

Select Committee on Children's Services – 17 September 2007

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Inspection Findings of Ofsted in respect of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service

Purpose of Report

1. To report to the Select Committee on Children's Services on the inspection findings of Ofsted in respect of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service.

Background

2. Local Authority Adoption services are subject to inspection by Ofsted 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 and Children Act 2002 and the Adoption Service Regulations 2005.
3. 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.
4. The Adoption Service Regulations 2005 are secondary legislation with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards which form the basis of the judgments by Ofsted.
5. The Inspection of Dudley Local Authority Adoption Service took place in June 2007 with some additional time to observe an adoption panel and meet with service users and adopters.
6. In total there are 28 standards. The 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. The Inspection judgements are as follows:

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high standard
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

7. The inspectors did not make judgements against the Be Healthy and Achieving Economic Wellbeing outcomes.
8. Dudley's Adoption Service arranges for the adoption of children and in doing so provides recruitment, assessment and training and support services to prospective and approved adopters. The service offers advice to child care social workers in matters pertaining to adoption and works in partnership with social workers to identify suitable placements for children looked after by Dudley Council for whom a best interest decision for adoption has been made.
9. Adoption services in Dudley are provided by a dedicated team of 5.5 fte adoption social workers, 2.5 adoption support workers, an Adoption in the Black Country Marketing Officer, plus 3 administrative staff. The team is managed by an Assistant Head of Service and a Service Manager.
10. The Inspection gave an overall quality rating of **good**.
11. The individual ratings were as follows:
 - **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe** – The provision is satisfactory
 - **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do** – The provision is good
 - **Helping children make a positive contribution** – The provision is good
 - **Organisation** – The organisation is good
12. It was noted that there had been considerable improvement across the whole service since the previous inspection in 2004.
13. The inspectors issued a notice of requirement to improve with regard to one particular standard. Action must be taken with regard to this requirement in order to meet the Care Standards Act 2000 the Adoption Service Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The agency must comply within the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due Date
11	Ensure that all panel members are subject to the checks identified in schedules 3 and 4 of the LAA regs 2003 prior to starting work on the panel	28/09/2007

14. This action will need to be completed by 28 September 2007 and processes to meet this requirement are already in place.

15. The inspectors made a number of practice recommendations to improve the quality and standards further and an action plan is being drawn up to address those particular recommendations.

Finance

16. The major resource requirement from the Inspection is that the agency must ensure that there are sufficient staff experienced and qualified to meet the needs of the service.
17. The inspection recommended that the agency review the staffing provision with particular focus on adoption support, administrative roles, the ABC project and the panel adviser (National Minimum Standard 21). Any service restructure must be within existing resources unless additional budget can be identified.
18. Although accommodation has improved since the last inspection there are some changes required to the premises to make it suitable for purposes of the agency.

Law

19. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service including arrangements for the provision of adoption support services and an inter country adoption service.

Equality Impact

20. The maintenance and development of a comprehensive adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for looked after children by providing stable, secure and safe care. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they achieve secure attachments and have experience of family life when they are unable to live with their birth families.

Recommendations

21. That the Select Committee receive and note the contents of the report.



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