



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service

**Gleneagles Centre
East Carr Road
Hull
HU8 9LB**

Lead Inspector
Lynn Smith

Announced Inspection
9th May 2006 10:00 am

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

| | |
|---|--|
| Name of service | Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service |
| Address | Gleneagles Centre East Carr Road Hull HU8 9LB |
| Telephone number | 01482 707762 |
| Fax number | 01482 712438 |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Kingston upon Hull City Council |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Ms Heather Clare |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Adoption Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

N/A

Date of last inspection 8th March 2004 with a follow-up of the action plan on 25th November 2005.

Brief Description of the Service:

Kingston upon Hull Adoption Service is a Local Authority Service and is based at the Gleneagles Centre, East Carr Road Hull. There is a total of eighteen staff employed by Hull City Council solely for the purpose of adoption. These comprise of a team manager, twelve social workers, one administrative officer and five clerk/word processor operators. In addition there is a part-time adoption panel administrator and a part-time panel assistant.

The main functions of the Adoption Service is to recruit, prepare, assess and approve adopters, to offer advice to child care social workers in matters pertaining to adoption and to work in partnership with child care social workers to identify suitable placements for children looked after by Hull City Council. The Adoption Service also provides support, guidance and advice to adopted children and adoptive families, and counselling to birth relatives of adopted children. They also provide information and advice to adults who were adopted as children.

SUMMARY

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

The preparation for the inspection by the agency was of an excellent standard and included a very efficient approach to providing pre-inspection material and a thorough self-assessment. The facilities made available to the inspection team were comfortable and everyone involved was welcoming, courteous and helpful; this enabled the inspection to be carried out efficiently and with the minimum of disruption to the service.

Unfortunately after only two days inspecting I, as the lead inspector was unable to continue due to an accident. The inspection was therefore completed some three weeks later.

During the course of the fieldwork interviews were conducted with key staff and managers and an elected member of the council. The adoption panel was viewed as well as the adoption panel chair interviewed. An adoption support group was also attended. Visits were undertaken to four adoptive families; their views are incorporated into the body of the report. Questionnaires were sent to adopters approved in the last twelve months, some prospective adopters currently being assessed, birth parents, placing social workers, placing authorities and professional advisers. Some of the comments made in these questionnaires are quoted in the report.

All relevant policies and procedures were inspected, as were records in respect of service users, staff and panel members. A selection of papers submitted to the adoption panel in recent times was also inspected.

What the service does well:

All staff are committed to improving the quality of the service they provide and all are qualified and experienced in the work they undertake.

The successful recruitment practices of prospective adopters have enabled the service to ensure children receive the best possible match with adopters that meet their needs.

The adoption service does have a very good checklist in place to monitor the stages of each prospective adopters application. They identify any delays and allow them to be quickly addressed. Several adopter spoke positively about how they were always kept informed even when they had long waits.

Clear strategies are in place for working with and supporting children placed with adopters.

The 'adoption needs assessment' is regularly reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer at each review to ensure children are central to the adoption process.

Adopters said they feel able to ask for support and know they will get it from the adoption team.

The adoption team do work closely with the children social workers to promote the life long involvement of birth families and the importance of birth family information for children.

Hull adoption service does have good monitoring systems in place to ensure the needs of children are met with the minimum delay. Elected members and all management staff were aware of children waiting and adopters approved through the transparent and clear monitoring systems in place.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection in March 2004 Hull City adoption service has reviewed their statement of purpose, which is clearly a working document.

The adoption services policies and procedures have been updated and now reflect the new legislative changes in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Hull adoption service has clearly embraced the new legislation and is extremely well prepared to implement all aspects of it.

Prospective adopters now receive comprehensive information packs and are consulted and given 28 days to respond to their assessments. The manager has implemented monitoring systems that inform the executive side of the council of adoption activities at regular intervals.

Hull City's adoption service had two requirements outstanding from the last inspection. One referred to the accommodation. Staff have been consulted about new accommodation and a move will be taking place shortly. The other requirement was in regard to the manager holding a management NVQ 4 qualification. The manager is due to complete this qualification September 2006.

Overall Hull City's adoption service has made many improvements since the last inspection.

What they could do better:

Hull City's adoption service could benefit from a monitoring system that identified staff and adoption panel members' criminal bureau record (CRB) checks coming up for renewal. Personnel and adoption panel files do need to be reviewed to ensure all information is up to date and in line with requirements.

