



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Isle of Wight Authority Fostering Service**

**Social Services Centre  
Town Hall  
Lind Street  
Ryde  
Isle of Wight  
PO33 2NQ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Lynda Mosling

*Announced Inspection*  
15th November 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

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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](http://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](http://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

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Name of service</b>  | Isle of Wight Authority Fostering Service   |
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| <b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b> | Isle of Wight Council   |
| <b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>             | David Crewe   |
| <b>Type of registration</b>                                   | Local Auth Fostering Service  |

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      27th February 2006

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

The Isle of Wight Local Authority Fostering Service is currently managed by Mr David Crewe and is based at Ryde Social Services Centre in Lind Street, Ryde, Isle of Wight. The service has approximately 120 approved fostering households offering a variety of placements including long and short-term foster placements, Family Link for young people with disabilities, respite care and kinship care. At the time of the inspection there were 165 young people in foster care. The service recruits, trains, assesses and supports foster carers across the Isle of Wight. There is a dedicated fostering panel. The minimum fostering allowances paid to carers per week is £114.87, the maximum is £198.17.

# SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken by two inspectors over the course of four days. Information from the manager was received prior to the inspection and questionnaires were received from foster carers, fostered young people and some professionals.

The service was previously inspected in February 2006 and some of the evidence seen at that time remained unchanged.

The service was clear about the improvements they needed to make and the gaps identified were not a surprise to the managers. An action plan covering the issues raised at the last inspection was provided.

The service's main problem is the lack of available foster carers. This leads to some poor matches of young people to carers. This situation is worsened due to its position on an island as there is no scope to use adjoining counties resources without young people having to move off of the island.

There are a number of improvements since the last inspection, including the efforts being made to consult with young people. It is important that the good intentions expressed in the plans come to fruition.

The evidence showed that the service is becoming more child and outcome focussed.

## What the service does well:

- The service promotes the young people's health and meets most of the assessed health needs
- There are safe, thorough recruitment practices
- Assessments of foster carer's suitability is thorough
- There is an independent advocacy service provided for Looked After Children
- Most foster carers are providing good, safe care to young people
- Child protection training is provided to staff and carers – this is shortly to be up-dated
- Appropriate investigations of allegations and complaints are undertaken
- The membership of the fostering panel shows a wide experience base
- Panel considerations are thorough and clearly recorded
- Diversity training is provided for staff and carers
- Contact with family and friends is promoted and supported

- There are a range of consultation arrangements provided to young people using the service
- Allowances are paid regularly and exceed the National Minimum standard
- The fostering team are well managed and have a good range of skills and experience
- Foster carers say they are well supported by the fostering team
- Records seen were clear
- Family and friends as carers are encouraged, assessed and paid the same allowance as other foster carers

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

- Recruitment of a specialist nurse for Looked After Children
- Recent successful recruitment campaign for foster carers
- Exit interviews for foster carers leaving the service have been set up with information gained used to feedback to panel and to make changes to retain carers
- Plans are being considered to provide residential and assessment options for Looked After young people
- Gaps in matching of young people and carers are being routinely recorded
- A contract with a training provider has been agreed to deliver appropriate training to foster carers
- More robust systems have been put in place to review the suitability of carers
- Systems are in place to ensure the learning from complaints is not lost
- The children's services have agreed to review the placements of young people cared for by the Family Link scheme
- Pocket money for the 16+ age group is now paid directly into their bank accounts

## **What they could do better:**

- Ensure better access to mental health services for young people
- Target recruitment for the 12 – 16yr old young people
- Use the issues raised by young people to inform foster care training and preparation groups

- Provide more carers/options for young people to assist matching
- Consult with young people prior to placement to get their views on the proposed placement
- Ensure fewer moves for young people in placement
- Routinely collect data about young people's diverse needs
- Ensure young people using weekend respite are seen in placement by a social worker at regular intervals
- Minimise repetition in recording
- Enable quicker decisions to be made when considering requests for finances for activities, clothing, transport etc
- Review the Family link scheme
- Make further efforts to work with other agencies to improve young people's education outcomes

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

## 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.**

### JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

**The fostering service promotes the health and development of the young people placed and is assisted by a range of professionals, including the Looked After Children nurse specialist.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

### EVIDENCE:

The pre-placement information includes health needs. A further assessment of the young person's health is undertaken following placement and this highlights any particular issues to be dealt with. This information is made available to the carers and the young people.

