

Bristol City Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC054985
Inspection date	20/08/2010
Inspector	Paul Clark
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Bristol City Council: Children and Young People Services, PO Box 57, BRISTOL, BS99 7EB
Telephone number	0117 903 7941
Email	
Registered person	Bristol City Council
Registered manager	Christine Teller
Responsible individual	Ian Francis McDowall
Date of last inspection	28/07/2008

© 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

The adoption service is part of the Children and Young People's Service of Bristol City Council. The service has an agency decision maker (ADM) who acts as the responsible individual and who oversees all aspects of the service. A service manager is the day-to-day manager of the service. An adoption panel is chaired by an independent chair and makes recommendations to the ADM about identifying children whose needs will be best met by adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and prospective adopters.

A team manager operates a separate recruitment team of social workers which, in addition to its functions in relation to the fostering service, aims to recruit and train a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of children needing adoptive families. Another team manager operates an adoption team of social workers and sessional workers who assess prospective adopters and support approved adopters following placement, until an Adoption Order is made. This team also includes social workers who provide a post Adoption Order support service.

A planning and development manager acts as the adoption support service advisor (ASSA) who advises the deliberations of the adoption panel and other key aspects of the service and who manages the family finding service and the contact service. The adoption service has a service level agreement with a local adoption support agency to provide support to birth parents and to adopted people tracing their birth records and birth families.

The adoption service has a service level agreement with voluntary adoption agency to facilitate inter-country adoption.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced inspection found that this adoption service provides an outstanding level of support to children and adopters. Five households of adoptive families were visited, two birth parents were interviewed and one adopted adult participated in the inspection. Service and team managers and social work practitioners were interviewed. There are clear and comprehensive policy documents which guide practice. Practitioners feel that they are well managed and supported and adopters feel that they are well prepared to adopt and that the ongoing support they receive is excellent.

The comprehensive systems in place and the hard work of those in the service ensure that highly vulnerable children are placed in highly suitable and well prepared

household, which are supported in creating a bonded and nurturing household for them.

Improvements since the last inspection

All recommendations of the previous inspection have been implemented. A system is now in place to ensure that CRB checks on staff are updated every three years. All sensitive information sent to prospective adopters as part of their preparation and training are now routinely censored. The service has increased the number of social work assistants and additional management time has been made available for the adoption service such that service development can be addressed. Staff have now been trained in writing permanency reports. The authority have reviewed the premises used by the adoption service and more office accommodation has been made available for staff. A disaster recovery plan is now in place for the safekeeping of archive files.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards applying to this outcome group. However, there is a medical advisor who attends the adoption panel and who sees all children before they are considered for adoption by the panel and then updates their medical report every three to six months prior to their placement for adoption. Also, psychology services are commissioned from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services team to support children and adoptive families pre- and post adoption.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Systems and policies are in place to ensure that children and adopters are appropriately matched. Children's needs and suitability to be adopted are thoroughly assessed by social workers and ratified by the adoption panel and ADM. Prospective adopters are prudently recruited, assessed and prepared for adopting. Specialist social workers find the best match between child and prospective adopters and assessing social workers for both child and adopters present their recommendations to the adoption panel. Birth parents are consulted about their view of the proposed placement. After rigorous deliberation by the panel a recommendation is made to the ADM. The recommendation is ratified or further information is called for. Suitable arrangements are made by way of information giving, introduction and induction such that both child and adopters can make an informed decision about a proposed adoption. These good matching systems ensure that children will be placed with adopters who can best meet their needs and minimise the risk of placement breakdown and the distress that this may cause to children and adopters.

The preparation of adopters is full and comprehensive. This involves them being given thorough information packs, access to an information website, attendance at an information evening, a home visit by a qualified social worker and attendance at a four day preparation course. The British Association of Adoption and Fostering assessment process also serves as preparation and guidance for adopters. The service also holds 'child appreciation days' which gather a wide range of information about a child which further prepares potential adopters. This exceptional assessment and preparation of adopters ensures children receive high quality care by people who have a clear understanding of their role and function.

The adoption panel's constitution, role and function are clearly spelt out in a written document and in the authority's Statement of Purpose. It is independently chaired and it has members with legal, medical and education expertise. There are members with personal experience of adoption, and members from black and minority ethnic groups. Members receive required training and their contribution to the panel and their personal development needs are effectively reviewed. The panel meets every two weeks and decisions are referred to the ADM and are responded to in a timely manner. These rigorous steps to the approval and review of carers ensure that the function of the adoption service is effectively checked and scrutinised to mitigate the possibility of children being adopted by inappropriate people .

All social work staff working for the service have a professional social work qualification and are registered with the General Social Care Council. All panel members, management and staff have been subject to the appropriate vetting and recruitment procedures thus helping to ensure that they present no threat to the safety of children.

The council has a robust complaints procedure. A record of complaints received about the service in 2009 is in place and the actions taken by the service were appropriate.

Policies are in place to safeguard and protect service users. The council operates a 'letterbox' system for agreed periodic contact/communication between children and their birth parents/relatives where this can reasonably be done. This is appropriately safeguarded and staff operating this service have been trained so that they understand how to keep the children involved in this service safe.

There is a policy on discouraging adopters from smoking and from the physical chastisement of adopted children.

