



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Local Authority Adoption Services

**W Sussex CC (Social & Caring Services)
Adoption Service**

County Hall
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 1QT

21st March 2005

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

W Sussex CC (Social & Caring Services) Adoption Service

Headquarters Address

County Hall, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1QT

Adoption Service Manager

Peter Crawhurst

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01903839400

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Peter.crawhurst@westsussex.gov.uk

Certificate number of this adoption service

Date of last inspection

Date, if any, of last SSI themed inspection of adoption service

Date of Inspection Visit		21st March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		02:00 pm	
Name of Inspector	1	Sally Woodget	113975
Name of Inspector	2	Marian Denny	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
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		Peter Crawhurst	

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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 W Sussex CC (Social & Caring Services) 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.

West Sussex County Council "Social and Caring Services" operate its own discrete adoption service. The aim of the adoption service is to achieve good outcomes for children, thereby maximising their life chances and choices. Their objective is to provide a secure and permanent family in a timely manner for every child for whom adoption is considered in his or her best interests by;

- Maintaining a pool of motivated, committed, well-prepared adopters able to meet the needs of children through to adulthood.
- Establishing a high standard of assessment and vetting of adoptive parents.
- Maintaining a good quality system of support to adopters.
- The provision of appropriate supervision, support and training to adopters.
- Providing a well organised adoption support service, which will provide ongoing support and guidance to adoptive parents once the child has been adopted.
- Supporting adopters through short courses and support groups.
- Maintaining a responsive financial support provision to adoptive parents.
- Providing an efficient and responsive assessment and counselling service for children, adopters, birth relatives and adopted adults.
- Providing appropriate and timely therapeutic support to adopted children and their families.

The adoption service is presently operating on two sites within West Sussex. The adoption team providing link work to area children's social workers, the assessment of adopters and involved in matching issues are based in Horsham. The adoption support team providing assessment of the support needs of children, birth families, adopted adults and adoptive families, are based in Bognor. The team manager is based in Horsham, and the service manager is based in the Worthing. The adoption panel meets in Chichester.

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 service has been inspected the first time against the National Minimum Standards introduced on the 1st April 2003. As a result, this report may contain a substantial number of requirements and recommendations. If so, these should fall significantly at the next inspection. However, inspectors found that the service was operating well, and a number of new services had been and were being developed. The managers were well aware of any shortfalls and measures were considered to rectify these. Inspectors felt that the adoption service was child-centred; staff were fully committed, hard working and keen to drive improvements forward. The number of requirements inspectors made was low and a number of good practice recommendations have been made.

Standard 1 Statement of Purpose.

This standard was not met.

The Statement of Purpose requires a number of additions and amendments in order to fully comply with the regulations. The children's guide also requires further additions, and it is advised that it is produced in different formats to meet the needs of children of different ages and abilities.

Standard 2 Securing and Promoting Children's Welfare.

This standard was not met

The agency had good measures in place to ensure that children were identified for placement/adoption early, and these were being further improved by the introduction of the independent reviewing system. Inspectors evidenced sensitive handling of matching issues. Inspectors have raised concerns about the agencies' response to allegations of child protection nature, and further work needs to be undertaken in this area as a matter of priority.

Standards 3-6. Prospective and Approved the Adopters.

Three of these standards have been met, one was nearly met.

Some work needs to be undertaken to re-draft the information for prospective adopters. The agency had systems in place to fast track adopters who would meet the needs of children waiting. The quality of assessments of adopters was good and the checks and references that were undertaken were thorough. There were arrangements in place to ensure that adopters received detailed and thorough information about children to be placed with them and opportunities to meet with foster carers and medical advisers were provided. The agency operated a number of initiatives to support adopters, children to be placed for adoption and their families.

Standards 7-9 Birth Parents and Birth Families.

One of the standards was met, two were nearly met.

The agency has developed some good initiatives for working with birth parents. This service is still developing and further additions to the service for birth parents are intended. Further work however needs to be undertaken with children's social workers to ensure that they fully involve birth parents in planning for their child, in considering contact issues and that they have had a chance to comment on reports presented to the adoption panel.

Standards 10-13 Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions.

Two of the standards were met, two were nearly met.

The number of additions need to be made to the panel policies and procedures and issues of quoracy which have been a problem in the past need to be included. The panel meets fortnightly and the decisions are managed in a timely fashion.

Standard 14 –15. Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency.

One of the standards was met, one was nearly met.

Both the manager and the service manager have many years experience in children's social work and in family placement work in particular. Both have the relevant qualifications and experience. Further work needs to be undertaken by the human resources department to ensure that telephone inquiries are made to verify written references.

Standard 16-18. Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency.

One of these standards was met, two were nearly met.

The service manager and operational manager have systems in place to cover for each other in the event of any absence and systems to delegate work to senior practitioners as appropriate. There are a number of systems in place to monitor the work of the adoption agency and to scrutinise the quality of the work. A protocol needs to be developed to cover the role of specialist advisers.

Standards 19-23. Employment and Management of Staff.

Three of these standards were met, one was nearly met, one was not met.

The adoption service staff were qualified, experienced and very committed to their work. Good arrangements for training were available for all staff. Some further work is required to ensure training for all support workers recently employed and to ensure that contingency plans are in place to deal with any vacancies that arise.

Standards 25-28. Records.

One of these standards was met, one was nearly met and two were not met.