The newly recruited Looked After Children nurse spoke of her plans to improve the health screening of Looked After Children and her desire to get carers more involved in the process. Healthy eating, sexual health etc were identified as issues she hopes to cover in training for foster carers.

There is still a problem with accessing local mental health services for Looked After Children. Social workers and carers spoke of long delays for young people who have been referred to CAHMS and a dissatisfaction with the service offered to young people following assessment. One comment was 'children can get an assessment, if they are lucky, but rarely get any on-going help'. This is a situation that has not improved over the past year and it is recommended that those involved in the health care of Looked After Children start to address the gaps in the service to young people with mental health issues.

Access to G.P's, opticians and dentists appear to work well and young people reported that they generally get the support of their foster carer when accessing these services.

There is a medical advisor and a health visitor on the fostering panel. This acknowledges the importance given to the health needs of young people and carers.

# 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.**

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**.

**The person managing the service is suitable to do so. There are a range of foster carers providing safe care, but not sufficient to meet the needs of referred young people. The matching of young people is compromised by the lack of available carers. Young people are protected from abuse and neglect by a range of well tested systems. The recruitment processes for staff and carers are appropriate and aim to safeguard children and young people. The fostering panel is set up according to regulation and makes careful consideration of foster carers suitability.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The manager has been in post since October 2005. He has appropriate qualifications and is suitable to manage the team. His appointment followed a period of instability for the team and the majority of people spoken to felt he has made a positive impact on the team and the delivery of service.

Carers were particularly complimentary about his involvement and talked of him as being 'accessible and easy to talk to' and of 'turning the service around since he has been here'.

Systems are thought to have improved and been tightened up. The only expressed worry was whether enough energy goes into maintaining the systems and ensuring the necessary action is taken. This anxiety was acknowledged by the manager, he will make a particular effort to ensure good ideas are followed through.

There has recently been a successful recruitment drive that has led to approximately 11 families finishing the assessment process. However, there are major gaps in the provision of carers, particularly for the older age group i.e. 12 – 16yr olds. The team is now targeting this gap in their recruitment strategy.

Foster carers are appropriately assessed following preparation training. The BAAF Form F is used, with competency reports attached. All assessments are presented to the fostering panel for recommendation for approval.

Systems are in place to review unsuitable carers and a more robust household review is now being undertaken to ensure the continued suitability of carers. The first review returns to panel, as does any situation where it is alleged that a foster carer has not acted appropriately, or adhered to standards and/or procedures. Carers are invited to the fostering panel and can have the support of an advocate and/or another carer when these issues are discussed.

Whilst the shortage of foster carers is a real problem to the service, everyone spoken to said they felt this should not excuse supporting unsuitable carers. However, some young people felt that they had experienced 'poor care' by some foster carers and said they were rarely asked to give honest feedback about particular carers.

Issues raised by young people included: withdrawal or delay of pocket money, being locked out of the house when carers are out, poor quality of food and/or toiletries provided, and having to remain in placement for 28 days, even when everyone has agreed the placement is no longer suitable. Whilst young people understood the need for time to plan moves, their experiences of being cared for in a household where they are no longer wanted are difficult to ignore.

The manager of the fostering team said they are planning to involve young people more in reviews of foster carers. It is recognised however, that once a placement is over young people rarely wish to give feedback of their experiences as the 'moment has passed'.

