

Bournemouth Borough Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC054957
Inspection date	08/08/2008
Inspector	Lindy Latreille / Mike Stapley
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Child Care and Family Support Services, 27 Slades Farm Road, BOURNEMOUTH, BH10 4ES
Telephone number	01202 456746
Email	adoption@bournemouth.gov.uk
Registered person	Bournemouth Borough Council
Registered manager	Heather Freeman
Responsible individual	Ann Graham
Date of last inspection	05/07/2005

© Crown copyright 2008

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

The Bournemouth adoption agency is part of Bournemouth Borough Council's Social Services Directorate. The agency is constituted as a service under current legislation that requires local authorities to provide or make provision for adoption services. The adoption team was established in November 2003 from staff who had previously worked in the family placement team which covered fostering and adoption. The agency is a member of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC). The agency recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adopters, provides post adoption support, places children with adoptive families and provides birth records counselling. The agency also deals with enquiries and applications in respect to stepparent adoptions.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The aims, objectives and standards of the adoption service are clearly set out in the Statement of Purpose; the service operates in line with these.

There are good systems in place for recruiting adopters able to meet the needs of children waiting. The assessment process is comprehensive. The manager or senior practitioner carries out second opinion visits following assessment, to monitor quality control.

The matching process is methodical. Joint working with placing social workers ensures help and advice about family finding, matching, introduction and placement arrangements. The family support worker ensures that the child is well prepared before joining a new family and that a life storybook is prepared. Adopters are expected to prepare a photo book about themselves. The child is given a photo book about the adopters at the start of the introduction process.

The adopters and birth parents comment that there is a good range of support available for them post placement and post adoption.

Improvements since the last inspection

Requirements from the last inspection have all been met in the following ways: One identified that the contact details of the regulatory body were not contained within the Statement of Purpose and the children's guide. This has now been rectified.

When another local authority assesses a Bournemouth young person for adoption and the assessment is poor the manager shares this information with the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) to contribute to standards of good practice; meeting the requirement from the last inspection.

Reports are prepared and duly presented to the executive on a six monthly basis as required of the last inspection. There have been occasions when the time has over run due to this item not being a standing item on the agenda and the manager is aware and seeking to expedite the situation.

All assessments are prepared and presented on the Child Permanence Report (CPR) as required by legislation; meeting a previous requirement.

Young people's files are now subject to regular audit to meet a previous requirement.

A disaster recovery plan is now in place and has been reviewed to meet requirements in June 2008.

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.

Young people are matched for adoption with adopters who best reflect their ethnicity, culture, religion and language. Adopters who wish to adopt a young person from another country are supported to do so in consultation with the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC). Assessments are carried out by an experienced worker outside the agency who is familiar with the complexity of legal requirements from varying countries.

The agency is active in recruiting adopters from outside the geographical area of Bournemouth as it is not always appropriate to place the young people near their birth families. A recruitment policy underpins practice and reflects equality of opportunity for all adopters who are interested to make an application. A father's policy, reflecting on the role of adoptive fathers, has been drafted and is out for consultation at present.

Adopters are encouraged to provide an illustrated information booklet about their family which is appropriately worded for the young person. Examples seen are of a high quality.

Interviews with adopters confirm the robust and anti-discriminatory practice of the Adoption Team to further good outcomes for young people. Documentation supports that the views of young people who are in the process of being adopted are sought; or states a reason why such information is not recorded.

All adopters visited during the inspection, and questionnaires received, confirm the robust and comprehensive nature of the assessment and preparation leading to approval. Prospective adopters feel scrutinised by the process and able to see the

positive reasoning for this is to ensure the best outcomes for young people. An information evening with supportive pack is found to be useful 'it contained information specific to the LA ie the number and type of children adopted in the area'. Adopters speak very highly of their assessing social workers, describing them as professional, reliable and sensitive. 'We were given significant and thorough information about becoming an adopter....the LA have been excellent at regularly sending us information on any post approval events.'

Preparation workshops are delivered by the Agency's social workers over four days. An adopter, birth relative, medical advisor, Clinical Psychologist and a Family Support Worker share their knowledge and experiences to inform candidates within an informed programme. Assessments are robust and analytical, second opinion visits are routinely undertaken and all references are sought and verified. The health and safety questionnaire covers all areas of risk in the home environment and are well documented.

The agency makes good matches and there have been no disruptions since the last inspection.

