

# Kingston upon Hull City Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC056542
<b>Inspection date</b>	27/04/2009
<b>Inspector</b>	Stephen Smith / Marian Denny
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Kingston upon Hull City Council, Kingston House, Bond Street, HULL, HU1 3ER
<b>Telephone number</b>	01482 612800
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Kingston Upon Hull City Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	09/05/2006

---

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## 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

Kingston upon Hull City Council adoption service undertakes all statutory responsibilities associated with adoption. These duties include the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of domestic adopters. The service works closely with children's social workers within the authority to ensure that children are matched with suitable adoptive families. Currently the agency places children with its own approved adopters and those approved by other agencies. The Council commissions a service for those wishing to adopt from overseas from a voluntary adoption agency.

The agency provides support for adoption placements. It provides post adoption support to those whose lives have been touched by adoption, including birth records counselling and intermediary work. The service operates a letter box system to support contact between adopted children and their birth parents. Support is provided to birth families both by the service itself and through a contract with a voluntary adoption agency.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection of the adoption agency. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the agency's compliance with the adoption national minimum standards. All the standards were inspected under the four outcome areas of staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation.

The agency is good at recruiting prospective adopters and undertakes a thorough assessment process that ensures that people are suitable and competent to adopt children. Children are matched with adopters who are suitable to meet their needs. The authority provides good support to people affected by adoption; support for children and their adoptive families is provided based on their individual needs and the authority works hard to support the birth parents of children being adopted. Some parts of the agency's processes, recording and written procedures are not sufficiently well developed.

However, the service does not have enough capacity to assess and approve enough adoptive parents to meet the needs of children requiring families. The number of children with a plan for adoption has increased significantly. There is a long waiting list for prospective adopters and recently a waiting list has been implemented for children with a plan for adoption as the service is unable to allocate a family finder immediately. This is an unnecessary delay for children. This matter has been

identified by the authority and plans are in place to address this. Nevertheless this is a key issue for the service that must be addressed.

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

Since the last inspection the agency has ensured that all panel members and people working for the purposes of the adoption agency are robustly checked in terms of their suitability to work with children. The manager has completed a formal management qualification and the children's guide to adoption has been developed to contain all the required information. The adoption service has worked hard to engage birth family members in support groups and the adoption support service has benefited from additional administrative staff to assist its operation. Some work has been done to improve the accuracy of recording on adopters files but further work needs to be done in this area.

### **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 has an effective adoptive parent recruitment strategy and is successful in attracting prospective adopters. Clear working arrangements are in place to identify the sorts of adopters required to meet the needs of children who may require adoptive placements. A system to 'fast track' the assessment and approval of prospective adopters suitable to take children who are harder to place is in operation.

A significant reorganisation within the adoption service around two years ago and staffing difficulties at that time has led to the agency implementing a waiting list for prospective adopters. The adoption agency is working at capacity and has been unable to reduce this waiting list. Consequently prospective adopters can wait up to a year after their initial visit before an application can be made. Recently the high workload of adoption social workers and a significant increase in the number of children with adoption as their plan has resulted in a waiting list being implemented for children. After the decision has been made that a child should be placed for adoption, there may now be a delay before a family finding social worker can be allocated to them. Although this waiting list is very new and affects only a very few children at present it is likely to grow. This is an unacceptable situation for children waiting for adoptive families, particularly as there are a significant number of families waiting to be assessed.

Adoption and field social work staff liaise to arrange matches between children and adopters and there is a good record of successful adoptions. However, there is no

formal, structured process in place by which to make these matching decisions. This does not support the decision making process sufficiently well and does not provide enough evidence of thorough and rigorous practice for any child looking at their records in later life.

The quality of information about children included in child permanence reports for the matching process is variable. Some are of very good quality while others are weaker. For example, in some cases chronologies appeared to be copied directly from court reports of other documents. Consequently the information they contained was not written in an appropriately accessible manner and some contained confidential information about children's siblings. In other cases reports did not record efforts to seek the views of birth parents well enough or did not record a full consideration of any other possible arrangements for this child. The inconsistency in the quality of these documents means that in some cases the matching process is not adequately supported and information for children in late life is not accessible enough, whilst in others the information is of good quality.