The carers visited during the inspection were seen to be committed to the young people and were providing considerate care to the young people. They saw their task as caring for the 'whole child' and were involved in securing education and health provision for the children. This was confirmed by a number of completed questionnaires from young people who said they were happy with their care and felt that they were treated as 'part of the family'.

Exit interviews for retiring or de-registering carers are arranged with an independent person. This information is presented to panel and helps inform the service of the things it can improve on. Consideration of the inclusion of a carer in this process will take place.

It is clear that young people have a range of experiences in foster homes, many positive, but others not so. It is recommended that the service arrange workshops/training for foster carers to look at practice issues such as methods of control, welcome to the family, family rules, pocket money to ensure a consistent understanding of the standards of care expected.

Matching, or the lack of available carers, was mentioned by everyone as the biggest concern. Whilst all of the staff spoken to knew about the need for good matches and the consequences of poor matching the reality is that matches are made, out of desperation, which are felt from the start to be poor.

Young people and carers spoke about 'knowing it won't work' and feeling 'blamed' when an unsuitable placement breaks down. This was a feeling shared by everyone involved, and this level of frustration and sadness has a demoralising effect on the staff.

Although there is a clear system where agency placements can be purchased if there is no in house provision, the independent agencies approached are also struggling to come up with local placements, and young people see having to leave the Island as a major loss and/or a punishment. Some have said that they are 'threatened' with having to leave the Island if they 'do not make a placement work'. This is not, however, how the social workers spoken to saw the situation. They shared the concern about not being able to provide adequate care on the Island.

A senior manager explained that in order to ease the situation there is a plan to provide an assessment centre and number of small residential units for young people on the Island. This plan is currently being considered through the budgeting process.

The fostering team now records gaps in matching and can use this information for recruitment purposes, and to try and bridge those gaps by other means. However, this is a constant struggle and leads to far more moves for young people than anyone would wish. Complaints have been made by young people

about the lack of matching, and the number of moves they have experienced. There are still situations occurring where young people do not know at the start of the day where they will be staying that night. This is obviously frightening and unacceptable.

Social workers spoke about the lack of matching and the constant moves as 'sometimes being more abusive than the reasons they came into care'.

Training for carers in attachment and stability has raised the awareness of the need to commit to young people. This is beneficial and there are a number of placements where permanent plans have been made with foster carers. Whilst this is seen as a positive move for the young people some staff feel further frustrated that they are 'losing some of the best carers to permanent placements'. This demonstrated the stress that staff are under on a daily basis.

Good matches are celebrated and talked about so that the team can learn from the good experiences as well as the poor, and it is recognised that a large number of placements are well matched and that the majority of young people are receiving good, understanding care from their carers.

Further attempts to recruit enough carers and fund other providers is urgently required in order to improve the current situation.

Foster carers receive training in child protection prior to their approval and on an on-going basis. The training calendar for 2007 has a number of child protection sessions.

The foster care handbook outlines the procedures used for suspicion of abuse. This includes clear information about how the service handles allegations against foster carers. The manager confirmed that all issues relating to child protection were referred to the appropriate team for investigation.

Discussion took place with the local authority child protection adviser who provided feedback from complaints investigations. Action taken following investigation to further safeguard children and young people include: the service keeping a record on the carers file of any concerns/allegations raised, including outcomes, and the need to have someone other than the carer's support worker at the carer's household reviews. This will enable a more independent view of the carer's suitability.

Young people spoken to during the visits said they generally felt physically safe in their foster homes. The completed questionnaires raised no concerns about bullying or inappropriate punishments. However, a few of the complaints investigations raised issues about the treatment of fostered children by the foster family, including verbal abuse. Where this was alleged an investigation

had taken place and the foster family had been spoken to about appropriate behaviour. There are systems in place to ensure the service learn from the complaints made and during the inspection evidence was seen that practice had been changed as a result of this learning.

