

Scottish Adoption - Adoption Service Adoption Service

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Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
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Service provided by:
Scottish Adoption

Service provider number:
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About the service

The focus of Scottish Adoption (now operating as Scottish Adoption and Fostering) has historically been the recruitment, approval and support of prospective adoptive parents and of post placement and post adoption work with families and adopted adults. The service has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since 2011.

Scottish Adoption and Fostering state that they 'are a charity with a key purpose to ensure that all children should be supported to grow up in safe, loving and nurturing homes through both fostering and adoption.'

Scottish Adoption and Fostering is based in Edinburgh and the Chief Executive holds overall management responsibility. The position is supported by a board of trustees. The service appointed a new Chief Executive in early 2022. There has been a necessary focus over the past year on ensuring the service continues to be financially viable in a changing policy and practice landscape, as the numbers and needs of children needing care and support away from their birth families' changes.

Seeking to better meet the needs of Scotland's young people, the service plans to develop a fostering service outwith the remit of 'fostering to adopt' and has had a recent 'soft launch' of this service. However, at the time of the inspection, no carers had been recruited specifically to provide a fostering service. The service is now trading as 'Scottish Adoption and Fostering'.

The fostering service provided by the agency is registered separately and was the subject of an inspection that was carried out simultaneously with the inspection of the adoption service. A separate report is published for each service.

About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place between 24 April and 10 May 2023. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

To prepare for the inspection, we reviewed information about the service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service we:

- spoke with four families using the service and three placing social workers;
- spoke with 13 staff and management;
- observed practice and daily life;
- reviewed documents;
- reviewed survey responses from adoptive parents, panel members and members of staff; and
- spoke with two independent adoption and fostering panel chairs and the independent agency decision maker.

Key messages

- Children and young people experienced loving and compassionate care within their adoptive or prospective adoptive families.
- Families were supported to embrace and to meet children's individual needs, conveying a strong sense of belonging.
- Most carers felt they had enduring and positive relationships with staff within the service.
- The service has rolled out an innovative and sector leading 'early days' programme offering a comprehensive package of support to all families in the period after children move to new families.
- The service has actively recruited carers with the capacity to care for brothers and sisters together, and supports carers to maintain important links for children.
- The service takes a significant role in supporting children to have the best possible educational outcomes.
- The service offers adopters and carers ongoing access to good quality and relevant training and development opportunities.
- The service responded thoroughly when any child protection concerns were raised. However, the service should seek to develop a more effective way of recording and monitoring incidents, including protection concerns.
- The service makes use of a range of evidence-based, high quality interventions to support families.
- The assessment and approval of prospective adopters is of a consistently high quality.
- The service has taken the lead nationally in developing an evidence-based approach to the transition of children between families and care placements.
- The service should seek to improve consistency of practice in the area of post adoption support planning.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

How well do we support people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children and families. Therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good. Although an area for improvement has been identified, this was found to have limited impact upon outcomes for children and young people and we also found several elements of excellent, sector leading practice.

Children and young people living within adoptive and pre-adoptive families experienced loving and compassionate care. Families were supported by the service from the outset to be child-centred and to embrace therapeutic parenting. Families were supported to embrace and meet children's individual needs and worked to convey a strong sense of acceptance and belonging.

The vast majority of caregivers we heard from felt that they had enduring and positive relationships with staff within the service. We were told, "We have found the support offered by our worker to be invaluable" and "Nothing has ever been too much for them." The service recognised that adoptive parents needed access to flexible and continuous support throughout the journey of their family. Within the last year, the service has rolled out an innovative and sector leading 'early days' programme offering a package of support to all adoptive families in the period immediately after a child or children moved to their new families. Social workers, therapists, support workers and peer practitioners worked well together to deliver responsive and tailored support to children and their families. It was clear that these relationships and the skilled work undertaken helped families to meet the life-long needs of children in their care.

