

# North East Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Inspection date</b>	22/10/2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White / Dennis Bradley
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11/10/2005

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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 agency provides, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption services required under current legislation. It recruits, prepares and assesses people who apply to be adoptive parents and makes arrangements for children to be placed with approved adopters. Due to the small size and population of the authority children are, in the main, placed with adopters approved by other agencies. The service also provides, or makes arrangements for, support to people affected by adoption; this includes birth parents, adopted adults and families facing challenges.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This is an agency that demonstrates a very high level of competence in practice, a very well considered operational and strategic approach to delivery of services and a very strong commitment to children and their welfare. This is driven by outstanding energy and managerial integrity by workers who have considerable skill and expertise in adoption work and children's social care.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The agency has improved upon all the issues raised following the last 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 outstanding.

This is an agency with considerable commitment to meeting children's needs through adoption. Its conscientious, innovative and highly skilled approach is one that focuses on children as the driving force of its responsibilities, and all systems and operations are informed and motivated by this principle.

The matching process is driven by a commitment to placing children with the most appropriate families. In order to achieve this the agency works to a particularly high standard in many areas, and employs a range of initiatives to achieve the best

possible practice and, thereby, outcomes. A significant aspect of the agency's success is in respect of the importance it places on undertaking direct work with children. This boosts the matching process considerably; there is a much clearer focus on the needs of children and, consequently, greater potential for successful placements. Report writing is of a particularly high standard, which provides potential families – and the adoption panel – with all relevant and necessary information that is clear and well written.

Adopters are recruited, prepared and assessed in a thorough and well managed way. The processes from enquiry to approval are well considered, efficient and undertaken with professionalism, skill and sensitivity. The agency demonstrates significant commitment to approving only those people who are suitable to offer homes for children placed for adoption and the systems in place to achieve this are of a very high standard.

The adoption panel, which is appropriately constituted and governed by up to date policies and procedures, undertakes its duties with commitment and thoughtful consideration. It provides for further rigour in the adoption process and complements the work of the agency through careful scrutiny and quality monitoring of the work presented to it. The panel is well managed, efficiently administered and decisions are made in a timely way. The overall operations of the adoption panel are of a high standard.

The managers and staff of the agency are highly motivated, skilled and knowledgeable. The energy and commitment of everyone involved in the agency is very impressive and results in a dynamic and conscientious service that is unrelenting in its drive for excellence and improvement. The manager is qualified and widely experienced in adoption work; senior staff and workers are similarly qualified but also have a much higher than average post-qualifying ratio. Recruitment and selection practices are very thorough with appropriate systems in place to ensure only the most suitable and qualified staff are employed.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency's approach to support services is very strong, and in many areas impressively so. As in other areas of the service's work, the commitment to children's wellbeing is the driving force of its operations, and it undertakes its responsibilities to support with verve and innovative practices.

The continuing thread of this agency's work and practice is underpinned, in all operations, by the sheer determination to provide children affected by adoption with the best possible services. Listening to children and young people, and acting upon what they say, is a cornerstone of much of the support provided and precipitates a service and event of enormous importance for adopted young people.

In addition to the work and innovative practices of the adoption service workers,

there are other support mechanisms in place and services that can be accessed. The psychological services that are available bring a very strong extra dimension to supporting adoptive placements and showed a much broader support infrastructure than is usually the case.

There is also first class medical and legal advice to the agency and the adoption panel that ensures all relevant facts are available in all cases, particularly those with a complex dimension.

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

The provision is outstanding.

There is a clear commitment to having an inclusive and holistic approach to adoption in this agency. This is well demonstrated in the way that it places significant importance on providing high quality services for all people that have been affected by adoption, including birth families.

Birth parents are encouraged to be as involved as possible throughout the planning for their children's futures and to express their views, wishes and feelings. There have been considerable efforts made to ensure that birth parents, and other birth family members, have access to good quality support. This development of close and purposeful relationships has the added benefit of a collective commitment to the gathering of information for life-story work and adoption preparation.

Direct work with children and preparing them for their move into adoption placements is pursued as an essential aspect of adoption work and there is significant commitment and effort put into this. In addition, the development of life-story work and the importance that the agency places on children making sense of their circumstances and backgrounds is also vigorously pursued. The quality and preparation of life-story work is of a very high standard and is undertaken with great commitment and skill; all life-story work is duplicated to insure against material being lost or destroyed.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The preparation for this inspection was very efficient and of a very high standard, which demonstrates a commitment and ability to organise and manage well.

The framework within which the agency operates is governed and informed by a

very good Statement of Purpose and up to date policies, procedures and protocols. The three children's guides, which have been produced by the agency, are child-friendly, interactive and provide very good information for younger and older children, and those receiving adoption support. Similarly, the information pack for prospective adopters and enquirers is very well presented and provides all the necessary information for people to understand adoption in the wider sense and the agency's approach in particular. All documentation, policies and procedures are written with the welfare of children being the paramount consideration.

The management of the service, at both strategic and operational levels, is very impressive. There is a very clear understanding of how adoption fits into the overall context of children's social care and the systems in place to manage this demonstrate clear thinking and insight. Operationally the service is driven and managed with incredible energy and commitment. Workload management and support for staff is well organised and is undertaken with a clear understanding of how responsibilities are allocated and priorities set. Training and development are high on the agency's agenda and workers have access to a wide range of opportunities to improve skills, understanding and knowledge. There is a higher than average number of workers with post-qualifying awards.

Managers have an excellent balance of strategic thinking and operational quality; they are held in high esteem across children's services. Senior managers and the executive are kept fully informed of the agency's work and provide a solid and generous support framework for the agency.

The organisational and administrative structures of the agency are efficient, well balanced and effectively undertaken. Realistic and well produced procedures and protocols provide a strong underpinning for a well managed and administered service within which everybody is clear about roles, responsibilities and lines of communication.

Case recording is very thorough, reflects accurately the work that has been undertaken and provides for ease of monitoring and case tracking. Supervision records clearly show the oversight of managers and auditing of content is routine and well recorded. Case record management is very efficient and demonstrates a clear approach to operational effectiveness.

Personnel records and those in respect of adoption panel members are maintained to a high standard and included more than the required information.

The agency operates from well equipped premises that are located in an easy to access part of the town.