The agency has policies and procedures for the storage, recording and access of; case files. However further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that children's adoption files are made up, that open and closed (non archived) files are protected from the risk of damage, that the outcome of any CRB checks are recorded, that any child protection allegations are kept in a separate folder, that a system is developed to monitor the adequacy of files and that the human resources department develops a system for undertaking the references and checks required by the regulations for all staff and panel members.

Standards 29. Fitness of premises.

This standard was not met.

The adoption service is currently split over two sites geographically apart in West Sussex. One of these sites was overcrowded and not well equipped, the location of the other was not considered appropriate. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the adoption service is included in the local authority's disaster recovery plan.

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 Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 2 (1).	LA1.1	The adoption service must ensure that the statement of purpose fully complies with this regulation.	31st August 2005
2	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 3 (1).	LA1.4	The adoption service must ensure that the children's guide includes a summary of the statement of purpose and a summary of the complaints procedure.	31st August 2005
3	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 3 (2) (c).	LA1.4	The adoption service must ensure that every child, who may be, or has been placed for adoption by them, is given a written guide.	31st August 2005

4	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 9.	LA2	The adoption service must ensure that all its staff and managers are fully acquainted with the child protection policy, and that these procedures are followed in respect of all children placed for adoption by them, when an allegation of child abuse has been made. The adoption agency must also ensure that their staff have regular child protection training associated with their work within the adoption service.	Immediate
5	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg9 (2) (d).	LA2	West Sussex Social and Caring Services must update the child protection policy to ensure correct information about the Commission for Social Care Inspection.	31st July 2005
6	Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 Reg5(5) amended by 1997 Reg 5(4)	LA11.1	The adoption agency must ensure that the panel is quorate at all times. The adoption agency also needs to ensure that all recommendations made at the time when the panel was inquorate are brought back to a full quorate panel for consideration.	31st November 2005
7	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003	LA19.12/13/14	The adoption agency must ensure that all unqualified staff are appropriately trained to work with children and young people, their families and adoptive parents, and have a good understanding of adoption and they are appropriately supervised by qualified social workers who are accountable for, and check, their work.	31st August 2005
8	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg11 (3) (d) and Reg 15 (1). Schedules 3 and 4.	LA28and LA19	The adoption service must ensure that full references and checks undertaken in relation to each person working for the purposes of the adoption service, this includes: administrative staff, panel members and sessional workers.	31st August 2005

9	The Adoption Agency Regulation 1983 7(2).	LA25	The adoption agency must set up a case record in respect of any child being considered for adoption.	31st August 2005
10	The Adoption Agency Regulation 1983 14(2) (3) and (4)	LA25.2	The adoption agency must ensure a thorough review of the storage of open and closed adoption files to ensure the risk of damage from fire and water is minimised.	31st August 2005
11	The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 Reg 16 (1)	LA29	The local authority must of the review the arrangements for the premises of the adoption service.	31st August 2005

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	LA1.4	The adoption agency should ensure that the children's guide is suitable for all children for whom adoption is the plan, including different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children, in particular very young children.
2	LA1.1	The adoption agency should ensure that the statement of purpose describes all the facilities and services that it provides.
3	LA2	The adoption agency should ensure that its recruitment policy addresses issues of ethnicity and disability, outlines the agency's practice of collaborative working with the local consortium and their policies and procedures for the use of the National Adoption Register.
4	LA3.2	The adoption agency should review and amend the booklet provided for prospective adopters and ensure that it complies with the legislation regarding eligibility criteria and equal opportunities policies.

5	LA8.1LA7.2/3/5.	The adoption agency should provide further training for children's social workers and their managers, to ensure that they work with birth parents enable effective plans to be made and that birth parents views about adoption and contact are clearly recorded before information is passed to the adoption panel or to adopters.
6	LA10.2	The adoption agency should amend the panel policies and procedures to ensure that it fully complies with all the elements in this Standard namely, the appointment of the chair and vice chair, declaring an interest, rules for insuring quoracy, the method of providing feedback to the agency and the promotion of good practice.
7	LA19.3 and LA15.2	The adoption agency should ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify written references.
8	LA18.5	The adoption agency should ensure that a written protocol is developed which, governs the role of specialist advisers and determines suitable qualifications and registration by the appropriate professional body.
9	LA21.3	The adoption agency should ensure that where a shortfall in staffing levels occur, there are contingency plans to resolve the situation in the short and long term.
10	LA25.3	The adoption agency should ensure that the records of outcomes of CRB checks for adopters and their families are recorded.
11	LA27.2	The adoption agency should ensure that separate records are kept for any allegations received about adopters/prospective adopters and that this information is also stored in a separate folder on the respective case file.
12	LA27.3	The adoption agency should develop a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and take remedial action where necessary.
13	LA29.5	The adoption agency should ensure that the Council's disaster recovery plan will include both provision of premises and the safeguarding/backup of records of the adoption service.

- 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	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	YES
• Interview with birth family members	NO
• 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	21/3/05
Time of Inspection	9.00 AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	102
Number of Inspector days	8.5
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)	14

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?

1

West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Adoption Agency have a Statement of Purpose which outlines their principles, aims and objectives and which identifies their use of "best value". There are a number of amendments and additions to this document which are required by the regulations, namely; the name and address of the manager, the relevant qualifications and experience of the manager, the qualifications and experience of staff, the procedures for preparation, assessment, approval and support for prospective adopters as well as further information about the systems used to monitor and evaluate the provision of services provided by the adoption agency.

The Statement of Purpose did not describe all the facilities and services that the adoption agency provide as recommended in the standards.

Inspectors advise that it would be helpful to include the office addresses and telephone numbers.

