

Midlothian Council Adoption Service Adoption Service

7 Eskdail Court
Dalkeith
EH22 1AG

Telephone: 01312 713 413

Type of inspection:
Announced (short notice)

Completed on:
29 September 2025

Service provided by:
Midlothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002602

Service no:
CS2004083727

About the service

Midlothian Council Adoption Service is provided for children and young people, aged from birth to 18 years and their families who are assessed as being 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 and who need permanent alternative care through adoption.

The service aims to 'recruit, train and support a range of adopters who are committed, empathic and knowledgeable and who can give permanent homes to children and young people in Midlothian'. However, in recent years due to staffing capacity the service has not been able to.

As the findings in this inspection are based on a sample of children's experiences, we cannot assure the quality of experience for every single child receiving a service. An inspection of the fostering service took place at the same time as this inspection and a separate report for that service is available.

About the inspection

This was a short notice announced inspection which took place between 25 August 2025 and 18 September 2025. The inspection was carried out by three inspectors from the Care Inspectorate.

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:

- spoke with five people using the service
- spoke with seven staff and management
- observed practice and daily life
- reviewed documents
- reviewed survey responses from caregivers, young people, staff and external professionals
- spoke with external professionals

Key messages

- Children benefitted from the love and care of attuned and nurturing adoptive parents.
- Significant staffing changes meant that caring households had experienced multiple changes and gaps in allocated worker, which negatively impacted people's experience of support.
- Staffing issues at front line and management level limited the ability of the service to drive forward and sustain improvements.
- The service showed a clear commitment to ensuring brothers and sisters remained together.
- The importance of young people understanding their life story and of promoting a positive sense of identity was clear within caring households.
- Quality assurance mechanisms were not comprehensive enough to fully support clear overview and improvement within the service.
- The service needs to ensure that all adoptive families benefit from a clear and individualised adoption support plan.

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?	3 - Adequate
How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
How well is our care and support planned?	3 - Adequate

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

How well do we support people's wellbeing?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed the weaknesses identified.

Children benefitted from the love and care of adoptive parents who were attuned to them and cared for them with understanding and compassion. Those children enjoyed a sense of security with nurturing caregivers which allowed them to grow and flourish. Although there had been some adoption disruptions

during the period of this inspection, these had significantly reduced since the previous inspection period and did not always involve families with a history with the local authority.

However, ongoing staffing shortages and changes meant that caring households had experienced inconsistent support from the service. Some adoptive families had experienced periods of valuable support but we heard from several carers that this had not been their experience. They told us that their most useful and effective support had come from services outwith Midlothian council, including other local authorities and voluntary organisations. This was in line with the service's approach to signposting to support over a period when the service was effectively 'paused'. This approach caused a level of stress and uncertainty. At the time of the last inspection an area for improvement and a requirement were made in relation to relationships and support to adoptive families. These have not been met and will both be repeated.

Adopters and prospective adopters had access to a range of relevant and helpful training, including learning opportunities provided by Adoption UK. Some families were proactive in seeking out their own learning and development opportunities. This ensured that carers had a good understanding of the basics of therapeutic parenting and supported them to approach the needs of their children with compassion and understanding.

Young people were seen to have positive outcomes in relation to health and education, with effective multi agency work ongoing to support this.

Children and their adoptive families benefitted from a thoughtful approach to maintaining an understanding of identity and meaningful connections. This included acknowledging the importance of children's connections with foster carers and children they had lived with and built relationships with before moving to live with their adoptive parents.

This positive sense of identity was further supported by thoughtful preparation for life story work, which helped young people to understand their circumstances. Since the last inspection the service has introduced child appreciation days into the adoption process. These have provided an opportunity to share rich and detailed information as children are being matched with prospective adopter families and have been experienced positively.

Transitions for younger children and babies to their adoptive families were usually carefully planned. However, a more nuanced and trauma informed approach could be taken to help older children prepare for this significant move. Good practice examples were shared with the service and we look forward to seeing how this has been developed at the time of the next inspection.

How good is our leadership?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Although permanent staff were recruited to the service since the time of the last inspection, there has been ongoing instability within the staff team. There have also been recent significant changes within the management of the service, increasing capacity for improvement. Whilst this situation was improving this must be stabilised in order for the leadership to have capacity to drive forward vital service developments.

A detailed and aspirational service development plan has been created which was informed by a self-evaluation undertaken by the service. We encouraged the service to refine these plans to support progress in identified improvement work.

