



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

Birmingham City Council Adoption Service

Beechenhurst
10 Serpentine Road
Selly Park
Birmingham
B29 7HU

13th – 17th September 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

ADOPTION SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of Local Authority

Birmingham City Council Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

Beechenhurst, 10 Serpentine Road, Selly Park,
Birmingham, B29 7HU

Adoption Service Manager

Helen French

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Address

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Birmingham, B29 7HU

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0121 464 1098

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Certificate number of this Adoption Service

Date of last inspection

NA

**Date, if any, of last SSI themed inspection of
Adoption Service**

NA

Date of Inspection Visit		13 th September 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Vivien Slyfield	075999
Name of Inspector	2	Helen Norry	
Name of Inspector	3	Rosie Dancer	
Name of Inspector	4	Ros Chapman	
	5	Sean White	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Local authority Adoption Services are subject to inspection by CSCI, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976 as amended, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of **Birmingham City Council Adoption Service**. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Birmingham City Council (BCC) Adoption Service is part of the provision of services of the City Council's division for Social Care and Health. It is the largest local authority in the country and is complex and diverse. The structure of the Adoption Service has been under review in the last two years. The size of the service creates particular challenges and opportunities. BCC had just under 2,000 looked after children at the time of this inspection. Changes in the Adoption Service had run alongside changes in the organisation of Social Care and Health. The City's services have been split into areas and city wide services have been located under the North Area Directorate. Adoption has therefore come under the responsibility of the Area Director for the North of the City. It was also decided that in June 2003 that Fostering and Adoption Services should be separated under two Heads of Operation. The current Head of Operation was appointed to the Adoption Service but continued to hold responsibility for both services until June of this year.

The Adoption Service provides for the recruitment, preparation, training, assessment and support of adopters, including inter-country adopters. The service provides family finding for children needing adoptive placements, including babies whose mothers wish them to be placed for adoption. The Service also provides Section 51 counselling.

The approach to the structure of the service has been to create teams that focus on different aspects of the adoption process.

The first stage of recruitment is undertaken by the **Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Team** based in the City centre in the Adoption and Fostering Shop, 203 Corporation Street. The manager has a small team who recruit all the carers and provide information via regular open meetings. The Administrative staff apply for all the required references at the time the applicants decide to proceed. The team gathers information about placement needs and follows up enquiries about adoption and fostering. The team is informed by the area teams of any kinship care placements made.

At the point of application the work transfers to the **Adoption and Fostering Assessment Team**. This team provides pre-approval training, undertakes assessments and completes Schedule 2 reports for stepparent and relative adoption applications. The pre-approval training is managed by a Training Co-ordinator and delivered on a modular basis. This team presents assessments to the panel.

The size and scope of the service is most clearly reflected in the panel system, which has led to the establishment of the **Fostering and Adoption Panel Team**. This team is responsible for the administration of the panels. There are four separate adoption panels, Blue, Purple, Green and Red, which sit fortnightly. The Panel Team also manages the Central Resource Exchange (CRE), which is the department's permanent database recording all panel statistics and providing a matching and monitoring system for children with approved plans.

Once approved adopters are transferred to the **Adoption Support Team**, which provides post approval support and post placement support and training for adoptive families. This team also facilitates post adoption contact arrangements, including a Letterbox contact system, reviews adoption allowances and financial support and undertakes birth records counselling. There were proposals under consideration for the development of a second adoption support team.

The Family Finding Adoption Team identifies and pursues potential placements for children. They process referrals to ensure the relevant issues and concerns are identified, arrange link meetings, attend panel, liaise with external agencies and ensure post placement support is available.

The Adoption Service is part of the West Midlands Adoption Consortium and participates in sharing information and resources as appropriate.

The staff within the Adoption Service have a clear focus that “no matter where you are within the organisation you are responsible and accountable for your job and the outcome for that particular child”.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This inspection was the first of Birmingham City Council's Adoption Service undertaken in relation to The Care Standards Act 2000 Part III and the National Minimum Standards 2003. The developments in adoption legislation and practice have initiated significant changes for those delivering an adoption service. This inspection is in the context of Birmingham's Children's Services facing a complex and demanding agenda for change of a service with a history of serious concerns. Changes were taking place across the service in addition to those faced by the Adoption Service.

A decision had been reached in the middle of 2003 that the Adoption and Fostering Services should be headed by two Operations Managers and the current Operations Manager had been in post with sole responsibility for Adoption for four months. It was clear that the manager had undertaken a full audit of the Adoption Service and was aware of areas in need of further work. There continue to be recruitment difficulties in finding staff for positions within the service. However, the inspection was responded to in a positive and open manner by all staff. The nominated manager provided a very full and comprehensive Self-Assessment Document and Pre-Inspection Questionnaire, which have assisted the inspection. All the arrangements for the inspection worked well, including the provision of office and interview space, the punctuality of personnel for interviews. The inspectors felt welcomed and appreciated the effort that was essential to ensure this inspection worked so well. It is much to their credit that staff and managers were able to plan and arrange an inspection that ran very smoothly, with all those involved understanding their role and contributing in an open manner.

The inspection included observation of two meetings of the adoption panels and the papers presented and information from questionnaires returned by prospective and approved adopters, placing social workers, birth family members and specialist advisors.

As the first inspection there are some areas in need of work. The inspectors were conscious of the commitment and enthusiasm of adoption managers and staff to developing and improving their service. It is hoped that this report and its findings will assist them in this process.

A summary of the full report is as follows:

Statement of Purpose.

This standard was assessed and found to be partially met.

There was a clear Statement of Purpose, which identified the aims and objectives of the Adoption Service for Birmingham City Council.

Further work was needed on the Children's Guide to finalise the consultation and add the contact details for CSCI.

Securing and promoting children's welfare.

This standard was assessed and found to be partly met

There was a sound recruitment system in place, which was supported and enhanced by the establishment of a Promotions Officer. There was evidence of strong and well-considered campaigns to recruit adopters.

There was evidence of delays, however, at different stages in the process, which clearly had an impact on the needs of the children seeking placements. Managers were aware of the delays and had taken recent action to address the difficulties. Inspectors were also concerned about the quality of Form E reports and the failure to complete corrections identified by the adoption panel in the final draft of these documents.

Prospective and Approved Adopters.