During interviews with staff members it became apparent that there had not been full consultation and discussion about the content of this document, and a number of field social workers were not acquainted with it. Managers of the service explained that the Statement of Purpose was included in the Adoption Handbook and available for all staff, as well as being on the county council's web site. Inspectors were provided with a copy of the Adoption and Adoption Support Services Handbook, however a copy of the Statement of Purpose was not included. Inspectors suggested that once the document had been revised to take account of the comments above, that it be re-launched to all staff to ensure that they were fully aware of its existence. It is also advised that this document is shared with social workers from other placing authorities who use the adoption service.

Inspectors felt that the agency had some enormous strengths and were delivering a range of very useful services and that an opportunity has been missed in not providing this information in the Statement of Purpose to all it's stakeholders.

West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Adoption Agency were using the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering Children's Guide and had included local information at the back of this booklet. This booklet was suitable for children and young people over the age of eight years old. They were also using the children's guide produced by another adoption agency, which was more suitable for children aged five or six years old. Neither of these booklets however contained a summary of West Sussex's adoption service Statement of Purpose, complaints procedure or local information on advocacy services. The local information that had been provided included names and addresses of the adoption team, the adoption support services, the Post Adoption Centre and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. However there was no introductory information as to why these addresses had been given, or what services these organisations provided for children in the

adoption process. Neither of these two booklets were suitable for a very young child and inspectors suggest that other forms of guides could be produced for children such as a video, DVD, or audio cassette.

Questionnaires returned from placing social workers revealed that a number of them were unaware of the existence of these guides. The adoption service must ensure that every child who may be, or has been placed for adoption by them has been given a children's guide, as required by the regulations.

Inspectors were informed that arrangements were in place for adapting existing children's guides into a format which is appropriate to children and young people with physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and where English is not the first language.

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

YES

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?

1

West Sussex County Council " Social and Caring Services", Adoption Agency have developed a recruitment policy and strategy. The agency said they have a "continuous interest" in adoption from local residents and therefore do not advertise generally. The agency does however continue to raise awareness about adoption issues during National Adoption Week and through such means as posters, leaflets and press releases, as well as local radio interviews. Inspectors feel that the recruitment policy and strategy failed to address issues about ethnicity and disability and this needs to be added. Further information about the agencies co-operation with the local adoption consortium, the Berkshire and Kent Exchange and the policy of the use of the Adoption Register for England and Wales, could be included in this document.

Inspectors saw evidence however of careful matching to reflect the ethnicity of children to be placed and of positive and sensitive co-operation between members of the local adoption consortium in order to ensure children's needs are met appropriately.

The agency had good systems in place to respond to inquiries from prospective adopters and questionnaires received by the inspectors indicated that adopters found this stage in the process, helpful, timely and sensitively handled.

The agency has systems in place to pick up referrals of children who are being twin tracked. Each member of the adoption team has responsibility to link work with individual area offices and placing social workers found this arrangement extremely helpful. As a result children could be identified early, and children's social workers could be assisted through the process to take a case to panel for a "best interest decision".

The adoption agency also provides an "Adoption and Adoption Support Services Handbook" for all staff members, which takes staff through the legal and administrative steps and provides practice guidance. A number of staff interviewed however were not aware of this handbook and it is suggested that this document is re-launched to children's social workers and their managers to ensure they are aware of its existence and usefulness.

West Sussex County Council "Social and Caring Services" have a Permanence-Planning group, which has recently developed a "Family First" policy and established a system for independently reviewing plans of Looked after Children. These initiatives have introduced further mechanisms by which quality and progress in care planning are pursued. Further work is identified to ensure that the new independent reviewing officers are fully aware of adoption issues and have received permanency-planning training.

Inspectors were concerned to note when reading the case files of an adoptive couple, that the adoption agency had not followed correct Child Protection procedures in one particular case. A further incident was brought to the inspector's attention in a returned questionnaire. West Sussex "the Social and Caring Services" have a clear Child Protection Policy and clear procedures for referring a child placed with adopters where an allegation of child abuse is reported. The adoption service need to ensure that all their staff are aware of these policies, and managers need to monitor all matters of a child protection nature that are brought to their attention. This is a requirement.

The Child Protection Policy needs to be updated to ensure that arrangements are in place for persons working for the adoption service, to have access to information that would enable them to contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection, regarding any concern about child welfare and safety. (The present Child Protection Policy refers to the Regulation and Inspection Unit of the Social Services Department).

In the last 12 months:

How many children were identified as needing adoptive families?	29	
How many children were matched with adopters?	X	
How many children were placed with the service's own adopters?	24	
How many children were placed with other services' adopters?	6	
How many children were referred to the Adoption Register?	X	
In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?	X	
What percentage of children matched with the adoption service's adopters does this represent?	X	%
How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?	X	
How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made about adopters approved by this adoption service?	1	
On the date this form was completed, how many children were waiting for a match to be identified?	17	

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?	2
<p>West Sussex County Council "Social and Caring Services", Adoption Agency have developed a booklet for prospective adopters called "Adopting Children", which is sent out following their initial inquiry. This booklet provides information about children and their birth families, the law about adoption, frequently asked questions, the assessment process, the matching process and adoption support services. Some of the information in this booklet is ambiguous, in particular the information about whether lesbian and homosexual individuals or couples would be welcomed. This document needs reviewing and amending in light of present adoption legislation criteria and equal opportunities policies. Responses received from adopters in the questionnaires revealed that just under half were unclear about the eligibility criteria that the agency was using.</p> <p>Further information is provided to prospective adopters on the West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Web Site.</p> <p>The adoption agency has set up a service level agreement with the private provider called, "Overseas Adoption Helpline" to meet the needs of prospective adopters who wish to adopt a child from overseas. The team manager or senior practitioner who, inspectors were told provides an initial consultation for those wishing to adopt from overseas, have knowledge and expertise in this area. Assessments are however allocated to an independent sessional worker appointed and approved by the adoption agency.</p> <p>The adoption agency has systems in place to "fast track" applicants who were most likely to meet the needs of children in the care of the local authority.</p>	<p>Standard met?</p>	<p>2</p>

