes and time keeping of the adoption panels are very good. The documentation presented was well explored and the quality of the reports as well as the verbal presentation is fed back to presenting social workers.

Decisions made by the decision maker were thoroughly considered and where made in a timely way after reading panel papers and the minutes.

Letters to adopters and birth parents are sent out in a timely manner however good practice would be to place copies on the relevant adopters or children's records to ensure they are archived and accessible to adoptee's in later life.

The manager is fit and suitably qualified to carry out the role of adoption manager.

Personnel files viewed highlighted the need to do telephone follow-ups to all referees of new members of staff.

All adoption social workers are qualified and appropriately experienced. The team is well established and all adopters and children's social workers who have expressed a view spoke very highly of each and every member of the adoption team.

They felt all staff members are helpful and very approachable. The team have relevant training however a refresher course in Child Protection would be advised.

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

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

The service has clear and focused support systems that make full use of the specialist advisors available to promote and maintain positive adoptive placements.

EVIDENCE:

Adopters spoken to were aware of the support offered by North Lincolnshire adoption services and felt this influenced them into applying. One said, "From our first telephone enquiry to having a child placed with us, we have received all the help and support we needed at the right time".

Adoption support is being reviewed at present with consultation from adopters. At present North Lincolnshire do offer social events, on going support from social workers, CAMHS access and regular workshops.

Evidence was viewed of prompt support for school issues; the psychologist was involved in one case to meet with teachers and provided advice and support.

Staff members were concerned that they are unable to develop the support service to any great degree due to lack of support staff.

Good adoption support plans are in place and reviewed to ensure adopters and children receive the best services. The service level agreement with 'Adoption UK' enables independent choice and a wide access to training and support. Families may also be referred to NCH Children & Families project.

Leaflets were viewed of the inter-country adoption service offered by North Lincolnshire Council. These identified access to consultants and specialist inter country preparation courses.

Policies and procedures regarding disruptions/breakdowns are in place however no disruption s/breakdowns were recorded in the last 12 months.

There is access to professional specialist advice with named people in the fields of early years, Legal, inter-country adoption, psychology, medical, multi-cultural and education. A service level agreement is in place for professional advice regarding adoption matters with the British Association Adoption & Fostering (BAAF).

Many adopters spoke highly about the prompt response they received from the psychologist.

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

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

The service provides support to birth parents, however the lack of staffing resources in the agency prevents a more strategic approach from being taken.

EVIDENCE:

The service recognises the life long implications of adoption on birth parents. This starts with prospective adopters on preparation training. Adopters said, that they were able to understand the reasons for contact and the importance of this. Adopters understood the importance for children's life storybooks. Adoption social workers are involved very early on with children whose plan is for adoption, hence also are able to work with birth families as well as birth parents.

Evidence that birth parents are consulted and views recorded were seen on forms E and permanency reports.

Birth parents support plans are in place, however no evidence was seen to suggest that birth parents had been made aware of these support plans. A well-developed letterbox system is in place however; concerns regarding the amount of work this entails were raised, as it is one social worker that has undertaken the responsibility. There is no administration support for this task.

Life-story procedures require that the process of life-story work be monitored from the child's first statutory review and onwards. Guidance and training is available for all social workers on life story work. Children's social workers said they were supported by the adoption team to complete the children's life-story work.

The adoption team has in the past given training on life story work however, it would possibly benefit new members of the children's care teams to repeat this training.

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

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

The strong management leadership enables and supports staff in undertaking their responsibility to safeguard, promote and achieve good outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

Social workers said the statement of purpose reflects the service and they had contributed to it. It is reviewed annually via the adoption strategy group to ensure all developments regarding adoption services are incorporated.

The children's guide has been reviewed and is very good, the children's social workers said they use it with children regularly and have found it an excellent resource.

The information sent to prospective adopters is attractive and informative and available in other formats and languages. It has recently been up dated to include the new legislation and practices. There is clear evidence of the non-discriminatory approach towards all applicants. One couple said, "their approach to diversity and inclusion was excellent, we were all treated with dignity and respect. We would recommend their service to others!"

The agency is well managed by appropriately skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff. The management team demonstrated their understanding of adoption, the process involved with the continual focus on the child. Staff all spoke highly of the managers and the support they give. Staff said the open door policy of the managers was excellent.

Staff are aware who to contact if their manager was unavailable.

North Lincolnshire children's services have very good communication across all the services with the common goal being the children's welfare. Many staff spoke positively about this and named it as one of the reasons they remained with this local authority.

Through the close monitoring of all aspects of adoption work, the team are able to move quickly and in the best interest of children. Monthly management meetings and the adoption tracking systems ensure children are not delayed. Quarterly performance reports on adoption are prepared and six monthly reports are submitted to the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet. The adoption panel also monitor timescales and standards at panel business meetings.

The adoption staff team were very experienced and committed. They spoke very positively about developing their roles in light of the new legislation however; there are concerns that the adoption service lacks professional and administrative staff. The team members' work extremely hard to ensure children receive the best placements possible, families are assessed and support is given in a timely way however staff are unable to fully develop the services.

Clear evidence was seen that staff are having to under take a lot of administration tasks, this was particularly noticeable in the letterbox system with one social worker undertaking all aspects as well as holding a full case load.

Much of the good work of the team is done by good will; their commitment to children and families means they often are on call weekends and evenings. With the new legislation placing new duties on the local authorities this cannot be sustained by the present size of the team.

All staff voiced concerns about the high numbers of unqualified children's workers in the child care teams. The local authority must ensure no unqualified workers write permanency reports for children being placed for adoption.

Staff spoke highly about North Lincolnshire as an employer. They feel it was child-centred, dynamic with good communication between strategic and operational levels.

Training in the new act has clearly has taken place and put into practice. During discussions with adoption staff members they said that they had access to relevant training, also they supported and advised other staff working within childcare.

The adopters' files viewed were well organised, clear and concise with supervision decisions evident, however this was not the case for all files.

Children's adoption files viewed did not meet the regulations however they were clearly working files for both the adoption team and the child care team. Great care must be exercised to ensure the child's adoption files contain all information required by legislation when it is archived.

File audits need to be consistently done to ensure all relevant documentation is evident.

Many policies and procedures have been recently updated to reflect the new legislation however, the 'care first' It system needs to be included. Staff felt they would benefit from specific case recording procedures for adoption files.

North Lincolnshire Council does have a disaster recovery plan in place that covers the adoption service.

The adoption premises are suitable for the task with good security. Records are appropriately stored, including archive storage, which is stored in North East Lincolnshire.

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	3
4	3
5	4
10	3
11	3
12	3
13	3
15	3
19	3
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	4
3	4
14	3
16	3
17	3
20	3
21	3
22	3
23	3
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	3
29	3
30	N/A
31	N/A

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	AD25	ACA 2002	Children's adoption files must meet current legislation.	01/11/06

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	AD11	Recording of induction for panel members should be made in a more systematic way.
2	AD23	Members of the adoption team should undertake refresher courses in child protection.
3	AD7	Systems should be put in place to ensure birth parents receive copies of birth parents support plans.
4	AD25	File audits should be evidenced and undertaken on a regular basis.
5	AD20	Although the agency has sufficient staff to undertake the present adoption task, consideration should be given to developing the service in line with the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

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