3 of the 4 standards assessed were partly met and 1 was well met

The recruitment system appeared to work effectively and efficiently. Adopters were given a choice of courses at different times of the day. More work is needed to provide appropriate information for inter-country adopters and kinship and foster carers need to be given the same opportunities for training as other adopters. Preparation training was seen to be informative and helpful in assisting adopters in their care of children, although there were some examples of the need for greater awareness from adopters on the impact of past relationships for children.

There was evidence of some high quality assessment work.

The recording of appropriate details from CRB checks needs to be improved. Some of the changes in the service reflected issues raised by adopters, in particular the introduction of information sessions about the process of adoption. However, adopters were not aware of their views being sought and felt they were not consistently well informed about the progress of their application.

There is a need to ensure consistency in the provision of information to adopters about matching. The changes to the agreement form between the service and adopters in relation to contact were seen positively.

Birth Parents and Birth Families.

1 of the 3 standards assessed was met, 2 were partly met.

There were some concerns about the service to birth families. There was very limited awareness of possible support groups from them and a very mixed picture about how well involved and informed they were about the adoption process. There were a number of examples of Forms E not being signed by birth parents (although this was challenged through the panels). There was evidence of good work in seeking information about children's heritage and of the maintenance of this through Letterbox and other forms of contact. The proposal to develop a second Adoption Support Team was seen as a positive move which would assist the work

Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions.

2 of the 4 standards assessed was seen as commendable, 2 were partially met

The panel system for the service was seen to run effectively and efficiently. The organisation of the panel system was seen to demonstrate good practice. Panels had a good range of membership, although there is a need to address the independence of some of the members in this position. The system had good and effective panel chairpersons who were well supported by the panel advisers. Considerable effort had gone towards ensuring consistency between the panels.

The checks, references and details on panel members and their signed agreements are not in place on all members' personnel files. Action had already been initiated in relation to this. There have been some recent changes to the way the panel operates. There was a new chair and new panel adviser who have been effective in initiating changes. The overall organisation of panels is good, with regular monthly meetings and panel minutes were full, detailed and gave a clear record of the meeting. There is a need to look at the panel process to ensure the confidentiality of referees and allow panel members to ask sensitive questions in an appropriate manner.

The decision needs to be communicated in writing to adopters as soon as possible.

Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency.

Both of the 2 standards assessed were met

The current nominated manager of the Adoption Service is knowledgeable, experienced and skilled in adoption work. She is a qualified social worker and was undertaking an NVQ 5 in Management. There was evidence of sound developments implemented by the current manager. The management team in the adoption service were committed and enthusiastic about their work. Staff expressed confidence in managers and found them approachable and accessible at all levels.

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency.

2 of the 3 standards were assessed as almost met and 1 as met.

The overall impression was of a well managed service, which was run effectively and efficiently within the resources available and in line with the Statement of Purpose. There was evidence the City Councillors were kept informed of developments within the adoption service. The monitoring systems within the panels with Notices of Appreciation/Concern were seen as positive.

The areas in need of some strengthening were agreed timescales for transfers between teams, continued monitoring of delays and action to address this and adherence to the BCC complaints policy in terms of timescales. The review of the protocol in relation to specialist advisers needs to be finalised. Efforts need to continue in the recruitment and retention of good quality staff.

Employment and Management of Staff.

3 of the 5 standards assessed were met and 2 standards were almost met

It is the opinion of the inspectors that the members of staff involved in the adoption service were suitably qualified and experienced in childcare as well as adoption. They received regular, planned supervision and were clear about the roles, responsibility and accountability of those employed by the service.

There was a need to strengthen some of the inter-team communication systems, although some worked well. There was a lack of direct training about the implications of recent Inquiries which staff need to be aware of in order to inform their practice.

The organisation and support of sessional and independent workers was well organised and managed.

Records.

3 of the 4 standards assessed were met and 1 was not met

There was a clear and informative written policy on recording supported by specific guidance for social workers in relation to reports such as Forms E. It was disappointing to note some Form E's were of a poor standard despite this guidance being available. Some files were in good order and well recorded, some were not so clear and it was difficult for managers to establish the reasons for delays from the record. The inspectors were concerned that there was a lack of consistency in the content of Adoption files established when adoption has been identified as the plan. There was also concern about the poor standard of some Forms E, as referred to earlier.

The Human Resources section maintained personnel records of all employees. CRB checks were undertaken appropriately on all new staff. There had been some delays in the system for renewing checks on existing staff.

Fitness Of Premises

The 1 standard was assessed as met

The premises were seen as adequate for their purpose.

Questionnaires

Comments from the questionnaires have been incorporated into the report within the appropriate sections.

Adopters and Prospective Adopters returned 18

Birth Families returned 8

Placing Social Workers returned 13

Specialist Advisors returned 3

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's Adoption Service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NA

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their Adoption Service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of a failure by a Local Authority Adoption Service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NA

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority Adoption Service:

NA

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
(Not relevant at first CSCI inspection)**

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate officer of the Local Authority is requested to provide the Commission with an action plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan is shown in Part D of this report.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 or the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services. The Authority is required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for Adoption Services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	The Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 7	LA2	The Adoption Service must ensure that records are kept on children's files, which record the reasons for decisions made in relation to placements.	Immediate
2	The Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 8	LA4	The Adoption Service must ensure that full details of date of birth, status of the check and the reference number, are recorded on applicants' files in relation to Criminal Records Bureau checks.	Immediate
3	The Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 7(2)(b)	LA6	The Adoption Service must ensure that "later-life letters" are consistently in place on all adoption files.	Immediate
4	The Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 7(3)(b)	LA7	The Adoption Service must ensure that the appropriate information is given to and sought from birth parents and that they sign documentation or an explanation is given in relation to the absence of a signature.	Immediate

5	The Adoption Agencies and Children (Arrangements for Placement and Reviews) Regs 1997 Reg 11 (9)	LA13	The Adoption Service must notify prospective adoptive parents of its decision in respect of matters considered at panel as soon as possible after the decision has been made and keep a copy of this letter on the adopter's file.	Immediate
6	L A Adoption Service Regs 2003 Reg 12 (2) (a)	LA23	The Adoption Service must ensure that adoption staff have training in child protection issues and in the findings of current childcare enquiries.	25.2.05.
7	Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 7 (2) (a), (b)	LA25	The Adoption Service must ensure that an appropriate adoption file is maintained on all children from the point adoption is identified as their plan.	Immediate
8	The Adoption Agencies Regs 1983 Reg 14 (1)	LA25	The Adoption Service must ensure confidentiality of records at all times.	Immediate

