



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

ADOPTION SERVICE

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

**Conway Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead, Wirral
CH42 4DD**

Lead Inspector
Maureen
Moore

Announced
12th July 2005

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Adoption*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above.

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Adoption Service

Address Conway Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, Wirral, CH42 4DD

Telephone number 0151 666 4696

Fax number

Email address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Joy Miller

Type of registration LAA

No. of places registered (if applicable)

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

N/A

Date of last inspection N/A

Brief Description of the Service:

The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral is on Merseyside and is a member of the Mersey Region Consortium. The council's adoption service is part of the wider provision for children and families. At the time of the inspection the agency was preparing for the establishment of the new department for Children and Lifelong Learning due in April 2006. The council offers the following adoption services: recruitment, preparation and assessment of adoptive parents; matching adoptive parents to children; approval of non-agency adopters; support and supervision of adopters; counselling for birth parents (in-house and independent); the assessment of children's needs; production of relevant reports for court; placement of children with adoptive families; support for children and adopters post-placement; post-adoption contact and support and counselling for adults who have been adopted. The service commissions inter-country adoption to a local voluntary agency

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken in July 2005. It was the first time that Wirral MBC had been measured against the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (2003) (the regulations). As a result, there are a number of statutory requirements and good practice recommendations, for which the agency must produce an action plan.

The methodology for the inspection included the following:

- reading of documents provided by the service
- questionnaires received from adopters; birth parents & families; placing social workers and the panel legal adviser
- file reading
- talking to staff at all levels of the service; an elected member of the council and 4 sets of adopters.
- observation of the adoption panel.

The agency had prepared well for the inspection and people at all levels of the service were welcoming, open and informative.

What the service does well:

Staffing in the adoption team is now settled following a period of instability during the previous year. The social workers are child-focused, experienced and knowledgeable; and the vast majority of adopters were extremely positive about the service they received. Comments about the social workers included: "...excellent... helpful, very committed..." ; "we feel that the team genuinely care for us... it is clearly more than a job to all of them" and "we have never felt anxious because we did not know what was happening".

Adopters spoke highly of the training they received, particularly having the opportunity to listen to people who had already adopted: "gave us realistic views". Also highly valued was the input from a birth grandparent, who one adopter said, had altered their views on the importance of a child maintaining contact with the birth family.

The questionnaires from, and interviews with adopters revealed that a professional and sensitive manner was employed by the social workers towards the applicants throughout the assessment process: "it should have been stressful, but wasn't because of our social worker's professionalism" was how one adopter put it. Adopters also reported that they were kept very well informed throughout, and that social workers always kept to pre-arranged appointments.

Adopters who had been to panel all reported a positive experience, and commented on the "lovely introductions" and how "they each explained their [professional and personal] interest in adoption".

Social workers reported that the senior management team in Wirral is very supportive and accessible. Senior managers demonstrated an awareness of the challenges facing the adoption service as well as a determination to address them effectively. Adoption and permanency planning for children now has a high profile, and is being integrated into the wider service provision; which should improve outcomes for children and young people in receipt of these services.

The recent appointment to the post of manager for the adoption team has already had a positive effect; preparation courses have increased and there are no applicants awaiting allocation for assessment. The expected appointment of a team leader should further improve the efficiency of the service to adopters.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection undertaken by CSCI.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to develop and set out a written plan for the recruitment of sufficient adopters from a wide range of backgrounds for the children in Wirral who will need placements; all but one set of adopters approved in the previous year were white European heterosexual couples. Information sent out to applicants and on the website should be revised to ensure that the eligibility criteria are explicit.

Although there has been a positive cultural shift within the agency towards a coherent approach to permanency planning for children, social workers in the service require specific training and development in producing meaningful Form E assessment reports; as well as other aspects, such as life-story work. This whole area of work is crucial in helping children and young people to develop and maintain a positive self-identity, and so can contribute to the success of adoptive placements.

Form F assessments on adoptive applicants also need to be improved to make them more analytical and relevant. Effective quality assurance systems should be developed and implemented to ensure that reports are of a consistently high standard before they go to panel. The agency should ensure that all staff and panel members are given training on issues of diversity so that they are able to consider its significance throughout the process.