Although the leadership team have identified key areas for improvement within the service, significant challenges with capacity and stability have impacted the ability to implement and sustain improvement work. We have particularly seen an impact of this upon the adoption service. This has impacted on all areas of the service, from the recruitment of carers to family finding and the placement of children as well as the provision of post adoption support. There are plans in place to expand the support offered by the service, however there were limited examples of this impacting on outcomes for children and their families.

At the last inspection, a requirement was made in relation to the service fulfilling their legal responsibilities and providing the core functions of the service. This requirement has not been met and will be repeated.

A requirement was also previously made in respect of quality assurance mechanisms within the service. The provider has developed and effectively embedded quality assurance mechanisms which has supported the service's oversight of permanence journeys within the authority. Although work has begun to create and implement systems which offer strategic and practice overview in other key areas of the service, this is at an early stage, and it is not possible to assess the impact on outcomes and experiences at this time. As a result, it was assessed that the requirement has not been met and will be repeated.

We found that the permanence panel and its independent chair was robust and provided a valuable quality assurance role. This is an additional safeguard while improvements continue to be progressed by the service.

There continue to be regular meetings providing an opportunity for carers to meet with senior management. These appear to be relatively well attended by carers and provide an opportunity for information about the development of the service to be communicated. However, some caregivers reflected a continued feeling of disengagement from the wider service and we saw no evidence of adoptive parents taking up this opportunity. The service has acknowledged that work needs to continue to build confidence and trust in the newly re-established delivery of the adoption service .

How good is our staff team?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

An ongoing pattern of staffing changes have led to caring households experiencing a lack of consistency and stability in how their support is provided and limiting their ability to build trusting and enduring relationships with staff. The service is aware of these challenges and this is an ongoing priority. Staff and management are optimistic that the increased staffing resources which have been achieved will provide stability and support work towards addressing these ongoing concerns.

Staff experienced regular formal and informal supervision which they found useful. In addition, there were team development days and, for newly qualified social workers, this was complimented by a mentoring system providing informal reflective supervision. We encouraged the service to explore how an expansion of this mentor system could support other new members of the team, regardless of whether they are newly qualified.

Although a dedicated team leader for adoption and permanence has been recently appointed, at the time of this inspection aspects of the adoption service were being delivered by staff who were also occupied in delivering the fostering service. Although evidencing a clear commitment and optimism about the future of the service, some staff reflected that opportunities for learning had been impacted by staffing changes and that additional training would be welcomed to increase knowledge, expertise and confidence in their

roles. The area for improvement made around staff training and development at the time of the last inspection has not been met and will be repeated.

How well is our care and support planned?

3 - Adequate

We evaluated this key question as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

The service has shown a commitment to continuing to work with partner agencies to develop better practice around transitions to adoption, including child appreciation days and well planned moves. In the best examples, this was strongly guided by the knowledge and understanding of the people who knew the children best. However, as detailed under Key Question 1, this has been less evident for older children within the service and this is an area the service should seek to continue to develop.

The service has undertaken some positive work supporting birth parents with meaningful letterbox contact. This has been experienced as helpful and valuable by the parents involved and has led to birth parents being better able to manage this difficult task. However, outwith the letterbox service there was very little post adoption support being offered by the service. This has been acknowledged and forms part of the service's improvement plan.

The adoption service has an updated policy and process around post adoption support planning and we welcome this. However, the new format for post adoption support assessment when families approach the service after the adoption order has been granted has not yet been used. A requirement was made at the time of the last inspection with respect to post adoption support planning, and although the service has developed new protocols there is limited evidence that this has been embedded, and so this will be repeated.

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 15 January 2024 the provider must provide high quality support, which consistently meets the needs of children and their adoptive parents at all stages of the adoption process including post adoption support.

To do this the provider must as a minimum:

- a) identify vulnerabilities and support needs at an early juncture
- b) ensure supports are provided in a timely manner.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work improvement Scotland (Requirements for care services) regulations 2011 (SS1 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice.' (HSCS 4.11).

This requirement has not been met and we have agreed an extension until 12 January 2026

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service and the linked fostering service has sought to recruit to social worker vacancies in the period since the last inspection. Recruitment is ongoing and the service has sought to utilise existing resources to their fullest. There are more workers in permanent posts than at the time of the last inspection. However, for a variety of reasons there has continued to be a high turnover of workers within the teams which has impacted the ability of the service to provide consistent and high-quality support.

This has presented challenges in establishing effective working relationships between the service and adoptive carers and both prospective and established adopters, and the service is not yet delivering the level of service needed.

Not met

Requirement 2

By 15 January 2024 the provider must ensure quality assurance systems are robust and effectively support a strategic and practice overview and improvement work.