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	LA1	The Adoption Service should finalise the draft Children's Guide and amend it to comply with NMS 1.4
2	LA3	The Adoption Service should ensure that all those applying to adopt, including kinship carers, are pursued appropriately allowing as short a time as possible for children to wait for placements.
3	LA4	The Adoption Service should consider methods of providing appropriate information for inter-country adopters.
4	LA20LA4	The Adoption Service should offer the same information and preparation to all prospective adopters, including foster carers and kinship carers, whose applications should be handled as speedily as new applicants to the service.
5	LA4	The Adoption Service should ensure that the safety of prospective adopters' homes is assessed consistently.
6	LA4	The Adoption Service should ensure that all adopters are prepared for dealing with issues of a child's relationships.
7	LA4	The Adoption Service should establish clear and effective systems of communication with prospective adopters to allow feedback to be received and applicants to be kept informed.
8	LA5	The Adoption Service should ensure that all adopters received written information about adoption and specifically about the Adoption Register.
9	LA6	Inter-country adopters should consistently be given access to an appropriate level of support and advice.
10	LA6	The Adoption Service should ensure that all those with access to information about a child's past make sure it is stored securely.
11	LA9 LA7	The Adoption Service should ensure that birth parents are kept informed about any delays in the adoption of their child/ren, given advice about support groups and asked their views about the service they have received.
12	LA11	The Adoption Service should review the use of part-time workers as independent panel members to ensure true independence from the service.

13	LA13	The decision makers should be allowed time to read the panel papers in advance of panel in order to allow time to raise concerns should they arise.
14	LA13	The Adoption Service should arrange a regular meeting between decision makers, panel chairs and adoption managers.
15	LA20LA16	The Adoption Service should consider the introduction of timescales and a protocol for the transfer of work across the teams in the service.
16	LA18	The provision of legal advice to the Adoption Service should be timely, ensuring there are no delays for children needing adoptive placements.
17	LA15	The reviewed protocol for specialist advisers should be finalised.
18	LA23	The Adoption Service should develop an appraisal system to assist with staff development.
19	LA25	The Adoption Service should establish a consistent system of recording the supervisor's decisions on file.

- Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. LA10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Placing authority survey	YES
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	NA
• Interview with children	NO
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	YES
• Interview with birth family members	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints, allegations)	YES
Date of Inspection	13/09/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	196.5
Number of Inspector days	26.2
Additional Inspection Questions:	
Certificate of Registration was displayed at time of inspection	NA
The certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	NA
Total Number of staff employed (excluding managers)	42
42 plus 10 vacancies at the time of the inspection	

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable on this occasion.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.2, 1.3 (partial) and 1.4 – 1.7)

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Statement of Purpose

There was a clear Statement of Purpose, which identified the aims and objectives of the Adoption Service for Birmingham City Council (BCC). Staff were aware of the Statement of Purpose and it was reported that all staff, including independent workers are given copies. It was also available to staff via Birmingham's electronic library and posted on Birmingham's Adoption and Fostering website. It appropriately includes details of the service, its constitution, organisation, structure, methods of monitoring, a summary of the complaints procedure and details of staff and their experience and qualifications.

It was planned that the Statement of Purpose be reviewed annually and it was reviewed shortly before this inspection with a report to Cabinet on 9.9.04.

Children's Guide

At the time of the inspection there were two Children's Guides in use. The West Midlands Consortium had produced one and another was being developed by the Adoption Service to expand on the former document. It was positive to note that the Guide was being used while still in draft and that children's groups were being used in consultation.

There were some areas that need further work before it can be finalised. The summary of the Statement of Purpose, the procedure for adoption and complaints needs to be more child friendly in language and presentation. Information needs to be included about the availability of advocates and the contact information should be available about CSCI as well as the Children's Rights Director.

The inspectors were informed that different forms of communication were available for the Guide and Statement on request and that there was work underway looking at different formats, which would soon be available via the electronic library.

Policies and procedures for the service were in the process of being reviewed, which was evident in the documents seen by the inspectors.

Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually?
(Record N/A if the information is not available)

NA

Has the Statement been formally approved by the executive side of the council?

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

YES

Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?

NO

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Adoption Service had a written plan for the implementation and evaluation of its recruitment strategy. BCC have appointed a Promotions Officer with marketing experience to work with the Adoption Service in recruitment of appropriate adopters. The Promotions Officer works closely with the Recruitment and Family Finding Teams in the development of recruitment projects, running campaigns and establishing marketing plans. Some of this work was clear in the posters around the City and in a range of promotional material including bags, mugs, rubbers and note-pads advertising the Fostering and Adoption Service.

This work reflects the strongly diverse nature of the communities served by BCC. Leaflets relating to the current campaigns at the time of the inspection illustrated Birmingham's need for a wide range of adopters with different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. The Multi-Faith Project has focused on making and maintaining links with different religious groups and the material available relates adoption to specific aspects of individual faiths. The campaign at the time of the inspection had a particular drive on the need for siblings to be placed together.

There was evidence in matching of the panel's appropriate consideration of ethnic, cultural and religious needs and of the need for siblings to be placed together where appropriate. These issues were considered alongside the impact of possible delays in finding appropriate placements for children.

While the systems within the Adoption Service were clear and supported safe and appropriate placements there was evidence from children's files that clear explanations and statements were not consistently recorded. The Adoption Service had a range of guidance and advice available to social workers to assist them in clear and appropriate recording but social work recording practice was still inconsistent.

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?

119

How many children were matched with adopters?

131

How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?

43

How many children were placed with other services' adopters?

93

How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?

125

In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families, which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?

136

Birmingham has more precise information on this category, 78% matched on three of the above

99% on two

100% on one

What percentage of children matched with the Adoption Service's adopters does this represent?

100

%

How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?
How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made about adopters approved by this Adoption Service?
On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?

