

Brent Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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Inspector	Sean White
Type of inspection	Key

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Registered person	London Borough of Brent
Registered manager	Jan Fishwick
Responsible individual	Jan Fishwick
Date of last inspection	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 service that undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption responsibilities and duties. These are the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, the placement of children and support services to people affected by adoption. The agency approves both domestic adopters and those who wish to adopt a child from overseas.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is an agency that takes the wellbeing of children placed for adoption very seriously and operates with this as the prime motivator. There is a very thorough approach to the assessment of suitable adopters, a considered approach to identifying appropriate matches and careful management of placements. These issues are carefully and conscientiously managed by people with considerable expertise and knowledge of adoption.

Supporting placements and people affected by adoption is a particularly strong aspect of the service's operations and is undertaken with commitment to providing quality and responsive resources.

Birth parents are encouraged and enabled to contribute to the planning and future of their children, and are supported to do so.

The service is managed well by very experienced and qualified personnel who ensure that the agency undertakes its responsibilities with consideration for best outcomes for children. The approach to diversity and anti-discrimination is of a very high standard.

There are areas that do not meet required standards, the most important being in respect of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and incomplete child protection procedures, that compromise the authority's approach to safeguarding children.

Improvements since the last inspection

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

This agency is clear about its responsibilities towards children who are placed for adoption. It is evident throughout the service that the focus of its work is on meeting the needs of children, promoting their wellbeing and safeguarding them. There is also a strong emphasis on promoting a positive approach to diversity and cultural issues. However, the child protection procedures do not specifically address the safeguarding of children in adoptive placements, or those receiving adoption support.

The approach to the recruitment of adopters is firmly embedded in the need to find the most suitable people who can provide permanent homes for those children the agency needs to place. The written strategy is explicit in this area and the agency's operations reflect the underpinning procedure. This ensures, through a robust matching procedure, that children are placed with the most suitable adoptive parents.

The arrangements and processes that are in place for ensuring that adopters are fully informed about the children under consideration are clear and transparent, which enables a considered and informed approach to matching to be achieved.

The preparation and assessment process for prospective adopters is very thorough. The suitability and competence of applicants are fully analysed, second opinion visits are routine and reports are of a good quality. This enables the adoption panel, which is appropriately constituted and well managed by an experienced professional, to have well presented, full information from which it can confidently make recommendations.

The arrangements for organising the panel are generally efficient, minutes are comprehensive and reflect the deliberations of members, and recommendations are made with explanations of the reasons why conclusions have been reached; decisions are made in a timely way. However, there is no procedure in place that governs the functions of the panel.

The managers and workers are experienced and qualified professionals who demonstrate knowledge, skill and understanding of social work with children and adoption. They are fully informed about current law and practice, work conscientiously and sensitively with service users and undertake their responsibilities in a thorough and rigorous way.

Although most of the agency's approach to the recruitment and selection of staff is

robust, the agency does not routinely apply for a CRB when appointing social workers. This is not safe practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The area of pre and post adoption support is a particularly strong aspect of the agency's performance.

There is a conscientious and committed approach to ensuring that placements are supported and maintained from introductions through to the adoption order being made, and beyond. The formal commitment to provide continuous support is for a year after the order has been made, but this can be extended if necessary or appropriate. The agency has systems in place to provide a holistic approach to support through case management, is very responsive and works closely with all agencies to ensure families have the opportunity to develop a positive and optimistic outlook.

The agency also provides for a range of training and informal support networks that enhance the commitment to positive outcomes, other in-house resources such as psychologists, can also be utilised to enhance the range of support facilities.

There is medical and legal advice available at every panel and the advisors are accessible to social workers as and when needed.

Post adoption support is provided through a range of sophisticated packages that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of users. Assessments determine the issues and work is undertaken to address the challenges and difficulties being experienced. Families are clearly centrally involved in the whole process and are supported to determine the preferred outcomes. The approach is inclusive and, as in all other aspects of the agency's performance, gives due recognition of diversity and anti-discrimination issues.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency has a good approach to working with birth parents that allows and encourages them to be involved in the planning for adoption. Systems are in place to encourage birth families to contribute to the futures of their children through expressing wishes and feelings and by enabling them to understand the adoption process.