Wirral needs to develop and implement a written strategy for its work with birth parents and families from when a child first becomes looked after, to ensure that they are treated openly and so that vital information regarding a child's heritage is maintained.

The service must revise its children's guide to adoption to include information specific to the Wirral, as well as the information required by the regulations; the guide should be there to enhance children and young people's understanding of what is happening to them.

The agency should consider whether its present arrangement for case management delivers the most efficient and effective service in terms of planning for permanency, as there is evidence of hold-ups in the transfer of cases through the system; and ultimately, delays in the progression of children's care plans.

Although Wirral have some good systems and structures in place for performance management and monitoring of activity, they seem to be divorced from the everyday practice within the social work teams. The agency should consider how best it can produce and use management information to inform the development of the adoption service.

The agency needs to develop and implement a robust system of file auditing to ensure that information contained in children's and adopters' files is relevant and legible.

The council should give serious consideration to further investment in the IT infrastructure to enable staff to carry out their duties more efficiently. There was evidence of sluggish computer systems and social workers do not have access to email or the internet.

Wirral must ensure that personnel files kept on staff and social workers meet the requirements of the NMS and the regulations; some files did not have evidence of current CRB clearance or evidence that references had been verified by telephone.

The agency should review its arrangements for the storage of archived adoption files, to minimise the risk of damage from fire and or water.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

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Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing - There are no NMS that map to this outcome

Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements identified during the inspection

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The agency matches children with adopters (NMS 2)
- The agency assesses and prepares adopters (NMS 4)
- Adoptors are given information about matching (NMS 5)
- The functions of the adoption panel are as specified (NMS 10)
- The constitution and membership of adoption panels are as specified (NMS 11)
- Adoption panels are timely (NMS 12)
- Adoption agency decision is made without delay and appropriately (NMS 13)
- The manager is suitable to carry on or manage an adoption agency (NMS 15)
- Staff are suitable to work with children (NMS 19)
- The agency has a robust complaints procedure (NMS 24 Voluntary Adoption Agency only)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 19.

The agency does not have an effective plan to recruit sufficient numbers of prospective adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for adoptive placements in Wirral.

EVIDENCE:

The service placed 15 children (including a sibling group of 4) for adoption in the twelve months preceding the inspection; there were no disruptions within those placements (although one approved match did not go ahead). Discussion with adoption team social workers demonstrated their knowledge and experience in this area of work.

The agency does not have a written recruitment strategy for adopters. It is recommended that the service undertakes an analysis of the needs of children waiting currently in Wirral, and of those coming through the system, in order to target and recruit potential adopters best suited to meet those needs. These should explicitly include people from all sections of the community. In the period prior to the inspection, only one single adopter was approved (who later withdrew); there were no same sex couples and those couples who were approved, were all of white European origin. A more dynamic, marketing based

approach to recruitment would benefit the service as a whole, and enhance the chances of children finding successful adoptive families more quickly.

Many adopters reported significant delays during the initial stages of their contact with the agency (all cited staff shortages); but once the preparation training and assessment process were underway, the vast majority were extremely positive. Of the training, one adopter said "... excellent ... informative ... friendly and supportive". Another commented on how issues of the child's loss and rejection were brought home to them, which helped them to realise how important it was to keep a child's given name.

Adopters comments on the assessment procedure included: "We have nothing but praise for our social worker ... [she] was hardworking and efficient". The majority of adopters reported that they were kept well informed during the process, and had good access to support from adoption team workers: " [we] have always been called back if the social worker was not at her desk".

The standard of the Forms F, on adopters were variable, and despite the good practice of second worker opinions prior to completion of the assessment, there was evidence of insufficient quality assurance. There was too little analysis into the effects of applicants' life experiences and no weight given to the quality of information gleaned from referees. Issues to do with diversity were not discussed adequately, indicating a lack of confidence on behalf of social workers. Managers should consider how these issues can be addressed within the service.

The quality of Forms E was also variable; ranging from good to very poor, and again there was evidence of shortfalls in the quality assurance process. There were examples of panel recommendations being deferred because of the inadequacy of information contained in them. This contributes to delay in the progression of children's cases (which is discussed more fully in the management section of this report). In some reports seen, there was no evidence of children's views being recorded (one child was aged 9); or those of the birth parents.

