

London Borough of Haringey Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

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Inspector	Paul Gillespie / Marian Denny
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Date of last inspection	08/07/2011

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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 statutory local authority adoption service. It provides, or makes arrangements for, all matters relating to the adoption of children and support services for anyone affected by adoption. This includes the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters, and the matching and placement of children with suitable families. Support services are provided or commissioned to support placements before and after adoption, birth parents and adopted adults; this includes birth records counselling and intermediary work.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This announced full inspection was carried out by Marian Denny and Rosemary Dancer and all key national minimum standards were assessed. This is a satisfactory service with some good features. Children benefit from an experienced and skilled adoption team which works well with other teams in the authority and agencies in their best interests. Potential adopters are assessed in terms of their ability to care for children's holistic needs. The effective support provided to adoptive families is a strength of the service and contact is well promoted. Also, the information provided to adopters in the early stages of the process helps them make informed decisions that increase the likelihood for secure and stable placements. Overall the adoption management team and staff work co-operatively with their colleagues in the child care teams to achieve good outcomes for children and young people.

However, one breach of regulation was identified, specifically regarding the accuracy of recordings in Child Permanence Records. This does not ensure the adoption panel and prospective adopters have all the information needed to make recommendations and effect sound matching in every case.

In addition, other shortfalls include the quality assurance system not identifying omissions or errors in recordings; not verifying, in every case, the references for staff to confirm their suitability to work in adoption; improving the thoroughness of induction that would aid retention of new staff; not providing the executive of the local authority with written reports on the management of the agency every six months; written minutes of panel meetings not being sufficiently accurate to reflect the key issues and views expressed by panel members and the reasons for its recommendation and life story work not always presented in a format appropriate to the child's age and understanding or its preparation being coordinated in a timely way.

Improvements since the last inspection

Three actions were made at the last inspection. Although progress has been made in inviting applications from prospective adopters before they undertake preparation training, two actions have yet to be fully met. Children's permanence reports although improved, still do not fully comply with regulations. Recruitment procedures for all staff still need to be more robust to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children and service users.

Two recommendations were made at the last inspection one of which has been addressed through updating the children's guide. However a repeated recommendation has been made in respect of life story work being available to adopters and children in a timely manner and in a format appropriate to the child's age.

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.

The service is focussed on the welfare of children and ensures that they are safe and protected from significant harm. Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

Social workers are clear about their supportive role when visiting adoptive families; all those who have contact with children have current checks and references. This service has fostered positive working relationships with other colleagues such as the looked after children's team with whom there are regular surgeries to share good practice. Additionally the service has ready access to the child and adolescent mental health team who are available for consultation and advice.

Children's physical, emotional and psychological health is well promoted and the service ensures that they access services to meet their needs. Healthy living is covered in the assessments of adopters and they have written information about children's health, delegation of responsibilities and a sound understanding about where consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained.

There is a strong motivation in the agency to ensure children's backgrounds and birth family histories are accurately and suitably recorded in child permanence reports. However there were shortfalls in some instances regarding the accuracy of the content; for example inaccurate dates of birth, a full chronology of care and

capturing fully in CPR's the wishes and feelings of members of birth families. This has the potential to impact negatively on the matching processes and the understanding of adopters of children's needs.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Haringey is strongly committed to supporting their adopters. The support available to, and provided for, families with children in placement is responsive, sensitive to need and underpinned by a good range of resources. The adoption service's practice is child focussed. It provides good levels of support to adoptive placements and is committed to ensuring qualitative matching of children with adopters.

Adopters are made aware of the support services available at an early stage in their contact with the agency. Adoption placement plans and children's adoption care plans are generally well written. Adoption support plans are of a good standard and distributed in a timely manner. Any requests for support are responded to promptly and provided in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Adopters state that the support provided is very good. Comments from adopters included that, 'they are prepared very well for panel' and that 'preparatory training meets their needs well.'

Good working relationships exist between the adoption service and other services within the council. This enables adoptive families to access a variety of other specialist services to meet their needs, for example, the provision of additional educational support. There is also a good relationship with the looked after children's services and the child and adolescent mental health team.

