



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Adoption Service

Family Placement Team

117 Poplar High Street

London

E14 0AE

14th February 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

Family Placement Team, 117 Poplar High Street, London,
E14 0AE

Adoption Service Manager

Jake Morgan

Tel No:

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E14 0AE

Fax No:

Email Address

Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

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

Date of Inspection Visit		14/15/16 February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am 14 th – 16.00pm 16 th	
Name of Inspector	1	Sean White	127556
Name of Inspector	2	Pat McKay	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr Jake Morgan	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority adoption services are subject to inspection by CSCI, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976 as amended, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of London Borough of Tower Hamlets Adoption Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The adoption services of the LB Tower Hamlets are constituted and governed by current legislation and the agency operates statutory services within current statutes. The authority provides facilities for both domestic adoptions and for those wishing to adopt children from overseas. Domestic adoption services are all arranged and managed by the agency whilst inter-country applications are contracted out to specialists in this area.

The agency provides adoption support services for people who have been affected by adoption; this includes counselling and advice on a range of support services and other matters relating to adoption.

The agency is managed within the social services department of the council and is subject to the responsibilities and scrutiny of elected members.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The arrangements and preparation for this inspection were of a very good standard and everyone involved offered every assistance and courtesy to the inspection team. The facilities provided were comfortable and purposeful, and the organisation of the processes was particularly efficient. It was clear that the agency had taken the inspection seriously and endeavoured to ensure that the inspection team had access to all the necessary materials, personnel and information.

Overall the agency was found to provide a service of a very good standard; in many areas there was clear evidence of excellent practice and a commitment to improvement. Some shortfalls were noted and discussed with managers during the inspection and highlighted during headline feedback.

The following summary is produced under the main headings of the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

Statement of Purpose.

The one standard in this section was almost met.

The statement of purpose was, surprisingly, the weakest aspect of the agency's material and documentation. Although the agency had a statement of purpose, it did not, however, include all the information required by the NMS and regulations.

The information available to children looked after in general and children requiring adoption in particular, however, was of a very good standard.

Securing and promoting children's welfare.

The one standard in this section was exceeded.

The agency's approach to effective matching and securing families to meet the diverse needs of the children in the community requiring adoption was impressive. The information and publicity material was of a very high standard, there was a demonstrably sensitive approach to ethnic, cultural and religious issues and the policies and practices of the agency were clearly designed to ensure that adopters were aware of the priorities of the agency and the need for placing children in the most appropriate families.

Prospective and approved adopters.

Of the four standards in this section, three were exceeded and one was almost met.

The information available to prospective adopters was of a very high standard. The agency website is informative and 'user-friendly' and the information pack and eligibility criteria are clear and unambiguous, as well as being attractively and professionally presented. The sophistication of the information was seen to be a significant aspect of the services' dynamic approach to recruitment and informing of potential and prospective adopters.

The preparation and assessments of prospective adopters was informative, enlightening and thorough. Adopters said that their preparation and assessment were undertaken in a skilled, competent and sensitive manner.

The agency accepts CRB disclosures undertaken by other agencies; to ensure confidence in all its checks, it should undertake its own disclosure applications.

Adopters said that they were well informed about the matching process and the responsibilities of the agency to ensure that outcomes for children were the motivating priorities. Due rigour was applied to the process and it was clear that the needs of the children were central to all decisions made.

An adoption support service was in its infancy at the time of the inspection but it was clear that there was a commitment to developing this aspect of the agency's operations in a forward-thinking and dynamic direction. It had developed an adoption support plan format and set up an adoption support panel to agree packages of support. The service also includes a duty system that operates during and out of office hours.

Life-story work was not undertaken as quickly as it should be.

Birth parents and birth families.

Of the three standards in this section, one was met and two were almost met.

The agency, and children's social workers, work as closely with birth parents as necessary and invite them to be involved in the planning for their children's future, wherever possible.

There were some inconsistencies found in respect of the production of life-story books for children but there was a clear commitment to improving this.

Overall there appeared to be a positive approach to supporting birth parents; the adoption support team was developing different strategies, including an embryonic birth parent's support group and arrangements were in place with a voluntary agency to provide independent support for birth families. There were some issues, however, that required attention in respect of the timing of providing support and in the recording of birth parents views about what is written about them.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions.

The four standards in this section were all met.

