

Adoption Matters Northwest

Inspection report for voluntary adoption agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

The agency has been established since April 2007, in its current model, following a merger with another voluntary adoption service with premises in Blackburn. Prior to the merger both agencies had been established for many years. The agency undertakes all the required work in respect of the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters, both domestic and inter-country. It also undertakes a range of adoption support services, including birth records counselling and intermediary work. It is managed centrally but operates from four sites, Chester, Blackburn, Hale and Warrington.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Over the years this agency has clearly demonstrated that the work has a significant impact on improving the life chances, experiences and progress which children and young people make, once they are placed with their adoptive families.

Adoption Matters are robust in their recruitment, assessment, approval and support of adopters. This ensures children and young people, who may not otherwise have had this experience of family life, as they come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, or perhaps need to live with their brothers or sisters, or are older, have the opportunity to experience a happy and stable family life. This therefore greatly

improves their opportunities in life.

Adopters' preparation, assessment and approval are very child-centred and extremely thorough, which results in families having an extremely good understanding of the needs of children requiring adoptive placements. Information obtained indicates that the agency undertakes timely assessments of adopters and it is above national comparators when it comes to the timeliness of matching adopters to children waiting to be adopted. However, despite this timeliness in matching, the agency ensures qualitative matching takes place and as a consequence, children enjoy secure and stable homes with their adoptive families. The disruption rate of agency placements is therefore very low and considerably below that of the national average, which is around 10%. Outcomes across all aspects of a child's development are extremely positive as a result and often above that which is expected.

The agency excels in the prompt, responsive and creative adoption support provided. For example, the development of the post adoption centre, which is a very innovative service. At the time of the inspection, a local university was involved in undertaking research in respect of the centre and services provided. Adopters who have been involved in the centre and the support provided were fulsome in their praise of it and said, 'it is a fantastic development and should be replicated throughout England'. Agency support enables families to remain together and for children and young people to make exceptional progress and attain excellent outcomes. Adopters express an exceptionally high degree of satisfaction with the service they receive from the Adoption Matters, which they know is life-long. Adopters commented very positively about the staff in the agency's knowledge and commitment of staff in delivering these services, which resulted in children and young people being kept safe and secure. They also commented about the support provide by the Staff in the agency, as illustrated by some adopters comments, 'Adoption Matters North West have an incredible team working for them and no question or request is ever too much for them, the level of knowledge, experience and support provided is of an extremely high standard'. Another adopter said, 'Our Social worker was extremely helpful and supportive at every stage of the process'. Another said, 'The support and preparation throughout the whole process was thorough and well managed. The same can be said for placement and transition. I know that if I pick up the phone that I will be able to get the help and support I need whenever I need it. They are almost an extension of our family'.

The service has also been innovative in providing a concurrent planning service, which enables children who are unable to live with their birth parents, to be looked after and placed with concurrent carers, while their future is decided by the courts. This allows children to bond, from a very early stage with their new carers and if the court decides they should not return to their birth family, prevents children having the upset and loss of moving from home to home.

The agency also undertakes high quality direct work with adopted children and young people, which continues into adulthood. Children and young people feel extremely well engaged and supported by the agency. As a result, their outcomes and progress improve significantly, particularly in relation to their self-confidence and

self-esteem, as they feel valued and listened to.

Leaders and managers throughout the agency as a whole are exceptionally committed and passionate about adoption, which results in a service which is managed and monitored very effectively. Staff are inspired by their leaders, who strongly promote the continuous learning of their staff. As a result, the agency provides a service of exceptionally high quality and innovative practice. This has meant that, for some children, their progress has been exceptional. No shortfalls have been identified as a result of this inspection, although the manager is committed to developing and improving the service further.

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children and young people make exceptional progress with their adoptive families and achieve outstanding outcomes, particularly given the very poor start in life which many have experienced. This is partly due to the fact that their adopters and all the professionals involved actively listen to what they have to say and wherever possible, act upon this. As a result, children and young people realise that they can influence what is happening to them and this improves their self-esteem.