Staff are recruited using the local authorities established procedures. CRB's and appropriate references are taken up on all staff.

Carer's files had evidence of all the necessary information for assessment, including medicals, CRB's, personal references, personal histories etc.

Some of the staff in the fostering team do not have a social work qualification but are supervised by a qualified worker. The way the team is organised appears to make the most of individual skills and knowledge.

The fostering panel has been set up according to the Regulations. The panel minutes were seen and evidenced appropriate considerations when deciding on the suitability of carers.

The range of panel members covers a large experience base, including health, education and a carer's perspective. The service continues to seek an ex-fostered child to join the panel.

The minutes seen were clear and well written with decisions and recommendations highlighted. Carer's and young people are invited to the panel when the discussion/decision concerns them. Although the size of the panel can appear daunting the carers spoken to said they were pleased to have the opportunity to be heard by the panel.

Systems have been put in place to ensure necessary issues are brought back to the panel, to keep them informed of developments and monitor and concerns raised.



# 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.**

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

7, 13 and 31.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

**The service values diversity and provides diversity training for staff and carers. Educational achievement within the Looked After Children population is still poor, but there are clear inter-agency systems to address the issue. Respite care and family link recognises the parents (or carers) as the main caregivers and involves them in all decision making.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The service incorporates diversity and equality into all training for carers and staff. They also contract with 'language line' which allows quick and easy access to speakers of foreign languages.

Links have been made with the local mosque and attempts have been made to contact other religious and ethnic groups. However, the manager said that there was reluctance on their part to become involved.

The majority of children in the Looked After system were described as White British. However, looking at the information gathered at time of referral it is clear that information about religion, ethnic background, sexuality etc is not

routinely collected. The reason for this was not known, but it was acknowledged that this may not be seen as vital information to collect at a point of crisis. However, it does indicate a reluctance to follow up collection of this data and can lead to an inaccurate picture of the needs of the young people cared for.

Discussion with carers showed that they understood the need to celebrate differences and were generally accepting of individual needs and strengths. However, some carers were less aware of the value of understanding young people's background, culture etc.

Supervision and reviews of carers may be a good way of raising carer's awareness. One of the team has a lead role in diversity and will be looking at how to further understanding and good practice.

It is recommended that the children's services consider the importance of collecting accurate data about the young people they are providing services for.

The service promotes educational achievement and encourages carers to take an active part in the young people's schooling. Many of the questionnaires returned indicate that foster carers feel that they have the main responsibility to support the education of young people. They said that they often attend school to support the young person and act as an advocate when problems with the school arise. Where this happens there was evidence of good progress made with the young people, even if it didn't show in the young people's exam results.

There are some carers who feel the service should take more responsibility for solving education difficulties and some said there was still little help for young people who have major problems with attendance/behaviour at school.

Social workers and carers spoken to felt that the time and energy used to try to come up with a realistic education package for some young people is unrealistic. Some young people end up with 'very bitty packages', and it is then no surprise that exam results are poor.

There is evidence of further acceptance of inter-agency responsibility for education and the LACES manager remains optimistic that there will be further improvements in working together to achieve better outcomes for young people.

However, there is acknowledgement that there is still a long way to go to meet any of the government targets for Looked After Children.

The biggest problems arise with the older age group, and particularly those who frequently move around. Young people's views are being sought to try to understand the experiences of that group of young people.

In the meantime there is an annual celebration of achievements for children and young people. This event seeks to celebrate a range of young people's successes, not just academic successes.

Training for carers is planned. It is recommended that this training clarifies the role of the carers in the young person's education provision and encourages carers to see it as part of the overall task of caring for young people.

The service also needs to ensure that carers are given the support they require to care for young people who are out of school and to advocate on their behalf.

The service provides respite care for some young people that normally live at home, and to support other foster carers. In addition there is a Family Link scheme that provides short-term care for children and young people with disabilities.

During the inspection carers providing respite care were visited. In these cases the young person were well known to the carers who had been providing regular on-going short breaks.