There were clear and effective policies and procedures in place to inform the adoption panel of its remit, duties and responsibilities and it was clear that the panel adhered to these and functioned in a way that demonstrated thoroughness and rigour. Applicants to adopt are always invited to attend the panel. The membership of the panel was suitably constituted to provide an informed and thorough approach to considering the business brought before it. The panel has had no difficulties forming a quorum in recent times and members were conscientious about their attendance. The overall functioning of the panel was enabled by an efficient approach to organisation and administration. The decision-making was noted as being thorough and informed by rigorous attention to detail in the information provided.

Fitness to provide or manage an agency.

Of the two standards in this section, one was exceeded and one was met.

The managers responsible for the adoption agency were all highly experienced in children's matters in general and adoption matters in particular. Both senior and middle managers demonstrated significant knowledge and understanding of the adoption process and its importance in meeting the needs of children and, equally importantly, their personal commitment to motivating adoption to be an equal partner in children's services. The manager of the agency had an enhanced CRB disclosure.

Provision and management of the adoption agency.

Of the three standards in this section one was exceeded and two were met.

The structural and operational management of the agency was coherent and the lines of accountability and communication were clear. There were clear systems, policies and procedures in place to monitor the operation and performance of the service. Overall the agency was committed to quality management through adherence to its own procedures and personal, managerial commitment to ensuring the service was run to a high standard. There is a strong commitment to corporate parenting through the interest and responsibility taken by elected members (the corporate parenting scrutiny group operates independently of social services) .

The legal adviser regularly attends the adoption panel and the medical adviser is a member. As well as providing a detailed service to the panel both advisers offer specialist input to the team.

Employment and management of staff.

Of the five standards in this section, three were met and two were exceeded.

The department had a robust recruitment and selection policy and procedure. All social workers in the service were very experienced and suitably qualified; some had social work qualifications at degree or post-graduate level. It was clear that all workers were sufficiently aware of the expectations of adoption work and were fully conversant with the legal dimensions of children's services in general and adoption work in particular.

The operational management of the service and general infrastructure, under the leadership of the team manager, was well organised and efficient. The allocation of work, workload management and support were realistically structured and equitable. The agency is suitably resourced to undertake the range of work for which it is responsible. The department has systems in place to recruit and retain staff and the council has been awarded Beacon Status for supporting the social care workforce. Employment practices, staff care and welfare, and flexible working arrangements all contribute to demonstrating that the council is a fair and balanced employer.

The agency had an impressive staff training record: the training programme demonstrated a full and coherent approach to staff development and the courses that have been made available and attended were wide and varied. The training was a diverse mix of general issues and job specific courses and their relevance to the work of the agency demonstrated a high level of commitment to the development of the workforce.

Records.

Of the four standards in this section, three were met and one was almost met.

The record keeping, file maintenance and security were all of a good standard and

underpinned by a clear policy and procedure. Adopters' case files were well ordered and contained all relevant information and children's files were similarly well kept. Security and safety was of a high standard; the location of the files – in a dedicated, secure area – minimised the risk of damage from fire and water. There are clear arrangements and procedures in place to ensure that relevant information is made to partner agencies to effect the efficient approach to linking and matching children with suitable adopters. There is a clear and robust procedure in place that covers all matters of case recording, format, security and access. Auditing is carried out but better evidence would improve matters. In the main, staff files were of a good standard and in most cases had most of the required information, as were those in respect of panel members. There were some omissions that the agency must address.

Fitness of premises.

The one standard in this section was met.

The premises used by the agency were of a good standard and the building is appropriately secure and all realistic precautions are taken to ensure the security and safety of records held there.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's adoption service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NA

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their adoption service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of a failure by a Local Authority adoption service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority adoption service:

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first CSCI inspection)**

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate officer of the Local Authority is requested to provide the Commission with an action plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan is shown in Part D of this report.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 or the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services. The Authority is required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for adoption services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	Reg 2 (2003)	LA1	The agency must ensure that the statement of purpose includes all information required by regulations.	01/06/05
2	Reg 11 (2003)	LA28	Staff records must include all required information.	01/06/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA6	The agency should endeavour to ensure that life-story books are compiled and provided for adopters as soon as possible.
2	LA7	The agency should have a clearer strategy in respect of when independent support is provided to birth parents and in the recording of their views about what is written about them.
3	LA8	The collection of information for life story work should commence as soon as possible following a child becoming looked-after.

- Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. LA10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	YES
• Interview with birth family members	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	14/02/05
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	56
Number of Inspector days	6
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	YES
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	YES
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	16

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable on this occasion.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.2, 1.3 (partial) and 1.4 – 1.7)

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The statement of purpose was, surprisingly, the weakest aspect of the agency's material and documentation. Although the agency had a comprehensive statement of purpose that provided some information about its work and objectives - and included information about the borough in general, it did not, however, include all the information required by the NMS and regulations. There was no information, for instance, on the experience and qualifications of the adoption staff team, systems for monitoring and evaluation, and recruitment and assessment procedures; neither did it have the address of the agency. The statement did, nevertheless, indicate the timescales that it aspires to work to in relation to the assessment of adopters, matching children and decision-making.

The department provided very comprehensive information for children looked after in the form of a 'LACFAX', which is a loose-leaf 'filofax' type of document that enables children to be informed about their status and rights as looked after children. In addition, the agency had produced a simple but informative guide to adoption that is easily understood and which gives clear information about the agency's approach to adoption and what children can expect throughout the process.

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually?
(Record N/A if the information is not available)

NO

Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

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

YES

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The agency's approach to effective matching and securing families to meet the diverse needs of the children in the community requiring adoption was impressive. The appointment of a dedicated recruitment and publicity officer had brought a dynamic and focused approach to bringing the services of the agency to the attention of the community and the subsequent positive response that this brought in terms of people wishing to adopt.

The information and publicity material was of a very high standard and had been developed to create a 'branded' image of the agency; it demonstrated a clear approach to recruiting suitable adopters to meet the needs of the children in the borough and focused on the importance of meeting the needs of a very diverse population. There was a demonstrably sensitive approach to ethnic, cultural and religious issues that was understood and appreciated by adopters and prospective adopters.

The agency used a range of media and materials to effect appropriate matching; for instance, professionally made DVDs to promote the agency and its requirements, videos of children in foster placements (prepared, in some cases with the direct involvement of children) and documentation of a particularly sophisticated nature.

The policies and practices of the agency were clearly designed to ensure that adopters were aware of the priorities of the agency and the need for placing children in the most appropriate families.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

37

How many children were matched with adopters?

10

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

18

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

12

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

4

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

30

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

100

%

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

4

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

0

On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?

33

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **The adoption agency recruits and supports sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, who can offer children a stable and permanent home to achieve a successful and lasting placement.**

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

As already outlined in standard 2, above, the information available to prospective adopters was of a very high standard. The agency website is informative and ‘user-friendly’, the information pack and eligibility criteria are clear and unambiguous, as well as being attractively and professionally presented and the details contained in all the material clearly promotes the needs and requirements of the agency. The sophistication of the information was seen to be a significant aspect of the services’ dynamic approach to recruitment and informing of potential and prospective adopters. The information pack was developed using focus groups of existing adopters and foster carers. In addition, the dedicated publicity officer used a wide range of media outlets to bring information about the agency to the public, including local radio and editorials in local publications. She also evaluated the response from recruitment campaigns.

The agency’s approach to diversity was demonstrably evident in the information pack and clearly showed a commitment to welcoming people from all parts of the community, of any race, culture, religion, marital status or sexual orientation.

Adopters said that their initial enquiries were responded to courteously and speedily and that the information with which they were provided was clear and enabled them to understand the priorities of the service and the processes of preparation and assessment. The response from adopters’ questionnaires was, in the main, very complementary.

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The agency runs preparation groups at intervals that are sufficient to ensure that there is the minimum of delay in assessing prospective adopters. The information provided and responses from adopters showed a thorough and enlightening approach to preparation with people feeling that they were thoroughly equipped to understand the complexities and subtleties of adoption and the processes necessary to achieve desired outcomes for children. The quality of the assessments was noted of being of a high standard; Forms F were thorough in their analysis of prospective adopters, the quality control systems ensured detailed checks on the assessments undertaken and the adoption panel was robust in ensuring that only appropriate applicants were recruited.

Adopters said that the assessments were undertaken in a thorough, detailed yet sensitive way by skilled and competent professionals and that they felt confident that their applications were handled in the most appropriate manner.

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The matching of children with adopters who could best meet their needs was of a good standard. Due rigour was applied to the process and it was clear that the needs of the children were central to all decisions made. There were good working relationships between adoption service workers and children's social workers that enabled the exchange of details and information to be executed in an efficient manner.