Their uniqueness and individuality is also highly valued. Consequently, everyone does their utmost to ensure their individual and often complex needs, are met in an appropriate manner. This enables children and young people to really engage with their families and other professionals involved with them. Consequently, their needs are exceptionally well met and as a result, many have far exceeded professional expectations and achieved outstanding outcomes. This is quite clearly exemplified by one local authority social worker who stated, 'All the children I have placed with Adoption Matters are doing exceptionally well.'

Children and young people's health needs are quickly identified and they receive support from good quality health services so that they stay well and healthy. Similarly, their emotional and psychological health is also very effectively met and results in significant improvements in these areas. This is supported by some parents, through the use of therapeutic parenting techniques on a day-to-day basis, so enabling children and young people to develop secure attachments to their parents. It also helps them to form strong bonds with other family members.

Children and young people feel safe and are safe living in secure and stable families. They develop trust in their adoptive family and their secure base enables them to access the required formal therapeutic services, which helps them understand their backgrounds and their past history. This enables them to begin to understand their situation, to develop a positive view of themselves and establish their identity within their family and within the wider community, regardless of their country of origin. They also achieve significantly improved outcomes in terms of their social, emotional development and education.

Children of school age attend school and progress well in their learning. Many progress exceptionally well, often over and above what is anticipated, as barriers to learning are identified and addressed. This is clearly illustrated in the comment made by one adopter, who said, 'Another adopter said, 'I cannot fault this agency, they are so friendly, they really provide a superb service and are proactive in breaking down any identified barriers'. Adopters are also strong advocates for their children and ensure their children's educational, social and health needs are well met. Consequently, children and young people want to achieve and do well in their education, as they increasingly understand the positive impact a good education can have on their future lives.

Children engage with the usual age-appropriate leisure pursuits, such as sport, drama and various musical activities. This enables them to make friends and become engaged in wider local community activities, so promoting their social development.

Children and young people continue to make progress once they are adopted. Children are significantly safer as a result of their prompt and easy access to the post adoption services provided by Adoption Matters. Young people's anger and behaviour are managed much more effectively and they are much calmer and more confident as a result of the agency's support. This is quite clearly demonstrated in the comment made by some adopters, who said, 'The support I have received from this agency is excellent.'

Children and young people have a positive and strong sense of their own identity because they are well matched with adoptive parents who can meet their assessed needs in relation to culture, ethnicity and religion. They maintain a strong sense of their heritage because adopters understand the importance of this and positively promote contact in the best interests of their adopted children. This enables children and young people to be informed about any significant developments in their birth family and can reassure them about their well-being. Children from overseas also develop a good sense and understanding about their country of origin and their heritage is celebrated within their adoptive families.

Agency staff also assist in maintaining children and young people's heritage by providing direct work with children, for example, doing further life story work and providing improved life story books. Children and young people also have a very positive view of themselves as adopted people because they have frequent opportunities to engage with other adoptive children through the regular groups and family social events.

The agency undertakes work with adopted adults and also has a contract with a local authority to provide a service to birth parents and relatives whose children have been adopted. Adults who have been affected by adoption are helped to find out about their past in a sensitive, informative and very professional way. This means they develop a sound understanding about their past histories and those of their birth family. One person who used the service said, 'I had excellent support accessing my files'. Another person said, 'I am totally satisfied with the way I have been supported. At my age I was not expecting to get so much help'. Another person

said, 'The worker was excellent. The service was brilliant and as a customer I can't think of a better way the service could have made me feel valued and important'. Perhaps the quality of the service can be best demonstrated by someone who had used the service and said, 'Make all other agencies aspire to be like them'.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The agency informs prospective adopters about all aspects of adoption through the extensive information provided on its website, information packs, meetings, interviews and mailings. People who wish to adopt a child from overseas are helped to understand the complexities of this and the agency provides excellent support to them. The agency also helps them to consider if they could adopt a child from the care system in the UK. An adopter said, 'The service provides excellent information, adopters' talks are really informative, very open, honest and really provide a realistic view about becoming an adoptive parent'.

A number of adopters spoken with stated that their experiences in approaching other agencies had not been helpful and they had seriously questioned whether they should proceed with their adoption enquiry. However, they had found that Adoption Matters really welcomed them, was informative and it was their very positive response regarding their adoption enquiry that led them to approach the agency. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by a comment made by a prospective adopter, who said, 'My initial enquiry was through a telephone call, the lady I spoke to was extremely helpful and gave me time to ask all sorts of questions. Following this call, I felt confident that this was the agency I wanted to use'.