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?	3
<p>The preparation programme for prospective adopters is set out in the information provided to them in the booklet "Adopting Children" and was discussed in the last standard. But adopters reported in the questionnaires that they felt that there was no clear timeframe for the different stages of the preparation and assessment process and inspectors believe that it would be helpful to add this to the information provided. Questionnaires reflected a number of prospective adopters were unhappy that the process had taken a long time; one reported the process had taken two years, another that it had taken five years from start to finish.</p>	<p>Standard met?</p>	<p>3</p>

(Staffing issues, which may have contributed to these delays, are discussed in more depth in Standard 21).

Those applicants who had attended a training course provided by the agency felt that it had been "informative and well planned". A number reported that the experience had been invaluable particularly in relation to meeting experienced adopters and birth family members where it had resulted in them re-examining previously held beliefs and attitudes.

Preparation courses are run over three days and there are approximately four a year. During 2004, 8 to 10 couples attended each group. The course covers issues such as; Child development, attachment, the adoption process, adoption legislation, life storybooks, contact in adoption, and adoption support services. The senior practitioner evaluates and reviews the effectiveness of the preparation courses on a regular basis.

Inspectors noted that the quality of assessment of prospective adopters was good and the systems for checking references were robust. Another member of the team undertakes a second opinion visit towards the end of the assessment, exploring specific issues and attaching a report to the documentation for panel determination. This is good practice. All personal referees are interviewed by the assessing social worker, and the evidence provided by them is properly evaluated and assessed. This is also good practice.

Where there are concerns about adopters' health or other factors a "stage 3 assessment" is undertaken to fully discuss all the issues to ensure this will not be a prohibiting factor in the approval process. Inspectors had seen that this had taken place in one case and had heard that adopters had found the process helpful and reassuring.

The quality of the assessments was detailed and thorough, fully interweaving evidence with descriptions in order to provide a thorough understanding of the applicants' capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way. The assessments helped to identify the adopters competencies and the strengths, which they have or will need to develop.

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?**

3

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching process in the "Adopting Children" booklet that is sent out earlier on in the process. The adoption agency also send out the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering "Adopters Handbook" which provides detailed information about the matching process, and informs adopters about useful information such as the "Be My Parent" publication, information about adoption with contact and about siblings being placed together. This publication also provides useful information about the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales. The adoption agency have their own clear written procedures for child care social workers for the use of the register.

The "Adoption and Adoption Support Services Handbook" for West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services staff, provides useful guidance for children's and adoption social workers in selecting a suitable adoptive family and preparing a matching report. Inspectors observed that the matching reports were good quality, detailed and useful documents.

There was evidence that adopters were given full information on children for whom they were being considered. Adopters had the opportunity to meet with the child's present carers and with a medical adviser and/or other relevant professionals who were involved with the child in order to understand fully the child's needs, personality and interests.

The adoption agency has systems in place to ensure that adoptive parents are prepared to notify the adoption agency if their adopted child dies, and for adopters to prepare clear and appropriate information for the child who is to be placed with them about themselves and their home, prior to the placement in a "welcome to our family" album.

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?****3**

The adoption agency has an adoption support service, which is available to adopters and their families, adopted adults and birth families. The staff in this team ran the letterbox scheme, they support adopters and their families, adopted adults seeking information and they work with birth families whose children have been placed for adoption. The service has recently expanded, a play therapist and a psychologist have been appointed to work directly with adoptive families.

The adoption agency subscribes to the Post Adoption Centre in London, which gives adopters an alternative if they wish to seek post adoption support from outside the authority. As part of the agency's contract with this organisation, locally based counselling surgeries are held in West Sussex on a regular basis. The adoption support service will arrange training courses for adopters and are able to deliver Adoption UK's parent support package, "It's a Piece of Cake" and another course called "Motherhood without a Bump", for those who are interested. Further courses and workshops for adopters include: letterbox contact, sibling contact, life story work, understanding early trauma, the adopted adolescent, and the adopted child at school. Recently the adoption support service arranged a day seminar for staff and adopters at a local theatre on attachment issues delivered by the American psychologist Dan Hughes. Both staff and adopters, who attended, reported that it was useful and relevant, and appreciated this opportunity to attend training course.

The adoption service send out an annual newsletter and also run three local support groups for adopters in the area, however inspectors discovered that a number of adopters were unaware of the support groups and this information needs to be more widely disseminated.

The British Association of Adoption and Fostering Agency's Adoption Handbook provides a useful appendix for adopters with information about organisations, government agencies and web sites providing support and information to adopters.

The West Sussex Social and Caring Services offer an Out Of Hours service to deal with any emergencies and adopters are able to make use of this service, if necessary.

The adoption support services are further strengthened by the agency's close working relationship with the CAMHS service for looked after children.

The adoption agency have written papers suggesting proposals for further development in the support to adopters and to children whose plan is adoption or who have been placed for adoption, these include a support worker (based in the fostering team) able to undertake some direct work with children, and in the future a manager for the adoption support service.

