

Adoption West

Wiltshire

Floor 2, Old County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 8JN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

The agency's statement of purpose states that the agency is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) commissioned to deliver adoption services by six local authorities. These are Bath and North-East Somerset (B&NES), Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

The agency is a company limited by guarantee and is registered with Ofsted as a voluntary adoption agency. Service delivery is defined by a contract that sets out specific performance measures and the reporting requirements of the RAA. The local authorities make up the controlling committee of company members with ultimate responsibility for organisational performance and appointment and dismissal of directors.

The service operates from three hub premises in Wiltshire, Bristol and Gloucestershire. Each hub comprises a multidisciplinary team of recruitment, assessment, family finding and support staff. The panel is made up of a single central list and operates three panels with three chairs, linked to the three hub offices. Five panel meet per month.

The agency was first registered with Ofsted in March 2019. This is the agency's first inspection. The registered manager has been in post since September 2018 and is suitably qualified and experienced.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 January 2022

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	requires improvement to be good

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

Date of previous inspection: n/a

Overall judgement at last inspection: n/a

Enforcement action since last inspection: n/a

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Children placed by the agency make progress and achieve positive outcomes. This is because the agency places them with adopters who can meet their needs and provide them with a stable and loving family. Adopters speak with love and pride about the progress their children are making since being placed with them.

A strength of the agency is the good quality of support that the agency social workers offer to adopters and their children. The agency works closely with schools and the virtual heads so that they are aware of the educational needs of adopted children and how best to meet them. The children enjoy leisure activities such as swimming, community clubs and toddler groups. They increase their confidence and sense of belonging as they become part of a family and community.

Adopters benefit from the range of support that the agency offers to them. This support can be accessed through their allocated social worker, meeting with other adopters, support groups and virtually through social media adopter groups. Access to specialist support for a child's emotional needs is variable depending on which geographical area of the agency the adopter is based. However, social workers are comprehensively trained in therapeutic parenting techniques and dyadic developmental psychotherapy methods and provide effective help and support to adopters and their children when they need it.

Adopters do not always receive the support that they need when waiting to be matched with a child. This is an emotionally difficult time for some adopters. The agency does have a post-approval support agreement, but this was not always seen to be in place and effective.

The agency advocates well for adopters and their children. For example, the agency is supporting many adopters effectively to access the adoption support fund so that the appropriate support can be obtained using this funding.

Adopters are comprehensively assessed and prepared to adopt a child. Assessments of prospective adopters are rigorous and analytical, yet sensitively undertaken. The assessments give the panel and decision-makers the information they need to decide whether to approve adopters. Adopters report that they are warmly welcomed to the agency and their initial enquiry received a prompt response.

The agency offers comprehensive and informative training to adopters, who give very positive feedback about the training on offer both in stage one and two of the assessment. Adopters report that they were appropriately prepared to adopt a child. Training sessions are regularly undertaken by experienced and skilled adopters, which adds depth, experience and authenticity to the training.

Minimal adoption disruptions evidence good-quality matching and transition processes. When there is a disruption, the welfare of the child is foremost and the adopter is also supported by the agency. The reasons for the disruption are investigated and evaluated and any learning is promptly put in place.

Adoption timescales are steadily improving. Any delays have a valid explanation and are unavoidable or adopter led. Eighteen months ago, very few stage one assessments were being completed within timescales. There is now monthly tracking by leaders and managers and a commitment by the agency to further improve timescales. Assessments are now broadly completed within expected national timescales.

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

Prospective adopters are thoroughly prepared and supported to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect of children. This is achieved through good-quality training and a thorough assessment. Adopters also receive comprehensive training to inform them of the potential risks of social media, sexual exploitation and the action they must take should a child go missing.

Health and safety checks of prospective adopters' homes are rigorous. Recruitment checks for adopters are obtained to ensure that they are a suitable person to adopt. Any concerns arising from these checks are comprehensively explored before approval.

Agency safeguarding procedures are robust and any safeguarding incidents are well managed. For example, the adoptive parent trainers report that they have a clear safeguarding procedure to follow should a safeguarding concern arise during a training session. They feel confident to use this procedure and could give examples when they had.

Staff recruitment procedures are rigorous to ensure that only suitable people are employed. However, on one occasion the verification of staff references was found not to be recorded. This is now addressed. The agency has recently introduced a comprehensive checklist to ensure that all checks are completed prior to a person being employed.

