

Inspection report

Aberdeenshire Council - Adoption Service Adoption Service

Carlton House
Arduthie Road
Stonehaven AB39 2DL

Inspected by: Liz Adam
(Care Commission Officer)

Type of inspection: Announced

Inspection completed on: 19 February 2009

Service Number

CS2004084094

Service name

Aberdeenshire Council - Adoption Service

Service addressCarlton House
Arduathie Road
Stonehaven AB39 2DL**Provider Number**

SP2003000029

Provider Name

Aberdeenshire Council

Inspected ByLiz Adam
Care Commission Officer**Inspection Type**

Announced

Inspection Completed

19 February 2009

Period since last inspection

12 months

Local Office AddressJohnstone House
Rose Street
Aberdeen
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Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council operates its adoption service through the Family Placement Service, an integrated service since March 2003, which had three teams, each with responsibility for a discrete geographical area. Uniform practices and procedures are adopted throughout the teams. One team manager had lead responsibility for adoption and inter-country adoption, and a Senior Practitioner in Family Placement with specific responsibility for adoption was also in post.

Aberdeenshire Council provided the following services to children and adults:

Assessment: to recruit, prepare, assess and approve applicant adopters who can meet the needs of children needing adoption.

Matching: to match and place children with adopters who can best meet their assessed needs throughout childhood and beyond, once adoption has been identified as being in their best interests.

Post adoption support: children and adopters.

Support and supervision of adoption placements.

Birth records counselling.

Service to birth parents at the time of adoption, where adoption has been identified as being in the best interests of their child.

Home study for inter-country adoption.

The service was registered in December 2005.

At 31 December 2008 there were 25 approved adopters with 10 having being approved between 1st January and 31st December 2008. Between 1 January and 31 December 2008, 20 children and young people had been approved for adoption with 12 having been placed with an adoptive family. There had been 1 disrupted placement.

Based on the findings of this inspection the service has been awarded the following grades:

Quality of Care and Support - 5 - Very Good

Quality of Staffing - 5 - Very Good

Quality of Management and Leadership - 4 - Good

This inspection report and grades represent the Care Commission's assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during this inspection.

Grades for this care service may change following other regulatory activity. Please refer to the care services register on the Care Commission's website (www.carecommission.com) for the most up-to-date grades for this service.

Basis of Report

Before the Inspection

The Annual Return

The service submitted a completed Annual Return as requested by the Care Commission.

The Self-Assessment Form

The service submitted a self-assessment form as requested by the Care Commission.

Regulation Support Assessment

The inspection plan for this service was decided after a Regulation Support Assessment (RSA) was carried out to determine the intensity of inspection necessary. The RSA is an assessment undertaken by the Care Commission Officer (CCO) which considers complaints activity, changes in the provision of the service, nature of notifications made to the Care Commission by the service (such as absence of a manager) and action taken upon requirements. The CCO will also have considered how the service responded to situations and issues as part of the RSA.

This assessment resulted in this service receiving a low RSA score and so a low intensity inspection was required. The inspection was based on the relevant Inspection Focus Areas and associated National Care Standards, recommendations and requirements from previous inspections and complaints or other regulatory activity.

This report was written following an announced inspection which took place over two weeks beginning on 9 February 2009. Two Care Commission Officers conducted the inspection.

During the inspection process

During the inspection visit, evidence was gathered from a number of sources. Documents examined included the following:

- Service users records
- Relevant policies and procedures
- Information leaflets ;provided to service users
- Analysis of questionnaires
- Minutes of meetings
- Completed questionnaires in respect of grading
- Aberdeenshire Council's adoption agency website.

Discussion took place with a range of staff and service users including:

- Social Work Manager
- Three Team Managers
- Six staff from the Family Placement Service
- Three staff from the fieldwork/permanence teams
- Two adoptive parents.

This inspection was conducted simultaneously with the inspection of the Council's Fostering Service, which is subject to a separate report.

