

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

Unique reference number	SC056549
Inspection date	19/01/2012
Inspector	Michael McCleave / Marian Denny
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

Setting address	Royal Borough Kingston upon Thames, Guildhall, 2 High Street, KINGSTON UPON THAMES, Surrey, KT1 1EU
Telephone number	020 85476088
Email	
Registered person	Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames
Registered manager	Joy Rees
Responsible individual	Joy Rees
Date of last inspection	11/07/2008

© Crown copyright 2012

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 Royal Borough of Kingston provides a small, but comprehensive adoption service, undertaking all statutory responsibilities associated with current legislation and aiming to reflect the diversity of its community.

The service includes: recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters; assessment of applicants who wish to adopt from overseas; matching, introduction and placement of children with adopters; support for adopters, birth families and adopted children. A range of activities are undertaken in partnership with other agencies which, with Kingston, form the South West London adoption consortium.

The adoption team is managed on the day-to-day by the team leader.

The office premises are located in Kingston town centre.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection of the adoption service. The purpose of the inspection was to assess its compliance with the adoption regulations and national minimum standards. All the standards were inspected under the outcome areas of staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation.

This is a good adoption service with a strong focus on providing positive outcomes for children through adoption. It is well managed and operationally has made significant developments and improvements to its practice since the last inspection. There are effective systems in place to plan and progress adoption work. These help ensure that children with a plan for adoption are appropriately placed with suitable, well prepared adopters. The service undertakes good assessments of prospective adopters that prepare them to look after children. Assessments of applicants' suitability are detailed and thorough. The quality of reports is of a high standard. This helps ensure children are placed with suitably matched families. The adoption panel carries out thorough assessments of all reports submitted. It makes very clear recommendations along with the reasons for these. This supports the effective decision-making process.

The service provides adoption support to a significant number of people who have been affected by adoption in their past. The support to people affected by adoption is of a high quality. It engages creatively with partner agencies to provide flexible, individualised, proactive and effective support wherever this is needed. Individual needs are well assessed and careful monitoring by the team leader ensures that the

services provided are appropriate and effective. Significant progress has been made to ensure that children are helped to understand their background history through their life story book. There is a high level of expertise among staff relating to life story work. The quality of life story books is a particular strength of this service.

The adoption service has undergone significant development since the last inspection. It is very well managed and the team are provided with strong leadership and direction. The adoption staff work very effectively with children's social work teams and other agencies. This is a small service and staffing levels are adequate to manage current levels of work. However, the team would be presented with a challenge should numbers of staff fall due to absences.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the manager was asked to address three requirements and eight recommendations. These related to, the need for more robust checks to be carried out on staff; training opportunities; ensuring sufficient numbers of staff to carry out adoption work; review of the health and safety checks; the quality assurance role of the panel; access to therapeutic services; the use of life appreciation days to share information with adopters; review the transfer of work between teams; improving life story work; the development of management information systems, and ensuring the confidentiality of information. All of these have been addressed by the team leader to provide a more robust service to children and adopters.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Not Judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The approach to safeguarding is good with a strong emphasis on very thorough assessments of prospective adopters. This service works positively to ensure that children are placed with adopters who have been thoroughly vetted for their suitability to care for children requiring a permanent home. A testimony to this is absence of any disruptions or complaints since the last inspection. The service operates a robust recruitment and selection process to ensure only appropriate adults are chosen for this challenging role. This strategy is based upon good, early information about the needs of children waiting or for whom adoption may be the plan. The suitability of people to adopt is considered on an inclusive basis, based on the needs of children, irrespective of applicants' race, sexuality, disability or marital status. The service responds to enquiries promptly and provides good information and counselling for prospective adopters. It is at this early stage that those considered unsuitable are counselled out from pursuing their application.

An integral part of the assessment process is to ensure that the home environment is safe for children. The health and safety checks are detailed and cover all appropriate areas that may impact on the safety of children. In addition adopters are chosen for their commitment to promoting the health of children.

The safeguarding of children is further enhanced through the scrutiny of the adoption panel who play a key role in the selection of adopters. Panel members use their extensive experience at a personal and professional level to assess and recommend approval of high calibre prospective adopters. These measures positively promote the safeguarding of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

This adoption service provides very good support to people whose lives have been touched by adoption. It works proactively and creatively with other agencies and services to provide flexible, effective and well managed support, based on the individually assessed needs of those involved. The adoption support service engages closely with health and educational professionals, children's own social workers and independent providers to meet people's need for support. Adoption support plans are well developed, implemented and monitored for their effectiveness. A creative range of support services are provided. The birth parents' group enables parents whose children have been adopted to meet and to support each other. This particular service is valued by parents whose children have been adopted. They clearly gain a great deal of emotional support from the group and as described by one birth parent, 'they have helped me through my pain and trauma.' The adoption support service works in partnership with a consortium of neighbouring local authorities to provide advice and guidance on a range of issues that include, behaviour management, foetal alcohol syndrome, talking to children about adoption, praise, neglect and abuse, after adoption, access to records and counselling. Direct therapeutic and psychological support is provided individually where needed including play therapy, attachment work and support within school settings.