25
0
99

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **The adoption agency recruits and supports sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, who can offer children a stable and permanent home to achieve a successful and lasting placement.**

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.3 and 3.5 - 3.6)

Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>In 2001 following a restructuring of the organisation it was acknowledged that the adoption and fostering service would benefit from a recruitment shop. It was recognition that the City had a large number of children in the Looked After System, and that it was crucial the service promoted the needs of children for family placements across the City.</p> <p>The aim was to look at corporate responsibility for family finding and to find a place that was accessible and visible to the people of Birmingham and surrounding areas. The adoption service were offered a shop by the City council near well known landmarks that would ensure it was easily recognisable.</p> <p>The adoption service developed a City centre resource that is staffed each day including Saturday mornings by social workers and a full time administration team. The ethos of the resource was to encourage drop in callers and there was a wealth of information available to assist them in considering adoption. There was an information pack available to callers and a video which raised the issues of adoption, which had been funded through the Quality Protects programme.</p> <p>The recruitment team were based in offices close to the shop, and included social workers and promotional officers. Additional posts had been made available through the “Choice Protects programme” and it was hoped there would be recruitment to these in the near future. The team considered they had a variety of skills and were able to run five promotional events a year. The responsibility of the manager and the team was to manage the recruitment centre, ensure it is open for callers, answer daily enquiry telephone calls and e-mail enquiries and ensure information packs were sent out to prospective applicants. Statistics were collated on all activities of the recruitment service; this was done on a weekly basis to ensure the adoption service could evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of the recruitment resource.</p> <p>Information evenings were held at regular intervals.</p>	<p>Standard met?</p>	<p>4</p>

Once an applicant has made an “expression of interest”, screening visits were arranged. To ensure these are completed in a timely manner the adoption service were looking to recruit a worker whose specific responsibility will be to undertake screening visits. Until an appointment is made the adoption service will pay workers overtime allowances to ensure the visits are made. The screening visits were used to counsel people out or to prioritise assessments where applicants are making a specific application for children with mixed parentage, sibling groups and challenging older children. The service acknowledged family finding for 0 to 2year olds was not a priority and that applicants were informed of this at the point they expressed an interest in the adoption process. Once a screening visit was completed and the applicant decided to proceed their referral was sent to the Assessment team.

All staff within the team were appropriately supervised and where unqualified workers were working with families their work was closely supervised by the manager.

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

There was a well-structured programme of preparation, assessment and approval. The size of the service has led to the separation of tasks within the recruitment, assessment and approval process. The Assessment Team undertakes all assessment and preparation work and evaluates the preparation training.

Preparation

The inspectors received information from adopters, which indicated that there have been significant delays between an expression of interest, the receipt of the application and adopters being invited to the Preparation Group. The longest delayed indicated in the information received was from November 2001 – January 2003. There were other examples of prospective adopters waiting from three to twelve months. While this is a concern the Adoption Service had become aware of the delay prior to the inspection and had put in place Information Session about Preparation for Adoption. This allowed for an earlier meeting with prospective adopters. At the time of the inspection the system was for prospective adopters to be invited to attend an information session about preparation within two weeks of receipt of their application. It was positive to note action taken on the basis of information from adopters to address this delay.

The preparation training was planned and led by experienced adoption social workers from the Assessment Team. Applicants were given information about adoption and what was involved in the assessment process.

Inter-country adopters attended the same preparation and the service acknowledged that there was limited information for those seeking this type of adoption. However, inter-country adopters were given information about sources of information and groups with this particular focus. Some inter-country adopters informed the inspectors that they had attended training in London, which had been useful.

There was evidence from some adopters that those who had been foster carers were not consistently offered the same preparation training as other adopters. This needs to be addressed to ensure that all prospective adopters are offered the same information and preparation.

While there are some areas in need of strengthening in relation to preparation training it was also noted that the service provides preparation groups for the birth children of adopters. This is commendable and positive comments were received by inspectors about the groups during the inspection.

Assessment

The information leaflets for prospective adopters seen at the time of the inspection were informative about the needs of children needing adoptive placements. The information available in the Shop in the centre of Birmingham expanded on this and gave a picture of the local children waiting and of those children the service was finding it difficult to place. Examples were seen during the inspection of applicants' response to specific campaigns meeting the needs of specific children.

There was evidence of situations where applicants had been "fast-tracked". This followed an early identification of a possible link with a child or children. The Central Resource Exchange (CRE) holds a database with information about children needing adoptive placements. This information is used to identify potential matches at an early stage. Staff also talked of informal networking, which made them aware of possible links and led to prospective adopters being "fast-tracked". During the inspection there was also evidence of kinship carers' expression of interest not being pursued appropriately. The applicants were left with the impression that they needed to "chase-up" their application.

At an early stage the Adoption Service has reintroduced a "screening visit" to all prospective

adopters. Inspectors were told that this was to address the issue of a number of applicants who it was felt had started on the process inappropriately. While the inspectors were not able to comment on the effect of this change the principle of raising issues at an early stage with applicants is sound and should assist the smooth running of the service.

There was evidence of some sound assessment work undertaken by the Adoption Service, some of which was seen as excellent by the inspectors. Work had been undertaken on developing the use of competency-based assessments, which has led to a consistent approach and which is understood by all those involved. The assessment work includes a Safety Questionnaire and a Pet Assessment. Some of these were comprehensively completed addressing issues of concern in the home. Others were not of the same standard and needed to be improved in quality.

A system was in place for seeking references and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. However, inspectors had some concerns that the memo from Human Resources did not note the reference number or the status of the CRB check. One was also missing the date of birth.

Adopters reflected mixed views to inspectors about how they had experienced their assessments. Some had very positive experiences, were impressed with their social worker's skill, knowledge, sensitivity and expertise. Others had found the assessment process negative and belittling. Adopters who returned their questionnaire were mixed in their response about how well they were kept informed about the process (7 were "always well informed", 7 were "sometimes" and 4 were "usually") a majority of 9 felt they had not been asked for their views of the service. This indicates the need for communication to be strengthened and for the adoption service to make explicit the way in which they listen to the views of adopters. There was evidence that the service does respond to issues raised by adopters, but adopters did not reflect this and the communication needs to be consistent and systematic, to allow the service to make full use of the information.

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

At the stage of approval adopters in the BCC Adoption Service were transferred to the Adoption Support Team. Some workers felt this transition did not serve adopters well as they needed to develop a relationship with a new worker having got to know their assessing worker well through the assessment process. The reports of adopters' experiences of this stage in the process varied. Some felt they had full and sufficient information, others that they had received no written information at all until just before the inspection. The majority who responded to the questionnaire stated they had no information about the adoption register, only one said they had received this information. In terms of matching a number of adopters felt they had full information about children they were considering.

The inspectors saw the Welcome Pack, which was given to newly approved adopters. It appeared that receipt of this pack was new and it is a positive move towards providing information for adopters.

