

West Lothian Council – Adoption Service Adoption Service

Family Placement Team
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Announced (short notice)

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Service provided by:
West Lothian Council

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About the service

West Lothian Council Adoption Service is a newly developed service and is focused on the recruitment and assessment of prospective adoptive families who meet the needs of children requiring adoption within West Lothian and across Scotland.

Children placed by West Lothian Council for adoption are supported via a post adoption support plan. Adopters assessed and approved by West Lothian Adoption Service have access to training, support groups and individual family support from the service itself.

Other adopters living in the area can also access this support and a key focus is supporting the adoption community across the area.

About the inspection

This was an announced inspection which took place between 20 October 2025 and 5 November 2025. The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. This inspection took place as part of a pilot where we are testing a new inspection model to promote a more proportionate approach within a reduced timescale.

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 seven people using the service and seven completed our questionnaire
- spoke with four staff and management and three completed our questionnaire
- reviewed documents
- spoke with the panel chair
- reviewed questionnaire results from 17 external professionals.

Key messages

- Adoptive families were comprehensively assessed to ensure they had the capacity to meet the needs of the children.
- Children and young people received highly personalised support.
- Young people's views were well represented.
- Adoptive families felt fully supported because the team were committed to relationship based practice.
- The service was in the process of reviewing the post adoption support plan format.
- There is a culture of learning within the service which genuinely values the voices of people being supported.
- The adoption panel was relatively newly formed and required further improvement to ensure everyone was confident and competent in their role.

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 good is our leadership?	4 - 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 young people, therefore we evaluated this key question as very good.

Adoptive families were comprehensively assessed to ensure they had the capacity to meet the needs of the children. The conclusions of the assessment were evidence based and supported clear recommendations with regard to the carer strengths and potential vulnerabilities.

Children and young people received highly personalised support from a team of knowledgeable and compassionate practitioners. Young people's views were well represented, clearly recorded and they were placed at the centre of planning. They benefitted from a robust matching process and the service ensured that transitions to their new family were well managed and adapted to their individual needs.

Adoptive families felt fully supported because the team were committed to relationship based practice. They carried out regular home visits and stayed in regular communication. One said, "the supervising social workers have a wealth of knowledge. I find speaking to them easy and they're super approachable." Another said "The team are so approachable and responsive. They stick to their word and find alternatives when initial plans don't work out. I think the social workers are fantastic."

Children living within caregiver families were kept safe both emotionally and physically. The service fully implemented national guidance and best practice in child protection and, in addition to ensuring statutory checks were robustly completed, there was a high level of communication and collaboration between the adoption team and external professionals. If something did not go to plan, the service acted swiftly to ensure the children's needs were always prioritised and their safety was of paramount importance.

Staff were trained in trauma informed practice and they provided a containing experience, allowing adoptive parents to discuss any issues or difficulties and come up with preventative and supportive strategies. Often just the feeling of being heard was enough for adoptive families to feel supported.

Positive relationships with others including family and friends are supported. Adopters are given attachment and evidenced based advice and they had a good understanding of the importance of ensuring that introductions to wider family members were taken slowly.

Children and young people were living with their siblings, unless this had been assessed as not appropriate. In these situations, adoptive families were committed to ensuring children had every opportunity to build a relationship with their siblings and the service ensured the rights of children and young people to have meaningful relationships and make new treasured memories with siblings was recognised and actively promoted.

The service has taken active steps to reduce drift and delay for children requiring permanent alternative care. Delays in decision making, assessments or processes were identified by the service who took proactive steps, to address these. The service has had success in reducing the delays, and the staff told us the highlight of the year had been children moving in with their adoptive families.

Adoptive families who accessed the post adoption support service described the service as "transformative", one said they felt like "they had someone on their team". This support proved to be invaluable when issues with children's education arose and the team ensured a member of staff attended meetings with them and advocated for them. This ensured children's rights were upheld and helped reduce the stress from the situation for the adoptive parent.