The preparation, training and assessment of prospective adopters is thorough and undertaken with care and attention to detail. After an application is accepted the assessment process is timely and efficiently managed. Thorough checks on the suitability and competence of prospective adopters take place. Reports are well written and reflect the process that adopters have undertaken. This provides the adoption panels with the necessary information on which to make their recommendations on the suitability of applicants. Preparation training includes input from adoptive parents, birth parents and foster carers and is highly regarded by adopters. Ongoing training for adopters is provided throughout the assessments process and after approval. Adopters are encouraged to take part in this training and consider it very useful.

Health and safety checklists, used to check the physical safety of prospective adopters' homes, do not cover matters such as storage of alcohol, kitchen knives, decorative or ceremonial swords, window blind cords, garden tools, plants or chemicals. Often these are not signed or dated and evidence of work done to address any issues identified is not always clearly recorded. As such they do not afford a wide ranging enough assessment of possible risk.

The adoption panel is correctly constituted and appropriately managed. It undertakes its responsibilities with commitment, is thorough in its analysis of reports submitted and conscientious about the recommendations it makes. Panel states very clear reasons for the recommendations made and provides an effective quality assurance function by providing the agency with feedback about the quality of work presented to it. The panel has procedures in place to cover its activities but these do not cover all the matters required in the national minimum standard. Recruitment of panel members is thorough and careful to ensure that only suitable people are allowed to act as panel members.

The administration of the panel enables business to be conducted in a timely way. However the increase in adoption work being undertaken within the authority means

that panel is not able to consider all cases as promptly as it would like. This can mean that there can be a wait of up to three months for panel to have space to consider a case. This can represent a further delay for children or prospective adopters. Decision making is prompt and shows a thoroughness which ensures children have the most suitable placements in adoptive families.

The managers and staff of the agency are all suitably experienced. Recruitment procedures are robust and ensure that all staff members are suitable people with the appropriate qualifications to carry out their roles. Adoption staff know and understand adoption and social work with children. They understand the legislative framework and the impact it has on children's lives. A clear commitment to children's wellbeing is evident within the adoption team. The adoption support service has a safeguarding procedure in place that covers the range of services it provides to people. This procedure does not make clear the arrangements for dealing with any historical abuse which may be disclosed by service users.

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

The provision is good.

The agency's arrangements for supporting adoptive placements are effective. It provides children and adopters with good support throughout the introduction process and ensures that placements are well reviewed and supported. Adoption placement plans and children's adoption care plans are well written and comprehensive. The service ensures that arrangements to delegate parental responsibility to prospective adopters are also clearly agreed and recorded.

The service provides a range of flexible and individually tailored support strategies to help adopted children to settle into their new families and cope with difficulties they may experience. Support provided can range from informal support from workers to more complex work including therapeutic input if needed. Support work is creative and flexible based on the needs of individuals. For example, some therapeutic work was provided to a child alongside the adoptive parents to enable them to continue the work in the family. Work has also been done with children's teachers to help them understand behaviour that might arise from children's attachment difficulties.

The agency provides a range of support groups and activities for adoptive parents and their adopted children. It produces newsletters and information about other support and resources available. Training is provided for adoptive parents and one-to-one input, advice and training is available as needed. The letterbox arrangements for maintaining contact between adopted children and their birth families are managed effectively. Post adoption support, including birth records counselling, is based on effective arrangements and procedures that ensure support is available when requested. This work is undertaken by the adoption service and a voluntary agency and this arrangement is monitored to ensure to be able to meet the needs of people asking for support.