The preparation and assessment of prospective adopters are extremely effective and lead to sustaining and achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. The preparation of prospective adopters as parents is grounded in research and effectively prepares them for the role. This is clearly demonstrated by a number of adopters who said, that the agency's preparation was, 'very informative' and they found the trainers, 'to be approachable, knowledgeable and professional', which put them at their ease. Others said, 'It was excellent' and really prepared us to become adoptive parents'. The preparation also addresses the individual needs of adopters and is greatly valued by them. Adopters often refer back to the preparation information and documentation when parenting their children.

Adopters have an extremely good understanding of parenting an adopted child. This is gained through their excellent preparation, as well as the very effective assessment of adopters which is undertaken. The agency also ensures through the preparation and assessment process that adopters fully understand the impact that children's early lives have on their development. Adopters are also very well aware of their children's needs and they help them to overcome their past experiences and deal with their feelings of loss.

The agency carries out attachment style interviews (ASI) with the majority of its

prospective adopters, which supports the assessment of prospective adopter's attachment styles and close relationships. Staff are well trained in this and have been carrying out such interviews for the past eight years. The agency has two experienced moderators, both Senior Practitioners, one of whom is highly trained in the model and works closely with both the child & family.

Assessments cover all the required checks, so that as far as possible, adopters' suitability to care for vulnerable children is assured. All prospective adopter reports are thorough, analytical and provide a very good reflection of the adopters. This ensures the prospective adopters' reports informs and enhances the matching process.

Adopters are very confident that their social workers have helped them understand their capacity and capabilities. They also have a high level of trust that their worker will not let them commit to a child whose needs they will not realistically be able to meet. This is illustrated by the fact that adopters said, 'The assessment was very thorough and clearly identified our strengths and areas of development'. Adopters also said, 'The agency fully supported us to develop and to become as excellent a parent, as one can be'. In talking about the adoption process, some adopters said, 'The assessment process for us was enjoyable and quite cathartic; the worker was easy to talk to, with a lovely personality, which enabled us to trust her very soon after meeting her'. Another adopter stated that, 'the assessment was quite rightly, incredibly thorough but having said this; it was not intrusive as the worker was extremely professional and skilled in carrying out the assessment'. Another adopter stated, 'I have become a true advocate for the agency due to the dedication and commitment we have received from all the contact we have had over the last 12 months, especially from our Social Worker'.

Clearly, there is an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with the service. Adopters speak extremely positively about the service that they have received, from the initial contact with the agency to many years down the line. They all speak about the warm, friendly yet professional initial response to their enquiries about adoption. They also speak about the clarity of the verbal and written information provided, as well as the reliable, honest and open approach staff have with them. Many adopters said, 'I cannot fault them', and, 'I cannot speak highly enough of the staff, they are fantastic. 'Written material is inclusive and informative. Timescales are consistently met, unless there is an adopter-led reason for a delay, such as a house move, change of employment or bereavement. This is clearly evidenced in the comment by some adopters, who said, 'It would always be good to take less time to complete but given the need to have thorough checks and discussions, this is understandable,' another adopter said, 'The meetings with the social worker were frequently held and this felt about right'. Another adoptive family said, 'Yes, we both believe that the time frame has been appropriate, it has given us and our young son time to adjust to the idea of having a little person coming joining our family, allowing us time to look at the logistical elements of giving up work and the effect it will have on our family and us, as individuals. The progress in my opinion should not be governed by external drivers, but more about the family that the little person will be joining'. Initial visits are well considered and there is a very consistent approach to decision

making.

Adopters demonstrate a high degree of empathy for the birth family and are supportive of one-off meetings, contact arrangements and having mementos for the child to readily access.

Adopters willingly take children with a whole range of needs including children from a different ethnicity, older children and sibling groups. The agency's adopters are therefore a valuable national resource for children requiring an adoptive family.