The agency has relevant matching policies and procedures and adopters reported that they believed that they received sufficient information on their children. However, the service should consider whether meetings at which adopters are first considered as potential matches with children are sensitive towards the adopters: one case was reported where there had been four people present (including a foster carer and a social work student), which made the adopters feel uncomfortable.

Adopters prepare a family book for children, which is good practice, but guidance should be given as to the amount and type of information included. One seen resembled a family photograph album, rather than a personal introduction to a new home.

The service has various policy documents relating to the functions of the panel (one of which states "The purpose... [is]... to approve", rather than recommend). There should be one set of policies and attendant procedures which cover all of the points in 10.2 of the NMS.

The panel comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people, nearly all of whom have personal experience of adoption. There is a good gender balance, but no members from minority ethnic communities. The panel that was observed was well chaired, very child-focused and sensitive to all involved; insightful questions were asked and there was evidence of panel undertaking appropriate quality assurance. There was evidence also however, that the panel sometimes makes recommendations in principle, pending further information. This is not good practice as cases could fall through the net; especially as they are not monitored in any way.

The minute taking of the panel meetings could be improved to reflect better the discussion and the reasons for conclusions reached. This is a specialist role for which the minute taker might benefit from training. The agency decision is usually made in a timely fashion, following consideration of the papers; this was demonstrated by examples of decisions being deferred for clarification or further information. The agency decision maker does not meet with the panel chair; this should be considered as it would provide independent insight into the quality of work undertaken by the agency. Not everyone receives confirmation of the agency decision, and of those who do, the letters are not signed by the decision maker. A system should be set in place to ensure that letters confirming the agency's decisions are signed by the decision maker and sent out, in good time, to relevant parties.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- The adoption agency provides support for adoptive parents (NMS 6)
- The agency has access to specialist advisers as appropriate (NMS 18)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 6, 18.

The support offered to adopters and the very good access to a range of specialist advice contributes to the successful placement of children in the Wirral.

EVIDENCE:

Adopters reported that they receive good support from the adoption team post-approval and when a child is placed with them. Comments included: "... during this stressful time, our social worker contacted us out of hours and provided invaluable support"; "...during the placement we have felt very supported" and "... we know should we want advice, we only have to telephone...".

Placing social workers also remarked positively: "... the link worker was very good in this case. Very supportive and did over and above what was expected" and "the social worker in the adoption team is always working with the child's needs in mind".

Discussion with the adoption team social workers found them to be very child focused and there was evidence of some very good adoption support plans in place. However, there was also some evidence of panel recommending some potentially difficult placements without having seen the support plans. This is not good practice and could lead to otherwise avoidable disruptions in placements. The agency does not offer adopters any further training post-approval or placement. Relevant training can prove to be significant in helping adopters manage difficult situations and should be considered in terms of the agency's overall post-adoption support strategy.

Discussion with adopters revealed that the agency is very good at emphasising the importance of keeping safe any information relating to a child's birth heritage. All those spoken to demonstrated this either by their understanding

for the need of ongoing contact, or of the importance of their children's life-story work.

If a disruption occurs in a placement a meeting is convened and is chaired by a person who is independent of the local authority. Ongoing support is offered to children and adopters in these situations for as long as it is needed.

The service has access to a legal adviser who attends the panel, and a medical adviser who is a member of the panel. Staff confirmed that both advisers are available for consultation, and each was described by staff as being "very approachable" and accessible. The medical adviser "always offers appointments" when necessary.

The panel and social workers also have access to sound educational advice via an educational psychologist, of whom staff spoke highly. In addition, the service employs a child psychotherapist, who is also a member of the adoption panel. This person splits his time between the NHS trust and social services. This is an arrangement that appears to work well at present, but workload capacity needs to be kept under constant review if, as anticipated, the demand for this very valuable service increases.

There is no written protocol governing the roles of specialist advisers; one should be developed in keeping with 18.5 of the NMS.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- Birth parents and birth families are involved in adoption plans (NMS 7)
- Birth parents and birth families are involved in maintaining the child's heritage (NMS 8)
- The Adoption agency supports birth parents and families (NMS 9)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7, 8, 9.