Inspectors saw some good quality life story work for children placed for adoption and were able to evidence through their case tracking visits that adopters understood to need for continuing such work in order to help them maintain a positive self-identity and to encourage them to reflect on their history.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months	41	
Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months	33	
Number of children matched with the local authority's adopters in the last 12 months	24	
Number of adopters approved but not matched	38	
Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register	16	
How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?	1	

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

The adoption agency does not have a clear written strategy or practice guidance for staff in relation to the services and facilities provided to birth parents. This would be helpful, and will provide a useful addition to Statement of Purpose when describing the aims and objectives of the adoption service and the facilities and services that they provide.

The agency does however support birth parents in a number of ways. The agency has a contract with the Post Adoption Centre to provide two counsellors for two days per month in the locality offering support, advice and information to birth parents who contact them. Managers informed inspectors that further counselling sessions could be bought on a spot purchase basis for birth parents as required via PACT.

Inspectors saw that a review of the contract with the Post Adoption Centre had been undertaken. This service had been used by a total of nine other family members during the course of the previous year. Unfortunately inspectors did not receive a representative number of questionnaires returned by birth parents to draw any conclusions about the service they received.

One birth parent interviewed as part of the inspection process had been offered a range of services and was positive about the way the agency had managed their situation.

The adoption agency's own support service also provides access to independent advice and information for birth parents, on all matters relating to adoption, advice on and the negotiation of contact arrangements including letterbox contact, advice on tracing birth relatives and access to support groups. Staff employed in the adoption support service were sympathetic to the needs of birth parents and were continuing to develop a range of services to meet their needs. They have also been able to encourage some birth parents to take part in preparation courses for adopters, to talk about issues such as, letterbox and direct contact, the implications of the child's heritage, and to provide another perspective to the adoption process. This is good practice.

A number of the form Es presented to the adoption panel for consideration of the "best interest decision" indicated however that birth parents had not signed to say they had read these documents or that they had been involved in contributing to the information about themselves and their families. Many of these documents also indicated that the families had not been offered counselling. Inspectors recommend that further work be undertaken to provide training for children's social workers in ensuring that work with birth parents to enable effective plans to be made and implemented for their children and that the birth parents views about adoption and contacts are clearly recorded and used in the matching process.

The letterbox system was managed by the adoption support service and was well developed and organised.

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?

2

Inspectors were able to evidence that some good work was being achieved by field social workers and adoption social workers in this area, however, as already indicated in the previous standard, further training is required for children's social workers to ensure they work with birth parents to obtain clear and appropriate information about the child's birth family and that birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

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?

3

The adoption agencies contract with the Post Adoption Centre, includes a contact and mediation service to enable birth parents to reach agreements about when, where and how often contact may happen for adopted children. There is a Child Advocate whose role it is to talk with the child involved and to communicate the child's views and wishes in the meeting between adults. This is good practice.

Managers informed inspectors that consideration was currently being given to enhancing service for birth parents by creating a new part-time post within the agency's own Adoption Support Service, to do direct work with birth families, particularly in assisting them to fulfil the agreed plans for contact.

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?	2
<p>The adoption panel have written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions. These policies have been fully ratified by the County Council's Cabinet members. The policy and procedures need some amendments and additions to ensure that all the elements of Standard 10.2 are included in the document for example; the appointment of the chair and vice-chair, declaring an interest (the issue of quoracy also needs to be addressed here), the rules for ensuring quoracy, the method of providing feedback to the agency and the promotion of good practice.</p> <p>Prospective adopters are invited to attend the panel. A leaflet "Welcome to the Adoption Panel", has been produced and is given to prospective adopters and staff who attend the panel, to help explain the process and to introduce them to the panel members. This is good practice.</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?	1
<p>The agency has on occasion in the past 12 months failed to meet the statutory requirement of The Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 with regard to the operation of the adoption panel, as it failed to be properly constituted as an adoption panel. Minutes of the previous panel meetings show that the authority struggle to ensure the panel is at times quorate. It has been the councils policy to carry on with the adoption business despite the panel not being quorate and then seek the views of absent members following the panel. This is unacceptable practice and makes the work of the adoption panel illegal. This practice must cease.</p> <p>Inspectors observed the adoption panel as part of the inspection process and it was noted that a new panel member was co-opted onto the panel the day before in order to ensure the</p>		

panel's quoracy. This situation stresses the importance of having clear written policies and procedures about the handling of quoracy issues mentioned in the previous standard to ensure the panel is properly constituted.

The service manager indicated that a lot of work had taken place recently to recruit new panel members in order to ensure that the problems of quoracy that had been experienced over the past year would not occur again.

Whilst inspectors were informed by the managers of the adoption agency and the legal adviser, that this practice has now ceased, a requirement has been made that all cases where recommendations have been made when the panel was not properly constituted, are reviewed by a quorate panel.

The service manager indicated that he planned to undertake the role of vice-chair when the new panel was constituted later this year. Inspectors advise that with the new regulations coming into force, which clearly indicate the recruitment of an independent panel chair, this arrangement would not be appropriate.

Inspectors interviewed the panel chair and medical advisor who were able to verify that panel members had had training, covering such issues as; disruptions, medical issues, changes in legislation and the dynamics of the panel. The panel chair had undertaken the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering training for panel chairs. The medical advisor also had undertaken a two-day course run by the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering training for medical advisers.

Inspectors were informed that all panel members have copies of the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering publications "Effective Panels" and "Adoption Handbook".

