



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Reading Borough Council Fostering and  
Adoption Team**

**P O Bx 2624  
Reading  
RG1 7WB**

*Lead Inspector*  
Maire Atherton

*Announced Inspection*  
30<sup>th</sup> October-2<sup>nd</sup> November, 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> November 09:15

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection** 18th January 2006

## Brief Description of the Service:

Reading Borough Council fostering service provides substitute family care to meet the needs of Reading children and young people who are looked after by the authority on either a short term/temporary or longer term/permanent basis. The service also supports children who continue to live within their family of origin by providing regular periods of family based care. To this end the service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers.

The fostering service offers:

A general fostering scheme that provides planned and emergency short term, bridging, relief and longer-term task centred placements for children 0-16 years. Two foster carers are approved to offer parent and child placements.

A pool of Family and Friends foster carers, who provide short term and permanent placements to specific children, originating from their own extended families and networks.

The fostering service recruits foster carers offering permanent placements.

The Community Parent scheme provides fee paid emergency and short-term foster carers for the most challenging children and young people aged 8-16 years.

Fee-paid foster carers are recruited to care for specific individual children and young people with complex needs on a task centred and long-term basis.

The family link scheme provides children with disabilities with specialist family based day and overnight care to support them and their families.

(Taken from the statement of purpose for the fostering service.)

Other fostering services provided by Reading Borough Council, not line managed by the fostering team manager are:

Directions. This is part of a national programme of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care in England (MTFCE), which is supported by the Department of

Education and Skills (DfES), and the Maudsley Hospital in London. The treatment programme for each young person on the Directions project is based on social learning theory and a programme of points and levels that stabilises their behaviour and is designed to prevent placement breakdown. Directions foster carers receive a high level of support and supervision, and regular planned breaks from fostering.

Supported Lodgings. This is managed by the Leaving Care team. Supported Lodgings carers are primarily used for young people aged 16 to 18 who are on care orders or are accommodated (under Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act) by Reading Borough Council. Occasionally young people under 16 years may live with Supported Lodgings carers.

Crisis Carers. These are managed by The Adolescent and Family Resource Team to provide a placement for a young person involved with the scheme in an emergency on a short-term basis.

These three schemes have the same senior manager as the fostering service.

# SUMMARY

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

This was a joint inspection of fostering and adoption work of Reading Borough Council Family Placement Team. The inspector of the fostering service and an adoption service inspector shared the interview of the business support staff. There is a separate report of the adoption service inspection and the private fostering inspection.

Questionnaires were sent to all the children fostered who were over 7 years old and their parents, all foster carers registered with the authority and the placing social workers. Questionnaires were received from 23 children (33%); 31 foster carers (33%), 3 placing officers and 2 parents.

The acting manager supplied pre inspection information as requested. This was both statistical information and a self-assessment of the service.

The inspector met with:

- A group of children
- Foster carers at a family and friends support group.
- Five foster carers and the children placed with them in their homes.
- The fostering social workers at a team meeting.
- The acting manager of the service.
- The assistant team managers with responsibility for the specialist streams (Fostering, family link, family and friends) and managers and staff of the Leaving care team and the Directions team.
- The acting service manager.
- One of the joint interim Heads of Service.
- The panel chair.
- The Commissioning officer.
- The children's participation officer.

In addition the inspector spoke with two children on the phone at their request and also a Children's Rights Officer.

The inspector attended the fostering panel and read a number of records, including the case tracking of a young person placed with an independent fostering agency.

## What the service does well:

The fostering service is very good at ensuring foster carers involve children and young people in day-to-day decisions. 91% of children and young people who replied to the questionnaire said that they were "Always" asked for their opinions. 95% said that they "Always" felt well cared for.

Foster carers spoken with and those who responded to questionnaires said that they were well supported. They felt that the fostering service was good at supporting children's education through the multi-agency support team.

The fostering service positively addresses issues of equality and diversity. This was most clearly evidenced in the Leaving Care Team, the family and friends team and the Family Link scheme.

There is good team working across the fostering service.

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

There has been an increase in staffing, including an acting appointment to the manager's post. This has helped the team to pull together and focus on the task.