Respite care and family link recognise the need to work closely with parents/main carers and in many cases the arrangements are made between the carers and parents with little involvement of social services. Whilst this appears to work well to support the parents it does mean that the service has little control, or knowledge about, the care that is being provided.

As the care usually takes place at weekends there are often arrangements where the child is never seen in placement by the social worker. Added to this the young people using Family Link often are not allocated a social worker, and their placements/links have not been reviewed. This does not protect the interests of the young people using the service. Whilst it is acknowledged that the reviewing arrangements have recently been changed the council need to ensure that the welfare and best interests of the young people are properly safeguarded by the service provided to them.

Respite carers reported that their knowledge of the young people and their experience of living with them is often not considered when future plans and/or reviews are being discussed. As this is a valuable service, often greatly appreciated by parents and young people, the service should ensure that such carers are properly consulted when young people's care plans are devised/changed.

Staff with a history of the Family Link service have resigned since the last inspection. Carer's files and household reviews are not up to date, and Family Link carers said that they have had no recent training. Recruitment to the vacant post is being planned. It is recommended that the service take this opportunity to review the Family Link service and the resources currently allocated to it, if it wishes to ensure its future is safeguarded.

## **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.**

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

10 and 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

**The service promotes contact with family and friends and provides training for carers regarding contact. Children and young people are consulted about the services provided and have access to senior managers.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers are prepared during assessment for the need for young people to have contact with their family and friends. Many are actively involved in arranging contact.

Young people spoken to said that they have contact, are aware of the arrangements and the reason for any restriction. One carer said they felt there was not enough consideration given to getting siblings together when they are placed apart, but the placement agreements seen showed that these arrangements are considered and recorded.

When young people are placed off of the Island contact becomes much more complicated to arrange, but there was evidence that this is considered at the time of the placement.

The council has a contact centre where supervised contact can take place. This takes some strain off of carers who are anxious about contact taking part in their homes.

There are a number of options for young people to be heard within the service. This includes a corporate parenting panel where senior managers get together with young people representatives to discuss issues and services. The Care Advocacy Support Team is set up to provide young people with an opportunity to have a say in how children's services are run.

These groups look at how the young people's experiences can be improved. Discussions have included: young people to be told when their allocated social worker is to change, choice of placements, frequent changes in placement etc.

Whilst these groups have improved consultation with some young people, on an individual basis young people feel that the extent to which their views are heard depends on the relationship they have with their social worker. Some report this is good, and some report it is not. One of the questionnaires said, 'I've never been asked' in response to how have your views been sought about the fostering service.

The fostering team intend to introduce more feedback from young people in their reviews of foster carers in an attempt to understand, and use young people's experiences.

Advocacy for Looked After Children is provided independently by the Youth Trust. There has been an increase in the take up of this service in the last 12 months and it is now busy. Young people can use the advocacy service to support them at reviews, in disruption meetings and in making complaints. The service advertises through packs provided when young people enter the Looked After system, and by circulation of a leaflet and card explaining the service. The general feedback received from young people is given to managers and followed up by the advocacy service to ensure action is considered and the young people's views are listened to. There is evidence of changes in practice as a result of the issues raised through this service.

The LACES team have undertaken work with young people to look at 'good foster placements' and 'bad foster placements'. The issues arising from this, and other groups, should be regularly feedback to foster care groups and to those providing foster care training to ensure these important messages are heard and make a difference.

The service is planning ways to involve young people in recruitment of foster carers and preparation groups.

# 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)

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

**The service clearly sets out the allowances paid to carers and the expenses that can be agreed. These exceed the National Minimum level.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## EVIDENCE:

The service provided a list of allowances paid to its carers. The minimum weekly allowance is £114.87 and the maximum is £198.17. Carers reported that they receive their allowances on time.

There are systems in place to enhance the fees paid to meet young people's special needs. The process is recorded and decisions are kept on the carer's files.