The agency has a comprehensive complaints procedure. Complaints to the agency are minimal and adopters report they can raise concerns with their social worker or managers before a formal complaint needs to be made.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

It has been a momentous task and much hard work and commitment from leaders and managers to bring six local authority adoption services together, to form one agency and merge different standards of practice and different systems. This is a

child-focused agency that is still in development and there is a comprehensive development plan in place. Significant progress has been made in the development of consistent systems and practice. There is a realistic awareness by leaders and managers of the agency's achievements to date and what needs to be achieved to further develop the agency. This work is effectively supported through comprehensive management scrutiny and oversight from the board.

Agency medical advisers are not always appropriately qualified. One of the agency's medical advisers was not appropriately qualified to provide recommendations to the panel about the medical fitness of adopters. A suitably qualified medical practitioner is now in place. However, after leaders and managers were aware of this shortfall, the agency medical adviser continued for a short time to provide recommendations to panel. This means that adopters affected are now being medically reassessed and returned to panel, leading to uncertainty and delays for some adopters and children placed with them.

COVID-19 restrictions have been managed well by the agency. Minimal use of flexibilities has been required. Assessments of adopters continued through the restrictions and children placed using creative ways of working. For example, family finders have used technology creatively and adopters have recorded stories for children and used social media to develop relationships with children. Home visits to adopters were limited to two in-person visits and the remaining visits were undertaken virtually. On minimal occasions, this limited the depth of the assessment. Social workers report that virtual working has promoted the separation from their previous local authorities to a separate agency identity.

There are too many data breaches where sensitive information has been sent to the incorrect destination or person. However, action is being taken to address this through staff training and additional management oversight.

Social workers report that they feel well supported and receive regular supervision. However, supervision records are not always signed and agreed by the supervisor and supervisee. Caseload numbers are reported by some social workers to be too high and were not always reported on in supervision records, even when the social worker was in receipt of a protected caseload.

Adopters report very positively about the commitment and support they receive from their social worker and that they feel listened to by the agency. However, there is not yet a formal system in place to capture the views of adopters, children and staff so that they can be used to inform quality assurance systems to promote further improvement of the agency.

The recruitment of adopters is effective. The agency acts on the trends and patterns of which children require adoption, so that any delays for children are minimal. There is a diverse, sufficient and suitable pool of adopters to meet the needs of children. The agency is successfully placing sibling groups and children that are harder to place.

The adoption panels provide an effective quality monitoring function and has the necessary knowledge and expertise. It makes timely and well-informed recommendations to the decision-makers. The importance of ensuring diversity in the panel is acknowledged by leaders and managers. Consequently, diversity and targeted recruitment training has taken place. However, panels do not always contain sufficient diversity where there is an adopter from an ethnic minority background.

Panel minutes are comprehensive and evidence why a decision has been made. However, although vulnerabilities are explored during the panel, they are not always clearly documented as being rigorously explored and resolved. The panel chair is experienced and knowledgeable. Recommendations from the panel are sound, and decision-makers ask robust questions and provide appropriate challenge if needed.

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—</p> <p>obtain the information about the prospective adopter which is specified in Part 1 of Schedule 4 and obtain a written report from a registered medical practitioner about the health of the prospective adopter following a full examination which must include the matters specified in part 2 of Schedule 4 unless the agency has received advice from its medical adviser that such an examination and report is not necessary. (Regulation 26(a)(b))</p> <p>This particularly refers to the agency ensuring that the medical practitioner is suitably qualified to undertake the task of agency medical adviser.</p>	<p>28 February 2022</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the records of supervision are always signed as a true record by both the supervisor and the supervisee. These records should evidence that a discussion about caseload numbers is undertaken during supervision to ensure that they are not too high. (NMS 24.2)
- The registered person should ensure that prospective adopters fully understand and are prepared for the matching, introduction and placement process and receive the support that they need at the family finding stage following their approval at panel. (NMS 10.3)
- The registered person should ensure that, no matter where in the geographical area adopters live, they are able to receive a consistent level of support post adoption. (NMS 15.5)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a strategy in place to promptly reduce the number of agency data breaches. (NMS 28.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the management and outcomes of the services the agency provides are monitored in order to be satisfied that the

agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and their adopters. This particularly refers to ensuring that the views and opinions from children, adopters and staff about the quality of the service of the agency are gained and used to further improve the agency. (NMS 26.4)

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

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