Inspection Focus Areas and links to Quality Themes and Statements for 2008/09

Details of the inspection focus and associated Quality Themes to be used in inspecting each type of care service in 2008/09 and supporting inspection guidance, can be found at:
<http://www.carecommission.com/>

Fire Safety Issues

The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced new regulatory arrangements in respect of fire safety, on 1 October 2006. In terms of those arrangements, responsibility for enforcing the statutory provisions in relation to fire safety now lies with the Fire and Rescue service for the

area in which a care service is located. Accordingly, the Care Commission will no longer report on matters of fire safety as part of its regulatory function, but, where significant fire safety issues become apparent, will alert the relevant Fire and Rescue service to their existence in order that it may act as it considers appropriate. Further advice on your responsibilities is available at www.infoscotland.com/firelaw

Action taken on requirements since last Inspection

There were no requirement made at the last inspection but the Care Commission received an action plan from the service detailing how it would meet the recommendations arising from the last inspection. These recommendations were noted to have been satisfactorily addressed.

Comments on Self Assessment

The self-assessment was fully completed to a high standard and noted what the agency thought they did well and areas in which they thought they might improve.

View of Service Users

The views of two adoptive families were considered as part of the inspection.

Adopters had been given the opportunity to complete a grading questionnaire issued by the agency, and the views expressed were considered. The completed questionnaires were examined by the CCO.

It was not appropriate to interview the children whose files had been examined due to their age and circumstances.

View of Carers

The CCOs did not speak with birth parents as part of the inspection.

Quality Theme 1: Quality of Care and Support

Overall CCO Theme Grading: 5 - Very Good

Statement 1: We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of the care and support provided by the service.

Service Strengths

Service users experienced a service which supported participation in a number of different ways. They had good opportunities to make their views known. The service had recently formalised the participation process through the development of a participation strategy. The strategy acknowledged a number of principles based on mutual trust, respect, flexibility and working in partnership.

A questionnaire was given to prospective adopters which asked their views about the quality of care and support, quality of staffing and quality of management and leadership. They were asked to grade the service and to offer their suggestions as to the three top priorities for the development of the service for the coming year.

Adopters were asked for their views on a number of occasions during the approval and matching process. These included evaluation of the training course, the assessment process and the experience of attending the Permanence Panel.

The training programme for prospective adopters included sessions and presentations by adoptive parents which detailed their experience of the process. Discussion with the staff who were responsible for presenting the most recent training course indicated that the input from approved adopters was an integral and invaluable part of the process. Discussion with an adoptive parent who had subsequently been involved in the training course also acknowledged the valuable contribution which this made to the process.

The two prospective adopters interviewed during the course of the inspection were generally very positive about the level of support provided by the link worker and the child's social worker. One commented that "the fact that the staff are child-centred shines through". One prospective adopter had had her link worker changed on a number of occasions. While she acknowledged that this was unavoidable, there was a period when she considered that the level of support was not as great as previously offered. She had made contact with the management of the service and this had ultimately led to a satisfactory resolution of the situation.

Three children's experience of the adoption process was considered as part of the inspection. Information within their files, which were selected at random, indicated that all legislative procedures had been undertaken timeously. The files also indicated that where possible and appropriate birth families had been involved in the adoption process.

The agency's website was noted to be a valuable source of information for those interested in finding out about the service which was available. The agency also offered a range of information leaflets on all aspects of the adoption process. These were subject to regular review and included leaflets specifically for children and young people.

Areas for Development

As stated above a participation strategy was in place and the agency had already considered the developments of the service for the coming year. These included the development of a peer mentoring scheme and opportunities to improve participation by birth families.

The service is encouraged to maintain the current very good practice in this area.

CCO Grading

5 - Very Good

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Statement 3: We ensure that service user's health and wellbeing needs are met.

Service Strengths

Rigorous systems were in place aimed at ensuring the health and well being of service users was protected. The agency had clear procedures in place relating to the medical aspects of adoption and fostering.

Records showed that the medical advisor to the Permanence Panel ensured that pre adoption medicals were undertaken for applicants and for children. Prospective adopters confirmed that they had access to the medical advisor to discuss any issues they had.