There has been an ongoing issue for carers about the lack of itemised payments. This means that those who take more than one young person or provide a range of respite placements are unable to see what their payments are for. This has been raised at all of the previous inspections. However, the manager said that this will be arranged once the new computer finance package is available in the new year.

Carers who provide respite care for more than one young person have to complete a claim form for each young person and send it to a different team

and address for approval. This can lead to mistakes and a wait for the allowance.

The other main issue raised, to do with finance, was the length of time it takes for approval to be given for spending on small, but important items i.e clothing for new placements, money for school trips or activities etc. These are the things that cause frustration to carers, and anger and embarrassment to young people. Whilst it is acknowledged that budgets need controlling it is recommended that decisions about payments, and payments themselves be speeded up in order to remove this unnecessary frustration.

The service has changed the way it pays young people's pocket money (for over 16 years) by paying it into the young people's own bank accounts. This was changed as a result of listening to young people. The same group of young people are also provided with a list of carers allowances so that they can see what is covered.

Most of the carers visited and spoken to were not unhappy with the allowances. Some felt there was too much discretion for some allowances and believed that 'those who shout loudest get the most' and believe that there are 'deals struck' with people when the service is desperate to place. The manager, however, felt this was not the case.

There are a number of placements made with independent agencies both in foster care and residential care. These are regularly reviewed and their cost monitored. Any decision to return the young person to the Island and/or to in-house placements is taken after considering a range of issues, not just the finances.



# 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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32.  
Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

**The statement of purpose clearly outlines the services provided, although it requires some up-dating. Staff within the team are well organised and managed. There are two vacancies within the team, but these are in the process of being filled. There is a clear strategy for supporting and working with foster carers. Young people's files are not kept in the fostering team, but those seen were comprehensive. Administrative records are well kept and clear. The children's services encourage the use of family and friends as carers and pays the same fostering allowance as it does for other carers.**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose sets out the service provided. It has been agreed through the committee system and is supported by the council members.

There is some out dated information about staff details in the statement. The statement of purpose will be up-dated in the next few months to ensure it provides a true record of the staffing/management arrangements.

The team are organised in order to make the best use of individual's skills and knowledge. The duty officer arrangement is seen as a major success and takes the pressure off of the rest of the team. The duty officer is able to follow through on referrals, gathering information and talking to available carers. This is seen as a great improvement on the previous arrangement when everyone took a turn in covering duty.

The resignation of a key person in Family Link has required some alterations in order to cover the work. This appears to be working temporarily, but future plans for that service should be reviewed.

Some staff members said they felt under pressure and were not keeping up with all the paperwork, reviews etc. Others felt they were managing well with the workload. Generally the team felt able to cope and were realistic about the needs of the service and the budget cuts that have to be made. Most of the team said they felt supported by both colleagues and managers.

The team covers a number of specialist projects, including Private Fostering, it is recommended that these specialist projects are protected from losing their

momentum by being subsumed into the general staffing availability of the team, unless it is a well considered and definite decision.

The vacancies are in the process of being justified prior to advertisements being published to fill the posts. These vacancies have added to the work-load for the team, but there is optimism that this will be short lived.

The team, although busy, were more concerned about the shortages in the child care teams as this has a huge impact on the work undertaken with Looked After Children and foster carers. The senior manager interviewed felt that the staffing situation, in terms of numbers, was better than it has been for some time, although it was acknowledged that some of the new staff need a lot of support and induction.

One of the issues of concern expressed about the pressures on the child-care teams was the setting up of placement meetings. Whilst the fostering team are usually able to set these up in good time they were often cancelled, due to other pressures, and then not likely to happen for some weeks.

There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. In the returned questionnaires most of the carers said that they felt 'well-supported' by the fostering team. Carers spoke of their support worker being 'brilliant', 'the reason I carry on fostering', 'completely supportive even when we don't agree'. One felt they had 'little clout' and said 'they sit and listen, write notes, go away and nothing changes'.

