

# North Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White / Dennis Bradley
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	01/06/2006

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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 service that undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption provision. It recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adopters from all sectors of the community. Support is provided, or opportunities arranged, for all people affected by adoption; this would include adopted adults, birth parents and all members of adoptive families.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This agency has a clear focus on meeting the needs of children placed for adoption. It achieves positive outcomes through its thorough approach to the recruitment of suitable families who are approved following rigorous assessments of their ability to parent children.

Adopters and children are carefully matched to ensure that placements can provide for children's needs, including a careful and thoughtful approach to diversity and the importance of heritage to a child's future.

There is a well motivated and conscientious approach to supporting all people affected by adoption with needs-led packages being provided for a range of circumstances. There is a very inclusive approach to support services with both adoptive and birth families benefiting.

The service is well managed in most respects and very well managed in many areas. In particular, a focused approach to systems, structures and quality monitoring encourages and enables efficient management and good practice to flourish. This enables very skilled managers and staff to deliver a good, and in some areas, very good, service.

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

Organisational restructuring and a focused approach to structures, systems and management has enabled the agency to develop an improved service in all areas of its operations. This has been achieved gradually and with care. The agency has addressed all actions and recommendations raised at 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 good.

This agency places the needs and well-being of children at the forefront of its operations and practices.

There is a focused and well thought through strategy for ensuring that the needs of children placed for adoption are clearly identified, including their heritage, and a corresponding approach to recruiting adopters that are able to meet those needs. Prospective adopters are fully informed of the histories and circumstances of children they consider and have access to all necessary details. There have been very few disruptions in recent times with almost all placements moving on to successful adoptions, which demonstrates a thoroughness of approach aimed at positive outcomes for children.

Prospective adopters are provided with informative preparation that leads them into their assessment fully aware of the processes and possibilities. Assessments are rigorous, detailed and aimed at ensuring applicants are suitable people to be adoptive parents; there is a clear focus on not approving people who demonstrate weaknesses or where there is clear evidence that children may not be safe or their needs not met.

An appropriately constituted and well managed adoption panel brings further rigour to the process through its detailed scrutiny of the cases placed before it. It is well organised and administered with detailed minutes providing accurate information about the deliberations and the reasons why recommendations are made. Decision making is timely, conscientious and well informed, which provides the agency with a clear outcome for the business it has undertaken.

The manager and staff of the agency are suitable people to be involved in the specialist area of adoption and have been recruited to a high standard. They demonstrate a thorough understanding of adoption matters and social work with children, including current thinking and legislation, and bring a highly professional approach to their work and responsibilities. They are held in high esteem by both colleagues across children's services and adopters.

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

The provision is good.

The agency provides, or makes arrangements for, a range of services that can be accessed to support families and children. These include the facility for individually tailored support packages to address particular issues, support groups with open invitations and events with a social focus that enable adults and children to share common experiences and have fun.

All adoptive families retain their assessing social worker until at least an adoption order is granted and have ready access to either formal or informal support. There are also opportunities for adopters to receive further training and information about particular issues or areas of interest.

There is a range of specialist resources available to the agency, including medical and legal advice, access to specialist children's mental health services and links to education.

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

The provision is good.

The agency encourages birth families to be as involved as much as possible in the planning for their child's adoption, including taking account of their wishes and feelings. This enables the process to be child-centred and enables the agency to be informed about the child's history and circumstances.

The above also has a positive impact on the production of good quality life-story work, which is enhanced by a commitment to its priority, caseload provision, clear protocols and good resources. This creates a strong and focused approach to ensuring that children have comprehensive records of their backgrounds and that their preparation for adoption can be managed from an informed standpoint.

Support for birth parents/families is provided for or managed based on individual needs or circumstances; this can be either in-house or through a registered support agency. The adoption social workers have developed strong professional bonds with many birth families and maintain a working relationship with them for as long as is necessary. This demonstrates a clear understanding of the 'adoption triangle' that underscores the holistic approach the agency brings to its responsibilities.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency's statement of purpose provides a clear outline of its aims and objectives, and how they are carried out; policies, procedures and practices demonstrably reflect this. The children's guide and supplementary, interactive books enable children of sufficient understanding to be aware of the adoption process and their place in it.

There is a range of impressively produced material given to adopters and prospective adopters that covers all aspects of adoption; this provides people with all the information they need to understand the processes, challenges and outcomes they will, or may, encounter.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a clear policy statement and all written material reflects this. Workers are fully informed and up to date with diversity issues and practices are consistent with policy.

The authority operates and is organised in a well managed way, supported by systems, protocols and procedures that underpin and inform good practice and effective undertaking of responsibilities. This includes a very strong approach to quality assurance, which effectively monitors all aspects of the agency's work.

The managers throughout the agency are highly qualified and experienced, and demonstrate a clear understanding of organisational issues and how they should be managed. Work and caseload management is consistently and sensitively organised, workers are well supported and encouraged in their duties and arrangements for administration are efficient.

A high priority is placed on training and both workers and managers are able to access a range of in-house and specialist courses to develop their skills and knowledge. Training in child protection and safeguarding has also been extended to include members of the executive.

There is a strong approach to corporate parenting responsibilities. The executive is fully informed of the agency's work and there is an inclusive and supportive infrastructure within which managers and workers feel valued and encouraged.

Administration and case recording is of a high standard. Records are easy to navigate, are up to date and comprehensive in content; they are also audited regularly. Supervision decisions are explicit and demonstrate effective monitoring of progress and practice.

Personnel records contained all required information, which demonstrated good Human Resources practices, and the agency maintained up to date records in respect of the adoption panel members.

The premises used by the adoption service are in a rural location and are accessible by people having business with the agency; there is access facility for people with a disability. The premises are secure.