The number of foster carers reviews completed within a year has significantly increased.

An audit system for foster carers files has been developed to make sure that all the information that should be on file is there.

The family and friends assessment process has been refined with the focus on establishing a match with the identified needs of the child.

A new handbook has been provided to foster carers.

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

The interim management arrangements have overseen a positive response to meeting the requirements of the last inspection report. A secure management structure is needed for the team to further develop the service. This includes a more robust management approach to monitoring and quality assurance within the service.

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**

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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.

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

12

Quality in this outcome area is good.

The health, development and well being of the children and young people is actively promoted by the fostering service.

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

## EVIDENCE:

73% of children who completed questionnaires said that they “always” got support and advice about being healthy, the others said “usually”. One young person said he was given advice “Because I don’t do it myself” and another “Because it’s important”. The young people gave number of examples of the advice received, most related to “healthy eating” and “advice about diets”. The young people told the inspector in a group discussion that they were supported and encouraged to do exercise based activities. The examples given were bike riding, boxing, gymnastics and break dancing.

All the young people spoken with had met the Looked After Children nurse and thought that this was a good way to do health checks. Foster carers had also met the Looked After Children nurse and found her a useful source of information and advice. The inspector was informed that the Looked after Children nurse is responsible for drawing up health plans for each child. These were found on most files seen. Where there was a gap the foster carer confirmed that the nurse had visited. The Looked After Children nurse had also been involved with the Multi Agency Support team in organising events for adolescents aimed at providing them with information about keeping

themselves healthy and safe. It was reported that the 'Big Chill Day' had been well attended. The self-assessment by the manager of the Leaving Care team reported "group work had been undertaken with young Muslim males from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds regarding the promotion of sexual health and relationships which included legal responsibilities under English law." An adult Muslim man facilitated this.

68% of foster carers said in the questionnaire that the fostering service was good or excellent in helping the children they care for to be healthy and have healthy lifestyles. Foster carers said that they had got the health information and consents that they needed. Two foster carers of young children held their red books and kept the record up to date in respect of immunisations and health checks. For one child a significant improvement in speech had been noted since the placement with the foster carers. The inspector noted a significant improvement in the routine recording of healthcare appointments by foster carers since the last inspection.

The young people spoken with and the files case tracked confirmed that routine health checks are undertaken and specialist health care is obtained where necessary. This is also monitored through the review process. The family link team has been working on clinical care procedures and protocols to support foster carers providing care for children with specific health needs. A foster carer providing respite care through the family link team has attended training at a paediatric unit in physiotherapy, watched the child's mother provide the physiotherapy and been supervised in providing the physiotherapy in the first instance. This was all outlined in the child's placement plan, along with the mother's signed consent to emergency medical treatment and administration of medication. It is recommended that this be extended to include physiotherapy. The self-assessment identified the provision of family based respite care for children with complex health care needs as an area for improvement. The assistant team manager is exploring the possibility of holding a small bank of equipment, a portable hoist for example, to support foster carers in caring for children with complex health care needs. Specialist support needs are also sourced by the Leaving Care team, such as "Mother tongue" an organisation that provides culturally sensitive counselling.

Foster carers confirmed and the training records showed that courses are provided in health and safety, first aid and paediatric first aid. The paediatric first aid course was singled out as a particularly useful and enjoyable day. Foster carers reported that it could be difficult to access the core training in a timely manner after approval. This is being considered with the training department.

The new foster carers handbook provides foster carers with detailed, current and easily accessible information on a number of common childhood illnesses.

When observing the panel the inspector noted that health issues were well considered by the members in their discussions and a health care professional is a panel member.

# 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 good.

There are systems in place, understood and implemented by staff, to keep children and young people safe.

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

## EVIDENCE:

As at the last inspection there was not a permanent manager in post. There was an agency acting manager in post at the time of this visit. The personnel file contained confirmation from the agency that the required checks had been undertaken. The temporary appointment had been made in March 2006 and was due to continue until December 2006, pending departmental reorganisation. The regulations state that the manager of the fostering service is to be "one of its officers". An agency appointment does not fit this criterion.