There had also been recent changes in the system used by BCC in relation to seeking agreement from adopters in the event of their child's death. A new form has been added to the Form F assessment which specifies this as well as issues of contact and the importance of information from the birth family. This information was not fully recorded on all files, as the system was new. However, there was evidence of clear agreements about contact arrangements and that the Letterbox System worked effectively.

At the stage of consideration at panel the adopters had prepared a book about themselves and their family. Some of these were of a high quality and were seen to provide helpful and accessible information to children.

Does the local authority have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)

Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Key findings and evidence**Standard met?**

2

In relation to support for adopters the picture was mixed. There was evidence of some adopters feeling well supported and very positive about the Adoption Service. Others felt they had seen little of their support worker and some felt there had been delays in the allocation of a support worker following their approval. In the information received during the inspection it was evident there was a lack of support for kinship carers and foster carers who adopted. Some of the issues raised at this stage related to the change in worker, but must be put in the context of some very positive comments such as, “All the staff are extremely helpful and supportive”.

During the inspection there was evidence that for some adopters the issues of the child’s background and how to deal with this had not been fully explored. Other adopters demonstrated sensitivity and awareness in supporting their children and providing appropriate information for them. Leaflets were seen to be available to adopters that provided appropriate supportive information. Assessing social workers need to be confident of applicants’ understanding of these issues and able to highlight the need for particular support at the point that work transfers to the Adoption Support Team.

Although there were some exceptions, the majority of information indicated that the Adoption Service had prepared adopters well and in many situations supported them well. The placing social workers who returned questionnaires unanimously felt that adopters were well prepared and some gave examples of how the adopters had related their experience of adoption to the training they received.

Arrangements for the support and advice of inter-country adopters was seen to be an area of improving practice where there is a need for progress to continue. At the time of the inspection the knowledge and experience of staff was still limited and this area was acknowledged as one in need of strengthening.

Adopters indicated an awareness and understanding of the significance and importance of information from birth families. However, there was an example of information being lost to the child by the social worker giving the Life Story Book to the birth mother who refused to return it. Clearly there are issues of practice to be addressed where such a situation can arise.

There was information indicating that the Adoption Service worked well with adopters in addressing forms of racism and discrimination and in supporting adopters in the development of strategies to help their children cope with these issues.

Work to assist adopters in the maintenance of a positive self-identity for children was positive in many areas. The evidence was that the majority of adopters had a clear understanding of the importance of the child’s personal history in the development of personal identity. There were some examples of excellent life story work undertaken by adopters. Some felt they had little support from the child’s social worker in this work. There was also an example of a file, which had no letter for the child in later life.

There was evidence of only one disruption within the service. From the returned placing social workers’ questionnaires 21 placements had been made and only one had disrupted. When this does occur there was a procedure in place indicating that a Disruption Meeting must be held, organised by the Adoption Support Team, and that it must plan and provide support for the adopters.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months

30

Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	39
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	43
Number of adopters approved but not matched	38
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	57
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	5

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>There were some concerns about the quality of the service provided to birth parents by the Adoption Service. There was information that a birth father had complained that he had not been kept informed about the adoption of his child and that his views had not been recorded by the social worker. There were also examples on files of the recording of birth parents' views.</p> <p>Questionnaires were sent to birth families as part of the inspection. Of the 8, which were returned, 7 felt the service had worked "actively " on their behalf and that staff had been helpful, 6 of them felt respected by staff and all said they were satisfied with the service they have received. The areas in need of some improvement were keeping birth parents informed, especially when there are delays, providing information about support groups and in asking their views about the service.</p> <p>There was evidence of birth parent's views being recorded on adoption files and of their signature being present on Forms E relating to the child. However, this was not consistently in place. There was clear evidence from the panels of the challenge to social workers where this information was not available and clear guidance to assist the process, but there were still some adoption files, which did not have the information in place. Despite this shortfall there were examples of good practice, one birth parent wrote that "a worker at Silvermere wrote what I wanted", so enabling this parent's contribution to plans for her child.</p>		

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>As stated earlier there are approaches made by the Adoption Service to ensure that birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage. There were examples of foster carers contributing a great deal of work to the development and continuation of life-story work. The inspectors had information from grandparents, as well as parents, who had been asked to contribute information. One grandparent had experienced a range of practice from being well included and contributing a lot of information to being asked for very little. Awareness of information about heritage is raised as an issues at panels and shortfalls identified and followed-up.</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1)

The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The Adoption Service has a service level agreement with "Adoption Support Working Across the Midlands" (ASWAM) to provide support from the point a child's plan for adoption has been ratified. From comments referred to earlier, birth families indicated the need for more information about support groups and for direct support for some birth families. Some information related to this lack of support earlier in 2004. Information The Adoption Support Team Letterbox System allows for the continued contribution to children's heritage. Inspectors were informed that it was planned that this service was to be developed and given further resources.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

