

Caritas Adoption Support Service

Caritas Diocese of Salford

Caritas Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this adoption support agency

This adoption support agency is maintained by a charity, the Caritas Diocese of Salford. The adoption support service only provides a service to adults. It provides birth-record counselling and intermediary services. It also provides a limited service to adopters approved by the former Catholic Children's Rescue Society. Within this inspection period, it has also provided counselling for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption, via a contract with the local authorities, who are responsible for providing this service. However, it is no longer contracted for any of this work.

The registered manager has managed the service for the last five years, and has worked for the organisation for almost 20 years.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site inspection activity. Service users' views were obtained by telephone.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 July 2021

Overall experience and progress of service users, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

inadequate

The adoption support agency is not yet delivering effective services for children, young people and adults. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 25 July 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: requires improvement to be good

The quality of service that individuals receive is high. The judgement in this area has been negatively affected by the inadequate judgement for leadership and management. The agency has changed considerably since it was last inspected four years ago. The agency has lost its contracted work from local authorities, and currently the registered manager is the only employee in the service.

In April 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the trustees made the decision to furlough the registered manager. She was not undertaking any work for a number of months, resulting in service provision being suspended during this time. When she has been in work, this has been on a part-time basis for much of the time.

The need for adopted adults to access their birth records and for those involved in adoption to seek their birth relatives has not diminished in this time period. Many individuals may have had additional spare time during the pandemic, and the implications may have also made them think more seriously about the need to take action to trace their birth relatives.

It is a concern that the service was assessed to be one that could be suspended, despite there being an ongoing need. This has resulted in some significant delay for some service users. While the registered manager has contacted individuals to inform them of the delay, this has been a time-consuming task that has taken her away from service delivery.

There is a backlog of cases, which the registered manager is forced to triage, in order to prioritise her work. She is acutely aware of the need to progress her casework and has been frustrated by the inability to do so.

When individuals can access a service, they are greeted with empathy and respect. The manager is highly skilled in this complex area of adoption practice, and this gives service users confidence to take the next step. Records are of good quality and demonstrate a high-quality service provision. Feedback is requested from service users and is almost entirely positive. Comments include:

- 'I was very impressed by the time given, the exceptional care taken, and the attention to detail.'

- 'My case was handled with honesty, truthfulness and enthusiasm.'
- 'The social worker was extremely helpful, sensitive and went above and beyond on my behalf.'

Although some service users commented on delay, the quality of service provision, when service users receive it, has not diminished and remains high.

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The agency has a safeguarding procedure. Individuals working for the purposes of the agency are familiar with this. However, the procedures do not include the actions that staff should take if an adult discloses historic abuse during their involvement. The agency ensures that staff complete safeguarding training at regular intervals, so that they remain alert to indicators of abuse and are kept up to date with current practice.

Safeguarding is at the forefront of practice, and referrals have been made to the local authority safeguarding team when required. However, such concerns may not have come to the attention of the service during the time when the manager was furloughed, as individual contact details were taken by an administrator and they were advised that the manager would contact them when she had the opportunity to do so.

The agency has not recruited any new staff since the last inspection, so staff recruitment was not reviewed at this inspection. Similarly, the agency has not received any formal complaints.

Staff take appropriate safeguards when meeting with service users for the first time. Identification checks are undertaken prior to the sharing of confidential information, and this is now recorded clearly on case records, which is a development since the last inspection.

Service users are sensitively supported and prepared to take steps in contacting their birth family. Their emotional well-being is considered and assessed by the agency as part of their duty of care. One service user, spoken to as part of this inspection, followed the advice given by the agency and sought additional therapeutic support before progressing to contact a birth sibling. He commented, 'This allowed me more time to become stable in my own mental health.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered manager is enthusiastic and passionate about providing a high-quality service. She has a wealth of experience in adoption and is dedicated to the organisation. She is suitability qualified. However, since December 2019, she has been the only social worker employed, following the redundancy of the last social worker in the team.