The standard of assessment of prospective adopters was consistently very high. We saw evidence that assessment of capacity was ongoing beyond the point of approval. When concerns were raised post approval, during matching or in the early days after placement about the capacity of prospective adopters, this was thoroughly and fairly considered, always keeping the welfare of children at the centre of any discussion. The service experienced a higher than usual level of unplanned placement endings over two years between 2019 and 2021. The service carried out a thorough review of these cases and identified a number of important themes that contributed to this. This, in turn, has influenced some significant developments in the service, including the level of contact between the service and prospective adopters post approval; the pilot of the adult attachment interview during assessment; and the introduction of the package of 'early days' support. There has been a significant reduction in the rate of adoption disruptions since 2021.

Practice around the matching of children with prospective adopters was found to be strong. Family placement social workers spoke with confidence and knowledge about how these challenges are managed. Where a match is seen as 'high risk' due to the past experiences of the children being placed, this is being identified at an early stage and the support offered to adopters is consistently responsive and personalised.

The service has taken the lead nationally in developing an evidence-based approach to transition, along with a neighbouring local authority and another independent adoption agency. This has included making a film exploring the main elements of a successful transition; providing training to a number of local authorities, and producing a booklet that outlines the key principles of transition. It is often local authorities who determine how children's transitions are planned and managed; however, the service's confidence, clarity and professionalism has led to a more consistent approach emerging with better transitions for children.

The adoption and fostering panel acted as a strong quality assurance mechanism, and panel chairs, panel members and medical advisors were knowledgeable, confident and skilled in their role. The service has made great progress towards ensuring that prospective adopters acting as foster carers are reviewed in line with the fostering regulations.

The service took a proactive and thoughtful approach to embracing and working with diversity. Scottish Adoption is recognised as being an organisation that has been at the forefront of working with LGBTQ+ people who wished to adopt. It was evident that the service would recognise and challenge any form of discrimination and would remain open-minded and thoughtful when issues of cultural difference arose.

Children and young people benefitted from carers who were able to strongly advocate and work in partnership with others to ensure their needs were understood and met. The service offered tailored individual group work support to children, young people and their families at key stages. This included empowering a group of adoption experienced young people as paid 'ambassadors' to help to shape the development of the service and to shape policy on a local and national level.

Most adoptive parents we heard from felt that they were given opportunity to comment on or influence the development of the service, people received newsletters and recalled completing evaluation forms after assessment and panel, or after learning events and workshops.

The service emphasises the significance of children knowing about and, if appropriate, keeping in contact with the people who have been important to them. This has included work to help carers maintain links between brothers and sisters. The service has actively recruited carers with the capacity and willingness to adopt siblings. Assessments of capacity have been thorough, evidence-based and realistic. Adopters and children were supported to maintain meaningful links with previous foster carers. Lifestory work is valued and supported in a number of creative ways. Workshops are offered to carers to empower them to best support their children; specific therapeutic work is available; and in some cases, the service has been able to work together with young people, adoptive parents and birth parents. This all contributed towards children being able to more fully understand their identity, relationships and life story.

The service takes a significant role in supporting children and their parents to be prepared for significant transitions in education, as well as supporting schools to fully understand and respond to the needs of adopted children and young people. This included the provision of transition groups for parents and young people; 'wise up' which helps children to think about how to talk about their adoption story with peers; and specialist support from the service's occupational therapist. Parents advised that they felt empowered to advocate on behalf of their children, better enabling young people to thrive in education.

Children and young people's health and wellbeing was well supported by adopters and the service. Carers were proactive in seeking out information and training opportunities to better understand their child's health needs. We saw evidence of medical information being sought out and fully explored with prospective adopters when a link was being considered, and this supported people to fully understand the needs of children looking for families. Where children had health needs that had not been fully understood at the time of placement, adoptive parents were proactive in advocating for appropriate assessment, intervention and support and were well supported in this by workers within the service.

The service offers high quality and relevant ongoing learning and development opportunities to adopters, including pre-placement workshops; virtual and face to face workshops on a wide range of relevant topics; and more targeted support and learning via post adoption work with social workers, parent practitioners, support workers and therapists.

All staff members were trained in child protection, and there was an expectation that this was updated regularly. The service responded appropriately to protection concerns or allegations. However, there was no process in place for the recording and oversight of incidents and accidents, including protection concerns. The service should develop a consistent way for these concerns to be recorded and analysed, aiding quality assurance processes and increasing clarity and accountability for the service, for families and for partner agencies. This was identified as a recommendation at the time of the last inspection; however, the action plan was not fully implemented. This will form an area for improvement. (See area for improvement 1.)