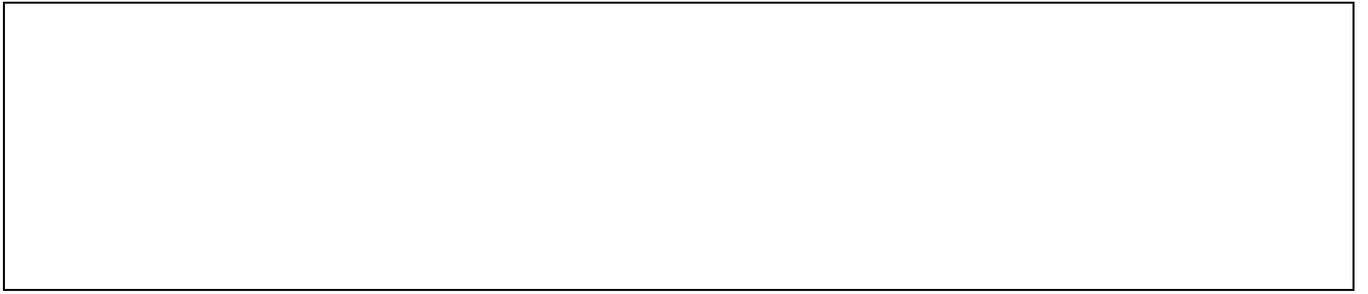
The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>As part of the restructuring of the service in 2001 a panel team was established which administers all Birmingham's Adoption and Fostering Panels. There were seven panels, which sit up to a total of thirteen times a month between them. All the panels were colour coded to assist staff in the management of such a large volume of panels. The administrative processes were also colour coded and were easy to follow. The four adoption panels were scheduled on alternate weeks. The Panel Team consisted of a Team Manager, three Panel Advisers (although there were only two in post at the time of the inspection), two Senior Administrative Officers, one Administrative Assistant, five Minute Takers and four Administrative Support Workers.</p> <p>As part of this inspection the Team manager for the panel team was interviewed and gave a comprehensive account of the procedures in place to ensure there was an efficient panel service available. The panel team work to the Adoption Standards 2001 and the time scales laid down in the adoption standards formed the foundation for the development of the panel teams and more recently the National Minimum Standards to ensure all work was undertaken in a timely manner. Each panel was responsible for a particular area of Birmingham although urgent work can be taken to any panel provided panel members were not involved in any day-to-day casework decisions regarding the work being submitted.</p> <p>It was clear it had been a major task to set up a panel team and the number of panels required to ensure work was dealt with quickly and to ensure the decision-making processes were conducted in a more transparent arena. It would appear it has not been without its problems but the adoption managers had persevered with their vision to develop a clear organisational structure and to have very clear roles and responsibilities within the service.</p> <p>The team manager for panel oversees all the work taken to panel. She would withdraw work if she feels it was not of an appropriate standard and would help and guide social work staff through the panel process and the work required to be undertaken before attendance at panel. The administration team had a booking in and reminder system to monitor the work being sent through and when it was due at panel. As part of a new member of staff induction programme they observe a panel and are talked through panel procedures.</p> <p>There were appropriate panel policies and procedures in place.</p> <p>All panel members had a Handbook; which is an excellent resource for them and included a number of useful reference documents, child protection inquiries, legislation and practice notes on key adoption issues. Prospective adopters were encouraged to attend the adoption panel and were supported through the process. There were leaflets available, which offer further practical advice.</p>		



Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)
 The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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All panel members were expected to attend at least 75% of panel meetings and the panel advisors monitor quoracy. If a panel was not quorate then panel was cancelled but not before panel members have been contacted and reminded of their responsibilities and commitment to ensuring timely outcomes for children.

There were up to thirteen panels a month and 70 panel members, who have to be managed, some panel members sit on two panels. Panel membership was constantly monitored and issues around gender, age, child care experience and diversity issues were always under review. The current arrangement of the use of a part-time worker for the Adoption Service as an independent panel member on her non-working days is questionable in terms of independence and needs to be reviewed.

Panel members were recruited through word of mouth, or internal or external adverts. Panel chairs were formally interviewed as part of their recruitment and selection.

All new panel members observe a panel before taking a full and active part in panel.

All panel members were expected to sign a confidentiality statement and have an appropriate CRB check before attending panel.

The team manager for the panel team observed panel to ensure the work of each panel was consistent and that it follows departmental policies and procedures.

Where work submitted to panel fell short of the required standard, arrangements were made to discuss it with the senior managers supervising the worker and a notice of concern issued. Where work was of a good quality a notice of appreciation was sent to the area manager and social worker.

The panel team manager and professional advisers visit area teams to provide basic training on Form E's, recording, attending panel, twin tracking and permanency.

There has been one joint panel-training day between panel members and the adoption team this was identified by the service as an area for development and will be on a more regular basis in future.

The adoption service was looking at ways to develop the service and was considering developing the IT skills of panel members so that can receive panel papers on disc or by e-mail once confidentiality and the security of the network can be assured.

A number of statistics are collated so that the activities of each panel can be monitored and evaluated.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO	
Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	YES	

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)

Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

In BCC the Adoption Service's panel system was well structured, thought-out and innovative to meet the needs of the large number of adoption matters the city needs to consider and minimise delays in allocating panel dates. Details of the organisation of the panel system are identified in Standard 10 of this report and support the evidence for this Standard.

The Panel Team included BCC's Permanent Database – the Central Resource Exchange (CRE). A CRE Co-ordinator manages the database with the support of two administrative staff. CRE provided statistical reports of panel activity, monitored the performance of the service and provided statistical information required for this inspection.

CRE also provided family finding matches between children and adopters. It is the identified link with the National Adoption Register and the West Midlands Consortium Register.

The methods for managing the flow of such a large volume of information appeared to work extremely effectively. It was possible for Panel Advisers to check information prior to its presentation at panel and they were therefore confident that panels had the appropriate details needed to make recommendations.

In order to maintain consistency a panel agenda has been established for all matters presented to panel and was followed by the panel chair, supported by the panel adviser. The time allocated was seen to be appropriate in most situations, where the time was extended it was observed to be appropriate in addressing the needs of the children under consideration. Those attending panel were given a copy of the appropriate agenda and an explanation about the process.

Panel members were sent papers in secure, sealed envelopes with sufficient time prior to panel to allow for reading and preparation. The panels observed during the inspection indicated panel members were well prepared and well informed about their responsibilities.

The minutes of the panels were clearly recorded and gave appropriate information about the discussions, conclusions and recommendations made.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Adoption Service has two senior managers as decision makers, again reflecting the size of the task and volume of work. They received the panel papers by courier on the day of the panel and reported they did not read them until the minutes were also available. The process needed to allow for “ the decision-maker (to take) into account all the information surrounding the case and the panel's recommendation before making a considered and professional decision.” (NMS13.2) It was recognised that the size of the service had a direct impact on this process and the process needed to ensure that decision were made effectively and efficiently, preventing possible delay.

The decision makers were both experienced in child care and reported they were able to raise concerns in relation to reports presented to panel and to follow this up with the appropriate managers. There was however, no forum for the decision makers, managers of the Adoption Service and panel chairs to meet on a regular basis. It was reported that there had previously been a Permanency Forum, which drew together staff working in this area. It would be positive if this meeting were reinstated.

Although it was reported to the inspectors that the system for notifying adopters of the agency's decision had been improved to address delays there was evidence of delays still occurring within the months preceding the inspection. Within the files seen there were examples of delays of two, five, and six weeks, the latter occurring in July 2004. There was also concern that one of the files seen by the inspectors had no letter of approval in place. The changes to the system need to be reviewed to ensure the letters reach adopters within a reasonable timescale. The Adoption Standards 2001 specify adopters should be informed of decisions in writing within seven days. The BCC policy should reflect this in the timescale they specify rather than fourteen days in the current BCC procedure.

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.3 and 14.5 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The managers of the Adoption Service were experienced and suitably qualified. All had experience of childcare and of family finding and had appropriate job descriptions. BCC was reported to be exploring NVQ in Management for the adoption managers. The Operations Manager was undertaking an NVQ 5 in Management at the time of the inspection and has a number of year's experience of management in childcare settings.

