

# Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Jayne Ivory / Sean White
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	12/07/2007

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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

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council offers a full range of adoption services as part of an integrated Children, Schools and Families Service. Rochdale employ an independent chairperson to chair the adoption panel. Rochdale provides the following adoption services for children and adults:

To match and place children with adopters who can best meet their assessed needs throughout childhood and beyond once adoption has been identified as being in their best interests.

To prepare children prior to introduction and placement with adopters in an age appropriate way whilst ensuring that the child's own history is understood and preserved.

To recruit, prepare, assess and approve adoptive applicants who can meet the needs of children needing adoption both locally, regionally and nationally. This includes the recruitment of adopters for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

To provide a range of adoption support services, either directly or through contractual arrangements with other agencies for adopted children and their families. This includes financial support where appropriate.

To offer a range of services and information to birth parents in order to make effective plans for their children, where adoption has been identified as being in the best interests of their child.

To work in partnership with other agencies as part of Adoption 22 to offer a service to adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

There has been significant improvements in the ability of the service to comply with national minimum standards and regulations. Although there are a few recommendations from this inspection, the overall quality of the provision is good.

The outcomes helping children to be healthy and achieving economic wellbeing were not assessed as part of this inspection.

### Improvements since the last inspection

The majority of requirements and recommendations which came as a result of the first inspection have been addressed. The service has invested additional resources in the adoption team and adoption support service. All the previous issues concerning the adoption files have been resolved. Files are now stored in fire proof and water proof cabinets and all adoption files are backed up electronically, with the

exception of current adoption files. Support services are available to all those touched by adoption and their partnership with a local voluntary adoption agency commissioned to provide adoption support services is managed well. The information from the commissioned service is of a good quality and provides evidence that birth parents are able to access services appropriate to their needs.

### **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.

Rochdale has sound systems to ensure that the needs of children waiting for or likely to need an adoption placement inform recruitment activity. The service promotes good outcomes for children with a plan for adoption by ensuring that matching is a thorough and well-supported process. Much time and effort is invested in the matching process to ensure that Rochdale's adoption service experiences consistently low disruption rates. There are very few children waiting for adoption placements. This is as a result of a clear focus upon family finding in the adoption team, and close collaborative working across the service.

The quality of recruitment, preparation and training for adopters is of a good standard. Rochdale works in partnership with another adoption agency to provide regular preparation training. There are inconsistencies in the range of evidence used to inform the assessments of prospective adopters. Some sources of information are missing from those outlined in the practice guidance for preparing and assessing adopters. Practice guidance timescales for completing prospective adopters reports are not always met.

Rochdale has a broad recruitment strategy. It is a leading member of Adoption 22, a network of adoption agencies in the north west of England and places the majority of Rochdale's children with other adoption agencies in the network.

Rochdale's adoption service benefits from effective performance management systems. The adoption panel ensures that adopter's and children's assessments are subject to close scrutiny. The quality of work submitted to the panel is of a good and improving standard. The adoption panel receives regular adoption service reports which detail the progress of children's plans and approved adopter's circumstances.

Rochdale has sound recruitment and selection practices, which ensure that vulnerable children and adults are safeguarded. Children receive an adoption service that keeps them safe in Rochdale, however adoption panel members files have not been audited to ensure that they meet the regulations and the national minimum standards.

Social workers and other members of staff in the service are not clear about the identification and management of cases of historical abuse in accordance with the additional adoption support national minimum standards.

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

The provision is good.

Rochdale provides a range of support services to children and their families, that acknowledge the life long implications of adoption. The service supports adopter's by financing their first year of membership to a national independent adoption support network. Rochdale facilitates a longstanding adoption support group.

Families receive good initial assessments of their adoption support needs by social workers in the adoption team, including financial assessments and support.

The need for information and support for young people about their own adoption is delivered very sensitively. Young people are able to express their feelings in an appropriate way and the integrated way of working with the families empowers adoptive parents to support their child and other children in the family.

Although there is a system to review financial arrangements, there is no formal system for the review of other packages of adoption support.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Rochdale's preparation training, assessment and matching process provided adopters, in most cases with information about a child's history and its relevance in enabling a child to develop a positive self-image. It also enables adopters to understand and to develop strategies in assisting a child to address all forms of discrimination. The importance of keeping safe information provided by birth parents and families is clearly addressed through out the preparation and assessment process.

The service recognises the life long implications of adoption. Placing social workers are encouraged to involve birth parents and families in the care planning processes for their child. The views of the birth parents about adoption and contact are clearly recorded in some files. The agency has a service level agreement with a voluntary adoption agency to provide an independent counselling service to birth parents.

Birth parents and families are given further opportunities to maintain and up-date their child's heritage through direct or indirect contact via the services letterbox system. This is a well organised and an effectively managed system, which provides birth parents and their families a real opportunity to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage. There is close liaison between the independent social work

service and effective systems to ensure that birth parents are referred at the point of the panel recommendation and agency decision that a child should be placed for adoption. Staff are aware of the need to preserve and maintain a child's heritage however, life work is not always completed within timescale.

The service work together with the child and adolescent mental health service link workers to help prepare children for adoption if appropriate. The multi-agency approach to counselling and preparing children for their adoptive placement supports good outcomes for adopted children and their families.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The statement of purpose clearly outlines the aspirations and operations of the agency and is written in an easy to read style. The policies and procedures of the agency, many of which had been recently reviewed and revised, support the statement of purpose. The statement of purpose did not include details of how service users can contact Ofsted. The range of children's guides that are available do not include details of how a child or their family can contact the Children's Rights Director.

The information provided for prospective applicants is satisfactory. It gives a clear indication of all the implications and processes of adoption, including profiles of the kind of children requiring placements, and it also specifies the range of people that the agency wishes to recruit.

Performance management is a real area of strength in the service, and underpins operational activity and strategic direction. All staff are well supervised and supported by their managers. All managers involved in the adoption service are qualified social workers and have considerable post-qualifying experience. However, there is no robust system of file auditing. The files for both children and adopters showed little or no evidence of any management oversight. The quality of some of the paperwork is poor, decisions made during supervision are not recorded on all files and signatures on documents are not always dated and supplemented by the manager's or social workers full name. As a result, there is no effective quality assurance systems which evidences the supervision and management decision making process of children's and adopters' assessments.

## **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):

- develop systems to ensure that assessment practice is delivered in a timely and effective manner in all cases
- ensure that there is greater consistency in the range of evidence used in the assessment of prospective adopters
- ensure that the files of adoption panel members meet the regulations and the national minimum standards
- reviewed and amended the safeguarding policy procedure to ensure that social workers and other members of staff in the service are clear about the identification and management of cases of historical abuse
- ensure that a formal system for the review of packages of adoption support is developed to go alongside the existing system of the review of financial arrangements
- develop a strategy to ensure that life work for children with a plan for adoption is delivered in a timely way, in all cases.