

# Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	10/01/2008

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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 enshrined in current legislation. It recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adopters, and matches and places children with them. It provides or makes arrangements for support to be available to anyone affected by adoption. Inter-country adoption services are arranged through a voluntary agency.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced, key inspection, all national minimum standards were inspected.

This is an agency that is in a constant, upward improvement trajectory. The core business of the service, the assessment of suitable people to be adopters and the careful matching of children with those families that can best meet their needs, is outstanding. This is clear through the determined efforts and careful structures that have been developed and put in place to effect the most suitable and successful placements.

There is a similar commitment to the provision of support systems and services, which enables placements to succeed and complex challenges to be managed.

The agency operates in an inclusive way that encourages birth parents to be involved in planning for their children. This enables life-story books of a high standard to be produced, which gives children opportunities to understand their backgrounds and circumstances.

The agency is managed well and to a very high standard in many areas. This enables the service to operate to a good standard in most areas and to an outstanding standard in some. The management and organisation is such that continued improvement is an integral part of the service's strategic direction.

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

The agency has made considerable strides in recent times and it is evident that the service is a continually developing and improving service. It has addressed the issues raised as recommendations following the last inspection. Procedures and policies are now comprehensive in all areas and the workforce is now qualified to a higher standard.

## **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 a service that takes its duties and responsibilities for the well-being of children very seriously. It has a conscientious and dynamic approach to promoting children's welfare through adoption and is outstanding in the efforts made to secure their futures.

The agency attracts a significant number of adoption enquiries and has systems in place to prioritise those who are most likely to be able to meet the needs of children requiring placements. This is particularly effective in respect of children with complex histories, needs and circumstances. The service has an impressive track record in this area; there have been very few placement disruptions in recent times, which demonstrates the success of the efforts it has made.

There is a clear focus on meeting children's needs through adoption. Most impressive is the clarity and rigour of the service's approach to matching children with the most suitable families. There is a clear and formal process in place whereby all available information is scrutinised and collective decisions made about the best possible placement option.

The practices in respect of preparing and assessing prospective adopters adds further value to the agency's performance. It has a diligent and thorough approach to selecting people to be considered as adopters and takes them through a well-considered, rigorous preparation and assessment process. In circumstances where complex issues are identified the service demonstrates a particular strength and sensitivity in the way it manages and progresses cases.

The adoption panel brings further scrutiny to the process and undertakes its duties conscientiously and with a clear focus on the best possible outcomes for children. The panel, which is suitably constituted, is managed to a high standard, has a full understanding of its responsibilities and operates with a clarity of purpose that demonstrates its committed sense of purpose. It is organised efficiently, the minutes are detailed, provide a clear outline of the proceedings and are produced very quickly. Decisions are made in a timely way following detailed scrutiny of the information provided.

The staff selection and recruitment processes are robust and ensure that children's safety is protected through the employment of only the most suitable employees. Workers demonstrate significant knowledge and understanding of adoption and children's social care, including current thinking and the legislative framework. It is

also evident that they bring well-developed skill and sensitivity to their responsibilities and undertake their duties with confidence, sensitivity and assiduous attention to detail.

The agency has clear safeguarding procedures in place, including protocols on managing disclosures of historical abuse.

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

The provision is good.

The agency has a clear strategy for providing support to adoptive placements and has a committed approach to the success of families establishing strong attachments. Adoptive parents are confident about, and appreciative of, the availability and responsiveness of the service. It is clear that significant emphasis is placed on ensuring that placements are confidently managed and monitored.

Wherever support is required there is a strong commitment to providing or accessing the most appropriate input and it is clear that the agency is attuned to the needs of families and responds accordingly. In challenging and complex cases detailed assessments of need are undertaken and services provided or arranged to address the issues as identified with service users.

Support is available to all people affected by adoption and the agency demonstrates a solid understanding of commitment to the issues and challenges faced by both individuals and families. Staffing resources are limited in some respects, yet the service endeavours, at all times, to provide bespoke intervention whenever required.

There is effective medical and legal advice available to the agency and other specialist services are sourced or commissioned as required or necessary.

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

The provision is good.

The agency has a deep understanding of the importance of adopted children being aware their place in the world, and the impact that their backgrounds and histories has upon this. The structures in place are such that birth families have opportunities to participate in the planning for their children's futures. They are also encouraged and enabled to assist in the collection of information to provide children with insight into their circumstances and antecedents.

As a result of this the agency produces life-story books of a high standard. This work is undertaken within the adoption service and clearly demonstrates the agency's skills and expertise in this area. This provides children with well-presented books that they, and their adopters, can use to make sense of what has happened in their lives.

The arrangements for managing indirect contact are of a good standard. Expertise

has been developing in recent times and there is a clear process that maintains the system well. This also enables children to maintain their knowledge of their backgrounds and provides birth families with levels of contact that promotes their children's identity.

There are arrangements in place with a voluntary organisation to provide support and counselling for birth parents. It is also clear that the service itself has good relationships with some birth families, through the development of life-story work, that adds a further dimension of support.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

This is an agency that is managed well, particularly in relation to its core business, and which has developed its strategies and practice through strong leadership. The effects of a recent reorganisation within children's services, which is still in the process of becoming firmly embedded, has had some impact on the overall efficiency of the adoption service. However, this has not created any significant challenges or difficulties and the service is maintaining high standards in most of its operations.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a clear understanding of the need to tailor services to meet the individual needs and circumstances of people using, or who are affected by, the service. This is very evident in the care that is taken to identify the particular needs of individual children and make arrangements for them based upon those needs.

The agency is informed and directed by a clear Statement of Purpose; this is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures that give direction and substance to the service's operations. The children's guides are produced to a high standard and give both young and older children a means of exploring adoption and its relevance to them and their individual circumstances.

The strategic and operational management of the service is undertaken with flair and skill and ensures that the agency's responsibilities are carried out to a high standard, and in many respects (as outlined in Staying Safe) to an outstanding standard.

Workers are clear about their duties and are enabled to carry them out within a supportive and enabling environment. Workload and allocation is carefully monitored and workers feel that the way they are managed and organised enables them to carry out their work to the best of their abilities. They are enabled to develop their knowledge and practice, innovative work is encouraged and people feel valued for

their contribution to the service. Senior managers provide a strong, supportive infrastructure for the service, which is also enabling and encouraging, and it is clear that this is appreciated.

The operations are carefully monitored and scrutinised, which promotes an efficient and well-ordered service that is able to carry out its work in a confident and structured way.

The service's efficiency is further enhanced by a clear administrative system that enables the agency to operate smoothly. This includes well-ordered case files, random auditing and a clear understanding of data protection, confidentiality and security. Personnel and panel members' files are kept to a good standard.

The premises are not, at present, fit for purpose with different members of the team in separate locations. This has not been judged as a negative aspect of the agency because plans are well advanced to be accommodated in new, suitable premises in the very near future.