Areas for improvement

1. In order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people and reduce vulnerability within caring households, the service should adopt a consistent approach to the recording and monitoring of incidents including protection concerns.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities' (HSCS 3.20).

How well is our care and support planned?

5 - Very Good

We found significant strengths in aspects of the care provided and how these supported positive outcomes for children and families. Therefore, we evaluated this key question as very good. Although an area for improvement has been identified, this was found to have limited impact upon outcomes for children and young people and we also found some elements of excellent, sector leading practice.

As an independent adoption agency placing children from local authorities throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK, there was not always consistency in the quality and relevance of children's written adoption support plans. This was largely dependent on which local authority had placed the children. The service acknowledged that it sometimes felt that they were 'at the mercy' of local authorities in this respect. Often, there was only a brief mention of the services that could be available to children and their adoptive parents from Scottish Adoption, with no specific details about what, if any, post adoptive support would be offered to individuals and families. This inconsistency was reflected in comments made by workers and adoptive parents that we spoke to and received survey responses from.

Within the service, individual workers and therapists use a range of methods to plans and review the support offered to families and that the service is piloting the use of the BERRI (Behaviour, Emotional Wellbeing, Risk, Relationships and Indicators) approach to outcomes monitoring which may prove to be a useful basis for planning.

It was evident that support to families is responsive and is 'planned'; however, there is usually not one centrally held written plan. This is required by the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009, and would be helpful for clarity and accountability and would allow for easier evaluation of outcomes for children. This could be improved if the service involved all adopters in creating a written plan and reviewing this at key points such as when an adoption order is granted, when there is a significant change or incident, or when additional support is sought. Whilst recognising that adoption support plans are a responsibility shared between local authorities and the adoption agency, improving consistency of practice around planning and reviewing adoption support plans will form an area for improvement. (See area for improvement 1.)

Despite this lack of consistency with regards to written adoption support plans, it was clear that the support offered to children and their families was incredibly flexible, specialist, creative and personalised. The service robustly assesses need and risk and responds to this.

Furthermore, the service has taken significant steps to influence and improve national practice around transition planning for children. The service has been proactive in reaching out to placing authorities,

sharing good practice principles with confidence and clarity. The practice of the service in this area is sector leading.

Areas for improvement

1. In order to ensure all adopted children and their families benefit from a co-ordinated partnership approach to post-adoption support, the service should fully involve adoptive parents and, where appropriate, young people in the production and review of post-adoption support plans.

This should include but is not limited to co-producing plans with adoptive parents and ensuring all adoption support plans are reviewed at key points including after an adoption order has been granted.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that: 'I am fully involved in developing and reviewing my personal plan, which is always available to me' (HSCS 2.17).

What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

Areas for improvement

Previous area for improvement 1

The provider should develop their current recording and quality assurance systems, ensuring that they are robust and used effectively in order to identify areas for improvement. This will support consistency in the quality of recording across the service and timescales being achieved.

This is to ensure that the care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state that: 'I benefit from a culture of continuous improvement, with the organisation having robust and transparent quality assurance processes' (HSCS 4.19).

This area for improvement was made on 3 September 2018.

Action taken since then

There have been recommendations made along similar lines in all three previous inspections, in 2014, 2016 and 2018.

There was an action plan proposed by the previous chief executive; however, this was not fully implemented and, at the time of this inspection, the service had not yet achieved consistency of recording or embedded a clear quality assurance system. This gap was acknowledged by the service and work has started to increase clarity around recording systems. At the time of this inspection, the impact of that could not yet be seen.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support people's wellbeing?	5 - Very Good
1.1 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families experience compassion, dignity and respect	6 - Excellent
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children, young people and adults' health and wellbeing benefits from the care and support they experience	6 - Excellent
1.4 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families get the service that is right for them	6 - Excellent
How well is our care and support planned?	5 - Very Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects the outcomes and wishes of children, young people and adults	5 - Very Good

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