

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
CABINET MEMBER**

OUTCOMES OF PILOT OFSTED INSPECTION OF NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member and summarise the findings of the 'pilot' Ofsted inspection of North Lincolnshire Adoption Services which took place between 28 November and 2 December 2011.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) which came into force in April 2011. The service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years. The last statutory inspection of service took place in June 2009. The outcome of the inspection was very positive with the service receiving a rating of 'Good' with no requirements or recommendations.
- 2.2 In June 2011 Ofsted published a draft revised framework for inspecting adoption services. As part of their consultation on this framework, they invited Local Authorities to bid to pilot the new inspection format. The aim of this was to test out the inspection process, how well the revised framework could be used by Ofsted to make judgements on the service and receive feedback from authorities who were inspected. They are an important part of our evaluation of all the materials that make up the framework for the inspection of local authority adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies which will be used from April 2012. North Lincolnshire was one of the authorities chosen. This took place at the end of November.
- 2.3 The government published revised adoption guidance in February 2011 and new National Minimum Standards in March 2011. The new draft inspection framework is based on these standards. Consequently, the pilot inspection gave us the opportunity to measure our progress against the new standards.
- 2.4 The key changes proposed in the draft inspection framework are:
- A significant reduction in notice given before an Inspection to 10 working days. This is aimed at giving inspectors 'as true a picture as possible of the provision'.
 - Ofsted making judgements under five headings: *outcomes for children; safety of children; quality of provision; leadership and management; and*

overall effectiveness. Consideration of how well a service promotes equality and values diversity is also key in each area.

- Involving children directly and routinely in the inspection of adoption services and continuing, where possible to meet with birth parents.
- Ofsted will also report on how well agencies do in ensuring the timely and effective identification of children for whom adoption is the right option and the approval and placement of children with adoptive families, helping make sure the process is as smooth and quick as possible.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Although the report from the pilot inspection is not a formally recognised inspection report. It was completed in the same way as for a full inspection of the service and included the inspectors judgments and recommendations for further improvements.

3.2 The key findings of the inspection were:

- The overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

The inspector's comments were: "Children and young people benefit from the adoption agency's efficiency in early identification of children whose plan may be adoption. Effective monitoring and reviewing of children's plans serve to avoid delay. Positive working relationships between all social work teams involved in adoption and at management level, ensure positive outcomes for children and allows for a flexible service which places the child at the centre of decision making. There is a strong understanding of the lifelong implication of adoption throughout the local authority that ensures that good quality information is gathered for children in later life.

Children are well supported to make progress in all areas, through effective partnership working with all professionals involved, including health and education. Accurate and thorough assessments of children and potential adopters safeguard children and provide for well informed matching decisions.

There is a strong commitment to continual improvement although some aspects of monitoring and quality assurance remain areas for development. A minority of reports contain inappropriate information or are in need of updating. The views of children and young people, adopters and birth parents inform the improvement agenda, however responses to questionnaires are not always collated and analysed".

- Outcomes for Children and young people were judged to be 'good',

The inspectors noted particularly that "Children are well prepared for adoption placements and in line with their age and understanding know what is happening to them. Their wishes and feelings are well documented and taken into account where possible".

- Quality of service provision was judged to be 'good'.

Comments included: *"Family finding is robust and starts at an early stage to avoid delay. Careful matching ensures that potential adopters have full information and are supported to make a considered decision"*.

- The service was recognised as being good at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The inspectors noted: *"safe recruitment of staff and adopters protects children and young people. Staff are trained and where there have been allegations they have worked effectively with safeguarding agencies. Appropriate policies are in place for handling professional abuse."*

Adopters understand the potential impact of abuse on children. Preparation groups, which focus on safe care assist prospective adopters to understand this important area from their initial contact with the agency".

- The leadership and management of the adoption agency were judged to be good.

The inspectors comments included: *"Adoption is well embedded within this local authority.....Staff are competent and the adoption team have a wealth of appropriate experience and skills"*.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The inspectors identified some areas to improve the quality and standards of care where they felt further improvements could be made and made three recommendations.

They were:

- ensure that feedback is sought from service users and partner agencies, on the success of the service provision (NMS 15.6)
- ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the agency (NMS 25.1)
- ensure that entries in records are appropriate, up to date and contribute to an understanding of the child's life (NMS 27).

These recommendations will be included in the ongoing adoption improvement plan and provided valuable feedback in ensuring the service is in a strong position for forthcoming inspections.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Nationally there is a shortage of adoptive placements, particularly for children with complex needs or within sibling groups. In order for the Adoption Service to meet the future needs of the North Lincolnshire care population, it is vital that the ongoing investment in the service continues and we continue

to take the lead in the region through developing business and partnership arrangements with regional partners.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

- 6.1 Statutory - The Adoption Service operates under the regulatory framework of The Adoption and Children Act 2002, The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005, the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Adoption) and revised statutory guidance implemented in April 2011.
- 6.2 In order to ensure the Adoption Service continues to meet statutory requirements it needs to ensure it achieves these revised standards. The Service is inspected by Ofsted under these standards every three years and is scheduled to be inspected during 2012 under the revised inspection evaluation processes.
- 6.3 There are clear expectations within the Ofsted inspection framework, and a strong focus from National drivers and key messages, that adoption services need to be robust, provide sufficient placements and achieve positive matches for children.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Children and young people, adoptive carers, birth parents and other professionals were an integral part of the pilot inspection. Their comments, views and feedback formed a key aspect of the inspection judgements

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member notes the positive outcome of the pilot inspection and continues to support the adoption service to enable it to continue its success.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: North Lincolnshire Council Adoption Service; Inspection report for local authority adoption agency (pilot inspection report December 2011)