

# Worcestershire Children First Voluntary Adoption Service

Worcestershire Children First

Worcestershire County Council, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## **Information about this voluntary adoption agency**

Worcestershire Children First is an independent not-for-profit company owned by Worcestershire County Council. Worcestershire Children First Voluntary Adoption Service (the agency) sits within the company. Some elements of the adoption service are undertaken by a regional adoption agency, specifically, the recruitment and assessment of adopters, adoption panel and family finding. Other elements of the adoption process are undertaken by social work teams from Worcestershire Children First, such as the completion of child permanence reports.

The agency is responsible for:

- Processing adoption referrals and ensuring that children receive adoption medicals and initial health assessments in a timely manner.
- Quality assurance of adoption decision-making reports to be sent to the adoption decision-maker.
- The agency decision-maker for adoption panels.
- Supporting locality safeguarding teams with writing child permanence reports.
- Ensuring that adopted children are provided with therapeutic intervention when this is assessed as required.
- Carrying out statutory checks and birth records file requests for other local authorities.
- Supporting and undertaking detailed reports and observations of families who are applying to the court for private adoptions.

This is the agency's first inspection since it was registered with Ofsted.

**Inspection dates: 6 to 10 June 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 **good**

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

**Date of previous inspection:** not applicable

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of service users: good**

Early permanence is promoted by the agency for children in adoption and for children where adoption is the agreed plan. Managers have developed strong tracking systems, which have helped them to identify children for whom early permanence may be required. This has enabled them to work alongside the regional adoption agency and Worcestershire Children First social work teams to undertake effective early care planning.

Managers have a clear understanding of the needs of children, which feeds into the regional adoption agency's recruitment of adopters to help meet the diverse needs of children. As a result, most children are placed with adopters through the regional adoption agency.

There are clear processes in the agency for the progression of private adoptions. Prospective private adopters who contact the agency feel welcomed and valued by them. Assessments completed by social workers in the agency are timely and detailed. A prospective private adopter told the inspector that a social worker in the agency was supportive and helped them and the child understand the assessment and court process. This helped them feel reassured about the adoption journey for them and the child.

The agency tracks and liaises closely with their partnership agencies, general practitioners and health authority leads to progress adoption medical reports.

Staff in the agency provide support to social workers and team managers in Worcestershire Children First social work teams with the completion of child permanence reports and adoption support plans. Work is ongoing by the agency to enhance the quality of reports by providing training. This work will ensure that information in the children's reports is captured in a more detailed way, which will provide further insight into a child's journey to adoption.

The decision-maker for the adoption panel is part of the agency. Their decisions are timely, reasoned and detailed. This ensures that children's matching for adoption is progressed in a timely way.

The agency has a thorough system for assessing financial support to children and their adopters. The financial assessment considers a range of issues, including the child's individual needs. Where financial support is being provided, this is specific to each child and their family and in some circumstances will remain in place until a child is 18. There is a system to review the financial circumstances of each family annually. However, managers do not have a system to measure the effectiveness of financial assistance provided to adopters and children. Therefore, the impact this has on the outcomes and progress for children is not captured clearly.

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

The agency has clear safeguarding policies in place. All staff in the agency have completed mandatory safeguarding training.

Managers have implemented a system that allows them to track any delays to adoption matching. This includes any delays due to safeguarding concerns. In these small number of cases, managers work with safeguarding partners to monitor outcomes, which then improve future practice and the progression of the adoption.

There are clear procedures for managing complaints. Since its registration, the agency has not received any complaints.

Children are matched well to adopters. Since being registered, there has been no disruption to adoption placements. Managers have developed processes to help them identify concerns so that support can be provided at the earliest stage if concerns are raised. This is carefully monitored by managers in the agency.

The recruitment process ensures that all relevant checks are completed for prospective private adopters. This good practice is also reflected in the recruitment of staff employed by the agency.

The managers and social workers in the agency are qualified and registered with Social Work England.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

There is a clear and well-written statement of purpose and children's guide. These clearly set out the ethos and objectives of the agency. Managers are planning to undertake future events, like a launch which will help raise further awareness of what the agency offers to children, adopters and partner agencies.

The agency is managed effectively and efficiently by a permanent, suitably experienced and qualified adoption agency manager. The agency is well staffed and resourced. The staff team is suitably qualified. Regular team meetings, training, supervisions and appraisals are taking place. The agency has recently increased its staffing levels in response to demand.

Managers actively and regularly monitor the adoption process. This is carried out in partnership with other professionals and external agencies. The agency uses learning from practice and audits to improve the experiences of children, adopters and other service users. For example, prompt action has been taken to ensure that staffing issues within the health authority do not have an impact on adoption medicals being completed in a timely way.

Managers have established several forums where they regularly meet with partners from Worcestershire Children First and the regional adoption agency. Inspectors were given positive feedback by partners about the staff from the agency in respect of collaborative working.

The agency is successfully working in partnership with Worcestershire Children First and the regional adoption agency to ensure there is monitoring of the progress and outcomes for children where there is, or is likely to be, a plan for adoption.

There is a robust governance structure in place that enables the agency to have a good operational overview of the regional adoption agency. This has enabled the agency to put plans in place to develop practice such as training.

Managers have developed good working relationships with the panel chair. Recently, managers attended a meeting with the panel chair and observed panel to strengthen the quality assurance process. This has led to further practice development work with regard to progressing fostering to adoption.

Managers work closely with the regional adoption team and Worcestershire Children First to ensure that, overall, children are quickly matched and placed for adoption in a timely way. Monthly meetings between all agencies ensure there is regular monitoring and tracking of this. However, for two children who have specific health needs, there has been some drift in family finding. While some discussions about the children's care planning have taken place, these children have been waiting a long time to be matched to suitable adopters. Managers in the agency did not evidence how they have worked creatively with partner agencies to find a family for these children. Drifts in family finding have the potential to impact children's outcomes.

The agency has developed lots of systems to collect data and, in some ways, uses the data to help develop the service. However, analysis is not being drawn from the data to identify service-specific patterns to inform future business plans.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered provider should implement an effective strategy to recruit and assess prospective adopters who can meet the needs of those children for whom adoption is the plan. The agency should monitor and evaluate the success of the plan. This specifically relates to ensuring there is no drift or delay for a child once adoption is identified as their plan. (NMS 10.1)
- The registered provider should seek feedback from service users on the success of the service provision. This feedback should be recorded centrally and on the case record of the service user. (NMS 15.6)
- The registered provider should ensure effective oversight to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users, and that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration. (NMS 25.6)

### **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:** 2645777

**Registered provider:** Worcestershire Children First

**Registered provider address:** County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP

**Responsible individual:** Maria White

**Telephone number:** 01905 763763

**Email address:** chsadmin@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk

## **Inspectors**

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector  
Shazana Jamal, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022