

Central Bedfordshire Council Adoption Agency

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Setting address	Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, SHEFFORD, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ
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Telephone number

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Registered person

Central Bedfordshire Council

Registered manager

Responsible individual

Fiona MacKirdy

Date of last inspection

N/A

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The adoption service is operated and managed by Central Bedfordshire Council, but provides a service to Bedford Borough Council under a service level agreement. It provides an adoption service for the residents of Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council. This includes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters.

The service also contributes to the matching and placement of children with adopters and provides a full range of resources to all those affected by adoption.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The purpose of this visit was to undertake a full inspection. Outcome areas for staying safe, enjoy and achieve, positive contribution and organisation were assessed.

This is a good service overall with some outstanding elements of practice. Children and young people are effectively safeguarded. They achieve good outcomes in terms of their education, health and social and emotional development.

The service recognises the need for children and young people to have some control in their lives and to understand and participate in what is planned for them. Children and young people are listened to, and things change for them as a result.

Adoptive parents undergo thorough assessment and scrutiny so that they can provide children and young people with life-long stability and security. Birth parents are afforded every opportunity to be involved in plans for their children and support is offered to all those affected by adoption.

Children and young people benefit from a service that is effectively managed and staffed by those who take a reflective and creative approach to their work. One recommendation has been raised, however, to help the service improve the quality of child permanence reports and thereby better contribute to an understanding of the child's life.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the service's first inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people are protected by a range of effective measures and good practice. Checks within the system mean that children and young people's welfare, safety and progress is carefully monitored. Swift action is taken in response to any concerns.

Children and young people's need for families who will nurture and protect them is central to the recruitment of adopters. With this in mind, and as a result of thorough assessment and analysis, not all prospective adopter applications are progressed. The adoption panel ensures that children and young people are safeguarded by applying stringent scrutiny of prospective adopters before making their recommendation. This includes ensuring that prospective adopters can provide good standards of physical safety and security.

Children and young people benefit from experiencing very few placement moves prior to adoption and sterling support from foster carers ensure that the move to adoptive placements goes smoothly. Children and young people can be assured that staff give a good deal of consideration to their individual needs, and in finding the right match for them with adopters who can offer them safe, nurturing life long care. Adopters commented that 'we think they got the match exactly right' and that introductions were managed well, with children and young people's needs foremost in any arrangements.

Children and young people have access to a wide range of individuals outside of their adoptive families, such as those who visit in a professional capacity. They are given information in the children's guide about who they can contact if they have concerns. This provides them with an additional and important element of safeguarding. The service also ensures that birth parents and adoptive parents are aware of their right to comment on service provision. One adopter noted that 'the agency was very good when we did make a complaint.'

Children and young people are protected as checks are carried out to determine the suitability of both staff and adoption panel members. The service follows safer recruitment guidelines and ensures that the performance of both staff and panel members is regularly appraised.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children and young people are provided with services and support to help them enjoy life and fulfil their potential. Their adoptive parents are enabled to meet their needs because the service ensures they receive full background information on their children's past history and any current or potential later life health issues.

Effective preparation training and support for adopters, such as parenting programmes, assists them in understanding their children's past experiences, cope with the challenges of adoption and strengthen their relationships as a new family. As a consequence, children and young people develop positive, secure attachments and acquire emotional resilience. Children and young people also benefit from interventions such as therapy and therapeutic life story work, as well as support from mainstream services such as child and adolescent mental health teams.

Children and young people are supported to achieve their academic and wider learning potential. Good relationships between education providers, adoptive parents and the service helps to facilitate this, identifying and helping to overcome any barriers to progress and achievement.

Children and young people come to their adoptive placements already involved in a range of leisure and sporting interests, and new ones are cultivated once they are placed. This promotes their physical, emotional and social development and affords them opportunities to engage as citizens in the local and wider community.

Adoption support is a strength of the service and offers valuable support and guidance to all those affected by adoption. This provides adoptive parents and their children and young people with an excellent resource and is an essential element in helping to sustain and maintain adoptive placements.

Adoption support is extended to birth parents and families. One birth parent described how the service had helped in the composition and exchange of letters which 'helped me to feel that I was still important'. Adopted adults are provided with a service which supports and helps them to understand the possible effects on them and their family on the outcome of their search.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children and young people have a say on decisions which affect their day to day lives and have an opportunity to give a preference on the kind of family with whom they want to be matched. They have influence on some aspects of service delivery, such as letterbox contact and social networking.

Of particular note is the development of the teenage adoption panel, which gives

prospective adopters the chance to meet and be interviewed by adopted young people. Assessments on adopters take account of issues raised by the teenage adoption panel and the scheme has received very positive feedback from both adopters and the adoption panel. Aply supported by skilful and sensitive adoption workers, this is innovative and outstanding practice. Young people on the panel noted that 'we do feel listened to.' Equally important is the benefit that young people gain from this experience in terms of being valued by the service, in developing a range of communication skills and in boosting their confidence and self-esteem.

Children and young people's diverse needs are suitably described and analysed in children's permanence reports. These important documents assist adoption panel in their matching deliberations, and adopters in helping to understand children's needs across all dimensions, and how they will be able to satisfy those needs.

Some reports are not entirely adoption aware, however, and do not always provide a helpful narrative which will contribute towards an understanding of the child's experience and history in later life. A recommendation is therefore raised to improve practice in this area.

The service recognises children and young people's diverse needs and recruits adopters from all sections of the community to provide suitable adoptive placements. There is particularly effective work in terms of meeting the needs of children and young people from specific ethnic groups.

Sensitive life story work and efforts to include birth parents in the adoption process enables children and young people to have a clear understanding of their identity, heritage and life before adoption. One birth parent commented on how helpful it had been to have the opportunity 'to meet the people who were going to look after my children.'

Children and young people benefit from, and are safeguarded by, suitable arrangements for contact with their birth families. This enables them to retain a link with their family of origin while ensuring that they are not placed at risk. Some young people are of an age where they take the lead on contact arrangements. The service recognises young people's rights in this respect and provides support for them and their adoptive parents.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The adoption service is managed in a way that delivers positive outcomes for children and young people. Staff have a good grasp of their responsibilities towards children, adopters and birth families. They work well with colleagues to ensure that the majority of children and young people do not experience undue delay in moving to their adoptive parents.

Senior management are available and visible. Through effective monitoring systems they keep children and young people's movement through the system under review and ensure there are sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children and young people.

Adopters comment favourably on the training and preparation they receive. One adopter noted 'We felt that the adoption agency did an excellent job. Our social worker was friendly, helpful, informative and supportive. We found the whole team showed a huge amount of empathy and understanding.'

Staff described the helpful open door approach of management. They are very well supported through access to training, team meetings and focussed individual supervision. There is time for reflective practice and this helps to improve children and young people's individual experience of their journey to adoption.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that records contribute to an understanding of the child's life (NMS 27)