Five foster carers were visited during the course of the inspection. One foster carer who was providing supported lodgings, another providing family link foster care, a family and friends carer and two foster carers providing short-term care.

The children were seen to be comfortable, relaxed and at home in the course of visits made. The homes were warm, and furnished and decorated to a good standard. The annual review process includes an update on the health and safety checklist, these were available on the files seen. In one case the central heating boiler was housed in a bedroom cupboard. There was no evidence that this had been risk assessed. The foster carer told the inspector of the intention to put a lock on the door. The link worker was unaware that there was a boiler in the cupboard; it was not clear whether it had been moved since approval earlier this year. Foster carers are asked to confirm that such equipment is regularly serviced but link workers do not routinely request sight of certificates as they do for car insurance and MOTs.

The children and young people seen with their carers during the course of the inspection seemed to be very relaxed and comfortable with them. Two cases tracked had placements outside their approved age range. There was evidence on one file that this had been recognised and is to be brought to the December 2006 panel for change of approval. In the other case the child had not yet stayed overnight, as the introductory process was ongoing. The Directions team have clear guidance on the matching process for their programme. One young person on the programme did not fully meet the criteria for placement. This had been discussed prior to placement and the decision made that it would meet the young person's needs. At the time of this visit the placement was unsteady but was moving towards achieving the aim.

As at the last inspection in January 2006 the fostering service was still working with paper records whilst the children's teams had moved to electronic records, which included the Placement Information Record. This document contains the information needed for a foster placement agreement and was found on all except one of the foster carers' files seen. It is completed by the child's social worker and does not address matching considerations as outlined in the standard. The self-assessments provided identified the recording of the matching/linking decision-making process as an area for improvement.

The agenda for the panel observed by the inspector included two cases for matching to long-term placements where the young people were placed outside the borough. One set of papers contained a thorough matching report. This was lacking in the other report, as was a copy of any risk assessment and safe caring guidelines, which led the panel to explore the issues with the child's social worker, the link worker and the foster carers themselves. This was time consuming and issues were not followed up as thoroughly as they might have been had the panel had more information before the meeting.

In the self-assessment the assistant team manager for the fostering team stated that there was a resource binder available for foster carers of children from different cultural backgrounds to the foster carers. This was being used at the time of this visit. It was also reported that individual support is available for children in transracial or transcommunity placements. In the questionnaires 68% of foster carers said that the fostering service was either good or excellent in addressing issues of equality and diversity, and provided support to transracial placements.

There is child protection training provided for foster carers. A number of carers reported that core training could prove difficult to access, as the courses were oversubscribed; one foster carer approved in April this year had gained a place on a child protection level one course for November 2006. This is an improvement on previous years but does require further improvement as identified in the self-assessment.

There are safe caring guidelines in place, which form part of the approval process for each family. The self-assessments identified these as an area of improvement in the past twelve months and their improvement plan for the next twelve months includes getting safer care agreements on all files.

There is clear written information for foster carers in the handbook on permissible sanctions and those which are not permissible. The record of allegations showed that when a child had made an allegation that he had been hit the child protection procedures were followed appropriately. The child did not return to the foster carers home and a joint investigation was undertaken. It was not clear how any allegations made by young people placed with foster carers not within the family placement team would be monitored and evaluated other than by the managers of those services.

One young person told the inspector that his foster carer had helped him to address bullying issues at school. The foster carer outlined the circumstances and the support that had been provided. Through questionnaires no young people said that they were being bullied in their foster homes. Three young people reported that they were being bullied at school and that they talked about it with their foster carers.

58% of foster carers questionnaires said that the information that they were received about the child before they were placed was excellent or good. The most common explanation for a lack of information was in the event of an emergency placement, which was accepted as reasonable by foster carers.

The handbook contains procedural guidance for foster carers if a child is missing from home.

There are clear recruitment and selection procedures in place. These were seen to have been followed in the sample of recruitment files for permanent staff inspected. The file of an independent sessional worker did not evidence that the full checks outlined in the schedule had been undertaken. All staff involved in the assessment and approval of foster carers are qualified social workers and there is provision and encouragement for further professional qualifications. At a support group the inspector saw a worker effectively promoting equality and diversity in a manner that engaged the foster carers.

