

# Kirklees Metropolitan Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White
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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**

This is a local authority adoption agency that undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption work. It is managed within children's services and undertakes case responsibility for children who are subject to a placement order.

The agency recruits, prepares and assesses adopters, matches children with families and supports all people affected by adoption, including adopted adults and birth families. Other support services are contracted where required.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This is a well managed agency that has an impressively rigorous approach to the careful recruitment and assessment of potential adopters. Its approach to matching children with suitable families is similarly rigorous and ensures that the needs of children are the driving force of all activity.

There are well defined support systems in place to enable adoptions to have an optimistic future and to ensure families and children have a clear framework within which they can establish and develop their relationships and attachments.

A non-stigmatising and welcoming approach to birth families is underpinned by a very positive approach to encouraging involvement. This has positive implications for the very committed and skilled approach to life-story work and the preparation of children for their futures.

This is all underpinned by a very active approach to diversity in all its considerations.

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

The agency has improved in all aspects of the issues raised following the last inspection. There has clearly been a concerted effort to acknowledge the shortfalls identified previously and to enact an improvement plan that has clearly borne fruit.

### **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 that takes its responsibilities in respect of children requiring adoptive families very seriously and approaches its work with a clear understanding of the needs that have to be met through effective placements. There is a clear, well thought through approach to the recruitment of adopters that is constantly reviewed, which enables the agency to be clear about the range of families required to meet the needs of the children. This includes those with complex needs and those with different racial or cultural backgrounds.

The operational approach to matching children with the most appropriate and suitable adopters is undertaken with great rigour. This includes great care being taken with providing all relevant and necessary information for prospective families to ensure the correct choices and decisions are reached.

Similarly, the approach to the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters is undertaken with a very strong focus on ensuring that only the most suitable families are approved. This ensures that children have the opportunity to be placed with families that can meet their needs and keep them safe. Assessment reports are very thorough and analyse people's abilities as parents in a detailed and focused way. The supervision and monitoring of the assessment process is very detailed indeed and demonstrates a particularly thorough approach to the quality management of assessments.

The two adoption panels are appropriately constituted and meet at intervals that are appropriate to meet the demands of business brought before them. The increase from one to two panels in recent times demonstrates a commitment to providing a needs-led approach to adoption which has positive consequences for the management of children's adoption processes. The panels are governed by detailed policies and procedures, are managed very effectively and undertake their duties with commitment and vigour. Decisions are made by the agency that are underpinned by a commitment to children's safety and future wellbeing in adoptive placements. The panels' business and outcomes are very well administered and coordinated within an efficient system; minutes are well presented enabling all relevant information to be available for informed decisions to be made.

The processes for recruiting managers and staff are very thorough and are undertaken within very strict operational procedures that ensure only the most suitable people are employed. Social workers demonstrated significant and detailed knowledge of adoption issues, the legislative framework and current thinking about best practice. Senior staff showed significant understanding of adoption processes and how they are to be applied to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

The agency has a very strong understanding of the complexities of diversity in the adoption of children and makes great efforts to ensure that placements are made with all their needs being considered, particularly their cultural and racial needs.

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

The provision is good.

The agency has a clear and focused approach to ensuring that families are supported, which is demonstrated by a clear commitment to the success of adoptive placements. Processes are well defined and managed and the clarity brought to operational matters enables the agency to concentrate its efforts on the presenting issues. This ensures that the most appropriate resources are sought and deployed in the right circumstances.

There are a range of resources available to promote the stability and sustainability of placements and these are accessed as necessary or required. The impact of difference and diversity is clearly understood by the agency in respect of providing for the support needs of people with widely varying circumstances and the resources needed to fulfil those needs.

There is medical and legal advice available to the agency and the adoption panel. Medical advice, however, is somewhat limited and has some negative impact on efficiency and process. Other specialist advice is resourced as necessary.

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

The provision is outstanding.

There is a clear and positive approach in the agency to working with birth families that is inclusive and non-stigmatising. This encourages birth parents to be as involved as possible in the planning for their children's futures and to express their views, wishes and feelings. Support is made available as soon as adoption is the plan for their child and access to counselling services provided. There is considerable effort made to obtain as much information as possible about a child's history and background, involving birth parents and other significant people.

Life-story work and preparation for adoption is approached with considerable commitment and enthusiasm. This enables children to be made aware of their histories and backgrounds and its impact on their circumstances and future. The resulting life-story books are of very good quality and assembled by people who clearly understand their importance for the child as an adopted person. There is also a clear commitment to producing them in a timely way.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is a very committed and conscientious approach to difference that is underpinned by policies and procedures and general practice. This includes identifying and meeting the needs of adopters and children from a range of backgrounds, support for gay and lesbian adopters and a particularly thorough approach to matching children with adopters who meet their cultural, ethnic and religious needs.

This is an exceedingly well managed service. It is underpinned by a well presented statement of purpose that clearly outlines the agency's approach to its duties and responsibilities; the policies and procedures that inform and direct the work are very comprehensive, up to date and clearly determine the high standards of provision. This is supplemented by an excellent information pack that provides clear, unambiguous information about the agency's aims and objectives, which provides for a very good platform from which prospective adopters can consider their journey.

All managers in the agency demonstrate significant skills in, and understanding of, adoption and social care for children. They promote good practice and service improvement in their management of both strategy and operational matters, which creates a solid and committed approach to achieving the best possible outcomes for children.

Staff are very well supported and enabled to conduct their work to a very high standard; this enables workers to feel valued as professionals. A significant aspect of the agency's management is the close and rigorous approach to quality monitoring. This ensures that the work undertaken is subject to rigorous scrutiny at all levels of the organisation, including the executive, which results in the best possible outcomes being achieved.

Workload allocation and management is carefully undertaken, which enables an equitable and manageable approach to tasks and duties being achieved. Workers feel their input is valued, whilst at the same time given rigorous quality oversight.

There is an impressive approach to staff development and training, despite limited resources, that enables and encourages workers to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding. The agency is well provided for in terms of staffing and has well developed systems in place that recognises and rewards personal skill and knowledge development. This has had a positive impact on staff retention.

Administrative systems and protocols are very efficient and carefully managed. The business support systems, underpinned and informed by policies and procedural guidance, ensures all aspects of the administration processes support the functions and operations of the service to a very high standard. This includes general administration, case record management and electronic record storage. Human resources procedures and practices are of an equally high standard with all records

being very well maintained.

The premises are of a good standard, accessible to people with genuine business with the agency. They are equipped with modern resources and provide for a comfortable working environment.