

# Bracknell Forest Borough Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for local authority adoption agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC059849
<b>Inspection date</b>	09/03/2012
<b>Inspector</b>	Paul Clark
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Time Square, Market Street, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 1JD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01344 424642
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Sheila McKeand
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	12/03/2009

---

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](http://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

Bracknell Forest Council's Adoption Service is delivered by a Family Placement Team which undertakes both fostering work and the recruitment, preparation and assessment of domestic adopters and adoption support both pre and post adoption order. The service also supports adopted adults seeking their birth records and it will undertake intermediary work or will signpost to an approved agency. Bracknell Forest is part of a local consortium of adoption services with the other five Berkshire unitary authorities. Each authority jointly funds the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS). Through this arrangement a range of resources is available to the six members. Resources include the operation and administration of the adoption panel; the letterbox system; the management of closed records; independent support to birth families.

The authority is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Adoption (Inter-country Aspects) Act 1999, to provide, or arrange to provide, an inter-country adoption service. Currently the authority delegates this area of work to a voluntary adoption agency.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Although the adoption service provided by Bracknell Forest Council is satisfactory, there are many areas of the service provision which are good or outstanding. Recent service developments and changes of personnel have led to improvements in the service which have benefitted adopted children and given further support to adopters. The service needs to continue to reduce the length of time that children wait for an adoption placement and the time taken to assess adopters. Additionally, the contact details of key helping agencies needs to be contained in children's information literature, and there needs to be clearly written adoption support plans in place for post adoption order adoptions which need support.

### Improvements since the last inspection

The quality of adopter assessments have been improved by better training of assessing social workers and by closer supervision of this area of work by management. There are now always second opinion reports for all assessments. The experience of adoption within the social work team has been increased. One to one supervision of social workers now occurs every three weeks.

Planning meetings for family finding and matching are now chaired by an assistant team manager of the family placement team.

The Council's in house training service provides training on safeguarding children at regular intervals at the appropriate level for social workers in the family placement

team.

There is now a tracking system in place for all vetting procedures that relate to staff and Criminal Record Bureau checks are now updated every three years.

### **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 satisfactory.

Children are helped to feel safe through the provision of a range of information documents explaining the adoption service and where they might go for help if they do not feel safe. There are two children's guides for younger and older children which are produced in age appropriate formats and which contain the contact details of Ofsted but not that of the Children's Rights Director. There is also an appropriately formatted young person's guide to adoption support services which gives information on what support children can expect to be given.

Children whose safety will be best secured by adoption are identified by social workers and this will be made known to the family placement team. Children's social workers produce child permanency records which detail children's needs and how these will best be met by adoption. These, together with written expert opinions are presented to the adoption panel for consideration and recommendation. Because of effective social work training and management, child permanency records produced within the authority are now generally of a good quality. This helps adopted children to have clear and accurate information about the circumstances of their adoption.

Children are consulted about their feelings towards proposed placements at various stages of the adoption process. If they are of an appropriate age, children are seen alone by their social worker during the early weeks of placement and asked if they feel safe and are happy in the placement. There have been no adoption disruptions in the past 12 months. Children enjoy stable placements with adopters who can meet most of their needs.

Children benefit from thorough assessments of potential adopters which are carried out by social workers in the family placement team or by independent social workers. Children are kept safe by the appropriate counselling out of unsuitable applicants. There are quality monitoring systems which ensure that the assessments of potential adopters are now of a good quality. Potential adopters receive full information on how they may make complaints about the service. There is a clear system for recording complaints and the actions taken in response to them. Actions taken by the service to address complaints are appropriate.

The adoption panel and family finders within the family placement team ensure that

children are suitably matched with prospective adopters. In the first instance, an adoption place for a child will be looked for within a member authority of the adoption consortium of which Bracknell Forest is a member. Children's names are also placed on the national adoption register if a match is not found locally. Of the children placed for adoption within the past 12 months, all were placed outside of the 12 months from the time when they were considered by the panel to be in need of an adoption place. Although steps have now been taken to address this delay, this untimely placing can have a negative impact on children's sense of security and permanency.

The service has a marketing and recruitment section which actively seeks potential adopters who are able to care for those children with more complex needs.

