

# South Tyneside MBC Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC050051                    |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 09/12/2009                  |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Sean White / Dennis Bradley |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Key                         |

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| <b>Registered person</b>       | South Tyneside Council   |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Terry Fitzpatrick  |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Helen Watson   |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 12/12/2006   |

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

The agency undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption work. It recruits, prepares assesses and approves adopters, provides support to people affected by adoption and enables birth families to be included in arrangements.

It is located close to the centre of South Shields and is accessible to people with genuine business with the agency.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This is an agency that has a highly committed approach to meeting the needs of children through adoption. It achieves this through a highly motivated, conscientious and innovative approach to recruiting and approving only the most suitable families, supporting placements and ensuring children's circumstances and histories are well documented. The focus on children is impressively demonstrated through its guides and information, and diversity is thoughtfully considered in the range of multi-lingual adoption publications.

There is a trusting and inclusive approach to working with birth families that has resulted in reciprocal, helpful arrangements throughout the process; this is achieved through a non-judgemental, enabling approach that benefits children throughout.

The agency is managed to a very high standard with strong involvement and commitment at all levels of the authority.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The agency strives and continues to improve upon an already established model of good practice and innovation in all areas.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is not judged.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a clear and focused strategy that is aimed at recruiting adopters that can meet the range of needs of children who require adoptive placements. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that children's needs are at the forefront of all activity and successful placements have been achieved through a carefully considered yet dynamic approach. The agency also has an impressive record of placing children with families that are able to meet their needs in a very timely way.

Families are presented with all necessary information in respect of the child(ren) they are matched with and there is a carefully structured approach to ensuring that plans for introductions and placement are well coordinated and executed. Children with complex histories and circumstances are matched with families following strenuous efforts to ensure that the adopters being considered are the most suitable.

The preparation and assessment process is undertaken with great care and thoroughness. The two stage preparation groups provide applicants with a detailed and informative underpinning to the assessment process, which is rigorous, skilfully managed and focused on parenting capacity.

An exceptionally well managed adoption panel brings further rigour to the process, ensuring that the agency decision-maker has clear and thoroughly scrutinised information from which informed decisions can be made. The decisions are made in a very timely way; even speedier decisions are made in situations where necessary, which adds further value to the overall process and avoids unnecessary delay. The administrative arrangements for supporting the panel are very efficient; all papers are available in time for members to read and absorb the information being considered and minutes of proceedings are very well presented, suitably detailed and coherent.

The highly qualified manager and staff team have all been in post for some considerable time, bringing stability and consistency to the agency. Everyone involved in carrying on the service demonstrate impressive skill and knowledge, and carry out their duties with innovation, and a passionate and conscientious commitment to meeting children's needs through adoption.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a clear, sustained commitment to its approved adopters and provides a high level of support. Placements are carefully managed with all workers across children's services operating in a coherent way, often led by the expertise and knowledge of the workers and managers in the adoption service. This ensures families are enabled to establish their attachments and relationships in a safe and supportive framework that is focused on successful placements.

Post adoption support is, in the main, provided through a registered independent agency. However, there are arrangements in place to support families directly by the service. Some of these arrangements are detailed, complex and demand a sophisticated approach, and demonstrate the lengths this agency will pursue to enable adoptions to succeed.

There is a medical advisor in post who provides the panel and the agency with all necessary advice and legal advice is also accessible at all times. The agency accesses all other necessary specialist advice to support families wherever required and demonstrates a sophisticated and innovative approach to seeking and securing the most appropriate support and advice.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

A group of workers from across children's services has been established to undertake and facilitate life-story work for all children placed for adoption; it is a multi-disciplinary team with its own coordinator. This has streamlined the work, developed a timely approach and produced material of a high quality. Birth parents are encouraged and enabled to participate in this, and the non-judgemental and inclusive approach of the agency has proved invaluable in engaging with families with complex and unhappy circumstances.

Birth parents are also encouraged and enabled to participate in the planning for their children's adoption and making arrangements for contact. This has resulted in a trusting relationship with many birth families, who in turn provide the service with reciprocal assistance in training and preparing prospective adopters.

Independent support is always offered with referrals made to an adoption support agency in all cases.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency's statement of purpose, policies and procedures provide a realistic framework within which the service operates. The children's guides, for both younger and school-age children, are innovative, presented in a first-class, professional and child-centred way and are very impressive. They demonstrate the dynamic and committed approach this agency has to children.

Similarly, the information provided to people enquiring about adoption is also impressive and demonstrates equally dynamic attention given to promoting adoption to potential families. It is available in a range of languages, including Braille, and provides a wealth of information about the service and adoption in general.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is a very strong commitment to, and understanding of, the needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds and practice is demonstrably aimed at ensuring that circumstances and needs are fully considered at all times.

The management of the agency, at all levels including the executive, is dynamic, innovative and seeking to improve the service on a continuous basis. The energy with which the service is managed is impressive and everyone involved in running the agency is held in high esteem across the authority. Quality assurance is built into the systems at all stages of the process and outcomes for children benefit from this focused and considered approach. Workers are encouraged and enabled to use and develop their skills through both well established support systems and training. Workloads are well managed and carefully supervised, administration is efficient and supportive of the service, and there is a constant reviewing of systems and practice to achieve the most suitable operative models.

The service's infrastructure, including administration, record keeping and case-record management is very well organised and supports the agency in its operational responsibilities. The premises, although somewhat small, are suitable for the current needs of the agency.