



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Tameside MBC Fostering Services

**Tameside MBC, Social Services
Level 2, Council Offices, Wellington Road
Ashton under Lyne
Tameside
OL6 6DL**

Lead Inspector
Alicea Bennett

Announced Inspection
6th March 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

Reader Information	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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 will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Tameside MBC Fostering Services
Address	Tameside MBC, Social Services Level 2, Council Offices, Wellington Road Ashton under Lyne Tameside OL6 6DL
Telephone number	0161 368 8865
Fax number	0161 342 4200
Email address	Jean.Carey@tameside.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	To be appointed
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 06/03/05

Brief Description of the Service:

Tameside MBC has a dedicated Family Placement Service, which is managed by the Unit Business Manager for Looked After Children. Their main purpose is to provide a diverse range of carers to cater for the needs of looked after children in Tameside and, in partnership with other sectors, to ensure the best outcomes for the young people.

The team recruits, assesses, supervises and supports foster carers and is responsible for ensuring that their training needs are met. Services offered by the team include emergency placements, task centred placements, long term or permanent carers, respite care and network care placements, where the aim is to support families before a crisis happens by the provision of day care and respite.

The service is also responsible for kinship care and works with the disability team for respite placements for children with disabilities.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This announced inspection involved two inspectors who spent time in the offices inspecting files and records, interviewing staff, and meeting with three foster carers in their own homes and with some of the children placed.

CSCI sent questionnaires to a sample of the carers and children placed within the agency. Some completed questionnaires were received from children placed, foster carers and some placing social workers.

Work is being undertaken on the fabric of the building where the service is sited and staff appear to be coping well with this. Nonetheless records requested for the inspection were easily accessed and readily available for inspection purposes at a time where this could have been difficult.

What the service does well:

The foster carers are committed to helping young people keep in contact with their families and friends. Young people who spoke with the inspectors were positive in their comments about the care they receive. Children who responded to questionnaires or were interviewed were satisfied with the care they were receiving and appeared to be making good progress in their placements, with one exception which was discussed with the manager at the time of the feedback.

The staff irrespective of role presented as knowledgeable, skilled and committed to the work and ethos of the agency. They were clear on their roles and responsibilities and appeared to carry out their work diligently. All staff said that they enjoyed working for the agency and said that they were well supported by supervision and training.

The fostering service provides high levels of support to carers to enable them to meet the needs of young people in their care. Foster carers praised the support and stated the best things about the fostering service are 'they offer great support..... excellent in supporting children'

What has improved since the last inspection?

Many of the requirements and all of the recommendations made at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. Links with the assessment and care management team (the fieldwork team of social workers) have improved understanding of the roles within the respective teams. Throughout the inspection work was being carried out to the fabric of the building, staff were coping well in the current surroundings and stated 'it will be worth itwill provide much better working environment and facilities'.

More work has been carried out in relation to health assessments of young people and overall educational attainment in the form of tracking all looked after children, statistics are available to give an overall view of these matters.

Staffing within the service has increased and staff reported that this has improved efficiency and the overall quality of the service.

What they could do better:

The service should ensure that a foster placement agreement is in place for all children placed. A targeted recruitment strategy could improve the response from specialist family link carers. The service should improve their system for obtaining information from placing social workers. Training for carers regarding children's records could improve the quality of recording. The service should continue to meet and where possible exceed the National Minimum Standards wherever possible.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Management

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Lack of information from placing authorities could put the health of some children placed at risk.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence that basic health appointments such as G.P, dental and optical checks have been attended. Those children who require specialist health appointments have access to these services. Carers were clear about their role in respect of promoting good health. Supervision records available indicated that carers are regularly asked about health care matters.

Children and young people reported that their carers promoted a healthy lifestyle.

The service does not always receive full health information from placing social workers. Two of the files inspected had little information in relation to immunisation, childhood illnesses or periods in hospital completed on the LAC documentation. Similarly not all foster carers files held full medical information. All carers have a copy of medication policy, which is contained within the foster carer's handbook.

The managers within the service reported that work has been undertaken to ensure that all children's health plans are in place. The LAC (Looked After Children) nurse was reported to have attended carer support groups, provided training and assists the service in relation to any shortfalls identified in relation to health records. Information for carers is contained within the foster carer handbook.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3,6,8,9,15,30.

The staff of the fostering service ensure foster carers promote and safeguard the welfare of children in their care. The fostering panels are well organised and are child focused.

EVIDENCE:

From discussions with the manager and staff and from the organisation of the service, policies, procedures and other documentation it was evident that persons involved are suitable to run a service concerned with the welfare of children and young people.

The homes of three foster carers were visited and found to be satisfactory with good standards of furnishings, fittings and cleanliness found. The bedrooms inspected were found to be satisfactory and provided appropriate accommodation.

Young people who were interviewed reported that they were satisfied with their care situations. Comments from children and young people included “I like living with my carers I am very happy Everything is fine and I’m happy where I am” with one exception which the managers of the service are aware of, all young people reported being satisfied with their care.

