

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

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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 agency that undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption responsibilities under current legislation and guidance.

The agency undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of people who wish to adopt a child from this country; those wishing to adopt a child from overseas are provided with details of an independent agency. It also makes arrangements, in collaboration with other services, to match and place children with adopters; these can either be the agency's own adopters, or those from another authority.

Support services are either provided for within the resources of the agency or through a contract with an independent adoption support agency (ASA). This would include anyone affected by adoption, including birth parents.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The adoption service has a clear focus on meeting children's needs for permanency through adoption. There are effective systems in place to prevent delay and drift ensuring that children are matched and placed with families who can provide a safe and caring environment for them to grow up in.

There is a robust and thorough approach to the selection, preparation and approval of applicants who wish to provide a permanent home for children. The support to adopters before and after adoption is excellent, ensuring as far as possible that children enjoy a stable family environment. The matching of children to adopters is carried out with care and sensitivity. Staff are highly professional in their work and demonstrate a commitment to high standards of assessment and reports to the adoption panel.

The service is well managed and effective supervision systems are in place to support staff. The administrative team provide an efficient service that enhances the work of the adoption team. There are good working links with the fostering and fieldwork teams which contributes positively to an integrated approach to service provision on behalf of children.

There are excellent and creative arrangements in place for adoption support for children and families as well as those who require support relating to adoption in the past. Children receive excellent support to understand their past and to develop emotional resilience to come to terms with the adoption process.

The service values and welcomes applicants to become adopters from a range of diverse backgrounds.

Improvements since the last inspection

One recommendation was made at the last inspection relating to the completion of life-story work by the time a child is adopted. Systems have been developed to address this.

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.

The service has a positive approach to safeguarding and this is embedded throughout the adoption journey for children and adopters. All adopters are thoroughly prepared by the service to understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

The health needs of the children are very well met and they have access to appropriate health service resources within the community. The adoption service has developed close links with a nationally renowned organisation that offers advice and support on mental health and emotional matters. This is additionally supplemented through the excellent partnership arrangements in place with the Child, Adolescent, Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Adopters also have very good access to the adoption panel's medical adviser who provides adopters with advice and guidance on a range of health related issues. The support of the medical adviser is greatly appreciated by adopters some of whom commented, 'it's like having your own private medical adviser' and 'it's fantastic that we can make contact with the medical officer any time for advice or access to services'. These resources positively promote the good health of the children and offer adoptive parents access to excellent advice and guidance on health issues affecting the children.

There are robust assessment processes in place to ensure the matching of children to prospective adopters is carried out with thorough considerations for the best interests of children requiring a safe stable family home. Social workers from the adoption service have a strong commitment to making careful considered decisions in respect of matching. It is clearly evident that a match will not proceed unless staff concerned are confident it stands an extremely high chance of success. Adopters are positive about the process and the life appreciation days enable them to come to decisions as part of a holistic team of professionals. The manager has an effective monitoring system in place to track the progress of children in order to prevent drift

and delay in the matching and the eventual adoption of the children. The service has access to prospective adopters within the county and from the wider community through a regional consortium of local authority and voluntary agencies.

Trust and respect is an intrinsic pre-requisite to a successful partnership between the prospective adopters and the social workers from the adoption service. Adopters confirm that they are treated as equal partners and are fully consulted throughout the matching and subsequent adoption process. Planning and placement arrangements are carefully progressed to meet the care needs of the child and aspirations of the adopters.

The service does not experience many inter-country adoptions. There is a contract in place with a regional independent organisation to manage and process any such applications.

The safety of children is paramount and the service has access to a robust safeguarding system within the local authority. The adoption service is positively committed to providing adopters who are suitable to care for children placed for adoption. The professional approach taken by staff and the management systems in place to monitor progress, means that children are given the best chance of being placed in a suitable safe family environment.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service chooses prospective adopters who demonstrate a strong commitment to the provision of high quality care for children requiring permanency. There is a thorough approach taken to preparing prospective adopters for the challenging task of adoption. The careful matching process works well and children enjoy positive relationships with their adoptive parents. Children are supported to achieve their potential through the love and care provided by their adoptive parents.

There is an expectation that adopters will support their children to learn about life through being part of a strong family unit where they can participate in and enjoy leisure interests as they grow more confident. The adopters are aware of the challenges that will be faced by their children as they learn more about the wider community. They have a clear understanding of the world beyond their rural county and are keen to ensure that their children develop the same approach to diversity and the richness of cultural differences.

The service has a strong approach to supporting adopters as they engage with the educational system. The support team have developed an effective liaison strategy with schools whereby any issues or difficulties are managed through professional dialogue with all parties involved. Adopters express admiration and gratitude for the strong support from their adoption social worker, 'our social worker has been

fantastic in supporting us through some difficult patches, we couldn't have coped at times without her'. The input from the support staff provides a stabilising coordinated approach for adopters that in turn promotes the educational and emotional welfare of the children.

