

Knowsley MBC Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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Inspector	Marian Denny
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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

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council operates a comprehensive adoption service, which includes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of adopters. The service provides training for adopters post placement and the approval of non-agency adopters. The matching and placement of children with adoptive parents; support for children pre and post-placement and post adoption contact is also provided. In addition, the service operates and maintains a letterbox system, which supports the information exchange in adoption placements.

The service commissions a voluntary adoption agency to provide an independent counselling and support service for adopted adults, birth parents and their families. It also commissions inter-country adoptions to be carried out through a voluntary adoption agency.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced interim inspection looked at the progress the service has made with the requirements and recommendations from the last full inspection.

The majority of the Adoption National Minimum Standards and Adoption Agencies Regulations were assessed under the outcome areas of Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Organisation. A judgement for each outcome was reached after assessing a range of information obtained in the inspection.

Overall, the agency is meeting the Adoption National Minimum Standards and the Adoption Agencies Regulations. Consequently, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Making a Positive Contribution and Organisation are judged as good. One action is made related to the Children's Guide. Three good practice recommendations are made, two of these relate to the development of an adoption policy and a disaster recovery plan. The third recommendation relates to the service's strategy in working with birth parents and their families.

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full inspection carried out in November 2005, resulted in 10 actions and 20 recommendations being made that related to each of the key outcome areas. During the past eighteen months, the agency has made considerable efforts to address these matters. Consequently, there is one action and three recommendations that remain outstanding in this inspection. The work undertaken by the agency has

resulted in an improved service being provided to adopters, children, their birth parents and family.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no Adoption National Minimum Standards, which address this outcome.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The adoption team is now fully staffed with permanent workers and is adequately resourced to meet the needs of the adoption service.

The preparation training for adopters has been reviewed. Whilst adopters and foster carers continue to be trained together, the service has introduced an additional training session for adopters. This training has been specially designed to meet the specific needs of adopters. Training is also provided to second time adopters on an individual basis. Improvements in the training have resulted in the prospective adopters' needs being met more effectively.

The notes, written at the time of the adopters' assessments, are now contained in the service's case records. They also contain where appropriate, a 10 day waiver notice in respect of adopters' written assessments. The agency has developed a health and safety checklist for prospective adopters. This checklist is comprehensive and is useful in assessing adopters' capacity to look after children safely.

The Adoption service ensures case records are established for all children, where there is a plan for adoption. Children's wishes and feelings regarding their adoption plan are fully recorded in a variety of case records, for example, the Statutory Review, the permanence planning meeting and the Child's Permanence Report (CPR). Records seen evidenced that the children's statutory visits are completed in the frequency dictated by legislation. A case file checklist has been devised to ensure these records contain all the information specified in the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

Child care staff receive training in writing the Child's Permanence Reports. Consequently there is an improvement in these reports and those seen were of a good standard. Good, accurate and up-to-date assessments of children's needs greatly assist the effective matching of children with adopters. The continuous improvement of such reports is crucial in the matching process and increasing the likelihood of children's adoptive placements being successful.

Similarly, the agency uses a book titled, 'It's all about me'. This helps ensure adopters obtain all the information regarding the children, whom they are considering adopting. The service also intends to introduce life appreciation days,

which will involve all the significant individuals in a child's life and provide the adopters with first hand, qualitative information regarding the children to be placed with them.

Birth parent's views about their children's adoption plan are recorded in statutory reviews, the CPR and permanency planning meetings. Records reviewed indicate that there had been an improvement in this area of practice.

The agency has reviewed all its written information and ensured it reflects today's multi-cultural society.

There are clearly written adoption panel policies and procedures, which fully meet the Adoption National minimum Standards and Regulations.

Adopters are invited to attend the adoption panel. Good preparatory work is undertaken with them prior to their attendance. Work is in hand to enhance the panel leaflets given to adopters.

The service has improved its adoption panel minutes, which are well-structured, informative and meet the Adoption National Minimum Standards.

The agency's decision maker ensures all information relating to a case as well as the panel minutes are thoroughly scrutinised before making a decision. The internal form used to indicate the agency-decision maker's decision has recently been revised to reflect the thoroughness of the decision making. Decisions are communicated to adopters within the timescales laid down in Guidance to the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

Appropriate recruitment and selection procedures in relation to the agency's staff are in place. The manager and all social workers are qualified, knowledgeable, skilled and experienced.

The agency has a safeguarding policy and procedure, however, this policy does not deal with allegations of historical abuse. There is a good recording system in place to enable staff to record safeguarding issues effectively. The agency ensures all those working in the agency are well supported to handle and manage safeguarding issues.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency has access to specialist advisers. There are written protocols in place regarding their roles. Adopters are able to access the agency's specialist advisers, whenever the need arises.

The agency's practice is service user focused. Those using the service are carefully listened too and their wishes and feelings considered.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

A permanency policy had recently been produced, which will provide the adoption service an opportunity to develop a coherent strategy for working with birth parents and their families.

The service clearly recognises the lifelong implications of adoption and this is effectively evidenced in various policies and procedures. Parents are provided with written information regarding the care planning processes for their child and are actively encouraged to become involved in these processes.

The Council commissions a voluntary adoption agency to provide an independent counselling and support service to birth parents and their families. Leaflets have been produced detailing the service. These leaflets are in a user friendly format and available in a variety of community resources. This service is actively promoted through a variety of childcare staff and other professionals working and living within the borough. The adoption service has an effective system in place to monitor the service provided.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no Adoption National Minimum Standards, which address this outcome.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose, which contains all the information required under the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

The agency has a Children's Guide, however, this did not meet the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption service and a number of quality assurance systems are in place, for example, divisional monitoring meetings, tracking systems, adoption panel and permanency planning documentation. The systems examined are effective in monitoring the agency's performance.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for case recording and access to records. Case records are well organised and in good order.

The agency has clearly written recruitment and selection procedures, which are followed. The personnel and panel members' files seen, contained all the information required under the Adoption Agencies Regulations. This ensures that the children

and young people using this service are adequately safeguarded.

The agency has produced a draft disaster recovery plan.

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	ensure the Children's Guide contains all the required information. (Reg. 3(1), Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003)	01/01/2008

Recommendations

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

- consider revising the agency's safeguarding policy (NMS 32)
- develop a clear strategy for working with birth parents and their families (NMS 9)
- provide a Disaster Recovery Plan. (NMS 29)