The agency has responded effectively to its business upsurge and has ensured its two panels have the capacity to meet the increased work load. The panel takes its responsibilities seriously and provides an additional level of scrutiny to the work undertaken by the agency. It provides advice to the agency and reports on the quality of the assessments on an on-going basis. Panel members are well prepared, appropriately trained and appraised, and provide a good range of experiences, both on a personal and professional level to support effective and informed challenge.

Panel administration is excellent and this ensures panel members receive all the papers in good time, so enabling them to give full consideration to the issues. Panel minutes are thorough and accurately reflect the discussions and support decision making. Decision making is very professional, well considered and completed in a timely manner. Overall, the agency adheres to the required timescales for the assessment and approval of prospective adopters. On the occasions when this has not been achieved, it has been due to circumstances beyond the agency's control.

Adopters do not generally wait long for a suitable match. This is because the agency very quickly and effectively uses Adoption 22 charms database, the National Adoption Register, local authority profiling, adoption exchange and activity days to ascertain whether any of their adopters can be linked with children who require adopting. This has resulted in children being matched very quickly and effectively with adopters.

Prospective adopters are also very well supported when considering matches because their social workers attend all relevant meetings with them. They query all the reports thoroughly and ask lots of relevant questions. Social workers are very tenacious in chasing up local authorities for information and challenging practice where necessary. At all stages, adopters are encouraged to think realistically about whether they have the capacity to meet the needs of the child they are considering, and to say, 'No', if there are doubts about this. This results in families who stay together and children whose progress and outcomes are positive.

The range of support services available is impressive and as a consequence, adopters are confident that support will be available at any stage, should they require this. The agency is extremely responsive and helpful to any requests for support. Recently, the service has developed a post adoption centre, which provides a plethora of adoption support services for adoptive families. A number of local authorities have also commissioned the centre's support services for their adoptive

families. The agency provides adoptive families with high quality pre and post adoption support services, including a variety of therapeutic services. In recent months, the agency has engaged the services of a local university to undertake research regarding the post adoption centre and its support services.

A number of adopters commented on the excellent support they had received. This is illustrated by one of the comments made by some adopters, who said, 'I have nothing but praise for the service and support provided by all staff at the agency'. Another adopter said, 'Our social worker has been fantastic and has been there for support 7 days a week'. Others said, 'We have had amazing support from our social worker, (name of worker) throughout.' Another couple said that the social worker goes, 'Above and beyond the call of duty'. One adoptive couple said, 'I have been given support and advice at every level that has helped our family greatly. I have also been given help with workshops such as the "Nurtured heart", which has helped us bond and communicate really well with our child. Another said, 'I don't know how I would have coped without them.' One professional said, 'The agency provides an impressive range of support services pre and post adoption which are invaluable in supporting children and their adoptive families.' The agency provides a range of support services, which are highly effective in promoting positive outcomes for children. Despite the already high level of intervention, the agency continues to develop the range of adoption support, which is clearly based on research to inform its practice.

Children are also very positive about the agency's support services. They really value attending the groups, social activities and events provided by the agency, as it provides them with an opportunity to meet with others who understand the issues relating to adoption.

There are also excellent examples of work being done on an individual basis with schools, as well as support regarding contact arrangements. The commitment and sensitivity of the workers carrying out this work is considerable and is much appreciated by the families. As a result of this work, there have been significant improvements in children's educational experiences and emotional well-being. Adoption support is underpinned by written assessments and support plans so enabling the support to be formally evaluated for its success.

The agency is involved in an innovative family finding project. It's All About Me (IAAM) is a scheme that encourages UK businesses to invest in finding families for harder to place children and supporting those families via a social impact bond. This is a project that has been set up and operated by the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies of which Adoption Matters is a member.

In partnership with another voluntary adoption agency, the agency is involved in another innovative service, concurrent planning. This service enables children who are unable to live with their birth parents to be looked after and placed with concurrent carers, while their future is decided by the courts. Concurrent carers are formally prepared, trained and approved both as foster carers and adopters. This allows children to bond, from a very early stage with their new carers and if the

court decides they should not return to their birth family, it prevents children having the upset and loss of moving from home to home. To date, although this service is still relatively new, it has been highly successful in the recruitment of concurrent carers and has already resulted in a child being placed in a concurrent placement.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children and young people experience a significant level of stability in their family lives, as the pre-order disruption rate is very low. Children and young people develop their attachments with their families, have a positive view of themselves and achieve significantly improved outcomes in terms of social and emotional development and education.