Inspectors noted that the professional adviser to the panel gave advice to them on issues to do with overseas adoption.

Some issues were raised with inspectors about the appropriateness of the panel meeting venue. The panel meets at County Hall where there are no facilities for waiting applicants and staff, which ensure issues of confidentiality and privacy. Inspectors advise the Adoption Agency to consider alternative appropriate venues and locations.

Is the panel a joint panel with other local authorities?	NO
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Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?	NA
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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?	3
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The adoption panel convene their meetings fortnightly, in order to avoid any delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and of matching children to adopters.

The members of the adoption panel received all the necessary information in advance of the adoption panel date. The panel administrator responsible is a highly valued member of the administrative team who manages this work effectively and efficiently.

Inspectors picked up some concerns raised by staff about the response of panel members. Some social workers reported feeling anxious and intimidated and felt that the criticisms were destructive. Some adopters reported feeling let down by the process and felt that where the panel were making a recommendation for approval, (whilst understanding that the decision still needed to be made by the agency decision maker), this could be done in a more positive manner. Inspectors suggest that the panel adviser and panel chair could consider more sensitive ways to handle these issues.

The minutes of the panel meetings are detailed and accuracy is checked at the beginning of the next meeting. The minutes reflect the panel's discussion and include reasons for the recommendation made. Inspectors noted during the panel observation that the reasons for the recommendation are pulled together after the recommendation has been made. It is felt that it be more helpful, if panel members gave their reasons for the recommendation at the same time, highlighting both the strengths and the outstanding learning needs of the adopters, so that this information could more usefully be used when planning adoption support needs at a matching meeting.

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?

3

The adoption agencies decision maker is the Head of Children's services for West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services. The agency decision maker receives the panel papers and the minutes of the panel and takes into account any recommendation made by the panel, when making his considered and professional decision.

The agency decision is made without delay. Adopters reported that they had received their approval in writing within seven working days of the panel meeting. The adoption agency has arrangements in place to, convey the decision of the panel to all other relevant parties.

Inspectors noted that there were no formal opportunities for meetings between the agency decision maker, the panel chair and the professional adviser. Such matters will need to be taken into consideration in the amended panel policies and procedures. It is advised that formal regular meetings are arranged in order to provide feedback to the agency on the quality of cases being presented to the panel.

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

Both the service manager and the manager of the adoption agency possess the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and adoption law and practice. They both have the management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively.

The service manager maintains close links with the financial service section of the authority. Any exceptional financial support payments are dealt with by an Exceptional Payments Panel, which is chaired by the adoption service manager and facilitated through financial services. The budgetary management of the service is overseen through close working relationships with the financial services.

The service manager has an MA in Applied Social Studies and is currently undertaking the Postgraduate Diploma in Strategic Management.

The manager has 32 years experience in children's services with many of these specialising in adoption and fostering work. West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Adoption Agency are presently funding the manager to undertake an MA in management.

Staff reported that both managers were accessible, approachable and responsive. Inspectors observed that both managers exercised effective leadership of the staff and operation of the adoption agency.

Both managers have clear written job descriptions, which set out their duties, responsibilities and levels of delegation. Further work is intended to update the job description of the team manager, to take into account recent changes and developments within the adoption and adoption support service.

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?

2

West Sussex Social and Caring Services, Human Resources Department, have undertaken relevant and appropriate checks and references of both managers, which comply with the Standards and Regulations.

Inspectors were unable to evidence that telephone enquiries were made to each referee to verify the written references. It is recommended that a system is put in place in order to evidence that this has been satisfactorily completed.

The human resources department are currently updating the electronic systems to ensure that the renewal of CRB checks every three years is systemised.

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

As already stated in standard 1, the adoption agency has a number of amendments and additions to make to its Statement of Purpose. As a result of this, it has been difficult for inspectors to ensure that the agency is run in accordance with its Statement of Purpose.

Clear arrangements are in place to ensure that the service manager and manager are responsible to cover each other's absence.

Inspectors noted that there are clear roles for managers, senior practitioners and other staff, as well as established lines of responsibility and accountability.

West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Adoption Agency do not have a discreet "conflict of interest" policy. Managers and staff however are informed of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest when they receive their statement of particulars of employment.

Inspectors were able to evidence that staff working with children, prospective/approved adopters took into account their racial origin, religion, culture, sexuality and disability. Presently the adoption agency used the Consortium or other local authority or voluntary adoption agencies to meet the needs of children of different ethnicity.

Inspectors have seen the West Sussex Social and Caring Services Equality of Opportunity Value Statement. This document indicates that each unit will be responsible for developing and implementing an action plan for equality in service provision. The adoption service is not currently collecting statistics regarding the ethnicity of the children where adoption has been agreed as a plan, or of prospective and approved adopters. Further work needs to be undertaken in this area and included in the adoption service's business/service plan.

The adoption agency presently provides information, on the Adoption Register for England and Wales, to adopters via the British Association Of Adoption and Fostering "Adopters Handbook".

Number of complaints received by the adoption service in the last 12 months

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

X

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

Inspectors interviewed the Head of Children's Services, the Councillor with portfolio responsibility for children's services, the service manager and the operational manager as part of the inspection process. These interviews revealed that there were a number of procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and for ensuring quality performance.

Adoption service policies, practice and developments are discussed at various levels and at a number of different committees. The Select Care and Scrutiny Committee considers the needs of children in the looked after system and in particular the need to find the right number and range of adoptive families for children for whom adoption is their plan. There is a Joint Policy and Development Group with education services and the Corporate Parenting and Advocacy Group. Plans for the provision of a Children's Trust are well underway.

