

Inspection of Midlothian Council Adoption Service

Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services

1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines the outcome of the above announced inspection as carried out by the Care Inspectorate in May 2014.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Adoption Service is based in Lawfield Primary School and 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.

2.2 The Care Inspectorate is the independent scrutiny and improvement body for care and children's services and they inspect every registered care service, local authority social work departments and child protection teams on a regular basis to make sure that providers are meeting standards required and are working to improve the quality of care for everyone. Every time they inspect these services they produce an inspection report.

2.3 Based on the findings of this inspection the Care Inspectorate awarded the following grades:

Quality of care and support	Grade 4 – Good
Quality of staffing	Grade 4 – Good
Quality of Management and Leadership	Grade 3 – Adequate

2.4 The report and grades represent the Care Inspectorate assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during the unannounced inspection.

2.5 The Care Inspectorate noted the significant improvements in relation to the following:

- Improved planning for children in need of adoption
- The development of a 'framework for permanence'
- The structural changes and staff training and development to enable improved planning for children in need of adoption

- 2.6 The Inspection Team noted the following strengths:
- The quality of support adopters received from their link worker was of a very good quality.
 - The strong working relationships within the team.
 - The Council was committed to finding families for children and had made positive links with neighbouring authorities so that they could share resources.
 - The Adoption Panel was working well to identify areas of practice where the service might improve
- 2.7 The Inspection Team identified the following areas for improvements:
- More effective communication with adopters concerning delays in the legal processes.
 - Improved oversight of children in need of adoption and the likelihood of placing children.
 - Regular visits from their social workers and, all children being placed for adoption have a post adoption plan which includes later life letters, life work, etc, as appropriate.
- 2.8 The Inspection Team concluded that Midlothian Council had made significant developments over the last year. The Inspection Team also reported that the authority was committed to improving and developing its adoption service for Midlothian's children.

3. Current Context

- 3.1 Midlothian Council's Adoption Service is still in its infancy. However, this Care Inspection report recognises our efforts and commitment to developing the service. Moreover, the report reinforces and legitimises the direction of travel undertaken by Midlothian Council.
- 3.2 Since the inspection report Midlothian Council has already taken a number of actions to improve the service. Namely,
- A detailed action plan which outlines the team and service priorities for the next year.
 - Further developed the 'Framework for Permanence' to include Key Performance Indicators.
 - Further developed training and development for staff.
 - Continued to review and strengthen our systems and processes including quality assurance.

4. Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There are no resource issues arising from this report.

4.2 Risk

The Care Inspectorate regulate all care services in Scotland using the [National Care Standards](#), set out by the Scottish Government, as a benchmark for how each type of service should perform. These standards are the minimum that children and young people should expect when using care services.

If the standards are not being fully met, the Care Inspectorate would note this in the inspection report and require the service manager to address these. The Care Inspectorate could impose an additional condition on the service's registration if the provider persistently, substantially or seriously fails to meet the standards or breaches a regulation. They also have the power to issue an improvement notice detailing the required improvement to be made and the timescale for this.

Monitoring, review and evaluation of progress by officers in Children and Families is the control measure in place to reduce the risk of failure of the care services and to demonstrate their capacity to improve.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Performance and outcomes will continue to be measured through the monitoring, review and evaluation process.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The Service will continue to improve its work in line with its improvement plan and the Education, Communities and Economy Directorate will continue to challenge and support the Service in relation to developing and implementing a range of quality improvement strategies.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

In addition to obtaining our own feedback, as part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate sent out questionnaires to the Adoption Panel members. Completed questionnaires were returned prior to the inspection. The contents of the questionnaires were used to inform the Care Inspectorate findings and are referred to in the Inspection Report.

The Inspectors also met with prospective adopters during the course of the inspection.

Copies of the report have been made available to Elected Members, staff and other interested parties.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

An action plan has been prepared to address the areas for improvement recommended in the report. The action plan will be screened for equalities implications.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The Service Improvement Plan allows for sustainable development and improvement.

4.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

5 Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) note the content of the inspection report;
- (ii) pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration;
- (iii) note that the Council will continue to challenge, support and monitor the service in relation to achieving excellence through further improving performance.

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Background Papers:

Care Services Inspection Report dated 16 May 2014