

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Inspection Report Voluntary Adoption Agencies In Wales St David's Children Society

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Responsible individual:	Gerry Cooney
Registered manager:	Joan Price
Dates of this inspection episode:	5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 28 February 2011
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	21 June 2007
Inspected by:	Neil Caddy

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Guidelines on inspection

Introduction

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the Voluntary Adoption Agency undertaken by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations.

The primary focus of the report is to comment on the quality of service experienced by service users (children who may be adopted, prospective and approved adopters, adopted persons, birth parents and any other persons receiving adoption support services).

The report contains information on how we inspect and what we find.

The inspection of a Voluntary Adoption Agency is based primarily on: -

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 as amended by the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Amendment) Regulations 2005

The Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005

The Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005

The Access to Information (Post-Commencement Adoptions) (Wales) Regulations 2005, as amended

The Adoption Information and Intermediary Services (Pre-Commencement Adoptions (Wales) Regulations 2005

Taking into account the National Minimum Standards for Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Local Authority Adoption Services in England and Wales 2003

Other regulations that will be considered are

The Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005

The Adopted Children and Adoption Contact Registers Regulations 2005

The report is divided into eleven sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection:

1. Summary of Findings
2. Policies, Procedures and Information
3. Safeguarding children
4. Birth parents and Birth families
5. Prospective and Approved Adopters
6. Adoption panel and Agency Decisions
7. Management and staffing of the adoption service (inc complaints, notifications and monitoring of your service)
8. Premises and records
9. Adoption Support Services
10. Intermediary Services
11. Inter Country Adoption

CSSIW inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect adoption services at any time. Inspection enables CSSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate. It also ensures that all adoption services are compliant with

The Care Standards Act 2000 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002
the aforementioned Regulations and National Minimum standards:

The service's own statement of purpose.

Any conditions of registration specific to the Voluntary Adoption Agency

At each inspection episode there are visits to the service during which CSSIW may adopt a range of different methods in its attempt to capture service user's and their representatives' experiences. Such methods may for example include self-assessment, discussion groups, case tracking, visits to adopter's homes, observation, interviews, and the use of questionnaires. At any other time visits may also be made to the service to investigate complaints and to respond to any changes in the service.

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector(s) at a specific period in time. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times.

The Responsible Individual and the registered manager of the adoption agency are responsible for ensuring that the adoption service operates in a way which complies with the service specific regulations. CSSIW will comment in the general text of the inspection report on their compliance. For those regulations which CSSIW believes to be key in bringing about change in the particular service, they will be separately and clearly identified in the requirement section.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 has introduced a number of new regulations; any requirements made at previous inspections were made under different legislation. Where the subject of a previous requirement remains outstanding and is still required under the new legislation, this will be listed under the heading 'Requirements which remain outstanding,' providing the new regulatory reference. The reader should note that requirements made in the previous report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with or no longer apply under the new regulatory framework for adoption agencies.

The regulated service is also responsible for having in place a clear, effective and fair complaints procedure which promotes informal resolution between the parties at an early stage, wherever possible. The inspection report will include a summary of the numbers of complaints dealt with locally during the preceding 12 months and their outcome.

CSSIW may also be involved in the investigation of a complaint. Where this is the case CSSIW makes publicly available a summary of that complaint. CSSIW will also include within the inspection report a summary of any matters it has been involved in together with any action taken by CSSIW.

Should you have concerns about anything arising from the Inspector's findings, you may discuss these with CSSIW or directly with the service provider.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales is required to make reports on regulated services available to the public. The report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW web site, www.cssiw.org.uk

Section one: Summary of findings

(This summary should include a brief description of the service and any significant information required to put the report into context e.g. size of service / any joint arrangements with other LAs, details of complaints in the previous 12 months, involvement of CSSIW other than this inspection e.g. with complaint investigations since last inspection / overview of regulatory requirements and good practice observations.)

