

Select Committee on Children's Services – 23 March 2011

Report of the Acting 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 is 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 late October 2010 with some additional time to observe an adoption panel and meet with service users and adopters. The OfSTED report for the Adoption Service has been included in this update report under appendix 1.
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 6.2 fte adoption social workers, 1.6 fte adoption support workers, 0.61 fte clinical psychologist (CAMHS grant) an Adoption in the Black Country Marketing Officer, plus 3 administrative staff. The team is managed by an Assistant Head of Service, a Service Manager and an Assistant Team 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 good
 - **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. The inspection reported considerable improvement across the whole service since the previous inspection in 2007. The inspectors concluded that the adoption agency is very child focussed with the child at the heart of its practice. There are good arrangements to provide a range of support, including psychological input either through the effective use of an adoption support agency or through in-house resources. Birth parents are involved in decision making as far as possible and encouraged to maintain their child's heritage through robust contact arrangements.
13. The inspection noted that the agency had responded to the limitations of recruitment within its own geographical boundaries through the collaborative work with three other adoption agencies across the Black Country. Adoption in the Black Country is extremely successful with a coordinated strategy to market and recruit potential adoptive parents able to meet the diverse needs of children waiting for adoption.
14. The inspection reported this is a good service that is managed well at all levels by people with the right skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm to drive the service forward. The management of the team has been recently strengthened with the appointment of an Assistant Team Manager with a specific remit to lead on adoption support.
15. The inspection highlighted that the work is managed effectively; activity has significantly increased particularly in relation to family finding for children but there were no identified shortfalls in practice despite this. There are good tracking systems to monitor the progress of cases and there is a systematic approach to permanency planning to prevent delay or drift.

16. The Adoption Service did not receive any notice of requirement to improve against any standard as a result of this inspection.
17. The inspection concluded that there were four minor shortfalls identified but these did not impact on the well-being and security of children. These relate to the role of the panel advisor and recording issues. An action plan is being drawn up to address these particular recommendations to further improve the service.

Finance

18. The work supporting the Adoption Service OFSTED inspection is funded from within existing Directorate resources.

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.
20. 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.

Equality Impact

21. 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

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



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