The adoption service does have a children's guide to explain adoption matters however they should look to develop one applicable to the needs of children in Hull.

The adoption social worker's needs to ensure they clearly record all the positive work they do with adopters within their files.

A system needs to be in place to ensure that any support service used is in fact registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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

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 central to the adoption process and are placed with adopters who are able to meet their assessed needs and have been well prepared and trained.

EVIDENCE:

The Marketing and Information Officer recruits prospective foster carers and prospective adopters. The officer has been very successful as a waiting list for prospective adopters to be assessed is now in place. This gives the local authority more choice when matching and ensuring the needs of the children waiting for family placements are met. The Marketing and Information Officers post was vacant at the time of the inspection however interviews were about to start for a replacement.

The adoption service is aware of all children waiting for adoptive placements however the information could be improved by identifying religious and cultural needs of the children waiting when looking at priority lists. The service was in the middle of installing a new computer programme that would inform the team of each child's needs. This information could influence the priority system

that is in place when considering assessing prospective adopters. Having a priority system could prevent unnecessary delays for children. All sibling groups where it was identified that they should be placed together were, as well as 100% of matches reflected the child's ethnicity, culture, language and religion.

The adoption staff said that if they could justify the need for extra funding to ensure that they make the best possible placement for the child, the funding would be available.

Child protection procedures have been up dated and give the procedure when the child is adopted. This ensures that all staff are aware of what procedure to follow if a child is adopted and referred to the agency regarding a child protection issue.

The child's 'adoption needs assessment' addresses the wishes and feelings of the child, birth parent and adopters application. The support requirements are then address identifying how and who will deliver each aspect of it. The adoption support team are consulted regarding contact. This could be the letterbox or face-to-face contact with various family members.

The adoption service does have a very good checklist in place to monitor the stages of each prospective adopter. They identify any delays and allow them to be quickly addressed. Several adopter spoke positively about how they were always kept informed even when they had long waits.

If the checklists were completed fully in every case, they would give an excellent overview of the timescales it takes for adopters to reach each stage.

Adopters' spoke highly of the preparation groups. One said, "The preparation sessions were excellently run and very informative". Many said how much they enjoyed the guest speakers, adopters and birth parents. Social workers placing children with Hull adopters said that adopters were well prepared.

The adoption service has embraced recent legislation and the recent assessments seen in the new format evidenced a good analysis of issues raised. The social workers generally explored and analysed the information that was then presented very well.

Adopters on the whole felt they were well informed and the social workers maintained good levels of contact throughout. The service produces very good working agreements that were signed by the social worker and the prospective adopters. This enabled all parties to be aware of the expectations each one has of the other regarding contact.

Once a child is matched with an adopter, placement-planning meetings take place. Adopters as well as many other professionals attend these meetings to ensure the placement will be well supported and meet the needs of the child.

The adoption panel is timely and well run. Good checklists are presented to the panel members to ensure all relevant reports and documentation is present. The observation of the panel evidenced that all members quality assure the reports and associated documentation.

Children's social workers with very little experience of adoption work are supported at the adoption panel by their managers.

The adoption panel members were well informed of their role and debate issues constructively and professionally. They are committed to ensuring that each child's plan for adoption is in their best interest.

The adoption panel members as well as social workers feel they receive excellent support and advice from the legal advisor as well as the medical advisor. Protocols need to be in place for these advisors.

Adoptive families spoken to say they were welcomed to the adoption panel and were pleased they had attended. Some felt that waiting outside the adoption panel meeting room was not suitable, however after discussions with the managers, it was evident a separate room is put aside for this purpose and social workers should direct prospective and adoptive parent there.

The agency decision is made in a timely manner and all adoption panel papers and minutes inform the decision maker. The panel minutes are of a good standard, evidencing well the recommendation and reasons however they also need to reflect recent legislation and evidence the advice the panel give regarding age range, number of children etc.

All social workers working in the adoption team are appropriately qualified and experienced. Four have obtained a Post Qualifying Award. Children's social workers commented favourably about the adoption staff in terms of their knowledge, helpfulness and experience.

Managers have been trained in recruitment and selection procedures and no one is appointed prior to written statutory and personal references and telephone checks being undertaken.

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 agency gives a good level of support to prospective adopters, adopters and children to ensure appropriate placements are made and maintained.

