

Aberdeenshire Council – Adoption Service

Adoption Service

Aberdeenshire Council
Buchan House
St. Peter Street
Peterhead
AB42 1QF

Telephone: 01467 532 800

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
21 February 2025

Service provided by:
Aberdeenshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003000029

Service no:
CS2004084094

About the service

Aberdeenshire Council Adoption Service provides an adoption service for children and young people aged from birth to 18 years and their families who are assessed as in need of this service. The agency recruits and supports adoptive parents to provide families for those children who cannot live with their birth parents or extended family members whose needs have been assessed in relation to adoption. The service also provides post adoption support to adopted young people and their families living in the Aberdeenshire area, facilitates post adoption contact between young people and birth families, and supports adopted people to access birth records.

Staff within the service are located throughout the Aberdeenshire area, most are co-located with social work fieldwork teams, and this means that there are staff in most areas within the council boundary.

Since the last inspection in 2019 the service has undertaken a number of innovative developments which have improved experiences for children who have a plan for adoption. These developments have impacted positively on every stage of a child's adoptive journey from initial referral to the service, through matching and transition, to post-adoption support.

About the inspection

This was a short notice unannounced inspection which took place from 15 January 2025 to 21 February 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate at the same time as inspections of the local authority's fostering and adult placement services.

To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this 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:

- met with three young people using the service and four of their adoptive parents
- spoke with six staff and management from the service individually and conducted a staff focus group
- observed team meetings and adoption and fostering panels
- reviewed documents including survey response
- spoke with visiting professionals as well as the independent panel chair

Key messages

- Children, young people and their adoptive families benefit from an exceptionally high standard of assessment, preparation and support.
- Children's voices and experiences are creatively sought and kept at the centre of adoption planning, transitions, and post adoption support.
- The service works alongside the wider local authority and voluntary partners to ensure that children are well supported to maintain lifelong relationships with people who are important to them with particularly strong work supporting brothers and sisters.
- A confident and well trained staff team support parents to take a trauma informed approach to parenting their children. This is enhanced by the role of a therapeutic transitions social worker within the team.
- Adoption support plans are of a high standard and are live documents, regularly reviewed and updated.

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?	6 - Excellent
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?

6 - Excellent

We evaluated this key question as excellent where performance was sector leading with outstandingly high outcomes for children and young people.

The unique voices and experiences of children and young people were listened to at every stage of their involvement with the service. This was supported by a detailed, child centred referral form and a multi-agency 'understanding the child day' which was held before family finding began to ensure that children were truly known and heard before any decisions about their future was made.

Even very young children were exceptionally well supported to make sense of their plans and to be active participants in their transition planning. Children were supported to use a variety of therapeutic communication tools to express their thoughts and feelings before and after moving to live with their adoptive families and continued to use these tools in the months that followed. Transitions happened at a pace that was right for each child, skilfully supported by the therapeutic transitions worker.

Strong and trusting relationships between adoptive families and workers within the team underpinned this. The team works to maintain these relationships over time in order to more effectively support families during times of stress of transition. One parent told us: 'My daughter and I are going through a very difficult time and I feel the social workers I am working with have gone above and beyond. They have made time to really listen, are compassionate and knowledgeable'.

Children and young people benefitted from their adoptive families and the adoption service advocating passionately on their behalf. This was particularly apparent for some of the older children receiving post adoption support who were experiencing difficulties in school. Workers within the adoption service built effective working relationships with children's schools, often supporting adoptive families with school planning meetings and helping to ensure that the needs of young people are fully understood.

Skilled work was undertaken to ensure children were able to maintain lifelong connections with people who were important to them. Sibling relationships were thoroughly assessed to ensure that the right recommendations were made with regards to whether children's needs would best be met living with or apart from brothers and sisters. The local authority has commissioned Barnardo's to deliver the 'Staying Connected' project to ensure brothers and sisters who do not live together are able to have positive and meaningful experiences together. Adoptive parents we met were very enthusiastic about the impact of the work of this project on the children in their care.

There have been no protection concerns within this service over the past two years. This is indicative of the effectiveness of the quality of assessment and support offered to families. When reviewing post adoption support, we noted some robust discussions around the role of adoptive parents in keeping their older children safe and maintaining connections when young adults made potentially risky independent decisions. Going forwards, the service should consider the most effective way of ensuring worker's skills and knowledge in this area remain strong and up to date as not all workers within the team have recently completed child and adult protection refresher training.

The service had identified the need for life story information to be more thorough, so that children could have a greater understanding of significant events in their lives. A number of changes in the adoption service have addressed this effectively, with meaningful information gathered from the earliest stages of adoption planning. One worker told us: 'We are trying hard to ensure the child has a narrative with them to help them understand why they did not remain with their birth families. It also should allow the child to understand that their early life experiences is not their fault and enable them to grow in confidence in their adoptive family'

Prospective adopters receive a thoughtfully delivered and paced programme of preparation training, which includes a day focused on therapeutic parenting and theraplay. This is enhanced and reinforced for new adopters over the course of linking and transitions due by the work of the therapeutic transitions social worker.