Specialist advice and support resources are readily accessible. Medical advice and

support provided to the agency is of good quality and readily available to inform all areas of adoption decision making and to support adoptive families. Legal advice is always provided at panel whenever children are being considered for adoption. Other resources and specialist services are sourced whenever necessary.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

The adoption service makes significant efforts to develop the support it provides to all people who have been affected by adoption, including birth families. Support to birth families is provided by the adoption service itself, as well as contracted from an independent service. The service provides support groups for birth parents. Although the take up of these groups by birth parents has not been high the service is trying to offer these in ways that will be more helpful.

Birth parents are helped, where necessary, to write letters for the letter box and encouraged to maintain contact in line with the contact agreement. Although some views from birth parents about the support provided to them from the agency are negative, the majority are very positive, one describing support as excellent overall.

The agency seeks to encourage birth parents to be involved as far as possible in the planning for their children's future. Some good work is done by the social workers involved in the case to maintain relationships and offer support. Workers try to engage birth parents and seek their views for adoption. For example, workers have attended meetings with birth parents to help them express their views. These views are recorded within the child permanence report but situations in which parents are consulted but choose not to cooperate are not always recorded well enough. This means that efforts to work with birth parents may not be apparent to a child looking back in later life.

The agency regards life-story work for children being adopted as important and plans that this work should be ready for second review after placement. The adoption agency offers support and advice to social workers in life-story work, and managers, the adoption panel and reviewing officers monitor the readiness of this work. However, this emphasis has not yet had sufficient effect and overall this work is not timely enough to fully support the adoption process. For example, one child's life-story book was not ready for the adoption order and social workers and others interviewed accept that this is sometimes the case for other children as well. This can mean that children do not have information with them when they move to their adoptive placements that could help them make sense of their history.

Letter box arrangements are effective and this results in more consistent contact arrangements between children and their birth families. The authority holds life appreciation days for children being adopted where these are appropriate.



## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The organisation has a comprehensive statement of purpose in place which accurately sets out the service it provides. It is appropriately monitored and updated as necessary. Staff members know how to access this document. The agency's children's guide contains appropriate information for children in line with the regulation and national minimum standard. However, the content and style of this guide is not accessible or meaningful for younger children who form the majority of children adopted or those with disabilities.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The agency sets out in its statement of purpose that it will endeavour to recruit carers to meet the diverse backgrounds of children looking for adoption and information for adopters makes this clear. Assessments of prospective adopters provide a good consideration of the applicants' views on disability, ethnicity and culture, both in terms of the types of children they are being assessed to adopt and also their suitability to bring up children to have balanced, fair and non-discriminatory views. The agency works hard to find appropriately matched placements for children taking into account their background or specific needs and provides effective adoption support for children with complex needs. The agency works with birth parents in a way that demonstrates respect and endeavours to engage them in the planning for their children. The capacity of the service is insufficient to meet the growth in numbers of children needing adoptive families. There is a waiting list for prospective adopters and recently a waiting list for a family finder for children with a plan for adoption has been implemented. This means that looked after children have to wait longer than is necessary for adoptive families to be found.

The agency has an effective recruitment strategy that sets out its eligibility criteria and makes clear the needs of children looking for adoptive families. This process allows the agency to prioritise adopters who can best meet the needs of the children needing families. The service responds to enquiries promptly and provides good information and counselling for prospective adopters. The adoption service is not able to accept applications from all prospective adopters immediately after the counselling stage and implements a waiting list of approximately one year. The length of this wait has changed little over the last two years.

The management of the service, at both strategic and operational levels is effective. Managers have a good understanding of how adoption fits into the overall context of children's social care. The management and monitoring of the agency's activities is effective. The adoption service manager has a clear knowledge of the key issues

facing the service and is working with senior management to address these. Reports on the operation of the adoption agency submitted to the executive side of the council are detailed and accurate, but provided on an annual rather than six-monthly basis.