Adopters said that they were well informed about the matching process and the responsibilities of the agency to ensure that outcomes for children were the motivating priorities and of the need to provide details about themselves to enable effective matching to be achieved. Matching reports were of a good standard and there was clarity in the way that agreements regarding contact and notifications about children were recorded.

As already noted in standard 2 (above) the agency uses a range of media to bring information to the notice of adopters and children; the use of videos to portray children in their foster homes, for instance, was a practice that added value to the whole process.

Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)

Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Key findings and evidence**Standard met?**

2

An adoption support service was in its infancy at the time of the inspection but it was clear that there was a commitment to developing this aspect of the agency's operations in a forward-thinking and dynamic direction. It had developed an adoption support plan format and set up an adoption support panel to agree packages of support; it was hoped that an approved adopter would become a member of this. An adopters' support group had been set up (following the canvassing of approved adopters) and there is also a birth parents support group. There is also an adopters support newsletter and the team has also written a general leaflet about available support services. In addition to direct support services provided by the agency there is also a service level agreement with a voluntary adoption support agency. The service also includes a duty system that operates during and out of office hours. In general, therefore, it was found that there is a progressive outlook for adoption support services, with much positive work already in progress. However, there were some instances noted of life-story work not being completed in a timely way and later-life letters not being compiled. It is important for adopters to be able to help children understand their situation and heritage to have such information as early as possible.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months

25

Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months

26

Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months

10

Number of adopters approved but not matched

14

Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register

10

How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?

0

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The agency, and children’s social workers, work as closely with birth parents as necessary and invite them to be involved in the planning for their children’s future, wherever possible. There was some confusion, however, amongst children’s social workers regarding the timing of the provision of independent support: it did not appear clear at what point such services were brought to the attention of birth parents and this left social workers providing the support themselves. There needs to be greater clarity regarding when independent support is provided so that social workers fully understand their role and responsibilities and birth families can feel confident that there are facilities available at the appropriate times. Although there was appropriate information about birth parents in Forms E and Matching Reports, there was no evidence to demonstrate that they had been asked to comment on what was written about them; whilst it is understood that there will be instances of birth parents being in conflict with the service, it should, nevertheless, be recorded that their views had been sought.</p>		

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child’s heritage.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>As already indicated in this report, there were inconsistencies found in respect of the production of life-story books for children. Although children’s social workers said that they were keen about and committed to this aspect of adoption work – and the agency social workers commitment to providing guidance and assistance – there were instances of life-story work being late in production or late in starting. It is essential that the gathering of relevant information starts as soon as a child becomes looked after to ensure that all necessary details are collected.</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1)

The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Overall there appeared to be a positive approach to supporting birth parents; the adoption support team was developing different strategies, including an embryonic birth parent's support group and arrangements were in place with a voluntary agency to provide independent support for birth families.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There were clear and effective policies and procedures in place to inform the adoption panel of its remit, duties and responsibilities and it was clear that the panel adhered to these and functioned in a way that demonstrated thoroughness and rigour. Managers were clear about the functions of the panel and their responsibilities in ensuring that it provided a satisfactory service to the children of the borough.</p> <p>Applicants to adopt are always invited to attend the panel and feedback received demonstrated that they were pleased with the way they were welcomed and given the opportunity to be heard.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)
 The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The membership of the panel was suitably constituted to provide an informed and thorough approach to considering the business brought before it. Senior managers (Decision-maker) are actively involved in the recruitment of the chairperson of the panel and due care is taken with recruitment of members; the chairperson is involved in recruitment and always ensures that new members are equipped to take up their duties through induction and the observation of at least one panel.

The chairperson ensured that the panel was conducted with appropriate diligence and that the members were given every opportunity to ask questions and give views on the matters before them. The panel has had no difficulties forming a quorum in recent times and members were conscientious about their attendance.

The panel has an active role in quality assurance and the chairperson has direct access to the decision-maker if there are serious concerns about the material brought before the panel. It also monitors the position of children who have been the subject of a best interest decision and no placement has been made.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO	
Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	YES	

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)
 Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The overall functioning of the panel was enabled by an efficient approach to organisation and administration. This and the skills and capabilities of the chairperson provided clear evidence of a well-organised and proficient aspect of the agency's work.