All staff working for the service receive training on the council's 'safeguarding children' policy and potential adopters are introduced to the policy as part of their preparation training. Adopters also receive further training on safe internet use. The council has a service level agreement with a local adoption support agency who provide counselling and support to birth parents whose children are adopted and to adopted people who are seeking their birth records. These systems and services help to promote the safety and emotional well-being of people affected by adoption.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Adoptive parents are well supported by a range of services provided by the authority. Pre-placement these include a website information page, the provision of a comprehensive information pack, information evenings, home visits by social workers and preparation groups. The assessment and approval process provides extensive information about the reality of adoption including the long term effects of birth trauma and attachment and loss on children. An adoption support plan outlines how the needs of the young person placed, and the needs of the adoptive parents will be met. These plans are properly reviewed.

Post Adoption Order there are specialist social workers who will give direct support to adopters. Support group forums for adopters are held every two months and there is an annual social event for adopters and adopted children. There is a periodic newsletter giving information and advice to adopters. The authority have a support service for looked after children who liaise with schools and who offer support to adopters up until the Adoption Order is made. The council have a service level agreement with a local therapeutic support agency who also provide school support packages for adoptive families and adopted children. The authority also have good working links with a local charitable group to offer adoptive families help and advice about parenting adopted children. There is a resource library available for adopters. Not all adopters are provided with membership of Adoption UK although they may subscribe themselves if they so wish. The effective support given to adoptive parents further mitigates the likelihood of placement breakdown and helps to ensure children are placed in a secure family setting.

The service organises support groups for adopted teenagers. The authority can access psychiatric and psychology support by referring young people to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services team. Later life letters and life story work with children is carried out by placing social workers who have received specialist training in this area. As previously stated, the council has a service level agreement with a local adoption support agency which provides counselling and support to birth parents whose children are adopted and to adopted people who are seeking their birth records. One adopted person using the service stated that they thought it to be of an extremely high quality and that they were grateful for the sympathetic way in which they were supported. These services help to promote the emotional well-being of those people affected by adoption.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The adoption service consults birth parents at all relevant points during the matching and adoption process including matters that pertain to ethnic, cultural and religious

matters. Parental views about the intended adoption of their child and proposed adopters are taken into account unless they negatively affect the best interests of the child.

Birth parents have access to effective support and counselling from a separate adoption support agency commissioned by the authority.

An 'letterbox' system is in place which enables adoptive families, birth parents and other family members to maintain contact when practical. The council have recently employed a coordinator of this service who is well trained in supporting birth and adoptive parents to construct letters and other methods of contact and in employing an effective methodology to prevent the location of adoptive households from being identified. One birth parent expressed their gratitude for the support they had received from the letterbox coordinator in maintaining contact with their child.

Children's adoption support plans are clearly written and contain full assessments of children's needs and detail the actions necessary to support them in the transition to their adoptive homes and the ongoing support they require. Potential adopters are given full information about a child's history.

Wherever possible a meeting is arranged between birth parents and adopters to provide a degree of accord about the placement. The consultation with parents and the promotion of agreed contact between birth families, adoptive families and adopted children helps to ensure the long term well-being of adopted children and birth families.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

There are no national minimum standards applying to this outcome group.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is evidenced by the range of staff, panel members and adopters from differing racial and cultural backgrounds. Some practitioners and panel members have personal experience of adoption. There are a small number of 'same sex' couples and single people that have been approved as adopters, evidencing the non-discriminatory approach of the service. The recruitment process prioritises potential adopters who express an interest in adopting a disabled child.

The council has corporate policies on equal opportunities and disability and staff spoken to were well aware of the detail of these policies. The adoption service also has a 'Adoption Service Equalities Statement' which details the service commitment to promoting equality within its practice. The everyday practice of the adoption

service includes observance of working in an anti-discriminatory way and this is detailed in its Statement of Purpose.

A clearly written and comprehensive Statement of Purpose is in place, which was reviewed in September 2009. This spells out the aims and objectives of the service. Adopters are provided with clear written information about the service at the recruitment stage and this is fully explained to them at preparation group training and further reiterated by assessing social workers throughout the assessment process.

The manager is appropriately qualified both professionally and in management and is a registered member of the General Social Care Council. She has many years experience in child care practice and management. All team managers and social work practitioners within the service are professionally qualified and are members of the GSCC. Supervision for practitioners is given at the required frequencies. Team meetings are held regularly. Staff comment that they feel well supported by management. Staff working within the service undertake ongoing training to ensure they maintain and expand their knowledge base. All staff and management undertake an annual review of their personal development and training needs. 90% of the social work staff have achieved the Post Qualifying Award in Social Work. This high level of staff training provides children and adopters with the best possible social work support.

The service has sufficient well qualified staff to meet the identified adopter recruitment and approval plans of the service. This has been achieved by the appointment of an additional social work post and a part-time social work assistant post and an increase in available management time.

The case records of children and adoptive parents are clearly written, comprehensive and up to date. There are good systems in place for the management and monitoring of records. The archive arrangements for the storage of children's adoption records ensure that these records are kept safely and securely. A disaster recovery plan is in place for these records.

The adoption service undertakes an annual review of the quality of care contained in its business development plan. This is presented to the council's corporate parenting panel who take an active role in the quality assurance of the service. This thorough ongoing review of policy and practice ensures that children receive the best possible service.