

East Dunbartonshire Council Adoption Service Adoption Service

Social Work Headquarters
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Telephone: 0141 777 3000

Type of inspection:

Unannounced

Completed on:

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Service provided by:

East Dunbartonshire Council

Service provider number:

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Service no:

CS2005087073

About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information about all care services is available on our website at www.careinspectorate.com

The service registered with the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

East Dunbartonshire Council provides an adoption agency for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service is delivered through the Care planning and placement team (CPPT). The team is part of children and families social work services and has a range of responsibilities including fostering and kinship care. The service is based in Kirkintilloch. The service manager has overall responsibility for the service. A new team manager, with substantial experience in fostering and permanence planning, was appointed in February of this year.

In addition the Council also has a service level agreement with Barnardos Scottish Adoption Support Service (SASS) to provide post adoption support and counselling services and manages post adoption indirect contact.

What people told us

Comments from adopters and those receiving post adoption support by a team member:

Adopters told us that overall they were happy with quality of care and support they received. One adopter carer told us:

"It has been a long journey since our first enquiry visit by a supervising social worker in 2015 to having our child placed this year. However, it has all been worth it".

"After our approval we spent some time searching for the right child for us and this brought ups and downs with disagreements at times between our supervising social worker and ourselves. However, in the end we followed our hearts and we could not be more delighted with our choice; we are so looking forward to our first Christmas as a family".

Another told us:

"Both our supervising social workers and the child's social worker have been great. Home visits are regular and we know they are both on the end of phone or, in the case of the adoption team, we can speak to anyone of them if our worker isn't available".

The process of transition of the child to the foster carer was reported to be of good quality.

One adopter told us:

"We used the "bump in" process where we were gradually introduced to the child as a friend of the family. This worked well and by the time of the formal transition period came, we were all relaxed and knew each other well".

Another told us:

"Our supervising social worker was warm, kind and reassuring. She is so knowledgeable; we have our child's memory box made for her by the foster carer. The social workers are helping us with life story work".

One of a small number of adopters receiving post adoption support directly from the service told us:

"My supervising social worker has been very pleasant and helpful. I have a very busy schedule and feel that if I need support with anything I can just text her and she responds fully, straight away. She has supported a referral to a community mental health service for my adoptive daughter but has been unable to find any resources for children with additional needs and behaviour issues in East Dunbartonshire".

Self assessment

The Care Inspectorate did not request a self-assessment from the service.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Quality of care and support | 4 - Good |
| Quality of staffing | 5 - Very Good |
| Quality of management and leadership | 4 - Good |

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

Through our discussions and records viewed, we found that the quality of care and support was good.

We saw that prospective adopters had regular supervision by their Supervising Social Workers; they also had safer care plans in place. They had access to the foster carers' training calendar and to on-line training on promoting early attachment and positive parenting. Post adoption plans were in place or in progress. Children placed experienced safe, nurturing care by adopters who felt confident and well prepared.

Adoption assessments were completed thoroughly with good detail and evidence of reflective discussion. All statutory checks and references had been completed. Medical and legal representatives contributed at panel and adopters felt confident that they had adequate information about their child's health and a clear understanding of the legal processes involved.

Opportunities for written feedback to panel members were in place. Adopters told us that panel members had a clear understanding of the needs of adoptive children: their questioning was thorough and relevant and they were helped to feel at ease.

We found members of the fostering and adoption team were working well in partnership with other professionals. This helped to ensure that children were placed in a timely manner with adopters who had a good understanding of their needs.

This positive approach was confirmed by placing social workers, one of whom said "The Supervising social worker was prompt and reliable in getting the match progressed; she prepared the adopters by discussing fully the child's complex needs and behaviour which really helped the child to settle well when placed".

Areas for improvement.

The service had recognised that previously they had not been meeting timescales in completing adoption assessments and arranging approval at panel.

We saw evidence that there is now a new system in place where enquiries were tracked to approval. We noted that current applicants were being assessed within timescales and have panel dates set. While this was welcomed the service should ensure that these improvements continue in order to achieve good outcomes for children who are awaiting permanence. We look forward to seeing further progress on this matter at the next inspection.

We were concerned that, due to the lack of available courses at the time of assessment, one adoptive couple we tracked could not attend the "Preparation to Adopt" course and had attended the "Skills to Foster" course instead, which did not meet their needs. We saw that prospective adopters from East Dunbartonshire now attend the appropriate "Preparation to Adopt" course provided by Barnardos and would expect this to be continued and consistent for all prospective adopters in order to maximise positive outcomes for children.