The minutes of the panel were full and informative and written in a way that provided the decision-maker with appropriate and necessary detail about both the conclusions reached and the manner in which the panel reached them.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The decision-maker was very experienced in this aspect of work and brought a knowledgeable and informed dimension to the whole process. He is provided with all relevant information at the same time as the panel members and receives the recommendations of the panel very soon after the event. The decision-making was noted as being thorough and informed by rigorous attention to detail in the information provided for him. Decisions are made in a timely way and adopters confirmed that they were satisfied with the speed of the process.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The managers responsible for the adoption agency were all highly experienced in children's matters in general and adoption matters in particular. Both senior and middle managers demonstrated significant knowledge and understanding of the adoption process and its importance in meeting the needs of children and, equally importantly, their personal commitment to motivating adoption to be an equal partner in children's services.

The agency has a particularly robust approach to management training and it was evident that such training resources are accessed routinely at all levels in the organisation. The service manager for the agency was undertaking a Masters in Public Administration (MPA).

The leadership of the agency was of a particularly high standard with a clear strategic view in place and a commitment to enabling day-to-day practice to develop to the highest possible standards.

The job description for the manager is clear and documents the range of responsibilities for which he is accountable. .

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

NO

Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?

YES

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The manager of the agency had an enhanced CRB disclosure and there were systems in place to repeat this every three years.

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The structural and operational management of the agency was coherent and the lines of accountability and communication were clear. It was evident that the adoption service had evolved to its current high standards through a clear strategic management input; the day-to-day operational work of the agency was well-coordinated and subject to continuous quality monitoring. Senior managers take responsibility for spot checks/audits of case files, which, although viewed with some concern when first initiated, are now seen as routine aspects of quality management.

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

3

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

0

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

There were clear systems, policies and procedures in place to monitor the operation and performance of the service. Overall the agency was committed to quality management through adherence to its own procedures and personal, managerial commitment to ensuring the service was run to a high standard. The department has recently initiated the publication, on a six-monthly basis, of an adoption performance overview report; this is presented to the cabinet of the council. The lead member also meets monthly with senior managers to monitor the performance of the service. As indicated in the previous standard, senior managers undertake their own, unannounced, checks on case files in addition to the formal systems in place. There is a strong commitment to corporate parenting through the interest and responsibility taken by elected members (the corporate parenting scrutiny group operates independently of social services) and the lead member had recently received an award as 'Councillor of the Year for Contribution to Improving Children's Services'.

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

Monthly?

Quarterly?

Less than Quarterly?

YES

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)

The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The legal adviser regularly attends the adoption panel and the medical adviser is a member. As well as providing a detailed service to the panel both advisers offer specialist input to the team and are used frequently to enable decisions and planning to be effected. Both are fully qualified and the agency has a satisfactory policy on the use of specialist advisers and their roles.

There was a CAMHS adviser who works within the team; this worker is an asset to the overall specialist input that is available to enable workers to have ready access to advice and information.

The agency has an arrangement with the overseas adoption helpline for specialist advice and training in respect of inter-country adopters.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The department had a robust recruitment and selection policy and procedure. All social workers in the service were very experienced and suitably qualified; some had social work qualifications at degree or post-graduate level. Although all workers had an up to date CRB disclosure, some had been checked by other agencies and this was general practice in the department. It is the view of the Commission that CRB disclosures are not 'portable' and the agency should, therefore, undertake its own for all staff working for the purposes of adoption. It was clear that all workers were sufficiently aware of the expectations of adoption work and were fully conversant with the legal dimensions of children's services in general and adoption work in particular; they were able to demonstrate their knowledge of current thinking and were fully aware of the issues surrounding diversity and anti-discriminatory practice.

The quality of Form F reports demonstrated their skills and thoroughness in assessing prospective adopters; responses to questionnaires were positive in their views about the quality of social workers' assessments and the sensitivity with which they were carried out.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

YES

What % of the adoption service's social workers have a PQ award?

33

%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12) Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The operational management of the service and general infrastructure, under the leadership of the team manager, was well organised and efficient. The allocation of work, workload management and support were realistically structured, equitable and focused on running and maintaining an efficient service. All workers received formal supervision and records demonstrated a thorough approach to case management and monitoring.</p> <p>Social workers were happy with the level of support and management in place and felt that their workloads were realistically allocated; all felt that the management culture in the agency was enabling and supportive and that they had recourse to all levels in the organisation and that they had a 'voice' and were taken seriously.</p> <p>The agency has a commendable approach to staff training and development that managers encourage and enable workers to gain access to; staff members were particularly impressed by the range and availability of training opportunities.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4) There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.			
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3	
<p>The agency is suitably resourced to undertake the range of work for which it is responsible. There is a well qualified and experienced team undertaking adoption duties and they are generally well supported by administrative staff; any shortfalls in staffing are filled by the use of appropriately qualified and experienced sessional workers or agency staff. Following the restructuring of the agency a few months ago the team was increased by four social workers, which added to the overall ability of the service to be more efficient. The support systems in place, as indicated previously, were well established and all workers are subject to an annual appraisal.</p> <p>The department has systems in place to recruit and retain staff – which has been very successful – and the council has been awarded Beacon Status for supporting the social care workforce.</p>			
Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	15	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	1
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	0		

Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)

The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

As indicated in the previous standard, the council has Beacon status for supporting the social care workforce. It was evident from speaking with staff that they felt they worked for a good employer, both in terms of conditions of service and salaries, and general staff care and support.

Employment practices, staff care and welfare, and flexible working arrangements all contribute to demonstrating that the council is a fair and balanced employer.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The agency had an impressive staff training record: the training programme demonstrated a full and coherent approach to staff development and the courses that have been made available and attended were wide and varied (and very relevant). The training was a diverse mix of general issues (Introduction to Conflict Resolution, Disability Awareness etc) and job specific courses which included:-

Improving the Assessment of Carers - Research;

Preparation for Court Proceedings;

Attachment Training for Assessing Social Workers;

Genograms and

Permanency Planning.

In addition the team has had away-days and all who undertake PQ awards have ten days study leave every year.

As indicated earlier in this report, managers are encouraged to undertake management training and resources are available for this.

Overall, the training opportunities, which are evaluated through supervision and annual appraisals, were of a very high standard; this, and the fact that the courses available were directly relevant to – or complemented – the service demonstrated a high level of commitment to the development of the workforce.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are maintained securely, kept and are accessible when required.

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The record keeping, file maintenance and security were all of a good standard and underpinned by a clear policy and procedure. Adopters' case files were well ordered and contained all relevant information. Case recording and details of assessment visits were of a particularly good standard and the inclusion of supervision records ensured that it was easy to track and understand the progress of any particular case.

Children's files (family finding files) are not compiled as Adoption Files but the information contained in them was relevant and appropriate; the agency may wish to review its practice in terms of how it approaches the setting up of these files to ensure that they always adhere to the legislative requirements of the 1983 regulations. This is offered as advice rather than a recommendation.

Confidentiality and access to records was covered by the departmental policies and it was clear that everyone understood the importance of this. Security and safety was of a high standard; the location of the files – in a dedicated, secure area – minimised the risk of damage from fire and water. The department has a contract with a private company for archives but this was not inspected on this occasion.

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)

The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There are clear arrangements and procedures in place to ensure that relevant information is made to partner agencies to effect the efficient approach to linking and matching children with suitable adopters. All precautions in respect of security and confidentiality are in place and maintained.

Access to adoption information is only granted after a request is made in writing and the inquirer has produced photographic identification.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There is a clear and robust procedure in place that covers all matters of case recording, format, security and access. There is a system of monitoring and auditing in place, with the additional quality monitoring undertaken by senior managers on a 'spot-check' basis. It was not possible in all cases, however, to find evidence of this in the case files – the auditing results being located elsewhere. It would enable managers to keep abreast of file management and quality of files if there were a simple checklist of what had been audited kept on the files.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)

Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

In the main, staff files were of a good standard and in most cases had most of the required information. Issues that the human resources section needs to address are in respect of ensuring that the practice of verifying written references by telephone is incorporated into selection procedures and that all files contain an up to date photograph of the worker – a photocopy of a passport or driving licence is insufficient and the practice of accepting CRB clearances from other agencies should cease.

Files in respect of panel members were well ordered and contained most of the required information; missing details are the same as for staff files.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The premises used by the agency were of a good standard and provided, in the main, a comfortable working environment for the staff – although there were some issues of space, alternative arrangements were already planned. They are located in an area that is easy to access and are open during normal office hours for those who have legitimate business with the agency. The manager of the service works at a location elsewhere in the borough, which is also easily accessible, although car parking is a problem.

The building is appropriately secure and all realistic precautions are taken to ensure the security and safety of records held there. The council has a disaster recovery plan that ensures the safety of electronic records.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Local authority manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 14th February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the local authority adoption manager, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26th April 2005 , which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

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

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Local authority manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of London Borough of Tower Hamlets Adoption Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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