The service manager meets with the Head of Children's Services annually to discuss and reflect on the activity of the adoption service. It is expected that the new panel chair will write an annual report, which will be scrutinised by the Social Services Select Committee.

The service manager attends a children's services management group, which meets monthly.

The adoption service has an annual business/service plan, which is reviewed on a six monthly basis and which outlines the objectives and targets for the adoption team.

Regular supervision between manager and the service manager, monthly meeting between the head of service and the service manager, provide a useful opportunity to discuss PAF indicators and to monitor the output of the adoption service.

Other forms of monitoring include the regular occurrence of team meetings of both the adoption service and the adoption support service, supervision of all staff, the evaluation of training groups, the feedback from the panel meeting by staff and applicants and scrutinising the outcome of any complaints.

It is intended that there will be bi annual meetings with the newly appointed panel chair, professional adviser and service manager which will provide another opportunity to scrutinise the operation and outcomes of the adoption agency.

How frequently does the executive side of the council receive written reports on the work of the adoption service?

Monthly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than Quarterly?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES

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

The adoption agency has access to a medical and legal adviser and these individuals are both committed to providing support, information and advice to the adoption service and to the adoption panel.

Inspectors were pleased to see that the medical adviser took time to meet with adopters and children to discuss any health-related issues.

The adoption agency has a contract with the specialist CAMHS service for looked after children and young people in West Sussex. The adoption agency has recently recruited a psychologist and play therapist to work within the CAMHS team and provide a service specifically to children for whom adoption is the plan and adoptive families.

The panel procedures include a reference to the special advisers, whilst this is helpful, it does not however include a written protocol, which governs the role of the specialist adviser, or provide information about suitable qualifications or registration by the appropriate professional body. This is recommended.

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?	1
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Inspectors understand that there are clear written recruitment and selection procedures, which follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people. All personnel responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff are trained, understand and operate within these guidelines. All staff reported having been interviewed as part of selection process and inspectors were able to see written references on the human resources files.

As already stated in Standard 15 inspectors were unable to verify that telephone inquiries had been made to check the written references and it has been recommended that a system should be put in place.

West Sussex Social and Caring Services human resources department are presently reviewing their electronic systems for recording CRB checks and for ensuring that these are renewed triennially.

All checks and references including CRB checks as outlined in Regulation 11 and 15 need to be obtained for all staff, including administrative staff, panel members and sessional workers. This is a requirement for Standard 28.

All social workers employed by the adoption agency have a professional social work qualification and many years experience in adoption matters. A number of the adoption agency social workers have obtained the Post Qualifying Child Care Award however, both managers and staff recognise that this qualification was not directly relevant to adoption work. Managers are presently looking at alternative courses such as those run by the Tavistock clinic.

Inspectors were impressed by the knowledge, experience and background of social workers in both the adoption and adoption support service and by their continuing determination to improve their understanding and develop their knowledge. It was recognised however that child protection training had not been updated for some time and social workers understood the importance of recognising child protection issues within their adoption work. This is a requirement. (cross reference Standard 2)

Staff expressed some concern about the appointment of support workers (employed in the family placement team's) who would be involved in some direct work with children placed for adoption, birth families and adoptive families. It is essential that the support workers will be appropriately trained and will have a good understanding of issues about adoption and this is

recommended.

Do all of the adoption service's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

YES

What % of the adoption service's social workers have a PQ award?

38

%

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?

3

As already stated in Standards 14 and 15 the service and team managers have the appropriate skills and qualifications to manage the adoption service.

Staff reported that managers were open, accessible, approachable and responsive to their needs. There are clear lines of delegation and responsibility and these are appropriate for the skills and qualifications of the relevant members of staff.

There are no formal systems and structures in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads, staff reported however, that they received regular supervision from the manager at four to six weekly intervals and that their manager was quick to respond if they felt under pressure. The supervision process was strengthened by a supervision contract and staff members received copies of the minutes of each supervision session. Staff felt that the complex nature of their assessments of prospective adopters required a more detailed and in-depth supervision arrangement and inspectors advise managers to consider developing a model, which supports this issue.

All staff reported that the adoption agency was very supportive of staff wishing to undergo specific training and skills development and had been generous in funding identified courses.

Staff reported that their clerical and administrative support was high quality and had developed an infrastructure, which enabled them to carry out their duties in an efficient and effective manner. Inspectors noted however to the adoption support service had grown considerably in size and number and as a result access to computers was problematic and the clerical and administrative staff were stretched. Inspectors advise that a review of the administrative needs of this service is undertaken.

The adoption agency had set up a duty service operated by members of the team during weekday mornings to be able to deal appropriately and promptly with enquiries from prospective adopters. Adopters reported that they were happy with the way their enquiries were handled and managed and that this had been prompt and efficient.

All staff have access to the local authorities policies and procedures via the personnel Handbook and via access to the council's website.

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?	2
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In last year the adoption agency has experienced some staffing difficulties due to unprecedented levels of sickness and two members of staff taking early retirement. This situation has caused some stress and pressure for both staff and managers. Some adopters also reported distressing delays in their applications and assessments for this reason. (Cross-reference Standard 4)

Managers responded by taking a number of measures to resolve the situation such as appointing sessional workers to undertake some assessments and some overseas adoption assessments, however staff expressed some concern about the length of time it had taken to advertise the vacancies. When a shortfall in staffing level occurs, managers must put in place contingency plans to resolve the situation in the shorter term and this is a recommendation.

