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11/09/2008

Mr Michael McCracken
Sunderland City Council
Civic Centre, Burdon Road
Sunderland
SR2 7DN

Our Reference SC056878

Dear Mr McCracken

Inspection report

An Ofsted inspector inspected your Local Authority Adoption Agency provision on 18/08/2008.

Please find enclosed:

- a copy of your inspection report

The inspection report

The inspection report sets out Ofsted's judgements about the quality of the provision you offer. Please make the report available to children and young people and relevant stakeholders. Ofsted will publish your report on the internet in 15 working days. This does not apply to children's homes.

If you have any queries about your report or inspection judgements, please contact our helpline on 08456 404040 within 15 working days of receiving your report.

Recommendations

The report contains some recommendations to improve your provision further. We will check whether you have acted on these recommendations when you are next inspected.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Wright", is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Janet Wright
Inspection Support Team

— City of Sunderland Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC056878
Inspection date	18/08/2008
Inspector	Sean White / Dennis Bradley
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Penshaw House, Station Road, Penshaw, HOUGHTON LE SPRING, Tyne and Wear, DH4 7LB
Telephone number	0191 382 3108
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Registered person	City of Sunderland
Registered manager	Jenny Parkin
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	09/08/2005

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You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority adoption agency undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory responsibilities in respect of adoption as laid down in current legislation. The agency recruits, prepares assesses and approves people as adoptive parents and arranges for the placement of children with them. It also provides, or arranges for, support to adoptive families and anyone affected by adoption including birth parents and adopted adults.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This is a strong agency that approaches its key responsibilities and the recruiting and approving of adopters, with thoroughness, rigour and a clear focus ensuring that children's welfare and wellbeing is at the core of all activity. It is well managed by skilled and experienced personnel and is efficiently organised in most areas.

It supports its families well and ensures that anyone receiving support services are provided with assistance based on their needs and circumstances as defined by an assessment.

There is a particularly impressive approach to the maintenance of children's heritage and background. Coupled with this is an innovative approach to supporting and enabling their birth families to be involved and to provide invaluable background information.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has developed in a positive direction since the last inspection. This is evident in a more strategic approach to the recruitment of adopters and improved practice in many areas. There is a stronger approach to assessments of applicants with a greater emphasis on clarity of analysis in reports presented to the adoption panel. There has also been a more thorough approach to the rigour of the quality management of processes overall. The agency's approach to diversity issues has also demonstrated a marked improvement.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

— The agency has a strong approach to ensuring that the needs of children requiring adoptive placements can be met through targeted recruitment strategy and practice. It uses a clear process to screen only those people who are deemed appropriate for an assessment and who understand that adoption is a lifelong commitment to children.

The approach to preparing and assessing prospective adopters is one of thoroughness, with a detailed analysis of the applicants' parenting capacity and their potential for keeping children safe. Potential applicants are provided with a range of opportunities to learn about adoption and it is clear that the agency is determined to ensure people are as fully informed as possible. There is a considered and careful determination in the agency to recruiting and approving adopters, underpinned by a commitment to adoption as a positive option for children.

The adoption panel continues the approach to rigour and thoroughness through its conscientious, well-managed approach to business. A very experienced professional chairs the appropriately constituted panels, which undertake their deliberations with a clear focus on the needs of children. The panels are held at regular intervals and are able to manage the volume of work placed before them. The arrangements for administering the panels are efficiently managed; minutes are detailed and provide a clear overview of proceedings. Decisions are made promptly by a senior manager committed to the welfare of children through adoption. The panels are informed and directed by policies and procedures that are thorough and detailed in most respects but are not explicit regarding a panel quorum.

There are strong, robust staff recruitment practices in place that ensure managers and staff are thoroughly checked and vetted prior to appointment. Both managers and workers demonstrate significant skills in and understanding of adoption matters, including up to date knowledge of current good practice and the legislative framework. All workers and managers are suitably qualified.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There is a clear and systematic approach to supporting adopters through the post-approval, matching, introductions and placement stages. Workers maintain regular contact with families and are able to offer support services from a range of in-house and external provisions.

Support is provided on a needs led basis for families who have a child in placement, or after an adoption order has been made; appropriate assessments are undertaken and assistance is provided on this basis. Adopted adults also receive services based

on their requirements and determine the pace of the support and advice they receive.

The agency has well established legal and medical advisors who provide significant and necessary support to the service. This advice is of a good standard, readily available to both the service and the panel and enables decision-making to be undertaken from a fully informed standpoint.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a commitment to enabling and encouraging birth parents to be as involved as possible in planning for their child's future. Their comments and views are sought and recorded and wherever possible, and in the child's best interests, their wishes are taken into consideration.

There is a very strong approach to enabling children to be as informed about their backgrounds as possible through a commitment to producing life-story work and supporting birth parents through this process.

There are very positive links across the department that promote joint working; this collective responsibility enhances the input into making sense and use of life-story material and information. Training in life-story work is provided twice a year by the agency to enable less experienced social workers to improve their skills in, and understanding of, this important aspect of adoption work.

The arrangements for supporting birth parents are impressive. There is a strong commitment to this area of responsibility and work is undertaken in a very supportive and focused way that enables birth parents, and wider birth families, to receive services of a very high standard. The agency's approach is sophisticated and innovative, has a significant impact on the successes in this area, and is carried out with great enthusiasm and commitment.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose (SOP) compiled by the agency is a detailed document that clearly outlines its aims and objectives, and how they are to be achieved. It is a comprehensive statement, underpinned and informed by clear, up to date policies and procedures, which provide a strong framework which the agency operates within. Children have written the children's guide, but although it meets

requirements, it is not of the same standard as other information produced by the agency.

The information that is sent to enquirers and prospective adopters is an extremely comprehensive, informative pack that provides a very thorough outline of adoption, the agency's approach to recruitment and assessment and details of the kind of children requiring placements. It is very clearly written and has a detailed and unambiguous content that enquirers should find very helpful when considering the adoption process.

This is a well-managed agency with clear lines of communication and accountability. The arrangements for carrying out the full range of responsibilities are efficiently organised and managed by people who are very experienced in adoption work and who demonstrate skills in managing a service. The agency is supported and monitored by a committed senior management and executive, which are fully informed of the activities of the agency.

Workers are well managed and their duties and responsibilities are carefully allocated; workload management is equitable and staff are well supported and encouraged to undertake their duties to the best of their ability. The permanent staff has to be supplemented by independent workers from time to time, which has a negative effect on the continuity of case management. However, every effort is made to minimise this. The service is competently managed from a corporate standpoint, having all required structures in place that enables workers to be protected. Training has a high priority in the agency and workers are encouraged to take advantage of all relevant staff development opportunities.

Record management is of a generally good standard overall. Adopters' case records and children's adoption case files include all required information and are well-organised and accessible, with some, but not consistent, auditing taking place. Policies and procedures in respect of sharing information with other agencies are in place and take due consideration of confidentiality and data management issues. Administration is efficiently organised within the service, although the records of panel members did not include all required information. This was also the case with records maintained in the personnel section; not all required information was available on every worker's file.

The premises used by the agency are located in an accessible area of the borough and have reasonable space and facilities. There are sufficiently robust security and fire protection facilities in place.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- include in adoption panel procedures full information about constitution and when a quorum is reached (NMS 10)
- produce a children's guide suitable for all children where adoption is the plan (NMS 1)
- include on all staff and panel members' files all required information (NMS 28).