

Midlothian Council Adoption Service Adoption Service

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Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)
Inspection completed on: 17 November 2017

Service provided by:
Midlothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002602

Care service number:
CS2004083727

About the service

This service has been registered since 2005.

Midlothian Council Adoption Service provides an adoption service for children and young people aged 0-18 years, and their families, who are assessed as in need of this service. Midlothian Council Adoption Service operates within a small geographical area.

During the past year there have been significant changes within the Agency. Only two members of staff remain from the team we met at the last inspection. A new manager has also been appointed and this has had a positive effect on the service.

What people told us

We examined feedback from a number of sources, including questionnaires that had been sent to adopters prior to the inspection taking place. We received four responses with mixed views in terms of adopter's experiences of the service. We met with five adopters at a focus group and also made contact with four adopters by phone. Some adopters reported good supports and outcomes for themselves and the children placed with them, concerning however, a significant number of adopters strongly identified areas where improvements could and should be made.

As the findings in this inspection are based on a sample of children and young people, inspectors cannot assure the quality of experience for every single child receiving a service.

Self assessment

No self-assessment was requested from the service this year

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	4 - Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	4 - Good

What the service does well

New arrangements following the restructure had resulted in the co-location of the fostering and adoption team within the locality team. Workers had found this beneficial in terms of collaborative working practices which should improve outcomes for children.

Adopters reported positively on preparation groups, the assessment process and training. The latter giving them good insight into the needs of their children and how to help them overcome earlier disadvantage. Assessments we examined for adopters were generally well written. Second opinion visits, carried out by managers, gave further assurance to the suitability of potential adopters. Where appropriate, birth parents and adoptive parents were encouraged to meet and discuss children at appropriate stages of the adoption process.

Linking processes were robust and as a result adopters felt that relevant information about the child had been shared. As appropriate, foster carers had remained in contact with the child. This approach can help a child to settle quicker and feel more secure. As we found in most elements of the adoption process adopters were able to feed back their views and felt that their concerns had been carefully listened to.

Introductions and co-ordination plans for children being moved to an adoptive placement are extremely important and two adopters informed us that they had a good experience of this process despite geographical challenges.

Life story work and later life letters offer the child a personal account of their early history, including information about their birth family. We noted some positive developments in terms of a more robust processes being in place to ensure these are always taken forward.

During this inspection we observed a panel to enable a child to be considered for alternative permanent care. The panel remained child focused, and demonstrated thoughtful and sound decision making. Panel members reported on the implementation of a new assessment report format. It is envisaged that this development will reduce delays for children requiring alternative permanent care. We will look at this development at the next inspection.

Recently managers had commissioned Adoption UK to identify the support needs of adoptive families in Midlothian. Improvements were identified such as the need for continuity of workers and more information sharing. These findings were included within the service's development plan. We were encouraged by this approach, as it uses feedback from adopters to prioritise key areas that need urgent attention. We will look at this at the next inspection.

What the service could do better

The restructuring of Children's Services within Midlothian Council, appears to have had an unsettling impact on the adoption service. The loss of experienced staff with specialised knowledge combined with a high level of planned staff absences and unfilled vacancies has left the fostering and adoption service with diminished capacity and capability. Staff in post are working extremely hard to raise standards and keep the day to day elements of the service running. However, in order to achieve the improvements required more attention needs to be paid at a strategic level as to how the staff are trained and developed to carry out their role effectively.

During the Inspection no poor outcomes were identified for adopted children, however the current situation is not sustainable. Unless positive action is taken we would be concerned about the future impact on staff morale and in terms of planning for children and young people.

Please see recommendation 1.

Midlothian Council intend to produce Adoption Support Plans for every child; however we noted that in practice this was not being achieved for all cases we examined. This was compounded by poor collaboration between the provider and the placing authority for the child. We asked managers to consider examining the application of their policy in respect of these plans to ensure consistency.

Please see recommendation 2.

The service provided adopters with a membership to Adoption UK Scotland, an organisation that enables adopters to access support services such as attending local focus groups once a child is placed. Adopters advised us that they appreciated this approach as it helped them to meet others in similar situations. However, adopters

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also require intensive support whilst waiting for a child to be placed. We asked managers to raise more awareness in relation to their post approval support group as not all adopters we spoke with were aware of this arrangement.

Preparation groups were led by East Lothian Council, and this worked well for the majority of adopters we spoke with. However, we asked the service to consider having a representative from Midlothian council attending the groups to create an early link to the fostering and adoption team. Managers will explore ways to take this forward once staff capacity has improved. We discussed the benefits of enabling an experienced adopter from Midlothian to attend to these groups and share their experience in specific area.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 2

1. To ensure that adopters are informed of the full range of support services available to their child, adoption support plans should be drafted for the matching panel as stated in the services' action plan.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 8: after you move in.

2. To ensure that good quality support is provided by the service, a robust staff development strategy and effective yearly training plan for all staff is required.

National Care Standards, Adoption Agencies Standard. 32: providing a Quality Service.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
18 Nov 2015	Announced (short notice)	<div>Care and support</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>4 - Good</div>
16 May 2014	Announced	<div>Care and support</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div>
27 May 2013	Announced (short notice)	<div>Care and support</div> <div>2 - Weak</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div>
22 May 2012	Announced (short notice)	<div>Care and support</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>4 - Good</div>
23 Feb 2011	Announced	<div>Care and support</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div>
15 Mar 2010	Announced	<div>Care and support</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>4 - Good</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div>
5 Mar 2009	Announced	<div>Care and support</div> <div>3 - Adequate</div> <div>Environment</div> <div>Not assessed</div> <div>Staffing</div> <div>2 - Weak</div> <div>Management and leadership</div> <div>2 - Weak</div>

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