

City of York Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC050064
Inspection date	07/01/2010
Inspector	Sean White / Dennis Bradley
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	City of York Council, PO Box 402, YORK, YO1 6ZE
------------------------	---

Telephone number	01904 613161
Email	
Registered person	City of York Council
Registered manager	Mary McKelvey
Responsible individual	Mary McKelvey
Date of last inspection	13/02/2007

© Crown copyright 2010

Website: 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

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 statutory local authority adoption agency that provides, or makes arrangements for, all adoption work. This includes the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, family finding, the matching and placement of children with families and support services for anyone affected by adoption. It is managed in the family placement service and has three workers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was a key inspection and all national minimum standards were assessed. The inspection was undertaken over three days by two inspectors.

This is an agency that is clearly focused on the needs of children who have been placed for adoption. It has a conscientious and rigorous approach to the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, and approves them only when it is fully satisfied with their suitability.

Careful consideration is given to family finding and the matching of children with families; close working relationships are developed with other agencies when placement arrangements are being put in place. Thereafter the service ensures that families are fully supported, either by its own staff, or in cooperation with social workers from other teams or agencies.

The commitment to, and arrangements for, ensuring that children's histories and circumstances are at the core of all activity is exceptionally demonstrated through the way the agency manages life-story work. This is of an unusually high standard and enables children, and their adopters, to be fully informed of their life and birth families.

The agency is managed well by experienced, qualified and committed professionals. The workers demonstrate skill and determination in undertaking their responsibilities and are supported and enabled to give of their best. It is an efficient and well organised service.

Improvements since the last inspection

The manager has ensured that all issues following the last inspection have been satisfactorily attended to, including improved personnel files, comprehensive safeguarding procedures and increased staffing levels.

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 is an agency whose operations and practices are aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for children placed for adoption.

There is a clear and focused approach to the recruitment of only the most suitable people that are able to provide permanent adoptive homes for children with a wide range of complex needs. It achieves this through a rigorous and thorough approach to the preparation and assessment of prospective adopters; only those that demonstrate their suitability at all stages of the process are approved. Attention to detail and following up of all available information is a particular feature of the agency's close analysis of applicants' backgrounds and circumstances. The health and safety checklist and pet questionnaire are not as comprehensive as they could be, however.

An appropriately constituted and well organised adoption panel brings further detailed scrutiny to the agency's work. It is well managed, demonstrates a knowledgeable understanding of adoption issues and makes its recommendations to the agency clearly and with explicit reasons for the conclusions reached. Decisions are made conscientiously and in a timely way, and only when all necessary and relevant information is available. The panel's business is well supported by efficient administration and clear, explicit minutes of its proceedings.

The agency is managed by a very experienced professional who is suitably qualified and who demonstrates a deep and wide knowledge of adoption. The adoption team is staffed by experienced, qualified social workers. Some have more experience of adoption than others but a coordinated and focused approach to induction and knowledge building ensures that workers are fully equipped to undertake their duties to a good standard. The recruitment of workers is demonstrably thorough, which ensures that only the most suitable workers are employed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The support provided to adoptive families ensures that they are able to establish their new situations in the knowledge that responsive, committed workers are available to assist and give advice whenever necessary. There are established practices in place that provides added value to the support systems and families are secure in the fact that they are not forgotten or ignored once they are approved.

Staff work closely with other professionals and agencies to secure the most appropriate support for placements and adopters appreciate the efforts that are made to establish a positive start to their new families.

The agency has established links with a range of support agencies and providers, and has access to specialist provision in a range of areas. The medical advisor is very experienced and has a valuable role in ensuring that the process of matching and placing children with families is very carefully considered and executed from a health perspective. Recent increases in the availability of legal advice has brought added value to the provision of specialist information accessible to the agency.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency places great emphasis on children's backgrounds and its importance in both the planning for their adoption and its significance as a historical context in respect of their identity.

Birth parents are encouraged and enabled to be as involved as possible in the planning for their children's adoption and suitable arrangements are in place for future contact. Arrangements for indirect contact are managed well and birth parents are offered assistance with maintaining communication with their adopted children. There are arrangements in place with a voluntary organisation to provide independent support and counselling if required.

The most notable practice in respect of ensuring children's histories and antecedents are carefully considered is the commitment to, and quality of, life-story work. This is exceptional in both the way it is undertaken and the outstanding results produced. All adopted children have a permanent record of their lives and birth families that are inventive, interesting and well researched. This work is started at the earliest opportunity and undertaken by support workers. The support that this provides to birth parents provides added value that the agency could capitalise on further if it were to be harnessed in a more formal way.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency's functions and operations are informed by strong policies and procedures that accurately reflect the aims and objectives set out in the Statement of

Purpose. All children placed for adoption are provided with a colourful guide that outlines the process in an interactive way.

The information provided to adopters regarding children they are matched with is comprehensive and includes all the necessary background and contemporary details. Both written information and meetings with foster carers and the medical advisor ensures that adopters are fully informed when they make their decision regarding the match. There are, however, some inconsistencies in the overall quality of children's permanence reports that impact on decision-making from time to time.

The operations of the agency and its strategic direction are well managed. Experienced, well-motivated managers direct and enable the service to run efficiently by encouraging workers to undertake their duties to the best of their abilities. Allocation and management of workloads is equitable and staff are well supported in managing their responsibilities. Staffing increases in recent times have given the agency greater flexibility and efficiency in its work. Good opportunities for training enables a continuous approach to skill and knowledge development to be achieved.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Managers and staff demonstrate a clear understanding of, and commitment to, anti-discriminatory practice and operations reflected this in the way that all sectors of the community are welcomed without prejudice.

Managers at all levels of the agency, including the executive, are clearly committed and motivated to providing children with the best possible adoption outcome. Clear monitoring procedures and lines of accountability demonstrate a focused approach to efficiency and operational management that ensures the service functions well.

The administration of the service is organised well by experienced workers. They undertake their responsibilities efficiently and with commitment but the administrative staffing resources are limited and workloads are high.

Case recording is thorough and files are well managed; they include all required information and it is easy to locate details. There are some inconsistencies in the way that case records are audited, however.

Personnel and panel members' records are well managed and include all required information.

The premises are close to the city centre and are accessible to anyone having business with the agency. They are well equipped and secure, and provide a reasonable working environment. They are, nevertheless, somewhat cramped.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- develop full and inclusive health and safety, and pet questionnaires (NMS 4)
- ensure children's permanence reports are consistent. (NMS 5)