Aberdeenshire Council adoption agency had access to a Looked After Children's (LAC) Nurse appointed by Grampian Health Board. Her remit is to arrange a health assessment when the child is first accommodated. She continues to be available for consultation where necessary.

Inspection Focus Area - Child Protection

Children were looked after by carers who were aware of safe caring practices and the policy in relation to child protection. The preparation training included caring for children who have suffered abuse and neglect and the impact this may have on an individual child's future development. The service are considering further input on child protection within the training programme. Prospective adopters are provided with a copy of the Children's Charter and the Framework Standards for Child Protection.

Staff within the agency were also aware of their role and responsibility in this area and the procedures to be followed should there be any concerns regarding an individual child's well-being.

Areas for Development

The self-assessment completed by the agency acknowledged the limits placed on the medical advisor and the LAC Nurse due to their responsibility to provide a service to other

local authorities within the immediate area.

The self-assessment also made reference to the development of a post adoption support service.

CCO Grading

5 - Very Good

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Quality Theme 2: Quality of Environment

Overall CCO Theme Grading:

Quality Theme 3: Quality of Staffing

Overall CCO Theme Grading: 5 - Very Good

Statement 1: We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of staffing in the service.

Service Strengths

This Quality Statement has also been reported on in Quality Statement 1.1.

Adopters were given the opportunity to provide feedback and comments in relation to various aspects of the service provision, including the quality of staffing. There was also the opportunity for prospective adopters to provide feedback at the end of the preparation course and after attending the Permanence Panel.

The complaints procedure further enabled prospective and existing adopters and service users to express their views. Discussion with the manager and examination of evidence indicated that the outcome of complaint investigations was used to assess and improve the quality of the service.

Two members of the Permanence Panel were adopters and they were also involved in the business meetings of the Panel providing a further opportunity for the development of practice.

Areas for Development

The service is encouraged to progress the developments noted in their participation strategy as detailed in Quality Statement 1.1.

CCO Grading

5 - Very Good

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Statement 3: We have a professional, trained and motivated workforce which operates to National Care Standards, legislation and best practice.

Service Strengths

The agency ensured that staff were appropriately trained and were both professional and motivated in undertaking all tasks associated with their roles.

The agency had a range of policies and procedures including protection of vulnerable adults and children, whistle-blowing, recruitment, confidentiality and employee development which

supported staff in all aspects of their work.

Discussion with the service manager, team managers and staff confirmed that regular supervision and annual appraisals were in place through the agency's Supervision Policy and Employee Development and Review Scheme. Staff spoken with confirmed that there were regular training opportunities which ensured that staff were able to meet the requirements of their Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registration. Staff training needs were discussed in supervision and were used to inform the agency's annual training analysis.

Individual staff spoken with confirmed that they were supported by managers and other colleagues within the agency. Family Placement Service staff were situated in Children and Families Teams which encouraged the establishment and continued development of positive working relationships. Staff also confirmed that they were able to access the expertise of social workers in other teams such as Criminal Justice or Mental Health as and when required. Both managers and staff spoke very positively of the support provided to the service from the agency's legal services team.

Staff were aware of the National Care Standards (NCS) which were taken account of within their practice. Copies of the NCS were also provided to all approved prospective adopters.

Managers and staff advised that monthly team meetings were aimed at improving team practice and providing opportunities for cascading information from the Social Work Manager on strategic issues affecting the service. The agency had recently considered re-structuring the Family Placement Service and managers and staff confirmed that they had been consulted and their views sought on this development. Discussion with staff and evidence provided indicated that staff were regularly encouraged to contribute to consultations and participate in working or focus groups.

All discussions with individual members of staff confirmed that they were conscientious, motivated and enthusiastic in relation to all aspects of their work. This view was also supported through the service's own grading questionnaire where respondents indicated that they considered social work staff to be 'excellent'. They commented particularly that staff were 'interested, committed and thoughtful'.

Inspection Focus Area - Notifications

The service manager evidenced awareness of the responsibility to report all staff dismissals and misconduct to the SSSC and the Care Commission.

As indicated, discussions with staff at all levels within the service indicated that they were highly motivated and committed to ensuring that the needs of all users of the service were met in a competent, confident, knowledgeable and caring manner.

