

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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Inspector	Sean White / Stephen Smith
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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

The Rotherham Adoption Service is part of the Children and Young People's Services of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC). A Service Manager is responsible for overseeing the adoption service and is also the nominated manager for the service. A team manager directly manages the adoption team. The adoption team recruits, assesses, trains, prepares and supports prospective and approved adopters to meet the needs of children and young people with an adoption plan. The agency also provides, or makes arrangements for adoption support services.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is an announced, key inspection.

The service operates to a good standard in most of its undertakings and demonstrates excellence in others. There are few of the agency's practices that fail to meet standards.

It has a strong approach to recruiting and assessing prospective adopters, ensuring only the most suitable people are approved to provide life-long families for children requiring adoptive placements. It is clear that the motivation behind the service's operations is the well-being of children and their continued welfare. Managers, workers and the adoption panel are thorough and committed in their approach to ensuring the most suitable placements are realised.

Adoption support is a particularly strong area of this agency and has improved significantly in recent times. Placement support, post adoption assessments of need, adopted adults and others affected by adoption receive a bespoke service assisted by extremely committed and skilled specialists.

There is a strong commitment to the production of meaningful life-story work and all colleagues work in partnership to ensure that all required information is gathered in a timely way. This enables adoptive families to be fully informed about children's family histories and encourages birth families to be involved in the planning for children's futures.

The management of the service is strong, despite challenges created by temporary management arrangements in recent times and has a clear approach to valuing diversity. The service is coherent, efficiently organised and administered well.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has taken seriously the issues raised following the last inspection. The improvements in the planning for and provision of support services are profound and impressive; this has given service users a significant support facility and has had excellent outcomes.

Administrative issues have been suitably improved upon, except for the standard of personnel files, which still have some minor omissions.

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.

The agency's practices are clearly aimed at meeting the complex needs of children placed for adoption. The approach to recruiting the most suitable people to become adopters is driven by the needs of children requiring placement.

Matching has been successful in recent times with a low placement disruption rate. Family finding is robust and changes to the allocation of this task have improved timescales considerably. Decision-making in respect of proposed matches, however, has some limitations. Although there is a collective approach between the adoption service and the children's social workers, this is only formalised by a meeting of limited attendance with a manager making the final decision on a choice already made.

The preparation and assessment processes of the agency are strong. Preparation input is significant and includes a wide range of relevant and necessary information; rather than being a freestanding event, the preparation days are woven into the assessment process. This enables applicants to pursue their adoption journey from a well informed standpoint.

Prospective adopter reports are clear, analytical and written to a good standard. They are produced in a way that enables the adoption panel to make recommendations from an informed position and gives social workers the requisite information for effective matching considerations.

The two adoption panels are chaired by a recently appointed professional social work manager. Both panels are constituted to required standards and they meet regularly to enable all the business of the service to be managed efficiently. The panels are managed and organised to a good standard and they address the issues placed before them with thoroughness and due diligence. There is also a clear commitment

to addressing quality matters in order that the agency can learn and develop. Administrative arrangements are efficient and minutes of proceedings are comprehensive and detailed. Decisions are made conscientiously and within timescales.

The recruitment of managers and workers to the agency is, in the main, good, although there are some omissions in the details and checks that must be completed in respect of some staff.

Workers demonstrate significant levels of knowledge, skill and understanding of adoption issues and undertake their duties with enthusiasm and commitment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has addressed the issues of placement and post adoption support with significant commitment and enthusiasm over the last three years resulting in impressive performance in this area.

The service ensures that adopters have continued support following their approval and regular contact from social workers is found to be very supportive by families. There are well-attended support groups in place which enable adoptive parents to develop their insight into the challenges they face or anticipate. When placements are made social workers operate in partnership with all colleagues and disciplines which provides a seamless service relevant to individual needs.

There is a particularly strong approach to working directly with children and this is supported by a range of specialist resources, including a discrete Looked After and Adopted Children (LAAC) support team. Sophisticated and complex support packages are in place to assist families with a range of challenges, including attachment, and it is clear that workers are very focused and committed to this area of work.

Adopted adults and others affected by adoption receive a responsive and informed service that is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Assistance is open-ended and enables people to move at their own pace in their own time.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency has a deep understanding of the importance of children's backgrounds and histories, including their cultural circumstances. Workers are committed to the gathering of background information at the earliest possible time and continues, with the assistance of others including foster carers, throughout planning and preparation for their adoptive placement and beyond.

Child permanence reports, in the main, contain all required information and are

prepared with the child in mind. Some, nevertheless, are not of the same standard as others and do not meet the high standards expected.

Birth parents are encouraged and enabled to contribute to the planning for their children's futures and are assisted in providing background information about their families. The agency has a conscientious approach to preparing life-story books, with contributions from a range of colleagues, and it produces good, well-presented material for children and families to use. Most of this material is produced in a timely way, although some are more efficiently produced than others. Later-life letters are of a good standard and it is clear that considerable thought and effort goes into producing them.

Birth families are offered independent support to assist them with the issues surrounding their children's adoption and indirect contact arrangements are managed to a good standard.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Despite the challenges the agency has faced in recent times in respect of changes in management personnel and panel chairpersons the service continues to be organised to a good standard.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong commitment to valuing diversity and difference with a focused approach to identifying and working with people's individual needs. Managers and workers are conscientious in their approach to recognising people's strengths regardless of their backgrounds and circumstances.

The Statement of Purpose provides a clear outline of the service, its aims and objectives and this is underpinned by up to date policies and procedures that inform practice and operations. There is a children's guide in place but this is somewhat perfunctory and does not meet the needs of all children placed for adoption.

The management of the service, much of which is undertaken by temporary personnel, is organised in a coherent way. Lines of accountability and responsibility are clear and everyone understands the structures and arrangements that are in place.

Managers are very experienced and qualified; they demonstrate knowledge and understanding of adoption issues and undertake their duties with skill and

commitment. Workers are supported well in their endeavours and are enabled and encouraged to undertake their duties to a high standard. Workloads are organised and managed well, the operation of the service is efficient and the structures in place provide a coherent framework. Workers have access to a range of training opportunities and there is a high percentage of staff with post-qualifying awards.

The agency is administered efficiently, although there is some pressure on the business support to the service that is creating some challenges. Case records are maintained to a high standard and kept securely. Archives are kept in a particularly safe and protected environment.

Staff and panel members' records are, in the main, kept to a good standard; some minor omissions, however, were noted.

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):

- ensure the health and safety checklist on adopter's homes includes all necessary information (NMS 4)
- ensure children's permanence reports are produced to a consistent standard (NMS 8)
- produce a children's guide suitable for all ages (NMS 1)
- ensure staff files contain all required information (NMS 28).