Adopters confirm that the agency informs them fully of all the arrangements. They are given accurate and current written information and opportunities to meet with the Medical Advisor and the Clinical Psychologist to discuss the needs of the matched young person. Adopters demonstrate a sound understanding of the importance of the birth family to the future understanding of the young person and passage of information as deemed appropriate by the Court.

The role of the Adoption Register For England and Wales is given to all applicants during their preparation and referrals are made appropriately.

The adoption and permanence panel are extremely professional and thorough. The independent chair is a qualified and experienced social worker. There is a range of appropriate policies and procedures which underpin its function. Feedback is sought from applicants and social workers, and made available to all panel members.

The panel is properly constituted, balanced in gender and reflective of the community. Though some members have experience of disability, there is no one currently on the panel with a disability. At present there is no representation of black or ethnic minority (BME) heritage. Advertising is in place to positively recruit to fill this diversity need. The panel's members have a range of appropriate personal and professional experience in adoption. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are in place for all panel members.

There is training for panel members and the adoption team annually covering legislation, regulation and guidance of adoption issues. New panel members follow an induction prior to commencement.

Papers are dispatched to panel members in good time and those consulted confirm appropriate time to read and understand the contents. Verbatim minutes are recorded at each panel and typed minutes are available for the manager the following day.

The recommendation of the panel is recorded in the minutes and the chair verbally informs applicants immediately of the panel's recommendation, when they are in attendance, and the process concerning the Decision Maker. The Head of Child Care and Family Support Services confirms that she, as the Decision Maker, receives the

papers swiftly and is able to make the decision based on the information contained in the panel minutes. Adopters confirm that they receive a letter of endorsement of the decision made within seven days.

The manager is a qualified and experienced social worker in the professional area of adoption. She has managed the team for many years and provides a sustainable service through professional leadership.

Currant Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are in place, as for all staff. Bournemouth Borough Council have a policy of destroying references once scrutinised, but do not record that all the original references were in order and confirmed by telephone. The team have access to, and is supported to attend, a range of relevant training. All staff are suitable to work with children and families. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) cited the Bournemouth Adoption service as an example of good practice in their report of November 2006; the service continues to develop to provide good outcomes to adopted children and their adopted families.

All the social workers hold a suitable professional qualification and are experienced within adoption and childcare; forming a stable staff team. The manager and her deputy hold professional and management qualifications; one social worker holds a post qualifying award. Support staff are qualified and experienced in childcare and contribute to the stability of the staff team. Some administrative staff are qualified; all are competent and provide a reliable and dependable service to the professional team.

All staff are trained in safeguarding and appropriate legislative changes for the protection of young people and adults using the service. Standards of good practice are well supervised by the manager and senior social worker so that users of the service are protected.

A policy update to support procedures relating to historic abuse has been written and is awaiting ratification by senior management before being put into practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Support for adoptive parents is guided by robust policies and procedures; supportive of operational practice. Adoption support plans are detailed, identifying holistic, therapeutic needs and education. Contact and Letterbox arrangements are defined with a named worker identified to oversee, and the family support worker is identified to deliver support services as required to the adoptive family.

An adopter's newsletter is sent in hard copy or by e-mail to all who request it. This provides an update on the seven group meetings held each holiday for young people and evening meetings for adopters, adopted adults or birth parents. Activities for young people, Bournemouth adoption statistics, new books from British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) are some of the other features.

All adopters and adopters of young people from Bournemouth Borough Council have membership of Adoption UK for three years from the point of approval.

Questionnaires returned prior to the inspection are very positive about the agency's support to adoptive parents: 'Post adoption support is excellent....constructive and thought through carefully'.

Staff use the Brokerage service to identify resources for young people and adoptive families which have included access to community and specialist play schemes, counselling for young people, sessional and respite support to manage challenging behaviour. A high level of specialist support is available to adopters to ensure safe and stable placements.

Adopters confirm that staff are helpful to inform and provide resources at their initial and ongoing contact with the agency. Pre-inspection questionnaires are positive: 'We cannot rate highly enough...helpful, supportive & welcoming all the staff are at the agency'. Feedback is requested by the agency from their group meetings and following activities which confirms a positive, listening and responsive service. 'They have made the whole process as stress free as possible'.

Birth parents speak positively about the agency and how their wishes are balanced for the benefit of the child being adopted. Views from young people are gathered where appropriate.