Since the last inspection a new panel has been constituted for the approval of family and friends carers. Training was provided for panel members in March 2006. In May 2006 the panel heard practice cases and will also consider Special Guardianship and Residence Orders. This panel has met once and a further meeting was scheduled for late November. The minutes seen showed that it was planned that some members would have short-term (six month) panel membership. This tenure would not seem long enough for the panel to establish and consolidate good working practices and this should be reviewed.

The membership of the panel has been reviewed since the last inspection and meets the requirements. The Chair of the family and friends panel was previously the chair of the fostering panel and now acts as vice chair on that panel. The current Chair of the fostering panel was the vice chair for the preceding year. The Chair has a background in education and is experienced in chairing family group conferences. The Chair told the inspector that he has attended panel training, facilitated by the Fostering Network, which had focussed on the role of the panel. This training was described as very useful. The panel chair told the inspector that he was taking on the role incrementally. For example "exemptions" (placements outside the foster carers terms of approval) are managed by the vice chair and the outcomes of foster carers annual reviews are also passed to the Vice chair. Information about exemptions is attached to the panel minutes. It is not clear how information about foster carers annual reviews is shared with other panel members. Annual reviews of supported lodgings and crisis carers should also be included.

The acting manager is the panel advisor. During the panel observed by the inspector the advisor became involved in panel discussion, showing a lack knowledge of the role of advisor by both the advisor and the Chair.

The panel considered one assessment for approval as a foster carer for Directions, two reviews and one specific match for a child placed with an independent fostering provider. This last provides a good way for the panel to monitor the range and type of carers available to carers available to the local authority in comparison with the needs of children. The Chair was skilled at putting people at their ease. The panel fully considered the cases before them and all members contributed to the discussions. There was good consideration of the quality of the reports presented to panel. There was also discussion



around the need to improve the gate keeping process to ensure that the reports presented to panel met the standard required.

The panel minutes should record the agency decision maker's response to the recommendation of the panel.

# 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 fostering service supports foster carers in striving to help children and young people achieve their potential.

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

## EVIDENCE:

In a self-assessment the Leaving Care team manager outlined a number of ways in which the team has promoted equality and diversity. These included an art project for asylum seeking/refugee young people to address expression and integration, which culminated in an exhibition at which the majority of paintings were sold. A literacy group has just been set up, run by an accredited ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) teacher, to improve the literacy and numeracy of young people for whom English is another language. The Leaving Care team working with some of the young people issued an invitation to celebrate Eid. This was well attended and much enjoyed.

The self-assessment from the family link assistant team manager outlined how young people with disabilities are supported by foster carers to access the

community and provided with new opportunities and experiences. One family link carer told the inspector of the recent outing to a funfair the family had done.

One young person spoken with told the inspector that he was well supported in following his religion. The examples he gave included the provision of halal meat, support during Ramadan, and attendance at the mosque. He also said that the supported lodgings service made sure that interpreters attended meetings with him.

The statement of purpose notes that there are 13 foster care households from minority ethnic backgrounds. The need to increase the number of carers from backgrounds to match the ethnicity, religious, cultural and linguistic background of the children referred was identified as an area for improvement in the self-assessment.

In questionnaires 77% of foster carers who responded said that the fostering service was good or excellent at addressing issues of diversity and equality. The group for carers from different cultural backgrounds had not developed as hoped at the time of the last inspection. The inspector was told that the opportunity for developing a mentoring role to support foster carers with transracial placements was still available. The response in one foster carer's questionnaire indicated that foster carers had not been kept informed of this as a possibility.

Through the questionnaires 95% of children and young people said that they were always or usually given the right help to be successful with their education. One child told the inspector of the additional help she was being given at Saturday school to help her achieve her ambition of attending a grammar school. The young people the inspector met with in a group were all in education and confirmed that foster carers attended parents' evenings and went on school trips. They felt well supported in their education. They had all attended Personal Education Plan meetings and knew what their plan said.