To do this the provider must as a minimum:

- a) implement systems for tracking key areas and benchmark progress
- b) ensure Care Inspectorate annual return information is accurate.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for care services) regulations 2011 (SS1 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) 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 requirement has not been met and we have agreed an extension until 12 January 2026.

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

The provider has reinstated a Permanence Overview Group which is effectively monitoring planning for young people who are looked after and accommodated.

The service has introduced a proforma for the audit of key areas of practice within the fostering and adoption services, tracking key paperwork and statutory requirements. Whilst it appears there are still some

gaps in some areas of practice due to staffing pressures, there is a clearer understanding of where these gaps are. The service also has a clear plan for how to address these gaps moving forward, however at the time of inspection this has not yet been achieved.

Not met

Requirement 3

By 15 January 2024 the provider must ensure that the adoption service is able to fulfil their legal responsibilities and complete the core functions of the service.

To do this the provider must as a minimum:

- a) Review and update the service's aims and objectives and service development plan.
- b) Ensure there is a competent and well-trained staff team with the capacity to undertake this area of work.
- c) Ensure that caregivers are adequately supported and advised at all stages of their adoption journey, including post adoption support.

This is to comply with The Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) (welfare of users) of the Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for care services) regulations 2011 (SS1 2011/210).

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'My care and support meets my needs and is right for me' (HSCS 1.19) and
'I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed.' (HSCS 4.23)

This requirement has not been met and we have agreed an extension until 12 January 2026

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

The provider has reviewed the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and has developed an ambitious service development plan. However at the time of the inspection the service had not yet achieved parts b) and c) of this requirement due to ongoing staffing pressures.

Not met

Requirement 4

By 15 January 2024 the provider must adopt a strategic approach to providing post adoption support services.

To do this the provider must as a minimum ensure:

- a) All adoptive families have a co-produced adoption support plan in place and that this is reviewed in line

with legislation and good practice guidance.

b) Ensure that staff are fully aware of their roles and adopters are aware of their rights in relation to the development of adoption support plans.

This is to comply with Regulation 4(1)(a) of The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

This is to ensure that the quality of care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state:

'I am supported and cared for sensitively by people who anticipate issues and are aware of and plan for any known vulnerability or frailty.' (HSCS 3.18)

This requirement has not been met and we have agreed an extension until 12 January 2026

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

Children who have been newly placed in adoptive families have had adoption support plans in place, with clear timescales around when these are reviewed. However, adoptive families approaching the service for support at a later stage do not have comprehensive adoption support plans in place. The service has developed a new proforma for the assessment of post adoption support needs however this has not yet been used.

This requirement has therefore not been met in full.

Not met

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

To promote positive outcomes the service should establish and sustain important relationships with carers and young people. This should include but is not limited to achieving consistency of workers supporting caring households.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I experience stability in my care and support from people who know my needs, choices and wishes, even if there are changes in the service or organisation.' (HSCS 4.15)
and

'If I am supported and cared for by a team or more than one organisation, this is well co-ordinated so that I experience consistency and continuity.' (HSCS 4.17)

This area for improvement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken since then

Due to ongoing staffing challenges, consistency of workers has not been delivered for the majority of adoptive households. We recognise that the service have attempted to progress this within limited resources when available however this has not been consistent and sustained and this will be continued.

Previous area for improvement 2

To support care giver and children's wellbeing, learning and development, the provider should ensure that all staff are sufficiently confident, supported and enabled to respond to the support needs of adopter families.

This should include but is not limited to ensuring:

- a) Staff have the opportunity to attend training that will enable them to confidently provide high quality adoption support.
- b) Staff have the opportunity for reflection and development, via individual supervision and team meetings.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state that:

'I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes.' (HSCS 3.14)

This area for improvement was made on 3 October 2023.

Action taken since then

The service has not been able to meet this area for improvement due to ongoing staffing issues and this will be continued.

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?	3 - Adequate
1.1 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families experience compassion, dignity and respect	3 - Adequate
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	4 - Good
1.3 Children, young people and adults' health and wellbeing benefits from the care and support they experience	4 - Good
1.4 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families get the service that is right for them	3 - Adequate

How good is our leadership?	3 - Adequate
2.2 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	3 - Adequate

How good is our staff team?	3 - Adequate
3.2 Staff have the right knowledge, competence and development to support children, young people, adults and their caregiver families	3 - Adequate

How well is our care and support planned?	3 - Adequate
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects the outcomes and wishes of children, young people and adults	3 - Adequate

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 iartras.

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.