This effective multi-agency working ensures the service is able to offer a range of packages of support. These are individually designed to meet the family's assessed and holistic needs and are provided in a creative and flexible way.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Social workers are clear about their supportive role when visiting adoptive families; the service has fostered positive working relationships with other agencies and services which also benefit children.

The agency is committed to engaging birth families in the adoption process and encourages birth parents to contribute to the planning for their children's futures. It also takes seriously the wishes and feelings of birth parents and works with them to achieve manageable outcomes. Birth parents are encouraged, and given the opportunity, to access independent counselling services at any stage of the adoption process, or afterwards, if required.

The service undertakes life-story work. This is of a good standard in many cases. However, in some instances the life story books are not age appropriate or always

completed in a timely manner.

Contact arrangements are well recorded. Direct contact is usually managed by the adopters; however, the service will provide support to adopters when the arrangements are difficult or complex. This was particularly evident in the sensitive manner in which distressing news had been shared with an adult affected by adoption.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The service ensures that the promotion of equality and diversity is reflected in their policies and practice. Prospective adopters' assessments address the applicants' views on disability, ethnicity and culture, both in terms of the types of children they are being assessed to adopt and their suitability to bring up children to have balanced, fair and non-discriminatory views. The agency works hard to find appropriately matched placements for children, taking into account their background or specific needs and provides extremely effective adoption support for children with complex needs. Respect for birth parents and their families are clearly demonstrated in their work and efforts are made to involve them in planning for their children's future.

There is good scrutiny of assessments presented to panel and the panel's role in monitoring the agency's progress regarding their own recommendations is sound. Panel minutes overall are clear however they do not always sufficiently set out clearly the reasons for recommendations reached and the views expressed by panel members.

The decision making is timely with appropriate decisions made with the objective of promoting the welfare of children placed for adoption.

The adoption service has a clear Statement of Purpose which outlines its objectives and how the service will meet outcomes for children. This document is supported by a range of policies and procedures, which inform and underpin the operations and strategic direction of the agency. The service has an attractively presented children's guide which is in a user friendly format.

The agency is managed by staff with appropriate experience, skills and qualifications. There are some vacancies which are covered by agency workers although the agency works hard to reduce the impact of the current vacancy levels. Responsibilities and duties, and lines of accountability are clear. Recruitment practices overall ensure that children are safe and checks such as Criminal Record Bureau checks and references

are routinely obtained. However, in one instance there was an omission regarding securing verification of references. This does not fully ensure a robust recruitment is being followed for staff in every case.

Children and service users receive a service from staff, panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs. The adoption team social workers confirmed that the level and frequency of formal supervision is good and they report they have regular access to their managers for more informal supervision and support when required. There are good training opportunities provided to support continued professional development for staff. However induction is not always sufficiently thorough for all staff including agency to adequately prepare and support them in their role which impacts on retention.

The adoption service approves prospective adopters who can meet most of the needs of children who are to be placed for adoption. Their recruitment strategy is based on knowledge of trends in children becoming looked after and activities are monitored and shortfalls are identified. A range of recruitment strategies are used which is beneficial in increasing the resources of the adoption team. Enquirers receive information packs in a timely manner and approved adopters said that the response from the service was useful and beneficial to them.

There are suitable policies and procedures for recording information on files. The premises are fit for purpose and a business continuity plan is in place. Facilities for safe storage protect confidential information and the building is secure.

The reporting to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee of the authority is not currently in line with the standards. Consequently they are limited in their ability to ensure the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.

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.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
	prepare children's permanence reports in a full and complete way to ensure the adoption panel and prospective adopters have all the information needed to make recommendations and effect sound matching in every case. (Regulation 17 & 31 The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005)	13/01/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure in all cases telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references for all people working in or for the purposes of the agency (NMS 21.1)
- improve the quality assurance audit processes to identify any shortfalls, in for example the recording of key information, and take action to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2)
- ensure that all new staff undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction standards (NMS 23.3)
- ensure the executive of the local authority receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every six months (NMS 25.6)
- ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 17.10)
- ensure that the life story book is in a format appropriate to the child's age and understanding and its preparation is coordinated in a timely way. (NMS 2.5 and 2.6)