Potential adoption households are appropriately checked to ensure that they do not present any health and safety risks to children. The adoption service has a number of written policies to further protect children. These include policies on firearms, potentially dangerous dogs and on adopters who smoke. Adopters who smoke cannot adopt a child under 5 and the policy takes further steps to discourage adopters from smoking and to promote a healthy lifestyle. Adopters receive training, advice and guidance on promoting children's healthy lifestyles. The adoption service has a medical advisor who carries out a medical examination of all children before they are placed and who adopters can consult for advice and guidance on children's health and related issues.

Children will be directly referred to a child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) team for psychiatric or psychological assessments if there are concerns about children's mental health or related behaviour. One of the social work team has a qualification in theraplay and will provide this service to adopters and adopted children. These various sources of support help to ensure that adopted children receive a level of physical, emotional and psychological health care.

Managers, social workers in the family placement team and potential adopters receive training on safeguarding children and are familiar with the relevant policies and procedures. All social workers have access to the safeguarding children procedures produced by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. There are systems in place which ensure that all necessary authorities will be notified of significant events relating to the protection of children.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Children's educational needs are well identified and supported. There are good systems in place for ensuring that there are educational plans in place for adopted children and these are appropriately reviewed at regular intervals. The Bracknell Forest Looked After Children Education Services (LACES) is a team of teachers working together to support looked after children and those in the process of being adopted. This ensures children get the best out of their education and

gives them opportunities to improve their potential and life chances and to support more stable placements by improving behaviours and attendance. Maintaining school places is seen as desirable to further support children and there are positive attempts to prevent exclusions when complex issues impact on behaviour in the classroom. Effective support programmes enable children and young people to maximise their potential and life chances. Maintaining school places, monitoring progress through effective personal education plans and preventing exclusions are key priorities for the team in enabling children to achieve their full potential. Life Chances is a relatively new project: a multi agency and multi disciplinary virtual support team implemented to further support achieving good outcomes for children. Where difficulties are identified support packages are put in place and a range of options are available to support children. Targeted mental health services in schools are supporting teachers in recognising mental health problems in children and offering them strategies to support young people where appropriate in the classroom. The authority have delivered training programmes for teachers to inform them about the particular educational needs of adopted children. These various levels of involvement provide a good level of educational and behavioural support for adopted children.

The service actively plans and provides the social support that children and adopters will need following an adoption placement being agreed. Family placement team social workers meet with adopters on a frequent basis at the early stage of placement to monitor how the plan is being applied and to gain an awareness of any potential difficulties that might be arising and how to deal with them. These will also be raised and dealt with at the review meetings which are held after four weeks, three months and six months. Adopters can also benefit from a range of ongoing support services which are not time limited. However, there are some instances where adoption support plans are not in place for post adoption order placements where difficulties are arising.

Children of an appropriate age are visited by placing social workers at the early stage of placement and are seen alone and asked if they are happy with their living environment. Adopters may be given a 'setting up' grant to a maximum of £400 to cover immediate essential items and expenses, based on adoption support needs. Foster carers who go on to adopt children who are placed with them will receive an adoption allowance at the same level as the fostering allowance for two years after a child has been placed. These levels of financial support will help to ensure that children will live in homes that provide adequate facilities and resources.

Approved adopters are given two year's free membership of Adoption UK where they can access help and guidance about adoption. The service has a resource library of adoption material which adopters are encouraged to access. Adopters also have access to a range of information materials and events which inform them about national and local developments in adoption. The consortium circulates a periodic information newsletter and arranges forum meetings for adopters which are both recreational and informative. There is an information page on adoption on the council's website. The consortium organises occasional social or leisure events for adopted children which gives them the opportunity to discuss aspects of adoption

with their peers. There are currently no forum meetings held for adopter's birth children.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Children of an appropriate age are informed about their rights and where they can go to get help. They receive useful advice about adoption and their rights as adopted children. There are properly formatted, age appropriate children's guides. Children are aided in understanding their backgrounds by the provision of good quality life story work and later life letters. This is achieved by the social workers being responsible for this work being well trained in this area of work. Prospective adopters are informed in their preparation training about the importance of maintaining birth family contact and giving children an awareness of their personal history .

Birth parents are consulted about their views of the proposed matching with prospective adopters. Adopters are encouraged to meet with birth parents unless this will negatively impact on the wellbeing of the child involved or is otherwise thought inappropriate. Birth parents are offered the opportunity to receive counselling and other support services from the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service and there is a high take up of this service by birth parents. This support for birth parents helps to maintain positive links between birth children and their adopted children and gives children a strong link and knowledge of their background.

