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**COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL CARE INSPECTION (CSCI)'S  
INSPECTION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan, Children’s Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Margaret Asquith, Director of Children’s Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To present a summary of the report from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) following the Inspection of Darlington Borough Council’s Adoption Service.

**Information and Analysis**

2. This was the first inspection of Darlington Borough Council’s Adoption Service and began on 28 February 2006. The purpose of the inspection was to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The Inspection Report was finalised in May 2006 following CSCI’s acceptance of the Adoption Service Action Plan to address the requirements and recommendations of the Report.
3. Darlington Borough Council’s Adoption Service is part of the wider provision for children and families. The Council commissions a large part of the adoption service from Durham Family Welfare (DFW), which is a well established Voluntary Adoption Agency in the North East.
4. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for Adoption. “Every Child Matters” outlined the government’s vision for children’s services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children’s services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life.

The outcomes are :-

- (a) Being Healthy
- (b) Staying Safe
- (c) Enjoying and Achieving
- (d) Making a Positive Contribution
- (e) Social & Economic Wellbeing

In response CSCI has re-ordered the National Minimum Standards for Children’s Services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under ‘Management’ to cover those issues that potentially impact on the five outcomes above.

## Inspection Summary

5. An overview of the inspectors' findings included the following :-
- (a) "Darlington's adoption service is child-focused and provides good outcomes for children who are placed for adoption within the resources available".
  - (b) "Darlington has access to an excellent Post Adoption Service which is part of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in the town".
  - (c) "The service has a longstanding relationship with DFW, a well-established voluntary agency and has developed a service level agreement for the recruitment of adopters. All the adopters spoken to confirmed that DFW provided an excellent service".
  - (d) "Staff in the service were experienced and committed to their role and worked effectively with their partners at DFW to match and place children in what one adopter described as a seamless service".
  - (e) "The managers of the service demonstrated their commitment to improving adoption service delivery by ensuring that there was a bi-monthly adoption monitoring meeting between Darlington and DFW managers and staff to monitor progress of children's performance plans. The managers of the service in Darlington demonstrated their commitment to the adoption process and their desire to improve outcomes for children".
  - (f) "Whilst adoption plans and the service level agreement were monitored, Darlington would benefit from proactively managing the recruitment of the types of DFW adopters they need as a small number of harder to place children continue to wait".
  - (g) "Darlington must ensure that they establish their own adoption panel, or seek to share an adoption panel with another local authority to ensure that the council owns recommendations and decisions concerning Darlington children and fulfils the service's obligations as an adoption agency to children and adults".
  - (h) "The service must develop independent support services for birth parents and birth families, as the existing arrangements are not independent or adequate to meet current needs".
  - (i) "The service should identify an appropriate agency to undertake inter-country adoption assessments".
  - (j) "The managers of the service in Darlington would benefit from reviewing the quality and quantity of services provided by the service level agreement with DFW in a more pro-active way".
  - (k) "Darlington should develop more consistent file audits to ensure management oversight and involvement in case decisions".

## **Staying Safe**

6. The inspectors looked at outcomes for standards 2, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 19 and reported :
- “Darlington has skilled and experienced staff in the Adoption Service. However, inconsistencies in the assessment of children’s needs must be addressed to ensure that all children with a plan for adoption stay safe and secure and are placed with their adoptive families in a timely way”.

## **Enjoying and Achieving**

7. The inspectors looked at standards 6 and 18 and reported :
- (a) “Darlington works in partnership with another agency to ensure that the majority of adopters are supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them”.
- (b) “Darlington commissions an excellent service from DFW for adopters and is developing a range of other Post Adoption Support services in partnership with the local CAMHS”.
- (c) “Darlington has access to excellent adoption medical advice, in addition to the specialist advice available from the Post Adoption Support service”.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

8. The inspectors looked at standards 7, 8 and 9 and reported :
- (a) “Darlington does not provide a range of services that support birth parents and birth families to deal with the lifelong implications of adoption”.
- (b) “Darlington must develop and implement a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families both before and after adoption”.

## **Management**

9. The inspectors looked at the standards 1, 3, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 and reported :
- (a) “The management systems are improving. However, the service must redefine Darlington as an adoption agency and develop more robust systems to monitor existing partnership arrangements to ensure an efficient, effective and child focused adoption service”.
- (b) “Darlington would benefit from developing a strategy that redefines their key roles and responsibilities as an adoption service. This must include arrangements for a Darlington adoption panel and independent social work support for birth parents and birth families. In addition, the reviewed Statement of Purpose should identify how Darlington will provide services to inter-country adopters”.

- (c) “Managers in Darlington were suitably experienced and qualified to manage an adoption service. However, the DFW Acting Service Manager should be supported and supervised more effectively by Darlington staff concerning the evidence needed to ensure that DFW are providing best value to children and adults through the existing service level agreement.

There are no National Minimum Adoption Standards that map Being Healthy nor Achieving Economic Wellbeing.

### **Action Plan**

- 10. In accordance with CSCI requirements, Adoption Service managers have submitted an Action Plan outlining how the Statutory Requirements and Good Practice Recommendations outlined in the Inspection Report will be addressed.

Actions are required in the following areas :

- (a) Establishing a Darlington Adoption Panel.
- (b) Developing independent social work support for birth parents.
- (c) Developing and redefining the Statement of Purpose.
- (d) Updating of staff personnel files.

Good practice recommendations will be complied with in relation to :

- (a) The recruitment of adopters for Darlington children.
- (b) Identifying and implementing arrangements for the assessment, approval and support of inter-country adopters in Darlington.
- (c) Enhancement of the quality assurance arrangements for children’s assessments.
- (d) Support for DFW manager’s development.
- (e) Avoidance of all unnecessary delay for children by development of the adoption monitoring meeting process.
- (f) Establishment of more robust file auditing and recording systems.
- (g) Ensuring children’s adoption files are fit for purpose.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

- 11. The following consultations are ongoing following the Adoption Inspection:

- (a) Consultation with DFW Adoption about establishing a Darlington Adoption Panel; and

- (b) Liaison by adoption managers with colleagues from other authorities to explore the development of independent support for birth parents at regional level.

### **Legal Implications**

- 12. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

- 13. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that the contents of this report do have such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

- 14. The issues contained within this report do not represent a change to the Council's policy framework.

### **Decision Deadline**

- 15. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

### **Recommendations**

- 16. It is recommended that Members:-
  - (a) Note the findings and recommendations of the CSCI Report as summarised above; and
  - (b) Note that the full report and action plan are available from the Children's Accommodation Manager on request.

### **Reasons**

- 17. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
  - (a) To comply with statutory requirements to make this report public; and
  - (b) To inform Members of the findings of this report.

**Margaret Asquith,  
Director of Children's Services**

## **Background Papers**

- (a) CSCI Adoption Inspection Report 2006
- (b) Darlington Adoption Service Inspection Action Plan 2006
- (c) The Care Standards Act 2000
- (d) The National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2003
- (e) The Children Act 2004

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