The agency places safeguarding and promoting children and young people's well-being at the centre of all it does. High priority is given to all aspects of the agency's work and this ensures children and young people are safe. The agency has clear, up-to-date safeguarding procedures that detail the role of the agency and local authorities in safeguarding children and young people. All safeguarding matters are promptly and effectively dealt with and there is excellent partnership working with local authorities and other agencies to safeguard children and young people. The agency ensures that if there are any safeguarding concerns in relation to adopters, they are fully supported while the issues are being considered.

The agency has a robust approach to the recruitment of staff, panel members and people wanting to adopt. This ensures that unsuitable people do not work with or care for children. It has a well-established system for risk assessing applications from people who may have a criminal record.

Safeguarding is given a high priority in adopters' preparation, assessment and subsequent training. The agency ensures adopters understand the impact of abuse and neglect on children's emotional well-being and behaviour and are supported to manage this appropriately. Adopters displayed a high level of understanding about these issues and take timely action to ensure that situations do not escalate. The agency also ensures adopters understand and can support children and young people in the safe use of internet. This enables adopters to support them to use social networking sites safely. Health and safety issues are also comprehensively addressed to ensure children are safe from accidents in the home. Adopters are aware as their children's needs change, they can ring and ask for help and advice at any time and they do so.

Staff are extremely experienced in all areas of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The staff are of a high calibre and their commitment to ensuring that safe and secure adoptive placements are made and maintained for children is impressive. The commitment of staff is driven by the supportive and open culture of the leadership and management who continually strive to ensure the safety of children.

Adoptive parents are excellent advocates for their children and ensure that they get the services they need. For example, parents are confident in asking for the help of the agency. For some children adoptive parents have advocated with schools to get them the support they need or to ensure that any barriers to their education are removed.

This agency receives very few complaints. However, any complaints made are viewed in a constructive way. They are thoroughly investigated and any learning from them is used to inform and improve agency practice.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Adoption Matters is totally committed to improving outcomes for children through adoption. Leaders and managers at all levels are passionate, inspirational, ambitious and innovative in developing the agency's services. They are not averse to trying new, ground-breaking ideas to improve the lives of children. Thus, the agency has introduced new training programmes and innovative services projects. For example, the parenting transitions and the nurtured heart programme; the development of the concurrent carers' project and the post adoption centre. Many of these services and projects support adoptive families no matter what stages of the process that they are at. Moreover, they have proved successful in significantly improving placement stability and the experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

The agency has established very positive and effective working relationships with partner agencies which also lead to improved services and improved outcomes for children and families. This is clearly demonstrated by the comment of one children's placing social worker, who said, 'The Adoption Matters North West social worker and myself have formed an excellent working relationship, this was recognised by our adoption panel who commented on this, specifically at the end of our matching panel'. Social workers also comment on the good communication between themselves and Adoption Matters staff, as well as the support provided by the agency. This is illustrated by the following comment, 'Liaison has been regular, and thorough, and I feel confident in the support that our children are getting from the local agency'.

Other local statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies are also extremely positive about the working relationships which have helped them to develop their services for the benefit of adopted children. Partnership working with local authorities in relation to the support services provided by the post adoption centre is very positive and clearly demonstrates good collaborative working.

The agency is well established within the local consortium and the Chief Executive is a former chairperson of the consortium. He is also a member of the board of trustees for the British Association for Adoption and Fostering and has served as a Trustee of Children England, the leading membership organisation for the children, young

people and families' voluntary sector. He has also liaised with the Department of Education regarding adoption matters and has spoken at the House of Lord Select Committee on adoption. The Chief Executive is very much at the forefront in adoption and is fully aware of the current issues facing local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies that may impact on placing children for adoption and in supporting their adoptive placements. The agency is therefore in an extremely strong position to tailor its services and develop them in a way that provides an effective, relevant response for children and young people and their adoptive families.