Birth parents are given the opportunity to have independent counselling and there was clear evidence of this being enhanced by the support provided by social workers and the adoption service through good working relationships and professional commitment.

The approach to providing and obtaining information about children's backgrounds and histories is generally good but is not well coordinated. Although there are some excellent examples of life-story work being undertaken, the overall strategy is piecemeal and relies on the commitment of individual workers rather than an organised system. Nevertheless, overall, there is a positive commitment and conscientious approach to maintaining children's heritage through a well managed, active, contact system, the involvement of siblings and a post adoption commitment that provides for life-long support for people affected by adoption.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency is well managed and is governed by sound policies and procedures that are underpinned and informed by a statement of purpose that clearly outlines the aims and objectives of the service and how they are intended to be achieved. The children's guide, however, whilst only adequate for older children, is out of date and does not include all required information.

There is a positive and well coordinated approach to the recruitment of adopters, which includes providing realistic, well presented information in a timely way to people who are considering applying. As is repeated throughout this report, the approach is inclusive, welcomes people from all sectors of the community and addresses difference and diversity in a positive way.

The structure of the agency is well organised, which provides a clear understanding of lines of accountability and communication; roles and duties are understood throughout the service, and everyone is clear about the responsibilities of the agency. Appropriately qualified managers demonstrate impressive knowledge and understanding of adoption issues; they have the respect of staff and the confidence of senior personnel and elected members, who provide a supportive and encouraging working environment. The approach to quality management and performance monitoring, whilst generally good does not, however ensure that the executive of the council receives full information about the management and outcomes in reports submitted.

Highly motivated and committed workers are managed in a constructive and enabling way by very experienced and qualified senior staff. There are effective systems in place for workload allocation and casework monitoring. Supervision is provided regularly and workers are given every opportunity to extend their professional practice, use initiative and develop creative and effective ways of

working. Although very busy, there are sufficient staff to undertake the range of responsibilities that the agency has, there have been increases in staffing resources in recent times.

Despite limited resources, the agency has an active approach to training and professional development. All workers are encouraged to develop their skills and knowledge, there is a high proportion of people with a post qualifying award and all staff are fully apprised of recent changes to legislation.

The management of administration, record keeping and confidentiality is well organised, although administrative support is compromised by a post that has been vacant for some considerable time. The authority has recently introduced an electronic filing/recording system that is not fully implemented in the adoption service, and although there is some confusion regarding this change, it is clear that efforts are being made to familiarise everyone with the system to improve efficiency.

Adopters' and children's records contain all required information. The arrangements for providing access to records by other agencies are well managed and are organised with due regard for data protection and confidentiality issues.

The records in respect of staff contain most required information, but there is no facility for recording that written references have been verified by telephone. Records in respect of panel members did not include all required information.

The premises are conveniently located, secure and have facility for record storage. There are arrangements in place for archived records, with a suitably robust retrieval system. Electronic records are backed up regularly and there is a disaster recovery plan in place.

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
19	undertake an enhanced POCA Criminal Records Bureau check on all social workers appointed to the agency. Reg. 11 & Schedule 4 The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.	01/05/2008
1	review the children's guide and include all required information. Reg 4 The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended).	01/05/2008

Recommendations

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

- have clear written policies and procedures about the handling and functions of the adoption panel. (NMS 10)
- have a child protection policy and procedure that addresses the safeguarding needs of children in adoptive placements and those who are receiving adoption support. (NMS 32)
- develop a more coordinated approach to life-story work. (NMS 8)
- provide the executive of the council with twice-yearly reports that include full information on the management and outcomes of the service. (NMS 17)
- include all required information in staff and panel members' personnel records. (NMS 28)