EVIDENCE:

Clear strategies are in place for working and supporting adopters. The adoption support team undertake all letterbox contact, all face-to-face contact and requests for support from children, adopters, adoptee's and birth families.

Support groups coffee mornings and parties are organised, however adopters felt a support group specifically for adopters with placements would be invaluable. The social workers said they felt torn between casework and the need to develop the service.

The administration support is under resourced for the adoption support team. At present there is one part time worker who's predominant role is the management of the letterbox contact.

The adoption support team do contribute to each child's support package. Children's social workers said they welcome the guidance that this team gives them in this sensitive area.

All adopters are encouraged at their assessment and throughout the process to produce a family life storybook for prospective children. Several were viewed and found to be of a good standard and relevant to the age of the children being placed.

Children's social workers are clearly committed to providing 'later life' letters and 'life story' books, however delays have sometimes occurred which the agency need to monitor.

The adopters spoken to were aware of the need to build on 'life story' books and recognised the importance of how they develop and build the children's sense of identity and belonging.

The 'adoption needs assessment' is up dated and addressed by the Independent Reviewing Officer at each child's review. The Independent Reviewing Officer remains with the child from when the decision for adoption is first made through to the last review before the Adoption Order. This gives the child and their family continuity and an independent link person throughout the adoption process who is aware of their particular circumstances.

The adoption service does have access to medical, legal and educational advisors as well as external support. The agency has a protocol in place, which clearly identifies the role of the medical adviser and what the adoption agency can expect from this service

Advice on adoption from abroad comes via the Service Level Agreement with Doncaster Adoption and Family Welfare Society (DAFWS). Hull City's adoption service monitors this service provision on a regular basis to ensure prospective adopters receive a good service.

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 is committed to providing a good level of support services to birth parents to enable them to contribute and understand the lifelong implications of adoption.

EVIDENCE:

The adoption support team and childcare social workers work closely with birth parents. One said, "The adoption service is great. The staff are 100% polite and will help with any problems or misunderstandings and always do what they say and keep their promises". The adoption support team support birth parents during contact and will help with writing letters.

Children's social workers record the views of birth parents about the adoption of their child and signatures indicating their involvement in the discussions about adoption were evident on adoption support plans and placement reports. Case files indicate where birth parents have been spoken to about the agencies plan and why adoption has been considered.

Children's Social workers record on the adoption plans where birth parents have disagreed and refused to sign the document. They see this as being very important as a historically record for children when accessing their files at a later date to enable them to understand why decisions were made and where there may have been disagreements to the plans expressed by family members.

Support plans and support packages are arranged for birth family members during the adoption process.

Letters on files show that birth parents are informed about the outcomes of the adoption panel and panel minutes show where panel have congratulated a social worker for seeking the views of birth parents under quite difficult circumstances.

Birth relatives can receive support and counselling and support groups via 'After Adoption Yorkshire'. This service is monitored by Hull City's adoption commissioning service.

Birth family questionnaires evidenced that they were not aware of any support groups available to them however press cuttings and recent advertising campaigns including Radio advertising show that the agency have made great efforts to promote the support and counselling services they offer to birth parents and to extended family.

The agency runs a very comprehensive letterbox service, arrangements for letterbox contact is arranged and managed by a social worker in the post adoption team with one administration officer supporting the process.

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 team provides for a coherent service that conducts its business and carries out its responsibilities to the advantage of service users.

EVIDENCE:

The manager regularly updates the statement of purpose, which is an accurate reflection of its work. Staff confirmed they were aware of it and felt it was reflective of their practice and consider it a working document.

The children's guide used at present is the general BAAF issued one. Hull City Council is currently working on producing one of their own. Social workers do use the 'Nutmeg' series of books to explain the adoption process. The adoption service is aware of the need for a guide that explains complaints, children's rights director, and independent advocates to all children who are adopted. This information needs to be available in a language every child understands.

The information given to prospective adopters at the initial contact is of a high standard. Adopters spoken to commented on the helpfulness and friendliness of this initial contact. The handbook for adopters viewed was an excellent resource.

Adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds were interviewed and they confirmed they were welcomed and treated with respect throughout the process.

Hull City Council is aware of the changing ethnic make up of the community and has ensured staff receive training on equality and diversity issues to enable them to understand the needs of Hull children and to ensure suitable placements are made.