Due to the growth and development of the adoption service the team manager is now responsible for 14 members of regular staff and a number of sessional social workers. It is envisaged that the team will be extended further in order to respond to the forthcoming legislation and changes in adoption and adoption support services. The team manager is under considerable workload pressure for this reason, which has been recognised by the service manager. It is advised that a review is undertaken of his present work commitments.

Some staff reported that a recent payment of the market supplement to "front line" child-care social workers dealing with child protection and looked after children to recruit and attract more staff to deal with the high vacancy rates in children's services, has led to an inequity in staffing conditions across the board.

Total number of social work staff of the adoption service	16	Number of staff who have left the adoption service in the past 12 months	3
Number of social work posts vacant In the adoption service.	1		

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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Good training opportunities were apparent, and all staff were aware of policies, procedures including the whistle blowing policy, locally known as " West Sussex County Council Confidential Reporting Policy " which is available in the personnel manual and available on the website.

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?

3

Inspectors were informed that the West Sussex County Council Social and Caring services provided a good general training programme for all staff, which covered a range of issues and subjects. Staff reported that they were encouraged to attend training courses and there was a range to choose from including I T courses. Staff identified a number of specialist courses run by other providers and inspectors noted that the adoption service was responsive and generous in providing opportunities for staff to attend these.

Training is intended on the Adoption and Children Act 2002 in the Autumn prior to its implementation in December 2005.

A new appraisal scheme has recently been introduced and staff have completed their personal development plans.

Team meetings are held regularly for both the adoption service and the adoption support service and matters of professional development, practice guidance and case law are discussed during these sessions.

Managers expect that staff will complete an evaluation form for any training undertaken. West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services Training Department evaluate the training priorities every three months in the light of any new service developments. Inspectors were informed that the adoption service and team managers meet annually with the relevant training officer to discuss the particular needs of the adoption service.

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?	1
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Children's adoption files were made up in the children's fieldwork teams, and inspectors noted in one case that these had not been set up. It is required that arrangements are put in place to ensure that such case records are set up and to ensure that these records are monitored to guarantee that they meet the regulations.

The adoption agency has written policy and procedural instructions for the "access and control" of case records which covers such issues as file retention and destruction policy, file structures for children's services and control of IT management systems. There is also an "access to personal records" policy, "data subject access" guidelines and a code of practice "client access to records".

Inspectors visited the main base for adoption archives.

Other archived files were kept in a local office in "sugar bags". Inspectors were concerned that facilities for the storage of these files were inadequate. Inspectors advise that a thorough review is undertaken of the storage of archived and of current adoption files to ensure that information stored on computer is thoroughly backed up and that all closed adoption files are identified and logged appropriately.

Inspectors noted and whilst there were detailed electronic systems in place to ensure that records were kept during the assessment of adopters, the outcomes of CRB checks were not recorded, this is recommended

Inspectors noted that decisions by supervisors are recorded on the case files as appropriate.

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?	3
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West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services have a number of corporate policies and procedures on the management of case recording and maintenance of case files, as already stated, and these take into account the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and of the Human Rights Act 1998.

They also have a comprehensive Access to Personal Records policy and procedures. Some of these policies require reviewing in the light of new legislation and this is intended.

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?

2

As already stated West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services have a code of practice on case recording and client access to records.

The West Sussex County Council " Social and Caring Services" have a complaints procedure, which complies with the regulations. Inspectors noted that complaints were addressed seriously and within the appropriate timescale.

Inspectors interviewed the complaints officer based at County Hall who keeps a record of all complaints made about the adoption agency. A record of these complaints is also kept on the relevant file.

Inspectors noted the records about allegations were not held separately nor were they included in a separate folder in the appropriate case file. This needs addressing.

Inspectors noted that there was some monitoring of case files but felt that this was not robust enough. A system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records needs to be developed and remedial action taken when necessary. This is a recommendation.

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?

1

Inspectors visited the human resources department and looked at the personnel files of a number of staff working for the adoption agency. It was noted in a number of cases that photographs, documentary evidence of qualifications, records of training undertaken and proof of identity were missing.

Inspectors also looked at the files of panel members and noted that references and checks had not been undertaken apart from CRB checks.

All checks and references including CRB checks as outlined in Regulation 11 and 15 need to be obtained for all staff, including administrative staff, panel members and sessional workers.

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?

1

The adoption agency has the use of two office premises based in different localities in the West Sussex area. The adoption support service is currently in premises, which are overcrowded and not well equipped. There are however plans to move this service to new offices in the same area and managers are working with architects, to ensure that these premises will provide appropriate facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room and appropriate offices which ensure privacy and confidentiality. The adoption service is housed in the same building as the day service for the elderly mentally infirm. Inspectors did not feel that this was appropriate for either service user group or their staff.

The County of West Sussex is a large geographical area and travelling between the two adoption service premises creates difficulties and is time-consuming for staff and managers alike. Inspectors suggest that West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services consider reviewing the arrangements for the premises of the adoption service, taking into account the need for this service to provide training, preparation and support for groups of prospective adopters as well as manage the adoption panel on a fortnightly basis.

Inspectors were informed that the West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services had appropriate insurance for its premises and contents.

The West Sussex County Council Social and Caring Services are currently drafting a disaster recovery plan, and it is recommended that issues relating to the adoption service are included in this document.

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 21st March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Provider's response available on request.

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

YES

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 5TH July 2005, 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 _____ of _____ 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 _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am 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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