Strong and robust governance, which is supported by regular reporting systems, ensure that the Chief Executive, senior managers and trustees maintain a close awareness of how the services are being delivered and their impact. There is very effective monitoring and evaluation at all levels in the agency. For example, the monitoring of the quality of adopters' assessments, agency timescales, agency records, complaints and allegations enables the agency to identify any issues and improve practice. The agency also has effective data collection processes and this enables the managers to monitor the performance of the agency. The financial position of the agency is also carefully scrutinised and ensures its financial viability.

The agency regularly obtains feedback from service users and this information is used to develop the service. Adopters feel their views are actively sought. They feel happy to contribute and believe they are taken seriously. Children and young people's views are also obtained and inform agency practice.

The agency demonstrates a strong desire to continue to improve its services. At the last inspection, the agency was judged as outstanding, with no requirements or recommendations made. Since then the agency has continued to develop and improve. For example, the introduction of the parenting transitions and nurtured heart programme, the concurrent planning service and the development of the post adoption support centre.

The recruitment of adopters is significantly increasing. For example, a total of 284 initial enquiries to become adopters were received during 2012-13 which resulted in 28 applications (April to June 2013) and 75 registrations of interest (July- March 2014). During the year 2013-14, a total of 45 families were matched to children and 37 occurred in less than six months, and all in less than 12 months. The timeliness of assessments is quicker than the comparator groups and families approved are well able to meet the needs of children waiting. Adopters do not wait long for placements; 82% were matched within 6 months of being approved compared with 55 % of the comparator group. On 31st March 2014, the agency had 68 approved adoptive families and 40 had children in placements.

The recruitment strategy is informed by national and local research. Good use is made of a wide range of media and events to breakdown the myths about who can adopt and to inform the public about the needs of children waiting. The agency is increasingly approving a diverse range of adopters and this is reflected in the ethnicity of the children placed.

The agency has a very committed, competent and experienced staff team who deliver a qualitative and highly effective service to adopters and children. They receive good, high quality training and this keeps them up to date with research initiatives, current thinking and the latest developments in adoption, which they are able to utilise in their practice. Regular team meetings, monthly supervision and team day's enables staff to reflect and develop their practice. All staff are formally appraised and have annual appraisals.

Staff said that they are part of very experienced, strong and supportive teams and are able to use each other to reflect upon and develop their practice. They stated that their management team have a great deal of knowledge, experience and skills in adoption. They believe the combination of all these factors, as well as the fact that they complement each other, results in an extremely strong, progressive managerial team. All staff said the management team promote the continuous learning of their staff and they were well supported by their managers, both formally and informally. They said this enabled them to provide a high quality service to adopters and their children and young people. They stated that all the managers are totally committed to providing an excellent adoption service and constantly strive to improve the agency's service. Managers are said to be eager to encourage staff's creativity and to take their ideas forward and this is totally embedded in the agency's culture. Staff talked about the agency's managerial team as very much having a 'Can do attitude and an eagerness to develop their service.' Consequently, staff feel positive, energised and valued. They also take ownership of the work they do and are motivated to provide an exceptionally high standard of service to adopters and children.

The agency also has extremely efficient, committed and competent administrative staff, who are able to provide excellent administrative support to the agency. This greatly enhances and supports the efficiency and quality of the agency's adoption service.

The agency has continued to develop since the last inspection and has increasingly developed its infrastructure to address the increased numbers of adopters' enquiries, assessments, placements and current workloads. The upsurge in business has obviously increased the agency's revenue and ensured the agency's financial viability.

The work of the agency is supported by a clear and informative Statement of Purpose that is available to all interested parties. The agency has developed a guide for children about adoption and the support available. Arrangements are in place to ensure that the guide is distributed to all relevant children and young people. These documents are accessible, useful and ensure anyone using the service has clear information and knows what to expect from the service.

The agency has recently moved to new premises in Blackburn, as its previous premises are being refurbished. There was also some building work being carried out in the Chester office, so that the reception area was improved and to accommodate increased administrative staff. The agency's premises were accessible, suitable and secure for the purposes of an adoption agency. There is relevant insurance cover

and appropriate security of electronic systems and case file. The business continuity plan appropriately addresses how the branch will continue to operate in the event of an emergency, thus ensuring continuity of service to adoptive families.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of voluntary adoption agencies.