While already case holding, the manager assumed responsibility for additional cases, following the departure of the remaining social worker. In March 2020, there were still cases waiting to be picked up. However, as highlighted above, the decision was still taken to furlough the only employee of the service, resulting in further enquiries being placed on hold, until her return to work, which was then on a part-time basis for the majority of the time.

The trustees do not appear to have fully appreciated the impact of their decision-making on the service. The need for such a provision, particularly during a time of national crisis, does not appear to have been given due consideration. The decision was made quickly and without consultation with the manager or service users. Consideration was not given to alternative ways of working or tasks that could be completed without the necessity to meet face to face. Service users were not consulted about their preference. This has resulted in some significant delay in service provision. A backlog of work remains.

Ofsted was not informed regarding the absence of the registered manager, or indeed about the implications of this on service provision, despite this being a regulatory requirement. Furthermore, the agency failed to fulfil the objectives outlined in their statement of purpose, as they were unable to provide an immediate response to any adoptive families who contacted them in the period when the manager was furloughed.

The registered manager receives supervision from a qualified social worker, who specialises in another remit for the organisation. However, she does not have experience in adoption. The registered manager is the only person delivering the adoption service and, as such, the opportunity for professional supervision with someone experienced in this area of work would allow her the opportunity to reflect on and develop her practice. The registered manager is not currently responsible for the supervision of any staff. However, the supervision and appraisal records of the former social worker could not be located during this inspection, despite regulations dictating their safekeeping.

The long-term future of the adoption support service remains under review. It has reduced in size and in ability to deliver a timely service over recent years. It is reliant on financial support from 'Caritas Diocese of Salford' to survive, as it is currently unable to tender for any local authority contracts, given its size. While trustees are mindful of the origins of the service and the clear need for it, they continue to debate its long-term future, but in the interim the service has become marginalised.

What does the adoption support agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person/s must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person shall compile in relation to the agency a written statement which shall consist of a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 1 ("statement of purpose").</p> <p>Subject to paragraph (8), the registered person shall ensure that the agency is at all times conducted in a manner that is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 5 (1) (7))</p>	30 August 2021
<p>The registered person shall ensure that there is, having regard to the size of the agency, the statement of purpose, and the number and needs of persons to whom the agency provides adoption support services, a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the agency. (Regulation 18)</p>	30 August 2021
<p>The registered person shall maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 3.</p> <p>The records referred to in paragraph (1) shall be retained for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 22 (1) (2))</p> <p>In particular, this refers to the safekeeping of supervision and appraisal records for former staff.</p>	30 August 2021
<p>Where—</p> <p>the registered provider, if he is the person in day-to-day charge of the agency; or</p> <p>the registered manager,</p>	30 August 2021

<p>proposes to be absent from the agency for a continuous period of 28 days or more the registered person shall give notice in writing to the registration authority of the proposed absence. (Regulation 26 (1)(a)(b))</p>	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that service users are consulted on decisions made in relation to their service provision. Consultation with service users is recorded on their individual records. (National minimum standards 16.5)
- Where the agency, for any reason, cannot adequately and consistently maintain its services which comply with regulations or NMS, an effective plan must be established and implemented either to rectify the situation or to close down the service. (National minimum standards 20.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the adoption support agency has written procedures for dealing with allegations of historical abuse which may be made by service users during the course of service provision. (National minimum standards 22.12)
- Ensure that suitable arrangements exist for the professional supervision of the registered manager of the agency. (National minimum standards 24.3)
- Ensure that the Adoption Support Agency's trustees: monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for service users, and satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration. (National minimum standards 25.6)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children, young people and adults, using the 'Social care common inspection framework'.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the adoption support agency, how it meets the core functions as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 and the national minimum standards.

Adoption support agency details

Unique reference number: SC411743

Registered provider: Caritas Diocese of Salford

Registered provider address: The Diocese of Salford, Cathedral Centre, 3 Ford Street, Salford M3 6DP

Responsible individual: Mark Wiggin

Registered manager: Lorraine Courtney

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Inspectors

Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector
Suzanne Birchall, Social Care Inspector
Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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