Taking account of all evidence provided during the inspection, the service was found to have very good practice in relation to the quality and professionalism of staff, response to current and proposed changes to legislation, the use of the National Care Standards and the promotion of best practice.

Areas for Development

The service is encouraged to maintain its current high quality in relation to its workforce.

CCO Grading

6 - Excellent

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Quality Theme 4: Quality of Management and Leadership

Overall CCO Theme Grading: 4 - Good

Statement 1: We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of the management and leadership of the service.

Service Strengths

Service users generally experienced a service which supported participation in a number of different ways.

Prospective adopters and approved adopters were asked their views about the quality of management and leadership within the agency as part of the grading questionnaire which had been distributed. The responses indicated that opportunities were provided for feedback to be given at various stages in the process, they would have appreciated an opportunity to give their views in a more direct way. The service's questionnaire asked for additional comments and those completing the form provided these. Discussion with the service manager and team managers indicated that any comments made would be considered and used to inform changes in the provision of the service.

The service also benefits from the information provided by two adopters who are members of the Permanence Panel and whose views are provided to the service through the Panel's business meetings.

Areas for Development

The service is encouraged to progress the areas noted as future developments in their Participation Strategy which include the development of a peer mentoring scheme, local forum groups and the development of participation by birth families.

The service currently provides a number of opportunities for feedback on aspects of the service including training for prospective adopters, the assessment process and attendance at the Permanence Panel. The service should ensure that prospective adopters, adopters and adopted children/young people are given the opportunity to express their views in relation to the management and leadership of the service.

CCO Grading

4 - Good

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Statement 4: We use quality assurance systems and processes which involve service users, carers, staff and stakeholders to assess the quality of service we provide.

Service Strengths

The agency had a clear and realistic vision of improvement, the process of change and their future goals. There was evidence of planning processes within the council which evidenced clear links and ongoing work between operational managers and those involved in strategic development.

Discussion with the Social Work Manager, Team Managers and examination of evidence provided confirmed that team managers within the Family Placement Service had responsibility for undertaking the quality assurance of all aspects of the work of their teams. This was seen to include quality assurance of reports for the Permanence Panel and for Court. The Social Work Manager had the responsibility for quality assuring all Form Es of children who will be considered by the Permanence Panel and the Team Manager with lead responsibility for adoption quality assures all Form Fs.

The Scottish Government Self Evaluation Document 'How Good is our Team' was required to be used by all teams in Aberdeenshire.

Feedback from prospective adopters was welcomed and used as a quality assessment tool. A complaints procedure was in place and information about this was available to prospective adopters in leaflets and on the Council's website.

Recommendations made by the Care Commission and other inspecting bodies were used to improve the service. Action plans requested by the Care Commission were developed and submitted and actions identified were seen to have been acted upon.

Discussions with staff and service users indicated that issues of concern could be raised with relevant staff and managers and that these were taken seriously. Where appropriate, meetings were held which provided an opportunity to discuss and resolve these concerns. Evidence provided indicated that where service users lodged any formal complaint, this was thoroughly considered and responded to within an agreed timescale.

The Social Work Manager and team managers demonstrated a forward thinking and committed attitude towards service user involvement and this was evident from their participation strategy and the plans to extend the range of methods to be used to gather views.

A comprehensive Annual Report for the Adoption Service was produced and this highlighted the work of the agency and identified key issues and developments in the previous year. The report also identified the gathering and use of feedback from service users at various stages in the process to influence practice improvements. Finally, the report identified key objectives for the forthcoming year.

Areas for Development

The service was encouraged to maintain the current processes used to quality assure all aspects of performance which was identified by the service within the self-assessment document.

CCO Grading

5 - Very Good

Number of Requirements

0

Number of Recommendations

0

Regulations / Principles

National Care Standards

Enforcement

There has been no enforcement action against this service since the last inspection.

Other Information

N/A

Requirements

There were no requirements made during this inspection.

Recommendations

There were no recommendations made during this inspection.

Liz Adam

Care Commission Officer