The lack of training for, and inexperience of, child care social workers does not enable birth parents to participate in the care planning processes for their children, when adoption is the plan.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence in one case of some very good work done with a birth family, which was reflected in the child's care plan and Form E. However, this was found to be the exception rather than the rule. Other Forms E looked at did not indicate birth family involvement in the planning process and the assessments were not signed by the birth parents. It was acknowledged by managers of the service that child care social workers need training in this very sensitive area of work.

Wirral has a service level agreement with After Adoption to provide independent support for birth parents. This agreement is very well monitored by the agency in terms of outcomes; but it is recommended that the service be more actively promoted to birth parents, and that take-up rates are analysed with a view to improving the service.

The agency has letterbox contact system which works well. The service has recently advertised the post of assistant social worker who, it is envisaged, will co-ordinate the information exchange under the supervision of the team manager.

There was evidence of life-story work being done for children, but the quality was variable. There was also evidence of significant delays in its completion – one case highlighted, revealed a two year gap before the work was handed to the adoptive parents. This work is crucial in helping children formulate and maintain a positive self-identity as well as helping them to reflect on and understand their history.

The agency needs to review its strategy for working with birth parents and families from when a child becomes looked after to ensure that they are treated openly, and that vital information regarding the child's heritage is maintained.

Management

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- The agency provides clear written information for prospective adopters (NMS 3)
- The manager has skills to carry on or manage the adoption agency (NMS 14)
- The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 16)
- The agency is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 17)
- The staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 20)
- The agency has sufficient staff with the right skills / experience (NMS 21)
- The agency is a fair and competent employer (NMS 22)
- The agency provides training for staff (NMS 23)
- Case records for children and prospective / approved adopters are comprehensive and accurate (NMS 25)
- The agency provides access to records as appropriate (NMS 26)
- The agency's administrative records processes are appropriate (NMS 27)
- The agency maintains personnel files for members of staff and members of adoption panels (NMS 28)
- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for purpose (NMS 29)
- The adoption agency is financially viable (NMS 30, Voluntary Adoption Agency only)
- The adoption agency has robust financial processes (NMS 31)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 3, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

The management systems are improving in the adoption service. However, the agency needs to ensure that social workers have the training and developmental support to ensure that good outcomes for children are achieved in a timely manner.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the adoption service. The document meets the regulations and the NMS and it has been ratified by the elected members.

Currently the agency uses the BAAF children's guide to adoption, but the booklet does not contain any information specifically for Wirral children. This should be put right so that children and young people can better understand what is happening to them.

The information sent out to applicants covers the eligibility criteria. The booklet states that applications are welcome regardless of "race, religion, gender or class..."; but does not refer to disability or sexuality. This should be altered, as people from these groups could assume that they were ineligible to adopt in Wirral. One adopter said that the written information "was generalised and poor". Adopters also reported that the website was mediocre; the service should give due consideration to the quality of this initial information as it could be losing potential adopters.

The service manager for adoption has been in an acting-up role since October 2004 and the team manager has been in post since May 2005. Both are professionally qualified and have relevant experience. The team manager is due to undertake NVQ 4 in management which should broaden further her knowledge and skills. She demonstrated clear knowledge of adoption and deep insight into her role. In the short time since her appointment there has been evidence of a more structured and proactive approach to the work: preparation groups have increased in number from 1 per year to 4; and management information systems are being established. This work should have a positive impact on the efficiency of the service. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for the post of adoption team leader, which meant that the manager had to fulfil a broader remit than would normally be the case. The team leader's post should be filled in September 2005.

Staff in the service reported receiving very good support from all managers through to the director; they were all described as being available and examples were given of when this had been so. Staff also spoke of the "nice system in place, for being thanked for work well done".

Wirral's plan for an integrated children's service is underway and the new Department for Children and Lifelong Learning will be established in April 2006. The current director of social services described the "journey" that the children's service has been undergoing, taking it away from crisis response towards a more co-ordinated approach. This approach has included raising the profile of permanency planning, as it was recognised that there needed to be a cultural shift in the attitudes towards this area of work. The senior

management team acknowledges that there is still a way to go before a coherent method of permanency planning is embedded in the service. The service should consider providing relevant training on all areas of this aspect of their work.