The manager has a social work qualification and is experienced and her responsibilities and lines of accountability are clearly defined. She is well respected and manages the adoption service well. In September 2006 she is due to complete a management qualification.

Personnel files revealed the managers Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check was out of date.

Policies and procedures have been up dated to address new legislation. The adoption manual was said to be "very good" by the social work staff.

The elected member spoken to had a sound knowledge of the adoption service and was a strong advocate for looked after children in Hull City Council. Monthly statistics are prepared for public use and are passed to the person responsible for the adoption service. This person reports to the Council's Scrutiny Committee every six months on the effectiveness and outcomes of the adoption service.

Through discussion with senior management it was clear that they had up to date knowledge of individual children waiting for, or recently placed for adoption.

Hull City Council has clearly embraced the new legislation and appears to have been prepared for sometime.

The adoption team have clearly worked hard to educate and inform children's social workers by giving presentations on the new legislation and relevant adoption issues. There was clear evidence of joint training with children's social workers, adoption panel members and independent reviewing officers.

Hull City Council adoption service does address any weakness constructively and timely. For example, the filing in of the new format of the child's permanence reports was causing some concern. Adoption and children's Managers gave support to children's social workers. As well as monitoring each report, they also attended panel with them. The adoption team provided a duty system to answer and queries as well as monthly surgeries. All children's social workers felt very well supported by the adoption team.

The adoption team social workers are very experienced and knowledgeable. The team is very well thought of by social workers from other local authorities as well as Hull City Council's children's social workers. Adopters interviewed or those that returned the questionnaires on the whole commented very positively about the service. One wanted to take the opportunity to comment on the "professionalism, authority and profound sensitivity" their social worker had throughout the assessment process. They said they found the assessment process a "rewarding and affirming experience".

Adopters' files evidenced good examples of management decisions made during supervision and overall the files had a good standard of recording. However isolated examples highlighted that some of the good work done with adopters was not clearly or sufficiently recorded.

The adoption service does use outside counsellors and therapists to support children and families that have been affected by adoption. A system to ensure these people are registered and fit to work with children and families must be put in place to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

The independent reviewing officers now practice remaining as the children's specific reviewing officer throughout the adoption process. This ensures continuity, relationship building with all people involved, including the child and their parents and ensuring plans are reviewed and actions taken when required.

'Care first' is the computer package used by Hull City Council. Social workers have raised concerns regarding the confidentiality of adopters and children's personal details. Manager's when asked, did say there are systems in place to

ensure confidentiality however this could be seen as a training issue for staff to alleviate there concerns.

The main adoption file of the child is jointly managed by the adoption team and the child care team and once an adoption order is made the adoption file and the child's care file are archived together to ensure there is a full and comprehensive case record maintained for future reference.

It was noted that Hull City Council do have a very good tracking system for archived files.

Staff files and adoption panel members' files did have information missing and do need to be reviewed to ensure they meet standards and regulations.

The accommodation situation is being addressed by management, staff were aware that the adoption service will possibly be moving. This did impact of the administration staff as some had moved or were imminently moving to other jobs. Adoption social work staff were concerned that the adoption service was losing several members of excellent administration staff who understood the needs of the service and adoption related matters.

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 | 3 |
| 10 | 3 |
| 11 | 3 |
| 12 | 3 |
| 13 | 3 |
| 15 | 1 |
| 19 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |
| 16 | 3 |
| 17 | 3 |
| 20 | 3 |
| 21 | 3 |
| 22 | 3 |
| 23 | 3 |
| 25 | 3 |
| 26 | 3 |
| 27 | 3 |
| 28 | 2 |
| 29 | 3 |
| 30 | N/A |
| 31 | N/A |

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

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. | AD14 | 6 (b) (1) | The manager must complete a formal management qualification | 30/10/06 |
| 2. | AD15 | 6 | The manager must have an up to date enhanced criminal Bureau check. | 10/08/06 |
| 3. | AD28 | 11 | All adoption panel members and staff working for the purpose of adoption must have a record containing all information in Schedules 3&4. | 30/10/06 |
| 4 | AD1 | 3 | The children's guide must contain a statement as to the matters listed in schedule 2 | 30/10/06 |

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. | AD25 | Recording on adopter's files should be clear and accurate to reflect the work done. |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 2. | AD9 | Birth family members should be informed about relevant support groups. |
| 3. | AD21 | The adoption support service should have sufficient administration staff. |

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