

# City of Sunderland Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC056878
<b>Inspection date</b>	24/11/2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Sean White / Marian Denny
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Penshaw House, Station Road, Penshaw, HOUGHTON LE SPRING, Tyne and Wear, DH4 7LB
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 382 3108
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	City of Sunderland
<b>Registered manager</b>	Jenny Parkin
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Meg Boustead
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	18/08/2008

---

© Crown copyright 2010

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**

This local authority adoption agency undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory responsibilities in respect of adoption as laid down in current legislation. The agency recruits, prepares assesses and approves people as adoptive parents and arranges for the placement of children with them. It also provides, or arranges for, support to adoptive families and anyone affected by adoption including birth parents and adopted adults.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is an agency that undertakes its responsibilities to very high standards in most areas of its work and to exceptional standards in many areas. The recruitment and assessment of adopters and the matching of children with them is undertaken with due rigour and commitment in almost all instances. Practices ensure that children are safe and their welfare is protected but there is a minor shortfall in the authority's procedures.

The provision of support services is exceptional across all areas. Families, children, adopted adults and birth families all have access to a range of assistance and support initiatives that are delivered with great enthusiasm and professionalism.

The management of the service is outstanding. The arrangements for organising and monitoring the responsibilities of the service are of an extremely high standard, undertaken by committed, enthusiastic and skilled managers. The strategic and operational work of the service is focused clearly on meeting people's needs and there is an outstanding approach to ensuring that their individual circumstances are considered.

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

The agency has taken seriously the issues raised following the last inspection and addressed all recommendations satisfactorily. Procedures and records now contain all required information and the children's guide to adoption has been developed to an exceptional 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 good.

This agency has a clear focus on the safety and welfare of children whose permanence futures are through adoption. The strategic and operational activities of the service are demonstrably child centred and, in the main, achieve very positive outcomes. Recruitment activity is clearly aimed at attracting people that are able to meet the needs of children requiring adoptive placements.

The approach to ensuring that children are matched with the most suitable adoptive families is thorough and carefully addresses the capacities of adopters to meet the individual and specific needs of the children being considered. The service, in cooperation with children's social workers, goes to great lengths to obtain all the necessary information to inform the matching process and in almost all cases this is highly successful, but not all. The service, nevertheless, learns from disappointing results and addresses practices accordingly.

Matches are only considered for the adoption panel when there is collective confidence in a successful placement. Whilst the agency demonstrates excellent success in most cases, there have been instances where child permanence reports have not met the expected standard and have been deferred; this has caused delays.

Prospective adopters undergo a detailed and thorough assessment following a comprehensive preparation and counselling process. They are enabled to understand the wide and complex needs of children, supported in recognising their strengths and encouraged to consider the types of children for whom they can optimistically provide a life-long family. Approved adopters are very complementary about the skilled way in which their journeys have been supported and managed.

The adoption panels are suitably constituted and independently chaired. They bring further rigour and scrutiny to the whole process and demonstrate a clear focus on meeting children's needs through adoption. It is organised and administered to a high standard, is efficiently managed and is supported by good medical and legal advice. The panel makes its recommendations only after all necessary and required information has been presented and decisions are made conscientiously and in a timely way.

The managers and staff are suitable people to be involved in the carrying on of an adoption agency. There are rigorous recruitment and selection procedures in place; all required checks are carried out and verified as necessary. All the staff of the

agency demonstrate significant skill, knowledge and understanding of adoption issues; they are highly experienced and all are suitably qualified.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency's approach to supporting people affected by adoption is impressive. The infrastructure and operational practices demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of support services and their impact on individuals and families.

The significance of support is demonstrated through the agency's strategic approach. There is a clear focus on applying the principles of support throughout and across the adoption network. This ensures that people affected by adoption, children, families and adults receive assistance and support based upon their individual needs and circumstances.

The agency provides a range of interventions and facilities that are tailored to meet presenting circumstances; this includes innovative and sophisticated packages of support that address very complex and challenging needs.

It achieves impressive outcomes through the diligence, skill and experience of its workers and by engaging with other specialist services whenever necessary.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The service's approach to the inclusion of birth families in the adoption process is demonstrably outstanding. There is a clear focus on ensuring that they are involved in the planning for their children's adoption, and their views and wishes are fully explored and incorporated into the planning wherever possible and when it is in the child's best interests.

The inclusion of a birth parent worker in the agency ensures that there is a positive and trusted link throughout the process between birth parents and the agency. This arrangement has very positive outcomes; it promotes the gathering of background information for the child and enables birth parents to have an independent focus for their support needs. The very well attended birth parent groups adds further value to the overall support structure. Contact arrangements, both direct and indirect, are exceptionally well managed.

Life-story work is undertaken diligently and with enthusiasm. Excellent examples of life-story books, produced throughout the adoption process, are provided for the children and their adoptive families. These are constructed on an individual needs and circumstances basis and, because of the endeavours of the service to elicit as much background information as possible, provide a comprehensive history which

children and their adopters can use effectively. This enables children to make sense of their place in the world and their birth family background.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

This is an agency that is managed to exacting standards at all levels. There is an explicit, professionally produced statement of purpose that informs and guides the work and responsibilities of the service; this is supported and given substance by clear policies and procedures.

The children's guide to adoption is of the very highest standards in terms of its presentation, which is polished and professional. In addition, and more importantly, it is an exceptional child-centred tool for working with young and slightly older children; a guide for even older children is also being developed to the same standard. The innovation and commitment to developing these guides is testament to the agency's clear understanding that the welfare of children is the focus of all activity.

The information that is sent to people enquiring about adoption is also of a high standard. It provides clear, unequivocal information that is easy to read and understand, demonstrates the agency's commitment to children and enables those considering adoption to be as informed as possible prior to continuing with their application. It welcomes and encourages people from all sectors of the community who are considering adopting a child.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The principles of anti-discriminatory practice and the acceptance and promotion of difference are embedded in the agency's infrastructure and practice. It is particularly strong in the matching considerations where children's individual needs and circumstances are the focus of attention and activity.

The arrangements for managing the agency are highly professional, considered and based upon a clarity of purpose that ensures strategic plans are pursued and operational activity is undertaken to a high standard. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability and all managers demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and professional integrity. Workers are supported and encouraged to undertake their roles to the highest possible standards and there is clear evidence that staff appreciate the enabling framework within which they work.

The work undertaken in the agency is closely monitored and quality assured at all

levels and it is clear that this is seen as an important aspect of effective workload management and practice oversight. The executive of the authority is fully informed of the agency's activities and outcomes.

Case recording, report-writing and file management are of a particularly high standard. All required information is in place and there is careful management oversight of content and presentation. Staff and panel members' records are maintained to a high standard and contain all required information. Administration is efficient, well-ordered and supports the activities of the service well.

The premises are suitable for the purpose of carrying on an adoption agency.

## **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):

- produce written procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse which may be made by service users during the course of service provision (NMS) 32.4
- ensure that child permanence reports are of a consistent standard and the panel receives all the necessary information on the child (NMS) 12.2
- ensure that when matching a child with adopters that recent written assessments support and inform the match as fully as possible. (NMS 2.3)