

Inspection of Midlothian Council Adoption Service

Report by Mary Smith, Director, Education, Communities and Economy

1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines the outcome of the above announced inspection as carried out by the Care Inspectorate in May 2013.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Adoption Service is a new service 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 2 -Weak
Quality of staffing	Grade 4 – Good
Quality of Management and Leadership	Grade 3 – Adequate

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

2.4 The Inspection Team noted the following strengths:

- Prospective adopters told the Inspection Team that staff were knowledgeable about adoption and generally they felt well supported by staff in the service.
- The Inspection Team thought the adoption provided a good oversight of the work of the service and were able to highlight areas for improvement.

2.5 The Inspection Team reported that the authority could do better in the following area:

- There were a number of areas the adoption agency should seek to improve. These included the quality of assessments of a child's need for adoption, direct work with children and the quality of their matching and linking processes.
- The service could improve the support arrangements for panel members by arranging role specific supervision. The training needs of panel members also needed to be identified.

2.6 The Care Inspectorate concluded that there was a commitment to improve and develop the adoption service within Midlothian Council for Midlothian children.

3 Current Context

Midlothian Council Adoption Service is a newly formed service. The service was formed after recognising that despite commissioning external agencies to provide adoptive families, many children continued to 'drift' in care. Historically, Midlothian Council would register children with external agencies as in need of adoption and these children would then await placement.

Since the inspection report Midlothian Council has already taken a number of actions to improve the service. Namely,

- A review and restructure of the management team.
- A process which will enable panel members' supervision and appraisal.
- A detailed action plan which outlines the team and service priorities for the next year.
- A dedicated working group tasked with delivering a 'Framework for Permanence'. The framework includes actions to improve the quality of our assessments and matching and linking processes.
- A training programme for operational managers within children and families.
- Strengthen quality assurance process.
- Strengthen existing systems and processes with expert support and advice from Legal Services.

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

As part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate sent out questionnaires to the Adoption Panel members. Seven 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) acknowledge the positive and ongoing work by management and staff connected with the Midlothian Council Adoption Service;
- (iv) note that the Council will continue to challenge, support and monitor the service in relation to achieving excellence through further improving performance.

29 November 2013

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Background Papers:

Care Services Inspection Report dated 27 May 2013

Declaration Box

Instructions: *This box must be completed by the author of the report. The box will be copied and saved by the Council Secretariat who will delete it from the report prior to photocopying the agenda.*

Title of Report: *Inspection of Midlothian Council Adoption Services*

Meeting Presented to: *Cabinet 14 January 2014*

Author of Report: *Mary Smith*

I confirm that I have undertaken the following actions before submitting this report to the Council Secretariat (Check boxes to confirm):-

- ☒ *All resource implications have been addressed. Any financial and HR implications have been approved by the Head of Finance and Human Resources.*
- ☒ *All risk implications have been addressed.*
- ☒ *All other report implications have been addressed.*
- ☒ *My Director has endorsed the report for submission to the Council Secretariat.*

For Cabinet reports, please advise the Council Secretariat if the report has an education interest. This will allow the report to be located on the Cabinet agenda among the items in which the Religious Representatives are entitled to participate.

Likewise, please advise the Council Secretariat if any report for Midlothian Council has an education interest. The Religious Representatives are currently entitled to attend meetings of the Council in a non-voting observer capacity, but with the right to speak (but not vote) on any education matter under consideration, subject always to observing the authority of the Chair.