Management and support for staff is of good quality. Workload management is effective in ensuring that the key functions of the adoption service are carried out effectively within the resources available. Staff members work hard and show a real commitment to children, management is supportive and allocates staffing resources as effectively as possible. However, the adoption agency does not have sufficient capacity to meet all the demands placed on it. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of children needing adoptive families and the service has not been able to reduce the waiting list of prospective adopters that developed after a reorganisation and staffing difficulties between two and three years ago. Consequently the agency is not able to assess and approve enough adoptive parents to meet the needs of the children waiting and has also had to implement a waiting list for children before a family finding social worker can be allocated. This lack of capacity is beginning to cause delays for children as well as adopters. This matter is of key significance for the authority and it is essential that it is addressed. The authority has already identified this situation and is taking steps to respond.

The agency provides its staff with very good direct support. Training and development opportunities for staff are good with the agency supporting both internal and external training courses. The adoption manager is a qualified and experienced social worker with the necessary management qualification.

Case recording is currently held in electronic and paper systems as the authority moves towards the electronic Integrated Children's System method of record keeping. Files generally reflect the work done with children and adopters, though case decisions are not, in many cases, clearly recorded on adopters or children's files. Records of decisions are important for the legal aspects of the adoption process and for reference by an adopted child in later life.

File checklists are used to ensure that the necessary action takes place at the correct point in time. This means that processes for the recruiting and visiting of prospective adopters, the receipt of their application and the consequent assessment and approval processes are well monitored and managed. However, one checklist contains some information about a necessary timescale that is now incorrect following a legislation change in 2005. Additionally, not all records held are fully accurate or signed and dated. For example, a child permanence report and an adoption placement plan did not record work done with birth parents to seek their views and there was a lack of clarity in the recording in part of one adopter's assessment. In one instance panel minutes contained conflicting dates and a number of documents, such as supervision records and reports, are not signed and dated.

In some situations records do not adequately protect the confidentiality of individuals, For example, confidential information about one sibling was contained within the child permanence report chronology of another sibling. In another case a

confidential email had been stored on the file of a different foster carer and some highly sensitive information that was no longer needed was retained in another file.

A robust recruitment process is followed in order to ensure that staff of the adoption agency are suitable people to work with vulnerable children. Records contain the required information to verify that this process is followed.

The agency operates from suitable premises with appropriate storage arrangements in place. Archived files are stored securely and protected from fire and flood. The agency does not have a sufficiently detailed or well developed disaster recovery plan that identifies how it will continue to provide services to children and adopters in emergency situations.

## 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
5	ensure that child permanence reports consistently contain full, appropriate information written in a suitable style (the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, Regulation 17)	31/07/2009
21	ensure there are a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the agency (the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003, Regulation 10)	28/08/2009
25	ensure all agency records are written in accordance with current adoption legislation (the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, Regulation 25 (9)).	31/07/2009

### Recommendations

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

- recruit and approve sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the children waiting for adoption recommendation (NMS 2.1)
- develop a formal, recorded process for deciding upon matches to be presented to panel (NMS 2.3)
- improve the range of the health and safety checklist to ensure that adopters' homes are fully checked for all eventualities (NMS 4)

- develop the adoption panel's written procedures to cover all required matters (NMS 10.2)
- ensure adoption panels are convened sufficiently regularly to avoid any delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters (NMS 12.1)
- develop the written safeguarding procedures to include arrangements for dealing with historical abuse which may be disclosed by service users during the course of service provision (NMS 32.4)
- ensure that life story books are prepared for all children being adopted in a timely manner to help them understand their heritage and background (NMS 8)
- develop a children's guide in formats suitable for younger children and those with disabilities (NMS 1.4)
- provide the executive side of the council with written reports on the management and outcomes of the services of the adoption agency every six months (NMS 17.3)
- ensure that case decisions are clearly recorded in children's file records (NMS 25.5)
- ensure all records of the adoption agency are accurate, signed and dated (NMS 27.5)
- ensure records held promote the confidentiality of the individuals concerned (NMS 27.4)
- develop a disaster recovery plan which includes arrangements for both the provision of premises and back-up of records (NMS 29.5).