Inspection of Midlothian Adoption Service

Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services

1   Purpose of Report
This report outlines the outcome of the above announced (short notice) Inspection of Midlothian Adoption Service as carried out by the Care Inspectorate in February 2019.

2   Background

2.1   Midlothian Council Adoption Services is co-located with other children's services based at 7 Eskdaill Court and provides an adoption service for children and young people aged 0-18 years. Whilst the fostering and adoption service are inspected as separate services, the inspections happen at the same time and it is one team who manage all the work.

2.2   The Care Inspectorate is the Independent scrutiny and improvement body for care services in Scotland. They inspect all registered care services and local authority social work departments on a regular basis to ensure 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 on the three areas it inspected:

Quality of Care and Support	Grade 3 - Adequate
Quality of Staffing	Grade 3 – Adequate
Quality of Management & Leadership	Grade 3 – Adequate

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

3.0   Findings from Inspection

3.1   Strengths

- Adopters told us they received important information about children, including about their health, birth families and early life experiences and that this helped them to be sure about their ability to provide a safe and loving family life.

- Secure, nurturing relationships, stable living situations and healthy active lifestyles, supported children to grow in confidence. Access to photos and videos, memory boxes, social stories and life story records meant children were well supported in understanding the important changes in their lives and in developing their sense of identity.

- Adopters had experienced a thorough preparation to adopt course. There were various opportunities for adopters to provide feedback and views to the agency, including for example through feedback questionnaires after preparation to adopt courses or panel attendance.

- The improvement plan was well written and comprehensive. It detailed the improvement work identified by the agency and clarified some priority development areas for the future.

- Although there was an overall reduction of adoption work since the last inspection, overall they saw that panel processes were being carried out well and in a way which supported quality monitoring of practice and reporting.

3.2 Areas for development

- Whilst most adopted children were being protected from harm, there was a very small number of children in greater need of care and protection. Whilst the agency had responded quickly to protect children and to carefully consider reasons for adoption disruptions this then resulted in unplanned moves which impacted on their well-being and longer term outcomes.

- Adopters commented that their own assessment timescale could be improved. They referred to unnecessary delays caused by staff changes and lack of staff experience which in turn led to delays in decision making and in achieving adoption plans at an earlier stage for some children.

- Similar to the fostering report safer recruitment processes were highlighted in particular with Human Resources not having records in relation to locum members of staff. No cyclical PVG checks in place.

- Whilst staff training was being undertaken, they were maintained within different systems which meant that management did not have a clear overview.

- Management's systems should be used more effectively and new systems could be developed to provide more of an overview of the agency. This would act to support improvements, for example relating to out-with approval procedures being followed, frequency of carer reviews and ensuring foster carer agreements are in place.

- The Care Inspectorate made 4 requirements and 3 recommendations which are highlighted within the attached action plan. All the requirements and recommendations shall be undertaken within the timescales specified on the plan.

4. Summary

Overall this is a disappointing Inspection report where grades have dropped in every area. In discussion with the Care Inspectorate the challenges and changes were fully discussed to give some context around the unusual set of circumstances that we faced over the past 12 months.

This said we appointed a new manager in September 2018 and already the team and carers are evidencing positive changes in practice. The manager is a reliable and experienced member of staff who shall offer much needed continuity and stability to the team whilst also ensuring that they drive forward the performance of the service.

5. Report Implications

5.1 Resource
There are no resource issues arising from this report.

5.2 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's Services is the control measure in place to reduce the risk of failure of the care services and to demonstrate their capacity to improve.

5.3 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

5.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes
The action plan outlines the work that is required to happen within set timescales. The progress of this shall be monitored during monthly meetings with the Head of Service.

5.5 **Adopting a Preventative Approach**
The Service will continue to improve its work in line with its improvement plan. 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.

5.6 **Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**
As part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate met with 5 adopters and 4 adoptive families. They met 2 children whose plans were for adoption.

5.7 **Ensuring Equalities**
An action Plan has been prepared to address the areas for improvement recommended in the report. The action place will be screened for equalities implications.