The agency would benefit from a review of its existing practices in planning for children by mapping out its core business. It needs to identify how best to accomplish a whole systems approach, and so achieve consistently good outcomes for children - as current methods appear confusing.

Presently, the adoption team workers are notified of cases following the 4 month statutory review, and they assume case responsibility from the completion of care proceedings. However, the volume of work, and blockages in the flow of transfers from the assessment to planned work teams, means that aspects of adoption work are carried out in all parts of the service. It is difficult therefore to track the planning and adoption processes systematically; and the task of effective monitoring is made more complicated. There was evidence to suggest that if all of the children's adoption work was with the adoption team, there would be little or no space for work with adopters.

The agency does not have a workload management system in place and it is difficult to gauge the weight given to work in terms of complexity and quantity. It is recommended that a system is devised so that managers can identify issues of capacity.

Wirral has a larger than average number of looked after children, (around 650) with relatively few adoptions. In the year preceding this inspection 15 children were adopted; however, already this year there has been a sharp increase to 11 children being placed for adoption since April. The agency facilitates an unusually high number of adoptions of children by birth family members. Immediately prior to the inspection, the agency held a seminar to explore the alternatives to kinship adoptions under the present and forthcoming legislation. This was a timely intervention as the complex nature of this work detracts from the team's main tasks.

It was noted that there is a backlog of stepparent adoptions, although the team manager had identified possible ways of dealing with this problem, which included the funding of a temporary social work post.

The adoption task force was established in November 2004 and meets monthly to consider the cases of children who are waiting and to identify and deal with obstacles and shortfalls in the care planning process. This supplements the work of the council's quality assurance and review unit which monitors the timescales affecting permanency planning for children. This unit produces good information on children's progress through to permanency, but the data is, by its nature, historical. It is unclear how such information is used to inform service development, particularly in the recruitment of suitable adopters; or

how it could be used to address the hold-ups in the transferring of cases referred to earlier. The business performance manager holds performance monitoring surgeries for all managers monthly, but there does not yet seem to be a universal understanding of their links to operational effectiveness; as interviews with middle managers and staff across the service bore out.

Wirral has suffered from the national shortage of social workers, and the council has undertaken a sustained recruitment drive which is now beginning to pay dividends. It is vital that new recruits to the childcare teams are given a comprehensive induction, particularly in relation to all aspects of permanency planning and adoption.

The service should establish, without delay, a robust system of file auditing: children's adoption files showed no evidence of any management oversight, and the quality of some of the paperwork was poor. Handwritten notes were difficult to read, as were poorly photocopied official documents. On one file, the date of a birth parent's death was recorded wrongly; there was no Form E on another child's file. Material for life-story work was placed loosely in files, and could easily be lost. It is of utmost importance that children's adoption files reflect an accurate record of all work undertaken in relation to the adoption, which will be readily understood by the adoptee at any future date.

Adopters' files were generally well ordered, but again handwritten notes varied in their legibility. These files too, lacked management oversight. Decisions made during supervision should be recorded on all files and any signatures on documents should be dated and supplemented by the manager's or social worker's full name. The service should develop and implement effective quality assurance systems for the supervision of Form E and F assessments.

The service recently introduced a new IT system, however it is yet to be fully established across the service. The team managers and independent reviewing officers still have manual data collection systems, which are laborious and could lead to inaccuracies, as well as difficulties in cross referencing. Social workers do not have email or internet access and there were several reports of the computer network being very slow. Adoption team social workers have one mobile phone between them, and this was reported not to be working properly. The council should consider seriously whether the equipment currently available to workers helps them to perform to their full capacity.

Administrative staff were seen to be hardworking and sensitive to the nature of the work of the service. However, the agency should consider the adequacy of its provision as there was evidence of reports being delayed in going to panel because there had been no one to type them.

Staff personnel files do not meet the regulations or the NMS. For example, some files do not have up-to-date evidence of CRB clearance and the agency does not follow up written references with telephone enquiries. Although

independent and sessional staff are not directly employed by the council, the service must keep appropriate files on them that contain the information set out in Schedules 3 & 4. Panel members' files do not meet the regulations either; CRB disclosures were missing from some files, and there was evidence that the agency had accepted a panel member's CRB clearance which had been obtained elsewhere. CRB disclosures are not portable; the service must undertake its own check on every person working for the purposes of the adoption agency.