The children live in homes that are assessed as being suitable to provide them with a warm supportive environment. This promotes their wellbeing and happiness. There is a strong positive approach taken to ensuring that adopters and their children receive high quality support and guidance as required. The assessment of prospective adopters is thorough and detailed so as to ensure as far as possible, only those who are suitable are selected for this demanding role. The service provides adopters with strong effective support systems. This includes a service level contract with a specialist regional organisation to provide support, advice and guidance to adopters and birth parents. In addition there are two adoption support social workers who provide an extensive range of services to adopters and children. The service has committed substantive resources to ensuring that support for adopters is of a high quality. The support team work extensively with schools, health agencies, training for adopters and other professionals. This approach positively enhances the likelihood of adoption placements being maintained and successful. As pointed by adopters, 'East Riding are fantastic they were there for us when we were down, we couldn't have made it without their support'. 'I would recommend East Riding to anyone wishing to adopt'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

A strong feature of this service is the commitment to providing an inclusive and open approach to adoption. This is demonstrated clearly in the way adopters, children and birth parents are encouraged to be fully involved throughout the adoption process. The views of all interested parties throughout the adoption process is valued by the service. Adopters are kept fully informed at all stages and they are confident that their views and wishes are fully taken into account. This promotes confidence and trust among adopters who feel they are being treated as partners in this complex and emotional process.

The background history of the children is presented very well in their life story book and there are very good examples of this work. The memory box prepared for each child is colourful and contains precious items that will inform the children about their early life. It is evident that much thought has gone into this work.

Contact between birth parents and their children is supported where this is in the best interests of the child. There is a recognition that this can be a very sensitive area and birth parents are supported throughout all contact arrangements. Sibling contact takes place as part of a carefully thought-out plan. Adopters are involved

where appropriate. This ensures that the children's welfare and their interests are fully supported.

There are systems in place to enable adult adoptees and their birth families to obtain information later in life about the adoption and background information. Counselling support is available to adults including independent advocacy advice and guidance for the children as required.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is a clear inclusive approach taken by the service to ensure that all those involved in a child's adoption are fully informed at each stage of the process. The adopters are chosen for their qualities as adults who can provide safe, loving and caring homes for children. There are no restrictions on age, race, disability, culture or gender. As pointed by an adoptive parent, 'we really enjoyed the life appreciation day which gave us the opportunity to look at all the information about the child we had been matched with. They treated us with utmost respect and as part of the team'. The service is proud of the diverse range of adopters who have provided children with excellent stable homes with a secure future.

The assessment and preparation of prospective adopters is very well thought-out and implemented. This carefully managed process, ensures as far as possible, that only those who can offer children a real prospect of a successful permanent home are chosen. This is clearly reflected in the very low disruption rates for the service. Close links are well established with a regional consortium of adoption providers thereby ensuring as wide a choice of prospective adopters as possible. Adopters confirm that they are thoroughly prepared for the tasks ahead and this again demonstrates the careful and well thought-out process in place to secure only the best outcomes for the children. Some adopters however, felt that the process of approval took longer than expected whilst for others they experienced little delay.

Inter-country adoptions are not routinely managed by the service and experience in this work is not high. This is recognised by the management and a service contract is in place for an independent organisation to carry out this work.

The adoption panel is efficiently managed with an effective administrative support system which ensures that all appropriate reports and associated documents are sent to members prior to the meeting. The membership of the panel complies with the regulations. It comprises of a diverse range of members including expert

professionals and those who are representative of the local community. The panel is independently chaired and prides itself on the thorough and detailed scrutiny of all reports. The panel takes a particular interest in the quality of reports presented and will refer these back to the author if they are not up to the high standards expected. The recommendations from the panel are considered by the agency decision maker who will decide whether or not to make a decision based on the information received. The high quality of recommendations presented by the panel enable decisions to be made in a timely and considered way. This is communicated to appropriate individuals within required timescales.

The management of the adoption service at a strategic and operational level is excellent. The adoption service is valued as an integral part of children's services, and resources have been protected by the elected members of the council. There is a clear line of accountability and information is shared openly throughout the management team about the operational capability of the adoption service.

Staff demonstrate a positive commitment to the core values of the service indicated in the Statement of Purpose. They carry out assessments to a high standard. The links with the rest of the children's services within the council is strong. Decisions affecting children who require adoption are made in a climate of cooperation and information sharing between each section of children's services. There is a positive enthusiasm among the adoption staff to achieve positive decisions for children who require permanent families.

The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide provide clear information about the service. Staff are committed and enthusiastic about their work on behalf of children and adopters. There is a passion for achieving successful adoptions for the children. Staff development is afforded a high priority and opportunities exist for ongoing professional development through in-house and external training. This ensures that adopters and children are supported by experienced and dedicated staff. The safety of the children is enhanced by the robust recruitment and selection procedures in place for staff and adopters.

The adoption service operates in a building that affords good levels of security. There are suitable storage facilities for all records and these are efficiently managed by the administrative team. Records for children and adopters are clear, accurate and well maintained providing detailed information that will be invaluable when accessed later in life by adults who were adopted.

This is a service that puts the children and adopters first and carries out the varied and involved tasks with rigour and passionate commitment.