All the managers hold responsibility for devolved budgets and are supported in this responsibility with monthly meetings with Finance staff.

In addition to this the managers met during the inspection demonstrated considerable commitment and enthusiasm about the Adoption Service and were positive about changes and future developments.

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

YES

Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?

YES

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

BCC has an employment file on each member of the adoption service. The service is looking to develop an electronic filing system with restricted access for personnel files. The manual files observed were neat and in an orderly manner and information was easily retrievable. The personnel manager was fully aware of the National Minimum Standards and the relevant section that affected employment files.

The responsibility to recruit appropriate staff to the service rests with the service manager. Once a vacancy is identified the post goes to the Employee Relations team to assess the grade and to ensure there is an appropriate job description in place. Certain posts/ grades have to go to a cabinet member for approval.

Where redeployment is being considered the applicant has to demonstrate a 70% skill match to the post.

There was a formal interview process for all posts, and appointments are subject to a satisfactory CRB and references.

There is very good checklist at the front of each file which sets out the applicant's details, CRB outcome, identification checks and photograph. Each form is signed by the employee and confirms they have received a copy of the service's statements of purpose and working policies.

There is no indication of the status of the CRB checks undertaken on each member of staff. The memorandum sent to the service manager confirming a satisfactory CRB clearance should be more explicit it currently uses words like a "negative response" and does not indicate the status of the check.

On one file there was evidence of robust disciplinary procedures in place.

Exit interviews are undertaken where staff agree to being involved in the process.

At the front of each file an events card was displayed so career paths could be followed easily, and any patterns and trends regarding employment issues could be quickly identified.

Recent files showed telephone verification of personal references were undertaken.

There is a separate secure system for CRB checks and a 3-month reminder system that shows when CRB are required.

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The overall impression was of a well-managed service, which was run effectively and efficiently within the resources available and in line with the Statement of Purpose. The size of the service has been considered in the structure that has been put in place and allows the adoption process to be considered and managed in its component parts. Staff understood their role and that of their colleagues and were clear about the lines of accountability. Delegation of responsibility is clear and if the Operations Manager is absent for twenty-eight days the Director must identify an individual in her place.

Within such a large and complex organisation it would be easy for communication to be experienced by staff as problematic. This was not generally the case. Communication appeared to work well between teams and staff saw the establishment of an annual Adoption Service Day positively with the first event having been very successful. There were no timescales around the transfer of work between teams. Inspectors found there had been delays in waiting for Preparation Groups and in the allocation of a new worker following approval for adopters; timescales would assist the movement of work across teams.

The BCC Code of Practice identifies the need for staff to declare any conflict of interest and the General Social Care Council's Code of Conduct is also present to BCC staff. The Adoption Service makes clear in the Statement of Purpose that staff are expected to follow an equal opportunities policy and this was reported to be monitored through both supervision and the panel system. There are clear procedures in place in relation to the Adoption Register.

While there are clear procedures in place for dealing with complaints files seen during the inspection indicated that they were not adhered to consistently.

Number of complaints received by the Adoption Service in the last 12 months

6

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

5

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)
There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Adoption Service has a written procedure for the monitoring and controlling of its activity. This takes place in several different forums. The Panel Team's CRE database produces regular statistical information about the panels and the Adoption Service. The decision makers monitor work via their panel information. The panels were seen to have a clear role in the monitoring of work and raising issues of concern. There was an established procedure to provide feedback to managers from panel in the form of "Notices of Concern" and "Notices of Appreciation" in regard to social work practice. Supervision was undertaken on a minimum of four to six weekly basis and used to monitor work. There was up to date information available about the financial arrangements relating to adoption. The City Council was kept informed of the activities of the Adoption Service. The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health had approved the Statement of Purpose, it had been posted on the City's Legal Service's database to inform all City Council members of its content. There were monthly bulletins to inform Elected members of decisions. There was a performance plan monitoring reports, which gave information about the Adoption Service, which was submitted, to the Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health, the Deputy Leader and the Executive Management Team of the Council.

How frequently does the executive side of the council receive written reports on the work of the Adoption Service?

Monthly?	YES
Quarterly?	
Less than Quarterly?	

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)
The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The Adoption Service has access to specialist legal and medical advice. The arrangements for legal support to the service were under review at the time of the inspection, with the proposal that there should be specific council solicitors linked with particular panels. The Adoption Service managers met with the legal services on a regular basis. There were examples in panel minutes of some delays while waiting for legal advice. It is hoped that the proposed changes will address this. The medical advisers were reported to be accessible and approachable and used appropriately by the service. They were used to meet with adopters where appropriate and to provide specialist medical advice or access to it as needed. The Adoption Service had access to further specialist advice through the Equalities Division when it is required. There was reported to be a sound working relationship with CAMHS. There was a draft protocol for the specialist advisers, which needs to be finalised to support the work of these roles within the service.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were satisfied that all members of staff employed on the adoption service had appropriate knowledge and skills in adoption issues. Most of the team were qualified and those who do not have a formal qualification were supervised by their line manager. All staff were formally interviewed and satisfactory CRB and personal references were taken up prior to appointment.

Ten Adoption staff have been entered for the PQ award.

Do all of the Adoption Service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

NO

What % of the Adoption Service's social workers have a PQ award?

27

%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)**Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The overall impression of the Adoption Service is of a service, which is run effectively and efficiently but with some areas in need of strengthening or adjustment. All staff had appropriate skills and experience for the work they undertook. There was a system of planned, recorded supervision in place, which was arranged to meet the needs of the individual. It was reported that new staff were seen weekly and that unqualified staff received more frequent supervision than experienced, qualified colleagues.

The structure of such a large service is complex but staff and managers were clear about their role and lines of responsibility as well as where they were in the organisation in relation to the roles and responsibilities of colleagues.

Systems for prioritising workloads appeared to work but were not systematised. There were some issues of delays when work transferred between teams, which would be assisted by agreed timescales and transfer protocols. Staff raised some concerns about the level of communication between teams. Cross team communication worked well in some instances and not in others.

Timescales were clearly in place with an Assessment Time-chart, which was seen on prospective adopters' files. The delays referred to earlier were seen to be prior to assessment and there was evidence that once the assessment started it was usually completed within appropriate timescales.

Staff were supported by the service in seeking appropriate specialist training for which there was evidence in the training records.