We noted that the service did not receive a significant volume of requests from those interested in adopting. However, we were told that a relatively high number of post adoptive families move into the area from the surrounding Council areas. In order to maximise opportunities for care and support to children and young people who have been adopted, as well as adopters themselves, the service should explore ways of actively promoting resources available to them, including those now provided on behalf of the council, by Barnardos.

In conclusion, there were a number of important strengths in the service which, taken together, are likely to have a positive effect on outcomes for people using the service. While there is good evidence that improvements are either already in place or at an advanced stage, these need to be further and fully embedded in order to ensure consistency in outcomes experienced by people using the service. This informs a grade of good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 4 - good

Quality of staffing

Findings from the inspection

We checked to ensure that staff had been safely recruited. Records and discussions with local authority staff confirmed that relevant checks and references had been completed.

We saw evidence of good quality relationships between supervising social workers and children's social workers and other professionals. Regular training on permanence and adoption was available and attended by all children and young people's services.

We spoke to a new staff member in the duty team who was undertaking joint work in adoption cases, increasing her knowledge base and confidence in responding to children and families affected by adoption. Another staff member told us: "Things have definitely improved a lot over the past year, we all attend the same planning meetings and the role and the relevance of the adoption service is much clearer".

We saw that all staff had regular supervision by the team manager who also audited and reviewed case work. Supervision minutes sampled confirmed detailed and reflective discussion and opportunities for further learning and development.

Additional training opportunities had been secured by the new team manager to enable staff to complete relevant formal post graduate training courses. All staff had benefitted additionally from attending a range of courses and conferences in relation to adoption and their learning had been shared during regular practice development sessions. For example one member of staff attended "Adoption Voices" conference in Edinburgh and this inspired them to want to hear more from adoptees.

Staff told us that they have worked closely together over a number of years and have always viewed themselves as a stable, committed and enthusiastic team of social workers. They discussed the changes and developments over this year with positivity and all reported feeling involved and included in the progress and development of the team going forward. One member of staff told us "We feel that our Team Manager enjoys a high level of credibility with Senior staff in all services and this has made such a difference. We feel that our voice is now heard".

In conclusion, it is clear that there are major strengths within the staff team in relation to adoption and permanence work. In addition to their core skills, individual staff members bring their own experience from previous positions, providing additional perspective and enhancing decision making.

All staff spoken to were busy in their work and remained highly motivated and enthusiastic, with a genuine passion for improving the service and outcomes for children requiring adoption. This informs a grade of very good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 5 - very good

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

At the beginning of this year a new Team Manager with substantial experience in the field of fostering and permanence was appointed to help improve and develop the service.

The Scottish Government's "Getting it right for looked after children and young people's strategy" (November '15) identifies "early permanence" as one of its key priorities.

In our last inspection we required the service to take action to improve permanence planning for children. At this inspection we noted that the service now had in place a robust system for tracking the progress of children requiring permanence; bi-monthly management meetings were held jointly with legal services and a sample of cases are further reviewed at the fostering panel which will impose timescales if necessary. This helped ensure that the service's 12 week time limit for completion of reports from the permanence planning meeting to the adoption panel were met. We saw examples of the new timescales beginning to be achieved, improving outcomes for children requiring permanence.

The service had a robust fostering and adoption panel with good quality and transparent quality assurance processes. The membership was diverse, panel development days take place regularly and a variety of training opportunities were available and well attended. Panel members we spoke to talked positively of the changes introduced over the year; they felt involved and included in service development and improvement. The panel chair has regular meetings with the agency decision maker and panel advisor and the service had a detailed annual business plan with agreed areas for improvement. We found that care and support was made more consistent and stable because people worked together well.

At the last inspection we recommended that links should be formalised between social workers of children in need of permanence, and child and family placement team in recognition of their knowledge of adoption and permanence.

We noted that the service's adoption procedures have recently been updated. We attended an all staff briefing at which the team leader discussed the changes and in particular the new policy of appointing a member of the fostering and adoption team to assist and support social workers to complete permanence reports within timescales. This will help to ensure that children's permanence arrangements are secured at an earlier stage, supporting security of family life.

The team manager, was in the process and also working with legal services and Scottish Children's Reporters Administration and related professionals to develop a permanence training course for all staff working with children. The course will take place in February 2019 and should help to improve outcomes for children who require permanence.

We agreed with the service that the above improvements, when fully embedded, would increase the confidence and effectiveness of staff and help to avoid unnecessary delay in achieving permanence.

