

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

OFSTED INSPECTION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE IN NOVEMBER 2009

Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning: Cllr Mike Carr

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

4th March 2010

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to share with Members of the Corporate Parenting Board the findings and outcome of the most recent Ofsted inspection of Middlesbrough's Adoption Service. The inspection took place from the 9th to the 12th November 2009. The final Inspection report was received on 26th November 2009 and gave an outcome of 'satisfactory'. This outcome was challenged, successfully, (Appendix 1) and the amended report, with an outcome of 'Good' was received on 20th January 2010 and is attached (Appendix 2).

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Adoption Service Inspection Report.

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION, WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent
Urgent report

BACKGROUND

5. This inspection of the Adoption service was undertaken by Ofsted, whereas the last, which took place in 2006, was undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. There were two inspectors and the methodology of the inspection was relatively unchanged, in terms of the initial data collection.
6. The overall rating for Middlesbrough from this inspection is, once again, “Good” from the range of “Inadequate”, “Satisfactory”, “Good” or “Outstanding”. The rating means that ‘this aspect of provision is strong’ and is supported by evidence provided by case files (adopters and children), social workers, adopters, the senior practitioner, development officer, manager and the Family Placement Panel.
7. The service was rated as ‘Good’ in the following areas:
 - Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe
 - Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do
 - Organisation
8. The service was rated as ‘satisfactory’ in the following area:
 - Helping children make a positive contribution

The key issue relating to this area was that children’s life story work and the permanence reports written for presentation to the Family Placement Panel were inconsistent in terms of timeliness and quality. Given the high numbers of children looked after and the existing staff capacity problems, the inspector saw *“little prospect of improvement without increased input”*.

9. The Adoption service is not measured at all in relation to:
 - Achieving Economic Wellbeing
 - Be Healthy
10. The inspector has listed the improvements made by the service since the last inspection as:
 - More stability in the management structure
 - New structures and systems...provided...more robust operational...administrative framework.
 - More efficient operational and strategic direction

This means that all three statutory requirements, which needed to be addressed from the last inspection, and each of the fifteen good practice recommendations, have been met.
11. The inspectors highlighted that *“the screening, preparation, and assessment of prospective adopters is undertaken with an analytical vigour that ensures only the most suitable families are approved...and efforts are clearly aimed at securing the best possible match (for children)...very evident when consideration is being given to children with complex histories...(and)...where heritage is a central issue”*

As these issues are of central importance to our children, it is reassuring that Ofsted has recognised the quality of the agency's work in this regard.

12. Staff were described as:

“very skilled and competent...conscientious...committed...often going the extra mile to ensure work is completed satisfactorily.”

In a climate of constant pressure and media criticism of social work practitioners, this comment is particularly pleasing.

13. There are eight good practice recommendations from this inspection, as follows:

- Include, in health and safety checklist, reference to curtain/blind cords
- Provide clearer recruitment processes for internal candidates who move posts or are promoted
- Include, in safeguarding procedures, reference to children in adoptive placements and those receiving adoption support
- Produce life story work in a timely way
- Produce more consistent life histories in children's permanence reports
- Produce a children's guide suitable for all children
- Employ sufficient staff
- Ensure all information is provided in staff files

14. The recommendations form the basis of an action plan to be implemented across the service in 2010. Each team manager, and other relevant parties within Children's Safeguarding Services, has received a copy of the inspection report and the associated plan to ensure that there is an inclusive approach to implementing the required changes. (Appendix 3)

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

15. As the service covers the whole of Middlesbrough, this report will be of interest to all Members. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. However, consideration must be given to the recommendation regarding the employment of sufficient staff to meet the demands upon the service.

RECOMMENDATION

16. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Adoption Service Inspection Report.

REASON

18. The Council is responsible for providing high quality care for its children.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

18. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- *The National Minimum Standards and Adoption Services Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Support Services, 2005*
- *The CSCI report of October 2006*

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Adoption Inspection – Challenge to Initial Outcome

Re; SCO50035 - for the attention of Mr. Sean White, lead Inspector.

Dear Sean,

I have had the opportunity to discuss the report with my direct Manager, Trish Fewster and Deputy Director, Mr. Neil Pocklington. It is our view that the limiting judgement of 'Satisfactory' does not reflect the evidence you provided verbally and within the written document under the section 'Organisation'. The report cites;

- 'Well presented statement of purpose'
- 'Providing...'Adopters with an informed choice about their application'
- 'promotion of equality and diversity is good' (we were described as "at the top of our game", in the verbal feedback)
- 'Management...is skilled ..experienced...has a deep understanding...committed executive..'
- 'managing of cases and workloads efficient, with a clear understanding of outcomes and timescales'
- 'Workers are supported...enables to (work) to the best of their abilities'
- 'supervision is well recorded...close overview of cases...consistent monitoring' (verbally you described as "amongst the best you have seen")
- 'workers...very skilled and knowledgeable...conscientious...committed, ..go the extra mile' (verbally you described that you had "rarely had kinder comments from adopters")
- 'Efficiently administered...with a clear understanding of maintaining a well organised system'
- 'case files well ordered, contain all required info...monitored'

It is recognised that your judgement was based on our staffing situation and the capacity (or otherwise) to sustain the quality of work currently being produced - which you describe very positively. You were also concerned about the capacity to respond to growing demands.

This Council would respectfully ask you to reconsider your judgement to be based on the quality of the work you assessed at the time of inspection, which you felt to be good. Our plans for reconfiguration within the adoption service - as described during inspection and, importantly, recent agreement to the appointment of an additional 6 Social Workers to the Safeguarding Service, should provide additional reassurance that the inevitable increase in work load will not impact negatively upon the quality of the adoption service provided.

Please contact me if you require any more information and I look forward to your response.
Regards,

Jane Wilson
Team Manager

Recommendations and actions from Adoption Inspection November 2009

Recommendation	Action needed	By who	By when
Include reference to curtain/blind cords in health and safety checklist	Amend Health & Safety list	Senior Practitioner	Achieved at point of inspection (inspector referred to a document for adopters approved pre amendments)
Provide clearer recruitment processes for internal candidates who move posts or are promoted	Ensure all contractual changes are evidenced on personnel files	Mouchel (Human Resources Department)	From November 2009
Include reference to children in adoptive placements and those receiving adoption support in safeguarding procedures	To be included in South Tees, and (subsequently) Middlesbrough Procedures	Local Safeguarding Children Board Manager	March 2010
Produce life story work in a timely way	Reinforce adherence to Permanence Process mapping and timescales	Senior Practitioner (Adoption)	Each Meeting

Recommendation	Action needed	By who	By when
Produce more consistent life histories in children's permanence reports	Ensure robust initial quality assurance process Family Placement Panel Quality Assurance as additional safeguard	Social Worker and Team Manager Panel Adviser	For every document produced
Produce a children's guide suitable for all children	Up date current guide to appeal to children of all ages and ability	Student – Adoption Team, Participation Officer Group of children with experience of Adoption	March/April 2010
Employ sufficient staff	Explore change fund bid/funding streams	Team Manager	Ongoing
Ensure all information is provided in staff files	Liaise with Mouchel regarding shortfalls	Team Manager	November 2009