

Peterborough City Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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Inspector	Rosemary Dancer
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Date of last inspection	26/11/2007

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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 agency of Peterborough City Council undertakes all statutory work associated with adoption services. The adoption team is based in central premises in the city. The team recruits, trains, assesses and supports adoptive parents. It provides counselling for parents wishing to place their child for adoption, for birth families who are not voluntarily relinquishing their children and for adopted adults.

The agency is a member of the East Anglia Adoption Consortium.

The agency has a service level agreement with a registered voluntary adoption agency in respect to inter-country adoption work.

The agency has a contract with a registered voluntary adoption agency in respect to supporting birth family members

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 in meeting the actions and recommendations made at the last inspection.

There is evidence of improvement in all areas. It is clear that this agency has worked very hard to address the issues raised as a part of the last inspection and as a result the service to children, adopters and others affected by adoption has improved significantly. These improvements have undoubtedly been possible due to a more stable management team than what was in place at the time of the last inspection. The team have clearly used the findings from the last inspection to improve services and they show a strong commitment to using self-evaluation as a tool to develop services and practice.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were 10 actions from the last inspection. Eight of these have been fully addressed and two have been partly addressed. The partly addressed actions relate to amendments to the statement of purpose and to the guide to adoption for children.

There were 22 recommendations from the last inspection. Of these most have been fully addressed with some having been partially addressed. The restated recommendations have been amended to reflect the work that has been carried out.

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.

The agency continues to develop its already good approach to the recruitment of those people who are likely to be able to meet the needs of children waiting for an adoptive placement. The agency is now taking the application to adopt before any assessment work is carried out which means applicants have access to the formal routes of appealing an adverse decision about their suitability from the point of the assessment commencing. The health and safety checklist which is used to assess applicants' homes has been updated in line with currently accepted practice.

A rather more robust approach is taken now to evidencing that risk assessments are carried out to inform the decision making process about the placement of siblings. However, this approach is not consistently taken by all workers. Likewise medical information about children and birth family members is not always obtained in a timely way which can mean that matches are taken to panel and the agency decision is made before prospective adopters are fully informed about a child's actual and potential health needs.

The adoption panel now has clear procedures in place to govern its function and operation. The panel has two social work representatives sitting which provides the panel with a more practice based view than was previously the case. Panels are held at a frequency to meet its business needs. The agency has worked hard to recruit a representative from a local ethnic minority group to panel although to date has not been successful in this. The agency reviewed the arrangements whereby the adoption team manager acts as the adviser to panel and it reached a decision that this arrangement presents a significant conflict of interests for the manager. Arrangements are being finalised for another manager with appropriate qualifications and experience to take over the adviser role. The arrangements for the quality assurance of the assessment reports for children have been improved but there are still some issues in some cases of incomplete or poor quality information being presented to panel. There are clear minutes made for each case which now show the role each attendee has on the panel. Where there is a sibling group separate minutes are not always being made in respect of each child. The decision making process remains robust in most cases but where a case is recommended for deferral by panel cases are not always being passed to the decision maker to make his decision.

The agency evidenced overall that a robust approach is being taken to the recruitment of panel members and staff. There are some minor gaps in evidencing this process. The agency has updated the safeguarding procedures and staff have been informed of the changes made.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has recently introduced a clear written plan in respect to support services. A recent reorganisation has provided the service with an adoption support team. This team will be managed as a separate team once the manager appointed to this post commences work. There is better attention being given to the development of support plans and for some these provide a clear plan of support which has been based on assessed needs. However, a consistent approach is not yet being taken to this work.

The services provided by specialist advisers are now underpinned by written protocols.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

There are clear plans in place to provide a support service to birth parents and family members which is independent from the agency. This service is about to commence and there are clear stages of review to ensure the service is meeting the needs of birth family members. Some birth parents have been waiting for this service for a long time.

The arrangements for carrying out life story work with children has improved. There are clear plans in place to progress the backlog of this work and a clear commitment has been made to ensuring that all such current work is carried in a timely for the child concerned.

The arrangements for the management and administration of letterbox contact arrangements have been improved with clear written agreements in place which are signed by all parties.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is a clear and comprehensive statement of purpose in place which along with the policies and procedures guides the work of the agency. The statement does not include the arrangements for assessing the support needs of families coming back to

the agency for a service. The agency has developed a guide for younger children; this does not include the details of the Children's Rights Director for England and Wales or details of how a child may have access to an independent advocate.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory in this agency with attention focused on the specific needs of the children coming through the system seen as the priority. However, appropriate attention is paid to other service users needs such as for those for whom English is not their first language.

There are arrangements in place for the manager to commence a management qualification. The arrangements for the agency to obtain medical advice have been further developed with the time the medical adviser has to carry out this important role having been doubled. This is reported as now meeting the needs of the agency. The practice of unqualified workers carrying out social work tasks have now been addressed. Staff training needs are to be assessed via a formal appraisal process and each member of staff is booked in for a meeting to discuss their needs in a formal setting.

The arrangements for carrying out file audits has been developed and is about to be introduced and the system for dealing with complaints is adequate. All complaints are monitored by the complaints officer. Staff personnel files are maintained but some do not contain full up-to-date information.

The agency has developed and introduced; an access to records policy and procedure document, a case recording policy and a disaster recovery plan which includes the provision of premises and arrangements for the back-up of current files. The arrangements for the storage of archived files are sound.

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
1	amend and develop the statement of purpose to include the arrangements for assessing adoption support needs for previously adopted children (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended Regulation 2)	01/12/2008
1	include in the children's guides the contact details of the Children's Rights Director for England and Wales and details of how a child may have access to an independent advocate (The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2005, as amended	01/12/2008

Regulation 3)	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure a consistent approach is taken to evidencing the decision making processes in respect to the placement of siblings and that medical information is obtained and disseminated to the medical adviser, adopters and any other relevant party in a timely way (MNS 5.2)
- ensure that the assessment reports for children are of a consistently adequate quality (NMS 12.2)
- ensure that for cases involving sibling groups a separate panel minute is made for each child (NMS 12.3)
- ensure that in cases deferred by panel the decision maker is presented with the papers and makes his decision on the case (NMS 13.1)
- ensure that the support services are subject to close monitoring including the development of robust support plans for every case (NMS 6.1)
- ensure that birth parents waiting for support and counselling are informed about, and supported and encouraged to attend the newly commissioned service (NMS 7.4)
- ensure that the arrangements for carrying out life story work are effective (NMS 8.2)
- ensure the manager undertakes a relevant management qualification. (NMS 14.2)
- ensure all members of staff take part in the appraisal system to identify their individual training and development needs (NMS 23.3)
- ensure that personnel files contain full information and are kept up to date (NMS 28.1)