In contrast the carers said they felt less supported by children's social workers and one said 'we are in the blame culture and foster carers always get the blame'. However, this was not so in every case and a number of carers just wished the children's social workers were not 'under so much pressure'.

Joint training between carers and staff may help understand the pressures each are under. However, the one thing that carers said would make a major difference to them and the young people would be 'if the social worker would get back to you when you leave a message'.

Carer's training has been sparse in the last year and carer's have been disappointed by this. The service has now contracted with a training provider and has a calendar of events available in 2007.

Carer's lunches and activities have continued and are generally well received. The local foster care association has remained active and its events have been well attended by carers and young people, less so by staff across the children's services.

The new reviewing arrangements for carers is seen as one way of making the process more meaningful and to confirm the important job the carers are doing. It may help carers feel more part of the team than they currently do.

The young person's case records are not held by the fostering team. They are held by the allocated social worker for the young person. Records seen were comprehensive and some are available through the computer Swift system. This makes it easier for essential information to be shared.

The administrative records kept in the team are numerous. This is a concern for the team who have identified a great deal of repetition. It was said that the same information has to be written in 7 different places every time a placement is made. The manager is aware of this and is hoping to streamline record keeping.

Some staff feel the computer system is a great help, others are less trusting of it, but all are hopeful that it will cut down on paperwork.

The carer's files seen were up to date and clear. It was made known that these had been prepared for the inspection and may not be indicative of all files. However, all staff were clear about what should be on the files and why.

Supervision records were not in the staff files, except for the last 2 or 3. The manager confirmed that supervision is regular and that staff held their own records. Most of the team confirmed this, although one or two felt supervision wasn't taken as seriously as it could be.

Team meeting minutes were seen, as were complaints records, training profiles, business plans etc. The majority of these were clear and helpful.

Information provided prior to the inspection showed that there are 30 foster carers who are also family or friends. The children's services are encouraging of such arrangements and the referral form to request a foster placement asks the question 'have all other caring options i.e family and friends' been explored.

The assessments are presented to panel at interim stage in order to meet the timescales and then a full form F is undertaken and presented to the panel, with a report about the young person for matching purposes. Carer's allowances are paid to friends and family at the same rate as other carers and the service sees them as a valuable resource.

Those that responded to the questionnaires said they are provided with support and training.



# 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

| <b>BEING HEALTHY</b> |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i>   | <i>Score</i> |
| <b>12</b>            | 3            |

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

| <b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b> |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i>            | <i>Score</i> |
| <b>7</b>                      | 3            |
| <b>13</b>                     | 2            |
| <b>31</b>                     | 3            |

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

### **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 |
|-----|----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
|     |          |            |             |                      |

### **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.  | FS12              | Continue to improve access to mental health services for young people.   |
| 2.  | FS6               | Training be arranged for foster carers to look at practice issues such as pocket money, family rules etc.                              |
| 3.  | FS8               | Further efforts are made to recruit enough carers or find other providers to enable better matching of young people's needs to carers. |
| 4.  | FS7               | Collect accurate data about the religion and ethnic background of the young people provided with a service.                            |
| 5.  | FS13              | Training for foster carers regarding their role and responsibilities in education.   |
| 6.  | FS31              | Review the Family Link service to ensure the welfare of young people using the service is safeguarded.                                 |

|     |      |   |
|-----|------|---|
|     |      |   |
| 7.  | FS31 | Enable carer's providing short breaks are properly consulted when reviewing young people's care plans.      |
| 8.  | FS11 | Issues arising from consultation with young people are used in foster carer's training and feedback.        |
| 9.  | FS29 | Consider systems to speed up the payment of monies for clothing, activities and transport.                  |
| 10. | FS16 | Careful consideration be made prior to using specialist posts to support the general staffing arrangements. |



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