St David's Children Society, VAA (Voluntary Adoption Agency) is a registered charity and has provided adoption services across Wales and Herefordshire since 1947.

The agency has been registered with the CSSIW (care and social services inspectorate for Wales) since 9th June 2006. Its certificate of registration will be updated to reflect a change of address for the agency.

The service is relatively small with a highly experienced and skilful staff team. The agency has approved 86 adopters since 2006 and 54 children have been placed with them in the last three years. The number of prospective adopters they have assessed and approved has increased by nearly 100% in the last twelve months.

More detailed information about the aims and objectives, and the operation and resourcing of the agency is available in their Statement of Purpose Document.

The methodology employed to inform this inspection was as follows:-

- Review of self assessment completed by the agency
- Review of a co-ordinated body of policy and procedural documentation
- Consultation took place via questionnaires completed by a sample of;
 - Prospective and approved adopters
 - Local authorities who have placed children with the agency
 - Other professionals involved with St David's
 - Panel members and Chair
 - Staff members.

Records were checked including;

- Case files for children
- Case files for prospective and approved adopters
- Birth records counselling and provision of intermediary services
- Complaint and allegations
- Panel meetings
- Staff recruitment, supervision, appraisal and training
- The consultation conducted by the agency to inform its review of the quality of service provided
- Report to the Board of Trustees and financial accounts.

Interviews took place with;

Administrative staff

Social work staff

Managers

The Chair of the Panel

The Chair of the Board of Trustees

The Chief Executive of the Agency

The designated social worker for intermediary services

The adoption panel was attended along with a visit to a group of prospective adopters attending pre-approval training.

The information provided in the agency's statement of purpose, young person's guide and their website was comprehensive to enable interested parties in understanding the operation, resourcing and ethos of the service.

The policy framework that prescribed and underpinned the provision of the service was also comprehensive and reflected a detailed understanding of the relevant legislation and a child centred approach throughout.

It was clear that safeguarding children was at the centre of the policies, procedures and practices employed by the agency.

The adoption panel, like the agency, benefitted from considerable experience among its members. Panel minutes and attendance at panel provided reassurance of the scrutiny employed to ensure the preparation and approval of prospective adopters was robust.

The staffing and management of the service was sufficient to meet its statement of purpose but also to demonstrate the high standards of professional practice aspired to by the agency. All aspects of this inspection indicated that these standards were being achieved.

The support provided to prospective and approved adopters was a particular strength of the agency.

In overall summary, the evidence gathered to inform this inspection would indicate that the service is managed and delivered with a commendable level of skill and professionalism and with a clear focus on enabling safe families and good outcomes for adopted children.

Section two: Policies and procedures & information

Inspector's findings:

Part 1 Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide

The statement of purpose document included all of the information required by regulations and would enable prospective adopters, adopted adults or local authorities to make informed choices about engaging with the service. Additional information was available on their website which was clear and easily accessible.

The children's guide also contained the information required by regulations and would be helpful to children when being placed and on an ongoing basis.

The content of the statement of purpose also conveyed a clear emphasis on providing safe and loving families for children, whilst working together with stakeholders toward the continuing development of the quality of its services.

Part 2 - Policies and Procedures / Information

The agency had a comprehensive policy and procedural framework to prescribe and underpin the effective operation of the service. All policies and procedures required by regulation were in place. They met all of the requirements of relevant regulations, reflected the core values of the organisation and an aspiration to achieve best practice standards.

Staff spoken with said that the policy framework the practices employed by the agency, made clear what was expected of them and also supported consistency in the delivery of its business.

The service had good information available to provide to children about the implications of adoption and for prospective adopters about the systems in place for their assessment, support and approval.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section three: Safeguarding children

Inspector's findings:

Case records in respect of children were in place as required. It was confirmed that systems were well established for sharing information about children with prospective adopters to inform safe and effective matching.