Most users of the service confirm that they know how to make a complaint. Only one has been lodged recently and is currently being investigated, following procedures.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Visits to birth parents confirmed that the agency works with them once adoption is the plan. Their views are listened to and recorded. A support worker is assigned to the birth parent and comments are favourable as to the encouragement in putting the Life Story book together for the young person. Responses received in pre-inspection questionnaires from birth relatives are positive about the agency's consistent ability to keep them informed, explain what they could and could not do and answered questions clearly. [Staff] 'communicate all relevant information at the appropriate time'. Birth families confirm that it is 'comforting to know that they have annual letter contact informing of children's progress'.

There is a joint service level agreement with Dorset and Poole since 2006 to provide independent support and advice to birth relatives by the Independent Birth Relatives Service (IBRS).

A birth parent group meets six times a year and staff from the agency rotate to cover this evening event. Comments from questionnaires are mostly positive, confirming 'All our needs were met', but one identified that they did not know how to make a complaint or receive information about local or national support groups. Adopters confirm that they have been given the opportunity to listen to foster carers and members of the birth family.

Visits and feedback to users of the agency's service confirm that the staff provision meets identified needs and recipients feel informed and supported. Adoption support is a strength of the service, reviewed throughout the adoption process and supported with access to Clinical Psychologists for users of the service and staff. Letterbox

support is valued by adopters and birth families alike who comment on the sympathetic management of this by staff. 'They do what they say they will do'. Senior managers substantiate the monitoring role of the manager to provide a quality service.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a clearly written Statement of Purpose which accurately reflects the work of the agency, is reviewed regularly and available to all interested parties.

Two children's guides are offered to the young people; an appropriately easier text for younger children published by Devon County Council, and a BAAF booklet for teenagers. The agency has resources of books that applicants can borrow to support their underpinning knowledge. Each young person who is adopted is given an age appropriate book to help them understand what the adoption process means.

Adopters speak of positive experiences with Bournemouth Adoption Team; for some this has been in contrast to other agencies. 'We feel blessed that we went to the Agency we did...we found the adoption process with Bournemouth engaging, rewarding and supporting'. Placing social workers feel that the managerial arrangements compliment practice and support best outcomes for the young people adopted. Referral to the Adoption Register for England and Wales is appropriately made following policy and procedure.

A Business Plan together with a Performance Improvement Plan are in place and confirm good outcomes for the service. Six monthly written reports are prepared by the manager, but not always presented to the Executive on time as this is not a standing agenda item. There are good systems in place for monitoring which feed into the reports to the Executive and confirm good outcomes for young people and their new families.

Staff feel they are well supported by the manager of the adoption service to develop professionally and contribute to good outcomes for young people through best practice. Appropriate public liability and professional indemnity insurance are in place. All staff have regular supervision and are registered, as required, with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Records held do not confirm that references were taken prior to employment of the independent chair of the panel.

All the staff are positive about the level and breadth of training available to them, either in-house or external, funded by Bournemouth Borough Council. All feel supported by management to access and achieve; quantifying the benefits working practice. Safeguarding training for staff is on a rolling three year cycle and booked to

for autumn delivery.

Practice is underpinned by policy and procedure for the case records of young people, adopters and prospective adopters; staff maintain records appropriately and legibly. Some photocopied documents are not signed and dated to confirm originals seen.

Personnel records for employed and independent, sessional staff and students are confidentially and appropriately stored.

The council's archive is well managed and secure from theft, fire and water.

There have been no complaints about the service until June 2008 and procedures are being followed to investigate.

The council's Human Resources Officer sites policy for the destruction of the references for the panel chair, but no evidence is on file to confirm receipt or status. Adoption Regulations require specified records to be retained for at least 15 years. Other personnel files contain the required information to meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
28	ensure that staff records are retained for at least 15 years. Regulation 15 (1) (2)	08/10/2008
28	ensure that all references are received, verified by telephone and noted as sufficient before destruction in line with any local policy. Regulation 11 (4)	08/10/2008

Recommendations

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

- seek to have a panel member with personal experience of disability. NMS 11
- ensure that reports to the Executive are presented six monthly. NMS 17
- ensure that the draft policy 'Allergations of Historical Abuse' is ratified by senior managers and available to all users of the service. NMS 32
- ensure that all photocopied documents to support the adoption process are

signed to confirm originals seen. NMS 25