All carers had on file a 'safe caring' policy and carers who were interviewed were aware of health and safety matters and took appropriate action with people not known to the fostered children. Unannounced inspections of the carers are carried out annually and records of this could be found on some files.

With the exception of one all placing social workers were satisfied with care provided and reported that in their opinion the placements were appropriate. One social worker raised a concern, which was passed to the manager of the service.

Whilst recognising that Tameside MBC have a duty of care and on occasion have to make a less than 'perfect match', consideration should still be given to placements which become long term following a placement made in an emergency, without due consideration to the original matching considerations. This has been a recommendation of all previous inspections.

Foster Placement Agreements were not in place for the files sampled. They should contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into account and the additional support needed by the foster carers to compensate for any gaps in matching.

Young people said that they felt safe in their placements and none said that they had been bullied. Carers have access to child protection training and safe caring issues are covered on the pre-approval training in depth and included as part of the assessment process. However not all carers have received child protection training and Tameside MBC should continue to encourage carers to attend. The fostering service has a plan in place to address this by ensuring this is recommended to panel at each review of carers.

There is a complaints policy in the foster carer handbook, information is also included in the children's guide and CSCI details should be included in the statement of purpose.

There have been a number of complaints which have been investigated and have a written record of the outcome. The management of the service monitor complaints in line with regulation. There was one outstanding and complex complaint which was being addressed at the time of the inspection.

A sample of staff files were inspected. They were well organised and accessible. There were some files which had substantial gaps of years and in other cases months. In one case no proof of address could be located. CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) record checks are held separately. Upon request to inspect these checks it was evident that there is some confusion within the authority in relation to CSCI inspection powers and the Data Protection Act, this lack of understanding is unhelpful to the inspection process. One CRB was produced as requested however the human resources employee was advised that this could not be inspected. In addition the memo contained within the staff files yields no information as to whether offences were recorded and if so what process was followed in respect of employing such a person or how their fitness is established in such cases. In addition the memo does not contain the address of the employee.

In one case a copy of a CRB was evident which was undertaken whilst the worker concerned was a student this was dated 2003 this was considered to be 'portable' this is not the case with a disclosure which is so out of date and as such the worker must remain, under the supervision of others until the authority is in receipt of a new enhanced CRB check. It was reported that a system is in place in respect of updating CRB check on a three yearly basis.

Positively the code of conduct for council employees includes that any offences committed during their employment must be declared to Tameside MBC, failure to do so could result in disciplinary action.

The panel was observed on this occasion and was well organised, it was clear that decisions are made following effective discussions. The panel was observed to be detailed and robust in its decision-making. The records of panel discussions on carers files demonstrate that the panel has been effective in scrutinising assessments and have asked for clarification or further information. In addition good practice was observed in dealing with carers who attended panel in respect of putting them at ease in a formal environment and consulting with them throughout the process. The Panel Chair is a well-experienced, independent social work practitioner who also chairs the Adoption Panel. He demonstrated his appropriate skills and experience on the day of the inspection. The Head of Service is the Decision Maker and her comments are included on the minutes. The minutes and the Panel chair indicated that attendance by the medical advisor was useful, however sporadic, this continues to be problematic. It was reported that some meetings of panel have not had the required constitution causing it to be inquorate although this has been less of a problem in recent months. Two new independent member have been appointed to panel since the time of the last inspection.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7,13,31.

The fostering service values diversity and promotes educational achievement and enjoyment. Family link carers do not meet the needs of children with severe learning and emotional difficulties.

EVIDENCE:

The service demonstrated that equal opportunities are promoted, as is valuing diversity. Promoting equality and children's rights is explored in detail at the assessment stage and included in the report to panel. It is clear that the carers of young people with disabilities ensure that they have a range of life experiences and the opportunities to meet with others of their own age and ability.

The fostering service has strong links with the LAC Education Resource Team and the multi-agency LAC Education Steering Group. It was clear from the discussions that school attendance of Looked after Children was a priority as was ensuring that they attended the school most suited to their needs.

Carers have a copy of the education policy and are aware of the expectations placed upon them by the service. Records indicated that staff routinely ask carers about the education of the young people in placement and that they are aware of homework, school attendance, school events and open days. Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers could give examples of good practice in relation to meeting the education needs of young people in foster care.

There is a Family Link scheme attached to the service for children with disabilities, which provides services based upon an assessment of need. The scheme offers short breaks to carers, which 'helps to reduce the stress that families can suffer, due to the demands of caring for disabled children'. Currently there appears to be some difficulty recruiting Family Link Carers who can meet this need. This facility is in place to help to prevent placement breakdown. In the case of one of the children involved in case tracking during the course of the inspection this facility is very much needed but not forthcoming at this time, despite efforts to identify a carer. There are also links with the residential service within Tameside to offer some respite in the interim period. There is an annual recruitment strategy in place, which may help to address these difficulties.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10,11.