As a result, adoptive parents demonstrated a strong understanding of the impact of early trauma and neglect on their children and were supported to respond to this in partnership with others. The staff team use an understanding of theraplay, dyadic development psychotherapy (DDP) and other evidence based approaches in their interactions with children and their adoptive families. This is further supported by Aberdeenshire's Wellbeing team, who offer training, consultancy and direct work support to enhance emotional wellbeing, complementing the work of the adoption service.

Adoptive parents and staff understand their role in supporting access to health care and work well with professional team around children to support positive outcomes. Parents and prospective parents are well

aware of the importance of a healthy balanced diet and active lifestyle and promote this in a gentle, trauma informed way. This is enhanced by the work of their adoption social workers and others supporting the child.

The service comprehensively assesses prospective adopters, to ensure that they have the capacity to meet children's needs. The service has introduced and refined a two stage assessment process since the time of the last inspection and this has been well received by adopters and the team. This shows consideration of the potential impact of assessment on prospective adopters and embeds strong relationships for the future. Recommendations for approval were clear, personalised, and evidence based. Second opinion visits were undertaken for all adopter assessments and robust panel processes further enhanced assessment and approval.

Children and their families benefitted from thorough and child centred matching processes, informed by an understanding of the individual needs of each child. This was enhanced by the role of the therapeutic transition worker. When a decision was taken to progress with a plan of adoption for a child, there were robust processes in place to ensure that children's voices and experiences remained central throughout the assessment.

Children and young people benefitted from robust practice throughout the local authority with regards to permanence planning. Although some children still experienced delays in planning, these were usually due to external factors. Where barriers within the local authority were apparent these were addressed in order to ensure plans could progress for children with minimal delay. The local authority's permanence managers played a pivotal role in monitoring planning and providing advice and support to children's social workers and managers.

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 young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Children and their families benefit from high quality personal planning. Children initially placed with their adoptive families on a fostering basis have child's plans and these were usually reviewed in line with statutory requirements until adoption orders are granted.

Prospective adoptive parents and adoption social workers were active partners in these planning and review processes. We noted that children had child's plans operating alongside adoption support plans, and noted the service had identified a need to streamline these processes to make statutory reviews more meaningful for children and their families. The adoption support plan often had far more detail about the specific needs of the child and their family than the child's plan and in many ways superseded the child's plan post placement. The adoption support plan is informally reviewed during regular adoption support visits and remains a live and useful document with clear responsibilities but may benefit from multiagency consideration.

Adoption support plans are highly individualised to the current and projected needs of children, and the development needs of their adoptive families. These are underpinned by a thorough understanding of the impact of children's past experiences, gained through a multiagency 'understanding the child' day and direct work undertaken with each child. Adoption support plans are of a consistently high standard and reflect the likelihood that families who adopt will often benefit from support at different points in their child's life.

One adoptive parents told us: 'Planning is very in depth and has room for adaptability and flexibility'.

Some young people receiving post-adoption support also had children and young people's plans in place, and adoption social workers regularly supported young people and their families at planning meetings. Again, these child's plans ran alongside post-adoption support plans which were agreed with families following a proportionate and helpful assessment. Plans clearly centred on the expressed wishes and areas for support identified by families. Post-adoption support was delivered at a pace that met the needs of each young person, and was flexible around emerging needs.

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?	6 - Excellent
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	6 - Excellent
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

To find out more

This inspection report is published by the Care Inspectorate. You can download this report and others from our website.

Care services in Scotland cannot operate unless they are registered with the Care Inspectorate. We inspect, award grades and help services to improve. We also investigate complaints about care services and can take action when things aren't good enough.

Please get in touch with us if you would like more information or have any concerns about a care service.

You can also read more about our work online at www.careinspectorate.com

Contact us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

Find us on Facebook

Twitter: @careinspect

Other languages and formats

This report is available in other languages and formats on request.

Tha am foillseachadh seo ri fhaighinn ann an cruthannan is cànan eile ma nithear iarrtas.

অনুরোধসাপেক্ষে এই প্রকাশনাটি অন্য ফরম্যাট এবং অন্যান্য ভাষায় পাওয়া যায়।

یہ اشاعت درخواست کرنے پر دیگر شکلوں اور دیگر زبانوں میں فراہم کی جاسکتی ہے۔

ਬੇਨਤੀ 'ਤੇ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ।

هذه الوثيقة متوفرة بلغات ونماذج أخرى عند الطلب

本出版品有其他格式和其他語言備索。

Na życzenie niniejsza publikacja dostępna jest także w innych formatach oraz językach.