The inspectors commented on the effective support system from administrative staff, which assisted the processes of the Adoption Service. There were some issues about the level of administrative staff available with some teams feeling under particular pressure, but this was not reflected in a diminished service. The administrative procedures worked well in dealing with new applicants and comments were received about the positive experience of initial enquiries. There were some concerns about the process of dealing with applications from those known to the department, such as foster carers and kinship carers. Their applications were subject to more and longer delays than others in the system.

There was evidence of a range of services available to adopters and children to support placements. A good relationship was reported with CAHMS and children's social workers felt that Health and Education services were aware of issues faced by Looked After Children and took them seriously in their response to the need for services.

All employees of the service and sessional workers had contracts and an appropriate code of practice. The Adoption Service makes use of a number of sessional workers. It has responded to this situation by creating a temporary post for a senior practitioner to oversee this group, providing supervision, regular meetings and a newsletter. This approach to the need to use sessional staff was well organised and the inspectors felt it to be commendable.

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)
There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Earlier this year there had been a review of the staffing and structure of the Fostering and Adoption Service. This led to an increase in social work and administrative staff in all the Adoption Service teams. Inspectors were informed that recruitment to these posts had been disappointing, despite the recruitment strategy and specialist advertising. Therefore there continue to be vacancies in all the teams, although recruitment continues. Use was made of sessional workers and adoption social workers were paid for additional pieces of sessional work (i.e. assessments), which they undertake.

There were plans for the development of a second Adoption Support Team, which included a new team manager, seven qualified social workers and administrative staff.

There was clearly a staffing and recruitment problem for the Adoption Service, which they are attempting to resolve. While the vacancies exist there was appropriate use of agency and independent social workers to address the shortfall.

The Adoption Service was working to retain staff and attract new staff to the City. At the time of the inspection in addition to regular training and supervision they were exploring home working and there was consideration of improvement to IT systems to make flexible working easier.

Total number of social work staff of the Adoption Service	42	Number of staff who have left the Adoption Service in the past 12 months	4
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Number of social work posts vacant In the Adoption Service.	10	This does not include the new Adoption Support Team of 7 SWs and 1 manager.	
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Standard 22 (22.1 and 22.3)
The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There was a sound corporate approach to staff employment. Some of the retention strategies have been referred to earlier in this report. Staff were positive about working for BCC and had confidence in the direction of the Adoption Service.

There was a written whistle blowing policy in place, which was accessible to all staff.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

During the past year the Adoption Service staff had been able to attend a variety of relevant training, including training on Attachment, new Adoption Legislation, Birth Records counselling, Assessment, Matching/Family Finding and Panel. Four workers were attending a course on Adoption Expertise and Counselling run by the Post Adoption Centre, which can lead to a certificate in Adoption Expertise. Staff felt they were able to attend relevant training courses.

It was positive that adoption staff had access to appropriate specialist training. Inspectors observed there was a lack of on-going refresher training in child protection for adoption staff and although information was available to staff in the Electronic Library there had been no specific training on the findings of relevant enquiries and of how these would impact on adoption practice.

At the time of the inspection there was no staff appraisal system in place. There was a Personal Development Scheme but this was not seen by staff as a system for appraisal. The development of the Team Service Improvement Workbook was seen very positively by inspectors in its attempt to relate the plans of the whole of BCC to the service and to the team, making the corporate plan relevant for individual workers.

All staff in the Adoption Service had regular team meetings. There had also been a training/workshop event of an Adoption Day, which was the first of a proposed annual event. It drew together staff from the whole service and was seen positively by staff and managers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are maintained securely, kept and are accessible when required.

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
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Some of the files seen were well structured and accessible. There were some examples of good quality recording on some adopters' files with thorough typed notes of each assessment visit and of every contact made. There were also some examples of limited recording where the contact with adopters was not clear and the reasons for delays were not evident from the file.

There was evidence on some files of supervisor's decisions and of their reading the files. This was not the case on all files, some showing no evidence of the supervisor's overview.

The adoption files for children were less well ordered. There did not appear to be a clear system for the establishment of an adoption file at the time when adoption became the plan for the child. Some adoption files did not contain the appropriate information in compliance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983. There were examples of forms not signed by parents and inaccuracies in the recording. The records were congruent with the Looking After Children System.

There were some concerns about confidentiality of records when home computers are used by sessional staff and e-mails sent externally to the service. Confidentiality was also an issue in respect of files, which contained panel information about others than those named on the file.

Confidentiality is comprehensively addressed in relation to panel members and observers.

There are policies and procedures in place, which relate to the recording of information for the service. Records are stored appropriately and securely.

Issues relating to CRB checks have been raised previously. The record needs to show the reference number and status of the CRB check.

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)

The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	
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There was evidence that the Adoption Service had developed satisfactory inter-agency relations and shared information appropriately.

The service has written policies and procedures about the access to records and how this process is managed. The Adoption Support Team undertake Section 51 counselling and all the members of the team had had training in this work.

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)

There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There is a clear written policy on recording that gives guidance on the purpose and content of the record and about how information should be recorded. There is also guidance about different aspects of recording, such as Forms E to assist workers in their understanding of the purpose and significance of the forms.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)

Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Employment files are maintained on all members of the adoption team.
 Each panel member has a satisfactory personnel file. They were very neat and contained all the relevant information required by the standards.
 Complaints against panel members were recorded and show any concerns raised about practice issues were dealt with seriously
 Each file has a confirmation that a CRB check has been undertaken on the panel member but the memo needs to specify the status of the check. There are personal details on each panel member and a list of training undertaken.
 There is a confidentiality statement signed by the panel member

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The recruitment team has a city central office; it is appropriate for its use if a little cramped. All files are secured in a locked filing cabinet The assessment team share a large building with the youth offending team. The offices have a large training room, which is suitable for its purpose. Some offices are small having little headroom in places. The adoption support team and the long term fostering team share a building that has conferencing facilities. The family finding team are based at Silvermere and have access to a variety of rooms. All offices are accessible during the day to members of the public but initial enquiries and enquirers are redirected to the recruitment shop in the city centre All files are secured and the department work to a “clear desk policy” IT is secured by password. The department has a Disaster Recovery Policy.</p>		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Local authority manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 13th September 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the local authority adoption manager, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 24th December 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Local authority manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I Helen French of Birmingham City Council confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name Helen French
Signature _____
Designation Operations Manager Adoption
Date 20 04 2005

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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