Children are assisted to make a positive contribution, contact arrangements are good, and the manager promotes consultation within the agency.

EVIDENCE:

Placing social workers are asked to provide written feedback for foster carers reviews and it was evident from these that the foster carers have worked with social services to make contact visits as positive as possible. The carers who were interviewed or returned questionnaires were clear about their responsibilities in relation to contact. The staff reported that they discuss contact arrangements during supervision.

The Agency consults formally with carers through carer support meetings, carers forum, supervisory visits and annual reviews. Children who were spoken with or responded to questionnaires said that their carers consult with them regularly about day-to-day matters. The manager reported that other means of consultation through consumer consultation exercises provided by Tameside MBC and a web site is available to provide additional feedback to the authority.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

29.

The authority ensures prompt payments to carers.

EVIDENCE:

The carers were aware of their financial allowances and what they were expected to provide. They reported that they are paid on time and that an advance would be available if required. Carers receive a payslip to indicate their payment.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1,17,20,21,24.

Staff and foster carers are well supported and some of their training needs are met.

EVIDENCE:

The service has an adequate number of staff with appropriate qualification and experience to undertake the task. They presented as loyal, committed, enthusiastic and competent to carry out the task. There was evidence of strong team working within a supportive environment. Administrative staff who were well aware of the needs of the service and presented as efficient and competent, support the team.

There remains a need to continue to recruit more carers to meet the demands of the service and as this continues to grow and to provide even greater placement choice. The manager reported that a number of carers recruited over the last 12 months have become long-term carers. Although this provides better outcomes for children it means that in reality the demand for carers always exceeds supply. However the Service is aware of this and continues to develop recruitment strategies.

The assessment of carers was inspected in detail and was found to be sound. The service is moving towards building upon the competency based assessments. Carers who attend at Panel present as capable people who wish to care for children. Assessment and care management (the fieldwork social workers) now work closely with the fostering service, this was reported to be beneficial, and has developed an understanding between the teams about competing priorities.

Tameside MBC has a clear strategy in place for working with and supporting carers. Carers reported that the best things about the service is that 'you can always contact someonethe duty servicesupport workers who are excellent and support the children 100%.....Tameside fostering service work very hard and do a difficult job well' The records indicated that most carers seen were receiving regular Supervision. Respite care arrangements are currently being discussed with carers. An annual report was presented to panel detailing areas of development including the following areas kinship applications, staffing, panel training, new developments, improvements in communications between the fostering service and other social work teams, family link, training and assessment of carers and the recruitment strategy.

All staff receive supervision and a record of supervision sessions is kept. There are clear arrangements within the management structure of the agency for supervision of all staff. In discussions with the Supervising Social Workers it was evident that they meet as a team often and were clear about the positive elements of working in a team. Staff were positive about the support offered to them by the management of the service.

Foster Carers keep daily records, which vary in how significant events are recorded for the child's information in later life. This is clearly a training issue. Foster Support Workers do not evidence that they have read them and addressed any issues. It would be beneficial if workers signed the records to demonstrate that the records have been read.

The carers stated that the lack of written information from placing authorities is an ongoing problem and the Registered Person must ensure that the Foster Carers are properly informed about young people in the care of the service.

The service has a number of Kinship placements, which make up approximately 10% of the total number of placements. Kinship carers spoken to were happy with the support offered by the service, with one exception who reported that family cares can be 'poor relations to stranger carers' in areas such as 'support and training', which on the surface appear to receive less support than 'stranger carers' however it was reported that these carers would receive the same amount of support if the cares requested it. This matter was discussed with the management of the service. The service is currently conducting a number of kinship viability assessments and is about to commence more due to the new Adoption Act.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	3
15	2
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	3
21	2
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS1	3	The registered person must ensure that the address and telephone number of the commission is included in the statement of purpose.	30/03/06
2	FS8	34	Tameside MBC must not make placements with carers outside their approval age and number. Tameside MBC must not place children with carers who do not have sufficient experience and skills to meet their needs. (Timescale of 30/06/05 not met)	31/10/06
3	FS8	17	Tameside MBC must ensure that placing social workers provide to carers and fostering staff all available information about the young people. (Timescale of 30/06/05 not met)	31/10/06
4	FS8	34	The registered person must ensure that foster placement agreements contain specific reference to additional support needed to compensate for any gaps in matching.	31/10/06
5	FS12	15	The Registered Person must obtain health care information and this be provided to carers. (Timescale of 30/07/05 not met)	31/10/06

6	FS15	20	Tameside MBC must ensure that 'gaps' in employment history are recorded. Tameside MBC must ensure that all staff employed in the service have CRB Disclosures at an Enhanced level.	31/10/06
7	FS30	24	Tameside MBC must ensure that the Panel does not make decisions when it is inquorate.	31/10/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS9	Tameside MBC should ensure that all carers receive child protection training.
2	FS30	Tameside MBC should try to encourage better attendance from the medical advisor at the Panel. Tameside MBC should consider appointing an additional independent member.

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