The letterbox arrangements for maintaining contact between adopted children and their birth families are managed effectively despite the growing number of contacts handled by this resource. The increasing numbers of contacts managed through the letter box are placing a pressure on the service. However, it is managed competently and the service provides much needed support to birth parents who have difficulty in writing or reading letters. This demonstrates a good approach is taken to promoting equality and diversity. Intermediary work is also managed well.

Children who have been adopted enjoy living in safe stable and caring environments. They are supported by their parents to achieve their potential at school and most intend to proceed onto higher education. The children are happy with their lives and it is evident that they have been very well matched with their adoptive parents.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The service welcomes and encourages the involvement of all parties to the adoption process. They recognise the significance of children's backgrounds. There is a clear understanding among staff of the importance attached to ensure that reports accurately reflect the subject of the report. There are good arrangements in place to support birth parents throughout this sensitive area of work. Contact with birth families is carried out with respect and sensitivity and includes seeking their views wherever possible, about the sort of family they would prefer for their children. These are taken into account when matches are considered. Staff endeavour to seek the views of birth parents in order to obtain information for inclusion in child permanence reports and life story work. There is a positive commitment to inclusivity within the culture of the adoption service. This is a clear demonstration of the promotion of equality and diversity.

The service attaches considerable importance to life story work for children being adopted. Since the last inspection significant steps have been taken to ensure that life story work and good quality later life letters are produced. These help support children in their understanding of their past. The children's placing social workers understand the importance of this work and the need to prepare the groundwork to ensure timescales are met for the completion of this work. This is much improved from the last inspection. Foster carers play a key role in life story work by providing children with information, mementos and photographs of their life with them. Adoption support extends to providing therapeutic input, where required, to help children understand and come to terms with their background, cultural heritage and life history. This promotes the children's ability to understand their past experiences.

There is a well established system in place to provide sensitive advice, guidance and support, for those adults who have been affected by adoption to seek information and, where appropriate, for contact to be established often many years later.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Not Judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The preparation, training and assessment of prospective adopters is thorough. Prospective adopters are well prepared to meet the needs of children placed with them. Assessment reports are of a high quality, evaluative and provide the adoption panel with the necessary information on which to make its recommendations to the

agency decision maker. The suitability of applicants is thoroughly checked out and their homes are assessed to identify and deal with potential health and safety risks to children. This promotes the safety of the children. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity is at the forefront of the authority's procedures and practice. The service recruits adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds to meet the different needs of children who need a permanent family. Assessments of prospective adopters consider applicants' abilities to respect and promote diversity and preparation training is delivered in a way that promotes equality and diversity. The service works hard to ensure that children are matched with adopters who are able to meet their needs and where possible reflect their background and heritage. This however, is not the overriding consideration. The adoption service seeks the most appropriate family for each individual child where their needs will be met.

Inter-country adoption work is carried out by an agency specialising in this complex area of work contracted by the adoption service.

The adoption panel is efficiently administered ensuring that members receive all reports in good time before the panel meets. The membership of the panel is diverse, and comprises of a range of professionals and independent members. This ensures impartial and balanced consideration is given to all presentations made at panel. Adopters' experience of attending the panel is varied and although most found it challenging, they were made welcome and given the opportunity to contribute their views to the process. Decisions made following the meetings of the adoption panel are submitted to the agency decision maker in a timely way to reduce the risk of any delays. The agency decision maker works to the required timescales by ensuring all recommendations from the panel are considered and acted upon within seven working days. Adopters welcome the colourful information leaflet given to them prior to attending the panel depicting a photograph and background details of each panel member.

The Statement of Purpose accurately portrays the aims and objectives of the service and this document is widely available. The Children's Guide however, does not have information enabling children to seek their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or Ofsted. This could disadvantage children who may wish to raise a concern or make a complaint to someone independent of the adoption service.

The management of the service is very effective and positive leadership and direction is provided by the current team leader. The key functions of the adoption service operate well. For example, the quality of recording is much improved since the last inspection. It is clear that significant steps have been made to improve the efficiency of the service. Adoption processes are well monitored and managed. This ensures that children with a plan for adoption are found suitable and well-prepared families in an improving timely manner. Where the service cannot identify a child for prospective adopters then a referral is made to the adoption register and to the local neighbouring consortium of local authorities. The team leader carries out a monthly monitoring situation analysis of each adoption case to ensure that drift does not occur. Once a placement order is made by the courts the majority of matches take

place within 6 months, the best being 1 month. Of those children waiting for a match their details are passed onto the adoption register. Adopters describe this as 'an excellent professional service.'

Adoption staff are committed to their duties and work to high professional standards. Relationships between the adoption service and social workers are good and this positively supports effective planning for children. The service provides its staff with very good direct support through formal supervision. Training and development opportunities for staff are good with access to both internal and external training courses. This promotes the knowledge and competences of staff who work for the children and adopters in a complex environment. Although the adoption service works effectively and to capacity, this is a small team and is vulnerable to staff shortages should any member not be available for work. Management are aware of this situation.

Effective arrangements exist to ensure that any records relating to children's adoptions are maintained with appropriate confidentiality. The service operates from suitable premises with appropriate storage arrangements for current files and those that are archived. The service ensures that confidentiality and security of information are maintained effectively.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure the children's guide contains information on how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors (NMS 18.5)