The inspector was advised that careful scrutiny was made of CARAS (children's adoption records of assessment) to ensure that children's feelings about being adopted were adequately understood to determine their need for support when placed and in particular to manage introductions and transition.

There was comprehensive policy and procedural documentation in place in respect of safeguarding children as well as practice guidelines and an overarching safeguarding children code of practice.

All staff had been provided with safeguarding training and the theme of safeguarding was seen from records checked, to be central to the assessment, training and approval procedures employed by the agency.

A very small number of referrals had been made by the agency that had led to investigations taking place in accordance with safeguarding procedures. In each instance, the agency fulfilled its role effectively within those procedures.

The level of experience and expertise within the agency to prepare and support adopters in understanding the experience of children and to support their positive personal development was commendable. Feedback from a wide ranging consultation exercise with adopters and with placing local authorities would indicate particular strength in this area.

Evidence of a clear focus of safeguarding was seen in the records held in relation to placement and casework monitoring and within staff supervision records.

Two complaints had been made in the twelve months prior to this inspection. One was relating to the provision of information between the ASSA (adoption support services adviser) of this agency and another ASSA who was seeking information relating to their client. The agency acknowledged that it had been overly cautious in its approach to providing this confidential information to the ASSA and has reviewed its procedures as a result. The other was in relation to adult seeking information relating to their childhood.

Discussion took place with the inspectorate at the time of both of these matters and it is the view of the inspectorate that the agency had been entirely solution focused and that no regulatory breaches had occurred. Ample evidence was available to demonstrate a commitment to learning from any issues that arose to inform the continuing improvement of their service. This included routine requests for feedback in relation to each aspect of services provided.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section four: Birth parents and birth families

Inspector's findings:

The agency had only limited involvement or responsibilities in relation to birth parents or birth families. It was confirmed however, that systems were in place to assist and or support any agreed plans for contact between children placed with adopters approved by the agency and their birth parents or family members.

They also advised adoptive parents on the content of the annual reports they were asked to provide to birth parents.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section five: Prospective and approved adopters

Inspector's findings:

Recruiting, preparing, approving and supporting adoptive parents is the core business of the agency. A recruitment strategy was in place to reflect the number of adopters needed and the types of children they would expect to provide links with.

There had been a steady increase in the number of assessments of prospective adopters undertaken over recent years with 24 undertaken during the year preceding this inspection.

As part of this inspection, consultation took place with a wide range of prospective adopters including those who had attended training; those who had been assessed and were awaiting approval; those approved and awaiting the placement of a child and those with children placed. Consultation also took place with other professionals in the field of adoption work and with local authorities who had placed children with adopters approved by the agency.

The feed back from all groups was that all work undertaken by the agency was of a high calibre and that their adopters were thoroughly trained and robustly supported in providing safe and good outcomes for children.

Information was seen to demonstrate that the number of placement disruptions that had occurred with children placed with adopters approved by the agency were much lower than the national average.

Case files of prospective and approved adoptive parents were checked and confirmed compliance with regulations.

All necessary recruitment checks had been undertaken; assessments were very thorough and with no indication of unnecessary delay.

The agency were not involved in any inter country adoption activities.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section six: Adoption panel and agency decisions

Inspector's findings:

The constitution of the adoption panel met requirements including the members' respective roles and tenure of office.

Minutes of panel meetings showed that meetings had only taken place when quorum was achieved. Panel, legal and medical advisers were in place as necessary.

Confidentiality agreements were in place and appropriate induction and training had been provided.

Panel meetings had generally taken place on a monthly basis with additional meetings taking place if necessary.

Performance appraisal of panel members had taken place as necessary.

Minutes of panel meetings reflected thorough and insightful scrutiny of the assessments brought to panel and it was confirmed that recommendations had been deferred if further information had been necessary to inform effective decision making.

It was pleasing that attendees were shown photographs of panel members along with an outline of their respective roles before attending panel and that one designated social worker provided them with support when attending. Feedback from questionnaires indicated that attendance at panel had been a very positive experience for prospective adopters.

