

West Lothian Council - Adoption Service Adoption Service

Family Placement Team
Strathbrock Partnership Centre
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Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)
Inspection completed on: 21 December 2016

Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002601

Care service number:
CS2004083333

About the service

This service has been registered since 2005.

West Lothian Council Adoption Agency is small, operating within a limited geographical area. Most of their adoption work is contracted to two local voluntary organisations with whom West Lothian Council have service level agreements. Children's long-term needs are assessed and subsequently approved by West Lothian Council's Permanence Panel and the designated Agency Decision Maker as being best met within an adoptive family. Families wishing to adopt in West Lothian are signposted to contact adoption agencies such as Scottish Adoption and/or St Andrew's Adoption Society.

What people told us

Due to the sensitivities around the cases we looked at and the age of the children involved we did not get direct feedback from children. We did have access to feedback provided by young people for the permanence panel and it was wholly positive about their experience of the adoption process. We also spoke with two foster carers who had subsequently adopted children and they both spoke very positively about the support provided by the service and their experience of the panel.

Self assessment

The self assessment was completed and we were satisfied that this was up to date, adequately summarised strengths of the service and indicated areas for further development.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	4 - Good
Quality of management and leadership	not assessed

What the service does well

West Lothian Council Adoption Service is child focussed and is achieving very good outcomes for children and young people where adoption is the agreed route to permanence. We saw and heard consistent evidence of improved well being of children being placed with adopters. We specifically heard about an increased 'sense of belonging' where older children had been adopted by their carers.

The service makes considerable effort to work in partnership with parents and carers and we would highlight the efforts made to engage birth parents. We felt there was good evidence of a respectful approach to birth parents and this supported decisions being made in the best interests of children. Partnership with parents and carers is one part of a participative culture within the service which we saw evidenced in communication with adopters and opportunities were provided for peer support. The role of foster carers in supporting children and adopters was identified as a strength of the service. We also found an example of excellent practice enabling a young person to contribute fully to the panel recommending their carers as adopters.

The 'child-focussed' approach is underpinned by a clear and coherent permanence policy and well received procedural guidance for staff. What this means in practice is that assessments, reports and decision making processes are informed by coherent evidence-based analysis of the circumstances of individual children. While we did have a little concern about some aspects of 'form filling' (see below) the overwhelming evidence was of a rigorous and thorough approach which supported timeous decision making.

The knowledge and experience of panel members was seen as a key strength of the service and we found that the consistency they had provided over the last year has been crucial in the context of significant leadership changes. The relationship the panel has with the service has changed over the last year but they have continued to effectively scrutinise the work of the service and ensure that there are no unnecessary delays.

Despite some staffing changes within the service we were satisfied that work around the adoption of children and young people was being undertaken by experienced staff and support from senior staff and management was accessible and valued by practitioners. We found a respectful culture amongst the staff group and with other teams and considered this a strength of the organisation. This included evidence of peer support, partnership working, availability of senior staff and respect for leadership.

What the service could do better

Service development has not been prioritised in the last year in the context of staffing changes. With the appointment of a new manager and other new staff we were satisfied that the service is committed to further improvement. We would suggest that there is a need for the service to develop a specific development plan for the adoption service in consultation with all those with an interest. (**Recommendation 1**) The following issues identified at this inspection should be considered.

Whilst we were satisfied that records and reports related to adoption were child focussed and would be accessible and valuable if accessed in the future there were some inconsistent practices. Whilst these would be unlikely to affect outcomes for young people we would have expected quality assurance processes to have identified and addressed these examples:

- Adoption support plans were not available for a number of children and young people
- Two 'Form E' reports written for two unrelated children and completed by two different workers contained almost identically worded sections.

Staffing changes over the last year had seen the loss of staff with significant knowledge and experience and this was noted in discussion with staff. An audit of the knowledge and skills of all staff would help identify any professional development needs.

The service has recently appointed a new manager and we found that this was viewed positively by all of the people we spoke with during the inspection. We look forward to hearing how this appointment has impacted on the service and specifically we would be keen to see a positive impact on supervision and appraisal for staff in the family placement team and further development of team meetings.

The 'panel coordinator' function was seen as a strength of the service but we heard that fulfilling this role had been difficult more recently and this had affected communication between the panel and the service. The provider should consult with panel members and others on how the service effectively supports the work and on-going development of the panel.

The crucial role played by administration staff in the functioning of the service was highlighted in discussions and in other evidence we looked at during the inspection. We were made aware of a review of administration resources across the organisation. We heard that senior staff were determined to protect the specific knowledge and experience required by the service in this area.

The role of foster carers in supporting children and adopters during the adoption process was consistently identified as being a key strength of the service. Training available to carers was identified by the staff we spoke with as an area which had been most impacted by staffing difficulties over the last year. We heard consistently of the need for a coherent training strategy and schedule in consultation with all who have an interest in the service.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. West Lothian Council should implement a robust strategic plan for the development of the adoption service, in partnership with staff, carers and young people who use the service.

National Care Standards: Adoption Agencies - Management and Staffing, Standard 32.8

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
26 Jan 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
12 Mar 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good
12 Mar 2013	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good
8 Dec 2011	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 4 - Good
3 Mar 2011	Announced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership Not assessed
26 Jan 2010	Announced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership Not assessed
6 Feb 2009	Announced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good

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