The security of archived adoption files is inadequate and they are at risk from fire and or water damage. The service should review its arrangements for the safe storage of these records.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Adoption have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
8	2
9	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
2	2
4	2
5	3
10	2
11	3
12	2
13	2
15	2
19	2
24	N/A

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
No NMS are mapped to this outcome	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
6	3
18	2

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
3	2
14	3
16	3
17	2
20	2
21	2
22	3
23	2
25	2
26	3
27	1
28	1
29	3
30	N/A
31	N/A

N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Voluntary Adoption and the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2003 or Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	2,5,7	7 (2) (b) & (e) (1983)	The agency must ensure that that reports on children for whom adoption is the plan include all information as required by Parts I and III, through to V of the Schedule; and that a child's wishes and feelings are taken into account.	31.01.06
2.	1	3 (2003)	The agency's children's guide must include the information referred to in the regulation and Schedule 2.	30.11.05
3.	19,21,23	10 & 12 (2) (a)(2003)	The agency must ensure that all current and subsequently appointed social work staff receive comprehensive training in all matters relating to permanency planning. The agency must ensure that all staff and panel members can demonstrate understanding of issues to do with diversity in permanency planning for children.	31.01.06 and ongoing
4.	28	15 (2003)	The agency must ensure that all staff and panel members' personnel files comply with schedules 3 & 4 of the regulation (this includes staff not directly	30.11.05

			employed by Wirral, but who work for the purposes of the adoption service).	
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RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	2	The agency should produce a written strategy for the recruitment of sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children waiting.
2.	2,5	The agency should review how it conducts initial matching meetings with potential adopters, to ensure sensitivity to all concerned.
3.	4	The agency should ensure that its preparation for adopters covers all aspects of diversity, and that proper assessment is made of applicants' attitudes in these areas. The agency should ensure that social workers consider the value of information gleaned from interviews with applicants' referees.
4.	4,5,7,20	The agency should develop and implement robust quality assurance systems in respect of its Form E and Form F assessments.
5.	5	The agency should produce guidance for the development of "family books" produced by adopters for children.
6.	10	The agency should develop one set of policies and procedures that cover all points in 10.2 Of the NMS. The panel should cease making any recommendations "in principle".
7.	12	The agency should consider specialist training for the panel minute taker.
8.	13	The agency should ensure that letters confirming agency decisions are signed by the decision maker and sent to relevant parties without undue delay.
9.	6	The agency should ensure that panel considers adoption support plans each time a child's case is considered for matching. The agency should consider providing post-approval training for adopters.
10.	18	The agency should develop written protocols to govern the roles of specialist advisers.
11.	7	The agency should ensure that birth parents are enabled to contribute effectively to their child's care plans. The agency should develop a system to promote the

		independent support service for birth parents and families; and analyse the take-up rates.
12.	8,9	The agency should develop and implement a strategy for working with birth parents and families from when a child becomes looked after, to ensure that they are treated openly and that vital information regarding the child's heritage is maintained.
13.	1	The children's guide should be altered to ensure that information is specific to services provided by Wirral.
14.	3	The agency should revise its information for potential adopters to reflect accurately the service's eligibility criteria.
15.	17	The agency should review how it produces and uses management information so that it is better linked to the day-to-day operation of the service. The agency should ensure all relevant personnel have access to computerised data collection systems.
16.	15,19	The agency should ensure that written references for members of staff are verified by telephone enquiries.
17.	20	The agency should consider whether its current system of case management delivers the most efficient and effective service. The agency should develop a workload management system that takes into account the quantity and complexity of cases held within each of the teams. The agency should consider whether its current provision of administrative support is adequate to meet the demands of the service. The agency should consider further investment in office equipment and infrastructure (including email) to enable staff to carry out their duties efficiently.
18.	25	The agency should review its arrangements for the storage of archived files, to minimise risk of damage from fire and or water.
19.	27	The agency should establish and maintain a robust system for the auditing of files. Case notes should be typewritten, signed and dated. Any signatures should be supplemented by a full printed name. Any case decisions taken during supervision should be recorded on files.

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