Decisions had been made by the agency decision maker in a timely manner and it was reassuring that they had spoken with the panel chair before final agency decisions were made. Written notification of decisions made by the agency had been made promptly to applicants.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section seven: Management and staffing of the adoption agency

Inspector's findings:

Part 1 - Management and Staffing

All necessary vetting has been undertaken to confirm that the registered provider and manager for this service had appropriate qualifications and experience.

Both confirmed undertaking relevant training to maintain their registration with the CCfW (Care Council for Wales) and to maintain their expertise in providing this service.

Managers and staff felt that staffing levels had been adequate to provide the service as outlined in its statement of purpose.

In response to the need to undertake significantly more assessments – and to assist in the continuing development of the service, a new appointment of deputy manager had been made just prior to this inspection.

The inspector was satisfied that resourcing was adequate to meet the agency's statement of purpose.

Systems for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the service were underpinned by multi layered processes for consultation with service users and stakeholders, during each aspect of involvement. These systems also provided very well to inform its continuing improvement and for reporting to stakeholders and the agency's board of trustees. These systems also provided for monitoring the continuing financial viability of the agency.

Part 2 – Management and Staffing

Adequate numbers of staff were employed to maintain the best practice standards the agency aspired to. All social work staff were appropriately qualified including any independent workers who undertook assessments.

Records were checked confirming that systems were in place for staff recruitment, induction, probationary assessment, supervision, training and development and performance appraisal. Records showed clear evidence of these systems having been employed thoroughly and with a clear focus on safeguarding children and achieving high standards of professional practice.

All staff interviewed stated that managers operated with skill and provided them with robust support but also robust scrutiny of their practice.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section eight: Premises and records

Inspector's findings:

Records

Records were in place to comply with relevant regulations and were held with the necessary levels of security and confidentiality. Managers confirmed that the arrangements for storing historical information / records met all relevant requirements. They were not inspected on this occasion.

The records in respect of the recruitment and employment of staff and others working for the purposes of the agency were maintained as necessary. The inspector felt that there was some room for improvement in those relating to panel members and recommended that contents sheets were added to their files that cross referenced the requirements of regulations to provide better evidence of the systematic maintenance of these records.

It was also recommended that a 'staff list' or register be compiled that would better reflect the requirements of Regulation 17(6) Schedule 3 and bring this information together in one record.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section nine: Adoption support services

Inspector's findings:

The agency provided a range of good quality support, advice and counselling to adopted children, adults and adoptive parents.

Any specific support identified to enable the placement of a child or children with adopters approved by the agency would be confirmed in plans produced by respective responsible authorities.

The agency would consider that the support it provides to the people they assess and approve as adopters, to be a particular strength of the service they provide. This would appear borne out by feedback received in inspection questionnaires and also in the consultation completed by the agency itself.

An example was seen in records of the agency liaising with a local authority to represent an adoptive parent in seeking additional support to meet the particular needs of a child placed. This was a role they fulfilled to ensure that placement support was appropriate to fulfil the presenting needs of the child and maintain placement stability.

Managers and staff said that the ongoing support provided by the agency to adopters after adoption orders had been made was an area of strength. This support included consultation, social events or specific support or counselling. They also saw low levels of placement disruption as a feature of their success in the support they provided to adopters and to children.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section ten: Intermediary services

Inspector's findings:

The agency had a designated social worker to assist adopted adults to obtain information about their adoption and to establish and facilitate contact with their birth family members.

There was a clear understanding of the relevant regulations relating to this aspect of the agency's work and appropriate records were in place.

The volume of this aspect of the agency's work was not high but the inspector was impressed by the calibre of work undertaken in this area and of the records kept.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section eleven: Inter-country adoption

Inspector's findings:

The agency was not involved in any inter- country adoption activities.

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:

NMS or other source

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