5.8 **Supporting Sustainable Development**
The Service Improvement Plan allows for sustainable development and improvement.

4.9 **IT Issues**
There are no IT issues.

5 **Recommendations**

Cabinet are requested to:

- Note the content of the Inspection Report.
- Pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration.

Report Contact: Joan Tranent   Tel No: 0131 271 3721
Joan.tranent@midlothian.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Midlothian Adoption Action Plan 2019/20   (Appendix 1)
Care Inspectorate Report dated 8 February 2019   (Appendix 2)

Quality of care and support						
ACTIONS	**TIMESCALE**	**LEAD**	**OUTCOME**	**MEASUREMENT**	**RED AMBER GREEN**	**UPDATE**
Ensure systems are in place to ensure children in external placements are provided with safe care of a high quality	27 May 19	Team Leader /Learning & Development/ Public Protection Unit	Midlothian Council must ensure that the health and wellbeing of children is always appropriately managed. In order to achieve this the service must ensure that effective working practices are established to assess and monitor risks for children placed for adoption (requirement 1)	management overview/ audit of ALL children who are adopted in external placements *(Linked to the recruitment of local adopters/nearby LA's)*		
Develop a training needs analysis to identify areas of professional development for the team (linked to requirement 1)	27 May 19	Team Leader	Midlothian Council must ensure that the health and wellbeing of children is always appropriately managed. In order to achieve this, the service must ensure foster carers receive sufficient and regular child and adult Protection training. (requirement 2)	All foster carers and prospective adopters undergo child protection training. All foster carers and prospective adopters undergo adult support and protection training. Individual and collective records located in one system		
Develop a training needs analysis to identify areas of professional development for the team (requirement1)	27 May 19	Team Leader	Midlothian Council to ensure that all family placement team staff members and the manager undertake appropriate child and adult support and protection training in line with the agency policy to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. (requirement 3)	All staff undergo child protection training. All staff undergo adult support and protection training		

Strengthen systems for ensuring procedures are followed in line with local and national policy (requirement 1)	27 May 19	Service Manager/ Team Leader	Midlothian Council must ensure that quality assurance systems are robust and used effectively in order to identify areas for improvement (requirement 4)	100% of outwith authority are reviewed by a manager 100% of cares are reviewed within appropriate timescales 100% of files are monitored and reviewed		
Develop a regular system for notifying the CI of notifiable incidents (as above)		Service Manager/ Team Leader		100% of notifications are made as appropriate		
Strengthen the function of the foster panel (recommendation 1)		Service Manager/ Team Leader/ Ind. Chair		4 X per annum development day 100% appraisal/annual reviews in place		
Develop a learning and development programme for foster care panel members and chair (recommendations 1)		Service Manager/ Team Leader		Panel Learning and development programme in place		
Develop more opportunities to recruit local adopters	Mar 20	Service Manager/ Team Leader	The service should raise awareness of the need for more adopters to come forward to enable the needs of more children to be met. (recommendation 1)	Strengthen existing recruitment strategy to target local adopters		
Strengthen timescales for approving adopters	Mar 20	Service Manager/ Team Leader	Assessment of adopters should be carried out within reasonable time scales. (recommendation 1)	90% adopters approved within 10 months System in place to monitor progress		

Develop and monitor robust recruitment record keeping practices (recommendation1)	Mar 20 Mar 20	HR/Managers	To promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people Midlothian Council must ensure appropriate recruitment and record keeping. (Recommendation 2)	All new recruits have a file that contains necessary paperwork in line with safer recruitment		
Develop a robust process for ensuring staff learning and development needs is contained in one systems		Team Leader /Service Manager		All staff are entered on the new system		
Strengthen the function of the fostering and adoption panel (recommendation 1)		Service Manager/ Team Leader/ Ind. Chairs	Midlothian Council should implement annual reviews and a learning and development programme for foster panel members and chair. (Recommendation 3)	4 X per annum development day 100% appraisal/annual reviews in place		
Develop a learning and development programme for fostering and adoption panel members and chair (recommendations 1)		Service Manager/ Team Leader		Panel Learning and development programme in place		