Contact arrangements between birth family members and adopted children are established at an early stage of planning and agreed by the court. The adoption service has an effective letterbox system in place to facilitate written contact between birth families and their adopted children. Birth parents contacted have a high regard for this service.

Adopted adults are well supported in accessing their birth records by a specialist worker within the team. Adopted adults will be assisted in making contact with birth family members or will be referred to a specialist agency if they wish to conduct further tracing searches of birth family members. This latter service is also provided for birth family members tracing their adult relatives who were adopted as children and with whom they have lost contact.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

Not judged



## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The way that the service promotes equality and diversity is good.

There is an all female family placement team but there is a gender balance within the adoption panel.

There are no people from black and minority ethnic groups within the family placement team. However, there is within the adoption panel and the service will consult with practitioners within the authority for advice about racial or cultural issues when required.

All publications and online materials display the promotion of a diverse range of adopters. The adoption service has approved applications from single adopters. There are members of the adoption panel with personal experience of adoption. There is a corporate policy in place on Equality and Diversity which includes the council's position on dealing with sex, race, religion, disability and age discrimination.

Potential adopters expressing an interest in adoption are sent an information pack within five days and are invited to attend an information evening where they receive further information. They are then visited at home by a senior social worker who will give further information. Interested applicants submit a formal application to be considered for adoption to enable CRB, references and medical checks to be carried out. Potential adopters are invited to attend preparation groups at an early stage of the assessment process.

Children, adopters and other stakeholders benefit from a comprehensive statement of purpose which clearly sets out the aims, objective and priorities of the service and which details the composition of the management and workers within the adoption team. This statement is reviewed annually. The service do not undertake inter-country adoptions but will refer prospective adopters to an appropriate agency. Providing potential adopters with this full range of information at an early stage of the adoption process enables them to be clear about their commitment and helps children to be linked with adopters who are well informed about their general needs.

Adopters receive a good level of assessment by specialist workers in the adoption team. The quality of these assessments is effectively monitored. Second opinion visits are conducted by other senior social workers within the team. Three of the four potential adopter assessments took longer than eight months to be considered by the adoption panel. One of these was delayed because of the illness of the adopter.

The service arranges a minimum of six preparation groups a year for adopters, these groups introduce potential adopters to the key areas and realities of adoption. Adopters undertake further appropriate training to prepare them for aspects of adoption. As previously stated, approved adopters are given two years free membership of Adoption UK where they can access further information on adoption.

The registered manager of the adoption service is a professionally qualified social

worker who is registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). She has many years experience in child care management and practice, and has an appropriate management qualification. Social workers in the family placement team are all professionally qualified and are members of the GSCC. All have the Post Qualification award in Child Care. Social workers receive three weekly supervision and there are fortnightly team meetings. All management, practitioners and panel members undertake an annual performance appraisal which identifies their training and development needs. The vetting and recruitment practice for staff, panel members and potential adopters is appropriate. This reduces the likelihood that children will be cared for by inappropriate people who may present a risk.

An independently chaired panel meets twice each month and will make recommendations to the agency decision maker about adopter approval, children's suitability for adoption and the matching of children with approved adopters. The panels are properly constituted from a central list of members. It is well administered and the recommendations and decisions are made in a timely manner both by the panel and the agency decision maker. This ensures that adoption plans for children are well thought out and should contribute to a reduction in the time that children wait for an adoption place.

Case records of adopters and adopted children are comprehensive, up to date and clearly written and are stored in a manner which ensures their confidentiality. Effective file auditing ensures that files are well ordered and up to date. Archive files of children's adoption records are securely stored in a purpose built building and in a manner which ensures their security and longevity, so that they will be available to adopted adults who may wish to trace their adoption records in the future. A business continuity plan is in place to support the storage of important case records.

The service conducts a report of the adoption service every six months which details its effectiveness in meeting its service aims and objectives and identifies necessary areas of development. This report is presented to the corporate parent group of the council. Internal review of service provision helps to improve the quality of children's care.

## **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 that children are placed within 12 months of the decision of the agency decision maker that they should be placed for adoption (NMS 13)
- ensure that there are timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children (NMS 17 and Adoption Guidance February 2011, Chapter 3.1)
- ensure that the Children's Guide contains information on how a child can contact

the Children's Rights Director (NMS 18.5)

- ensure that children and adults affected by adoption receive an assessment of their adoption support needs. (NMS 15)