The service agreed that parts of its adoption website were in need of improvement. We considered that a streamlined and up to date website, with a clear system of signposting to the range of services available would further enhance positive outcomes for Adopters and Adoptees residing in East Dunbartonshire.

In conclusion it is clear that the introduction of a new team manager, supported by senior colleagues in legal and social work services, has helped to create a culture of continuous improvement within the adoption services. We acknowledged the significant investment made to develop the service over the last year. We found that some of the developments were either at an early stage or were just beginning to impact positively on the experience of people who use the service. We encouraged the service to fully embed and sustain improvement to ensure consistent and high quality experiences and outcomes for children and their adoptive families. This has informed the grade of good for this theme.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Grade: 4 - good

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

Requirement 1

East Dunbartonshire Council require to improve permanence planning for children and strengthen this with effective monitoring and tracking tools.

This is in order to comply with:

The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011, Regulation 4 (1) (a) Welfare of users.

Timescale: within three months of the publication of the report.

This also takes account of:

National Care Standards adoption agencies - Standard 2: Your adoption plan.

This requirement was made on 18 December 2017.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service has put in place a robust system for tracking the progress of children requiring permanence through bi-monthly management meetings, jointly chaired with legal services, each case is then reviewed by the fostering and adoption panel, who impose necessary timescales for completion of the work.

Met - within timescales

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

Recommendation 1

The service should seek to raise the profile of the work of the adoption service within East Dunbartonshire.

National Care Standards adoption agencies - Standard 18: Getting information.

This recommendation was made on 18 December 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

We saw that the service has started to do this. Adoption services is on the agenda and regularly discussed within the Senior management team meeting. Additional funding has been made available to recruit adopters, optimal use of these funds is currently under review by the team manager and it has been agreed that the service should aim to recruit a minimum of two adopters per year. We noted that two assessments of adopters are currently in progress.

A small amount of information about adoption is featured within the publicity and social media campaigns related to the fostering service. The service does have a specific website but this, we agreed, requires to be improved and updated.

We assessed that sufficient progress has been made in respect of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The service should develop permanency planning procedures which should include a formalised link between social workers in need of permanence, and the child, and the family placement team in recognition of their knowledge of adoption and permanence. These should also include different ways in which children's permanence could be achieved more timeously.

National Care Standards adoption agencies - Standard 32: Providing a good quality service.

This recommendation was made on 18 December 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

We saw that the team manager had introduced a system of allocating a supervising social worker at the point where the permanence decision is made for a child, to assist and advise the child's social worker in completing the permanence processes and reports.

The team manager is also actively planning with others, four days training on permanence for all staff. All staff spoken to welcomed these developments and told us that they now have a better understanding of each others roles and work more closely together to secure positive outcomes for children.

We considered this recommendation to have been met.

Recommendation 3

Supervising social workers should be considered for post qualification awards in order to meet with their continued professional development and continue to build on the teams expertise.

National Care Standards adoption agencies - Standard 32: Providing a good quality service.

This recommendation was made on 18 December 2017.

Action taken on previous recommendation

We found that Supervising social workers are now actively considered, through process of interview, for all relevant post qualifying awards. Staff have also attended of a range of relevant courses and conferences this year; and have shared their learning with colleagues at team practice sessions.

We consider this recommendation to have been met.

Complaints

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

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

Inspection and grading history

| Date | Type | Gradings |
|-------------|--------------------------|---|
| 18 Dec 2017 | Unannounced | Care and support 3 - Adequate Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 3 - Adequate |
| 12 Nov 2015 | Unannounced | Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good |
| 30 Jul 2014 | Announced (short notice) | Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good |
| 24 Jan 2014 | Announced (short notice) | Care and support 3 - Adequate Environment Not assessed Staffing 3 - Adequate Management and leadership 2 - Weak |
| 10 Feb 2012 | Announced | Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good |
| 26 Nov 2010 | Announced | Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 3 - Adequate Management and leadership Not assessed |
| 30 Sep 2009 | Announced | Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good |

| Date | Type | Gradings | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|--|------------------|----------|-------------|--------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
| 20 Feb 2009 | Announced | <table> <tr> <td>Care and support</td> <td>4 - Good</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Environment</td> <td>Not assessed</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Staffing</td> <td>4 - Good</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Management and leadership</td> <td>4 - Good</td> </tr> </table> | Care and support | 4 - Good | Environment | Not assessed | Staffing | 4 - Good | Management and leadership | 4 - Good |
| Care and support | 4 - Good | | | | | | | | | |
| Environment | Not assessed | | | | | | | | | |
| Staffing | 4 - Good | | | | | | | | | |
| Management and leadership | 4 - Good | | | | | | | | | |

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