

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

8 April 2013

Ofsted inspection of Sunderland City Council Adoption Service

Report of the Executive Director Children's Services

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with the final report and draft action plan following the recently successful Ofsted inspection of the council's Adoption Service. A copy of which are provided as **appendix 1 and 2** respectively.
- 1.2 The inspection report was published on the Ofsted website on 3 April 2013 and judged the service's 'Overall Effectiveness' to be 'Good'. The service was considered to be 'Good' for each of the four sub-judgements, with the exception of 'Quality of service' which was considered to be 'Outstanding'.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 Ofsted conducts inspections of local authority Adoption Services on a three yearly cycle to provide assurance that services are being delivered in line with the Children Act 2004 and within the National Minimum Standards. Sunderland Council's Adoption Service has been inspected on three previous occasions (i.e. November 2010, August 2008 and August 2005), with the 2010 inspection finding the service to be 'Good' with a number of 'Outstanding' features.
- 2.2 In April 2012, Ofsted began a further round of Adoption Service inspections, which will continue until summer 2013 when Ofsted commences inspections of looked after children and care leavers. These new inspections (which will include a specific sub-judgement on local adoption performance) will replace the currently separate inspections of local authority fostering and adoption services, and the looked after children element of the former announced inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services.
- 2.3 The current round of inspections grades services using the following judgements:
 - **Outstanding:** A service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
 - **Good:** A service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements
 - **Adequate:** A service that only meets minimum requirements
 - **Inadequate:** A service that does not meet minimum requirements

3. The inspection process

- 3.1 On 28 January 2013 the council received notification from Ofsted that the Adoption Service was to be inspected. Two Ofsted inspectors were on-site between 11 and 14 February 2013 (i.e. four days) during which time they reviewed a range of key

documents and evidence, management information and case files. They also spoke to a range of stakeholders, including:

- Service managers
- Social Workers and Adoption Service staff
- Independent Review Officers (IROs)
- Adoption Panel Chair
- Key partners from Health and Education
- Children and young people who have been adopted
- Adopters
- A birth parent

3.2 During their four days on-site, the inspectors also observed examples of practice, including a Permanence Monitoring Group meeting, a Pre-planning meeting and a Review of the introductions meeting. The latter meeting enabled the inspector to meet with a foster carer, an adopter and a sibling group that had been introduced prior to an adoption placement.

4. The inspection findings

4.1 Ofsted judged the Adoption Service to be 'Good' overall. Three of the four sub judgements were graded as 'Good', with a fourth graded 'Outstanding', i.e.

Overall Effectiveness	Good
Outcomes for children and young people	Good
Quality of service	Outstanding
Safeguarding children and young people	Good
Leadership and management	Good

4.2 A copy of the report is attached as **appendix 1**, however some of the key findings included:

- A good and effective adoption agency.
- The service is ambitious for its children and successfully places a much higher than average proportion of children for adoption, a significant number of whom are older, part of large sibling groups or disabled (a large majority of these within appropriate timescales).
- The service excels at matching, and is extremely professional and thorough when planning introductions and placements. This results in placements which last, with the disruption rate much lower than the national average.
- Children, adopters and their families are thoroughly prepared and well supported.
- Good and effective multidisciplinary working contributes to the positive outcomes which children experience. As a result, children live in safe and secure families who meet their needs.
- The whole service, including members, managers and staff, are fully committed to adoption, and demonstrate a high level of understanding, skills, experience and qualifications to enable them to provide an effective service.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious for the service and have a good and realistic understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

- 4.3 To improve the quality and standards of care further, Ofsted made the following recommendations:
- Continue to develop ways of using the wishes, feelings and views of children to monitor and develop the service (NMS 1.6)
 - Ensure children have prompt access to specialist services, with particular reference to psychological support (NMS 5.4)
 - Continue to improve on adhering to timescales, particularly in addressing the child's need for a permanent home and making a permanence plan at the four month review. (Adoption and Children Act 2002 Statutory Guidance paragraph 2.2)
- 4.4 An action plan has been developed to address the formal recommendations in the report, which is attached as **appendix 2**. During the final feedback to the service, the inspectors also offered some suggestions as to how the council could further strengthen service delivery and support continuous improvement. The service has reflected upon these and included in the draft action plan those where the necessary resources exist to deliver the improvements.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note the very positive inspection report and the associated actions the council plans to undertake in response.

6. Appendices

- 1 Sunderland City Council Adoption Service inspection report (February 2013)
- 2 Adoption inspection: Draft action plan