The service was in the process of reviewing the post adoption support plan format. Whilst they had plans in place they were not fully reflective of the work that was being carried out. We look forward to seeing the impact of these plans at the next inspection.

How good is our leadership?

4 - Good

We evaluated this key question as good where several strengths impacted positively on outcomes for children and young people and clearly outweighed areas for improvement.

There was continuous evaluation of people's outcomes and experiences to ensure they received the best possible care and support. An external professional said, "There is a strong presence of team, group and senior managers across the service. Everyone is friendly, inclusive and shows commitment to leadership."

Quality assurance led to improved inputs and processes for delivering the service. There is a culture of learning within the service which genuinely values the voices of people being supported. People who use the service feel empowered to give feedback and raise concerns. People's views were central to the process of evaluation and they were well-informed about any changes. One adoptive family said "we have been encouraged to provide both negative and positive feedback and this was taken seriously and valued".

The staff team benefitted from the adoption service manager providing regular supervision and support. The manager was described as approachable, supportive and knowledgeable. Staff were confident that if they had any uncertainties they would receive good guidance and support.

The adoption and permanence panel had recently taken on the role of approving adoption assessments. Their new role began prior to sufficient training being undertaken and this resulted in the panel experience being less supportive and more stressful for some prospective adoptive families. The service immediately listened to feedback and adapted the process of the panel. However they have not yet implemented training expectations or an appraisal process for the panel chair or panel members. It is important that the panel members are confident in their role and that those attending panel feel confident that the panel are competent in their role. (Area for Improvement 1)

Areas for improvement

1. To ensure panel members feel confident in their role, and that those attending panel have confidence that panel members are competent in their role the service should, at a minimum, have clear training expectations, and provide an annual appraisal of panel members and the panel chair.

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)

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

Requirements

Requirement 1

By 1 March 2023, the service must ensure that adopters within their service are able to access post adoption support. To do this the provider must as a minimum: Review the support needs of adopters within the service. Identify staff training needs in providing post adoption support.

This requirement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken on previous requirement

The service has significantly changed the way adoption support is delivered within West Lothian Council through the development of the new team. Whilst it is still relatively new, they now deliver individual and group based support to adoptive families. Every family spoken with knew how to access the support and those receiving it spoke highly of it.

Met - outwith timescales

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 ensure children and young people enjoy enduring relationships with important family members, the service should develop a consistent approach to life story work, sibling assessments and letter exchange.

This should include but is not limited to:

Identifying learning needs for staff in completing life story work and sibling assessment. Developing a central overview for the management of letter exchange.

This area for improvement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken since then

Letter exchange is now overseen by the adoption service. This has had positive outcomes in that young people and their adoptive families were able to create or maintain links with birth families, allowing the young people to further understand their life story and increase their sense of identity. The individual work carried out by the team with birth families has supported the success of this. Sibling assessments for adoptive children have been carried out and evidenced within case records and reviews.

Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure that children in need of permanent substitute care do not experience delay in planning, the service should continue to evaluate practice in relation to Permanence.

This should include but is not limited to, ongoing monitoring of timescales contained using Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) to drive improvement.

This area for improvement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken since then

Since January 2025 the service has developed a robust overview of permanency planning. The information is reported on and analysed by the permanence business panel. There has been a clear reduction in delay and the service has taken active steps to support this.

Previous area for improvement 3

To ensure children and adopters get appropriate support the service should improve the quality of post adoption support plans.

This should include but is not limited to: Ensuring all adopters have an adoption support plan that anticipates future need. Undertaking regular review of adoption support plans.

This area for improvement was made on 18 January 2023.

Action taken since then

Adoptive families had a post adoption support plan however the quality of these did not reflect the good work that was being carried out. The service had a plan to develop these plans further and we looked forward to seeing this at the next inspection.

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
1.2 Children, young people and adults get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.4 Children, young people, adults and their caregiver families get the service that is right for them	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	4 - Good
2.2 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	4 - Good

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