

# Sandwell MBC Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC059602
<b>Inspection date</b>	03/09/2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Vivien Slyfield
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Random

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	17/05/2007

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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 of the Metropolitan Borough Council of Sandwell is part of the local authority's Child Care Division, which is part of Education and Children's Services. The adoption service is provided through the Family Placement Service based at Crystal House in Smethwick. The nominated manager for the adoption service is the service manager with responsibility for fostering and adoption. The adoption team, including the adoption support team is managed by the adoption team manager. There are seven social workers in the adoption team and one senior practitioner. The adoption support team has a senior practitioner, one social worker, a community support worker and a business support officer.

The work of the adoption service is to provide placements for Sandwell children in need of adoptive families. The team recruits, trains, assesses and supports approved adopters. It manages and supports a Letterbox system for post adoption contact, undertakes work with inter-country adoptions, section 55 counselling and family finding for children needing adoptive placements. Adoption support is assessed and links provided to local groups and direct work, including intermediary services. Sandwell adoption service is part of the Black Country Consortium, which has formed Adoption in the Black Country (ABC). This consortium of the neighbouring authorities of Walsall, Wolverhampton and Dudley work closely together on adoption issues. They jointly fund a recruitment officer and offer preparation training to prospective adopters in the consortium.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced interim inspection that looked specifically at the progress made by Sandwell MBC in relation to the actions and recommendations made at the last inspection.

There is evidence of improvement in all the areas, although the Child Permanence Reports (CPR) and information held on children's adoption files are not yet of a consistent quality. The children's guide and the safeguarding procedure for children placed for adoption does not yet fully comply with regulations. There is progress in all the areas considered and there is a real sense of a service establishing what it needs to do and moving forward.

### Improvements since the last inspection

There were six actions from the last inspection. Of these only two are not now fully met. All new personnel files are fully compliant. CRB checks are appropriately

recorded in relation to prospective adopters and their health and safety checks have been amended. No breach of confidentiality was seen on any of the files and there is a contract in place for the archiving of adoption files. Full and accurate information is not in place on all children's files and within the safeguarding procedure.

The recommendations were also mainly met. Of the seven made, only one has not been addressed. Information is clear about Sandwell children who need adoptive placements and there are fewer delays in the early stages of assessing adopters. Notifications of the agency's decision are made within the timescales and clearly state who is responsible for these. A new post has been created of panel advisor, which will support the work already undertaken on monitoring to address quality assurance issues.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

There is evidence of changes to the recording of information about prospective adopters. The files seen of recent assessments have the level, date of disclosure and reference number of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks undertaken. A new health and safety checklist includes weapons, guns and checking of certificates of firearm registration.

The files seen showed that letters of notification are now sent within the timescales identified. These letters are now signed by the agency decision maker. This process is now fully compliant with the standards.

A child protection procedure is in place, which describes the procedure to follow in relation to 'Allegations Against Prospective Adopters'. This does not include all situations of possible abuse for children placed for adoption.

Training has been provided for staff on the completion of reports and specifically on CPRs. There has been little time for the impact of this training to be demonstrated in the reports seen. There is still a lack of clear consistent recording of all the information relating to children with adoption as their plan. Information is lacking about siblings and about why parental views are not included. However, there is also an example of a birth parent writing directly on the CPR and giving valuable information. Health details about the child and their birth family are included in documentation available to prospective adopters and will be stored for future access by the child. The case records seen did not identify any breaches of confidentiality. All the information seen related appropriately to the individual who is the subject of the case record.

The personnel files seen all included proof of identity and are compliant with the regulations. A form is now in place for completion when undertaking telephone verification of references. This is complete on all new appointments. CRB checks were in place on all the sessional workers, although none of these had been appointed since the last inspection.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is not judged.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is not judged.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is evidence of significant work having been undertaken by the managers of the service. The adoption team have been involved in work to identify the needs of Sandwell children with a plan for adoption. This work has given a clear focus to the adoption team about the recruitment needs of the service and is incorporated into the strategic plan and the information provided for prospective adopters. Work has been undertaken in securing a new post of panel advisor for both the adoption and fostering panels. This post is independent of the line management for the adoption service and is seen as strengthening quality assurance.

Similar work has been undertaken to address the delays in the recruitment and assessment of adopters. There is a clear sense that the managers are aware of what is happening with applications and that they take action to address any delays. Work has also been undertaken on the monitoring systems for the service and of the quality of CPRs. The forms are evident on files seen and there is information demonstrating that managers are using the system to ensure they have an overview of the work and of improvements that are needed.

The statement of purpose has been further revised and is now fully compliant. There has been further work on the children's guide and there is now an accessible and

child friendly guide available. However, it does not include a summary of the statement of purpose, information about the adoption process or the contact details for Ofsted.

There is clarity about the storage of adoption files and the archive facility. The latter has been visited by members of the adoption team staff and assessed as being appropriate. The contract with the archive provider states the need for confidentiality and secure storage in fireproof cabinets.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
2	ensure that full and accurate information is available in relation to each child being considered for adoption. (AA Regs. 2005)	03/10/2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure the Child Protection procedures are finalised making it clear they relate to any situation of possible abuse of children placed for adoption. These procedures must include guidance about allegations of historical abuse NMS 1 and 32 (LAA Regs 2003)
- ensure the children's guide is finalised to include the summary of the statement of purpose, the procedure for adoption and the Ofsted address. NMS 1 (LAA Regs 3, Schedule 2)