

Adopters for Adoption

Adopters for Adoption Limited

Senate House, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire B60 4AD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

This voluntary adoption agency was registered in March 2014. It recruits, prepares, trains, assesses and approves adopters to provide homes for children, from a range of local authorities, who need new families. The agency operates across England.

The adoption agency approves adopters for domestic adoption. It also provides adoption support to the adopters that it approves, their children and other adoptive families requesting support.

In the year to date, the adoption agency approved 49 adoptive families and placed 31 children with adoptive families. There were 41 families waiting for a suitable match with a child at the time of the inspection.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 December 2021

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account **good**

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 9 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Staff ensure that prospective adopters receive a prompt response to their initial enquiry. Managers promote the adoption agency as one that is inclusive and open to applications from a diverse cross-section of society. Applicants report that they are welcomed and experience acceptance at this first contact. This means that people who may have previously ruled themselves out of adoption have an opportunity to explore the possibilities.

Prospective adopters are well supported through their preparation and assessment process. As a result, they feel ready for the next stage once they are approved as adopters.

Assessments are undertaken by independent social workers. Prospective adopters and adopters build strong, supportive relationships with their independent social worker. One adopter told inspectors, 'The support I have received throughout my adoption journey has been impeccable. I have the most supportive and caring social worker and family finder and they have both supported me in my family finding. Not only have they both answered all my questions if I needed any answering, but they have provided me with the emotional support I've definitely needed throughout the process.'

The adoption agency has a dedicated member of staff who gets to know new adopters and supports them as they start to consider which children will join their family. This individual support provides new adopters with the confidence to navigate this new experience.

Overall, prospective adopters and adopters are very positive about their experiences with the adoption agency. However, when this has not been their experience, the impact on prospective adopters and adopters is significant. Some adopters told inspectors that they have felt isolated or unable to express their views due to fears this would have an impact on the decision about their suitability to adopt. This feedback was a surprise to the manager during the inspection. This indicates that consultation with prospective adopters and adopters is not as open and transparent as it is intended to be.

Children placed with adoptive families make progress in all aspects of their lives. Children who have previously struggled to meet their developmental milestones make significant progress, coming into line with their peers. Adopters are responsive to their children's individual needs because they understand their early life experiences. Staff enable adopters to promote their children's identity, with support to maintain links with the birth family when this is appropriate.

Consultation with children is in its infancy. There is a lack of feedback from children about their experiences to inform the development of the service. The manager is aware of this as an area for improvement.

The adoption agency operates the 'Safer Stronger Families' programme. This has been extended from post-adoption to support the introduction process for children recognised as having complex needs. Those adopters who have undertaken the programme speak highly of the impact in stabilising their family. A restructure of the service and changing staff roles have resulted in a reduction in the availability of the programme. The manager has plans to review and expand this area of service in the coming year.

The adoption agency offers ongoing post-adoption support to any of their adopters who require this. Options range from an initial phone consultation to a post-adoption support clinic, signposting to an adoption support fund assessment or to other external resources. This ensures that adopters are enabled to access additional resources as any stage of their post-adoption journey.

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected: good

The manager ensures that safeguarding is strong in all elements of the adoption agency. This includes thorough assessment of prospective adopters, in ongoing training and as part of regular newsletters. This proactive approach ensures that children's safety is prioritised.

The manager has developed the training offered to staff, adopters and prospective adopters since the last inspection. Training regarding the risks of radicalisation and online safety helps adopters to equip themselves as their children grow up and make more contacts in wider society. The manager has arranged to make the training offered available to independent social workers from January 2022. This means that these key staff have access to all the training that the adoption agency expects them to have undertaken.

The preparation process for prospective adopters ensures that they understand the impact of trauma and past experiences on their child. One adopter told inspectors, 'Our individual training with our social worker was thorough and extensive, which helped us to prepare for the eventuality of adopting a child. The training helped us to be therapeutic, but simultaneously ensure that we had firm boundaries in order to help our son feel safe.' Social workers also offer regular workshops to adopters' friends and family. These help people to understand a child's behaviour as a communication of past experiences. Because of this inclusive approach, adopters have strong support networks around them.

There are clear policies and procedures to underpin safeguarding practice and ensure that staff understand their roles and responsibilities. However, senior managers have not ensured that the adoption agency manager has undertaken

training in the management of safeguarding. This omission was addressed during the inspection.

The policy for the safe recruitment of staff does not meet the requirements of regulation. In particular, managers do not verify reasons that staff have left all previous roles with children or vulnerable adults. All other elements of safer recruitment practices are in place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is a qualified social worker with extensive experience in adoption. She is passionate about the adoption agency and dedicated to its development.

The adoption agency has a core team of permanent managers and support staff. These staff operate three regional hubs, which enable the service to provide national coverage. The adoption agency employs a team of over 30 independent social workers across the country. These independent staff undertake assessments of prospective adopters and provide ongoing support until a child has been placed and an adoption order granted.

Staff and independent social workers report that they are well supported by an available management team. Staff have regular supervision and an annual appraisal of their performance. Access to regular practice surgeries helps to create a feeling of team and provide regular opportunities to reflect on and develop consistent practice.

The manager uses a range of reporting and recording systems to maintain oversight of the adoption agency. This has been of particular importance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has ensured that the adoption agency has been well placed to respond to the changes and challenges that have arisen from the global pandemic.

Assessments are suitably detailed and analytical. This enables the agency adoption panel to make clear recommendations about suitability. However, processes to consider reviews are not yet sufficient. For example, reviews of adopters who have not had a child placed for adoption within a year of approval are not undertaken within the regulatory timescales. These delays prevent timely consideration of the ongoing suitability of adopters.

The adoption agency has received six complaints in the past 12 months. Oversight of these during the inspection was hampered by the inconsistent recording system for complaints. However, there is no significant impact from this as the manager demonstrated clear oversight of all matters.

What does the voluntary adoption agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 or any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
|--|------------------------|
| <p>The adoption agency must review the approval of each prospective adopter in accordance with this regulation, unless—</p> <p>in a section 83 case, the prospective adopter has visited the child in the country in which the child is habitually resident and has confirmed in writing that they wish to proceed with the adoption; and</p> <p>in any other case, a child is placed for adoption with the prospective adopter or the agency is considering placing a child with the prospective adopter in accordance with regulations 31 to 33.</p> <p>A review must take place whenever the adoption agency considers it necessary but otherwise not more than one year after approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than one year. (The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, regulation 30D (1)(a)(b) (2))</p> <p>This refers specifically to managers ensuring that reviews take place at intervals of not more than one year after approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than one year.</p> | <p>28 January 2022</p> |

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the adoption agency has in place systems to support consultation with children. Children's wishes, views and feelings should be considered by the adoption agency in monitoring and developing its service. ('Adoption: national minimum standards', page 11, paragraph 1.6)

- The registered person should ensure that the practice within the adoption agency reflects the aims and objectives of the statement of purpose. In particular, that the adoption agency has systems in place to gather, understand and respond to open and honest feedback as defined in the statement of purpose. This should include options for those prospective adopters and adopters who feel that the service does not/has not understood or responded to their needs well. The systems should recognise the potential power imbalance in the relationship between the agency and prospective adopters and adopters. ('Adoption: national minimum standards', page 53, paragraph 18.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the recruitment checks undertaken for staff, agency staff and persons on the central list meet the requirements of adoption regulations. ('Adoption: national minimum standards', page 61, paragraph 21.2)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: SC476482

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Inspectors

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