

ANNOUNCED 3 YEAR ADOPTION INSPECTION OUTCOME REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The Adoption and Permanency Team, London Borough of Hillingdon, provides a comprehensive service to children who cannot live permanently with their family by recruiting, assessing and supporting families who are able to provide a substitute permanent home through adoption or long-term fostering. It also provides support to sustain permanent placements for life and post adoption support in line with the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Adoption Service also assesses the wider family network where appropriate and step-parent applications.

Ofsted regulates children services and has the power to take action to ensure that required standards are met and that children are not at risk of harm. Ofsted undertakes 3 yearly, announced inspections of the Adoption Service. The last inspection took place 23rd – 26th July 2007 and the overall rating of the service at that time was 'Good'. This report relates to the inspection that took place on 9 November and 15 November – 19 November 2010. Ofsted again rated the overall quality of the Adoption service at this time as 'Good'.

During this period the inspectors met with staff from the Adoption and Children in Care Teams and with parents and adopters to seek their views. In addition they checked records, procedures, premises, equipment and resources to see how the outcomes for children are being promoted.

COMMENTARY

At the end of the inspection, during initial verbal feedback, the inspectors provided examples of very positive quotes and comments from birth parents, adopters and social workers both in the Adoption and Children in Care Teams. Quotes that stand out include: *'the Adoption Service is Brilliant'* and *'I used to be cynical about the local authority but now I trust the local authority'*. The inspectors commented on the enthusiasm of both the Adoption Social Workers and placing Social Workers in the Children in Care Teams and the valuable work of the Play Therapist and Post Adoption workers. Julie Saunders, as the Team Manager, was praised highly to the inspectors by social workers and users of the service and the inspectors commented on good strategic management. The inspectors said that *'there is some exceptional work being undertaken within the adoption service'*. Their verbal assessment was that *'overall the Adoption Service was Good - the provision is strong'*.

The final written report setting out Ofsted's judgment about the quality of the provision offered by the Adoption Service was received 2nd December 2010 (attached Appendix 1). The inspectors made their judgement on the overall quality of care provided by the Adoption Service by assessing how it meets a series of outcomes for children and young people that are set out in law. The inspectors also checked whether the Adoption Service met the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and service specific regulations and considered how the overall management of the service setting helped to

Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee – 22 March 2011

achieve outcomes for children. They also considered the improvements made since the last inspection.

As stated above, Ofsted rated the overall quality of the Adoption service as 'good'. Inspectors said that: LBH is 'an enabling authority, with staff feeling free to operate with innovation and use their skills expansively; equality and diversity are well embedded in all aspects of the operation; children benefit from well-considered matches with adopters who are carefully assessed to meet their needs; adopter's assessments were conducted in a sensitive and respectful way; the adoption panel was judged to be robust, child focused, diligent and acted as a good monitoring tool; adoption support to adopters was judged to be very good; the uptake of support by birth parents had increased; the adoption team is excellently led and demonstrates a clear and deep understanding of adoption matters'. Inspectors noted that there were significant pressures on the adoption team because of social work and management vacancies. Also 'the quality of letterbox contact had declined recently, although steps have been taken to address the shortfalls, which are starting to prove effective. Inspectors also noted that 'safeguarding procedures did not cover historical abuse and the way recruitment files are kept does not clearly evidence thorough vetting procedures in all cases'.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF REPORT

The report concluded by stating that 'to improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendations':

- Invite applications from prospective adopters before they undertake preparation training
- Review the terminology used on documentation to clearly demonstrate that the agency is making a decision, rather than ratifying panel's recommendations and record the reason for the decision
- Ensure that there is clear evidence that all staff are fit to work for the purpose of an adoption service
- Review safeguarding procedures to ensure that they include historical abuse allegations
- Consider providing information for birth parents on how to access counselling in languages other than English.

PROCEDURAL IMPLICATIONS

All procedural recommendations have been implemented.

REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES

The OFSTED inspectors said that our CP procedures must include a section covering 32.4 from the *'Insertions, amendments and revisions to the Adoption National Minimum Standards'*, which states:

'The adoption agency has written procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse which may be made by service users during the course of service provision'.

[Regulations: The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 - *Arrangements for the protection of children*].

Our Safeguarding Department was therefore asked to ensure this was included in the revised London Procedures. As it applied to other London Boroughs, a local procedure for Hillingdon was not deemed necessary. This has been actioned and it is included in the revised procedures.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Full consideration will be given to any resource implications resulting from the progression of the key tasks highlighted in the action plan. The Director of Children and Young People Services will ensure that any costs arising can be contained within the approved budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The inspection is carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 and contributes to Ofsted's annual review of performance of each local authority's children's services function and will be taken into account in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's statutory annual performance rating of the Authority.

Since the enactment of the Children Act 2004, the Authority is responsible for improving outcomes for children and young people, working with its partners through the Children and Young People Trust. OFSTED assesses the performance of the Authority in ensuring the provision of universal and specialist services, with reference to the Every Child Matters outcome framework.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Where recommendations have implications for staff training, particularly in relation to safeguarding, these will be considered carefully and an action plan produced which will be reported to a future meeting.