68% of foster carers felt the fostering service was good or excellent in the support provided to them in helping children placed with them achieve academically. The support provided by the Multi agency support team was highly regarded by foster carers and children.

There is good monitoring of the educational attainment of Looked after Children as a group, but not for young people in foster care as a discrete group within this.

The local authority had held a Looked after Children's Celebration of achievement day, Under 11s in the morning and over 11s in the afternoon. The inspector was told that this event was well attended and much enjoyed by all those who attended.

The Family link team has increased the staffing complement since the last inspection to the equivalent of just over two full time staff. This has led to an increase in the number of children receiving a service. It has also provided an opportunity for the consolidation of the systems that were being developed at the time of the last visit.

The placement agreements make a clear statement about the roles and responsibilities of the birth parents. This was further evidenced in discussion with a short break foster carer.

The assistant team manager of the service outlined the intention to further develop the training programme for short break carers. This included the provision of training in Safeguarding disabled children which would be cascaded by the assistant team manager.

## **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.

There are developing systems in place to ensure that the views of children and young people are sought and acted upon.

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

### **EVIDENCE:**

None of the self-assessments submitted by the fostering service commented on how contact is promoted. This area is covered in the foster placement agreement equivalent (placement information record), which is currently completed by the child's social worker. There was evidence from the foster carers spoken with that the contact arrangements were specifically tailored for each child. In one case there were some very complex contact arrangements in place initially, which caused some difficulties. At the time of this visit these had been resolved through discussions between all the parties involved. The involvement of the supervising social worker at an earlier stage may have avoided any difficulty. There was no evidence that foster placement agreements are updated when contact arrangements change.

Just one child commented in the questionnaire that she would like more frequent contact with a family member. The foster carer will address this through the review process. One child told the inspector that he was

comfortable with the contact arrangements that were in place. When a parent tried to make contact outside the schedule the child and foster carer felt that they were well supported to say no.

The records made by foster carers showed a good awareness of the need to report outcomes of contact and their perceived impact on the child. 91% of children and young people said in questionnaires that their foster carers always listened to them and took notice of their opinions. They said, "They take time to listen to what I have to say"; "They sit and talk to me about my opinions"; "My foster carer listens when I'm feeling down and helps if I have any problems". One gave a specific example of "having a night off my gaiters because my foster carer talked to the GP". One child who was assisted in completing the questionnaire said that he used "PECS".

81% of foster carers said that the fostering service was good or excellent in involving children and young people in decisions about their day-to-day lives.

The local authority uses a computer programme to encourage children and young people to contribute to their reviews. This is supported by a dedicated worker who sits with the young people and supports and encourages them to use the interactive programme, which is tailored for each individual. The worker involved has provided six monthly management reports on the initiative. These were not seen on this occasion. The worker is very committed to the process and is committed to ensuring that the children and young people's views are communicated clearly in the review process. The consultation forms are held by the reviewing officers and were not seen during this inspection.

The foster carers opinions about how the fostering service involves children and young people in decisions about how the service is run were evenly spread across the range from poor to excellent. There is a clear emphasis by the local authority on consultation with children and young people. This is outlined in the Participation strategy which states that "Reading is working towards every service, agency and partnership making sure that Children, Young People, Parents and Carers have the chance to be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of Children Young People's services by 2007/08." At the time of this visit the fostering service was about to commence a self-evaluation of how far the fostering service meets the strategy.

76% of children said they knew how to make a complaint and 82% said they knew who to talk to if they were not happy or had a personal problem. One said "My carers are always there to talk to".

# **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):**

These standards were not inspected.

## **EVIDENCE:**

# 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, 22, 24, 25 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate.

The appointment of an acting manager has seen a significant improvement in the undertaking of key fostering tasks. The fostering service needs the



appointment of permanent management staff to fully comply with regulations and improve service delivery.

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

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose was updated in September 2006. The document contains the information outlined in the standard. There is also a children's guide to fostering available.

At the time of the last inspection it was reported that "in June 2005 the fostering service manager was seconded to the role of service manager, initially for six months, to the end of 2005. This was extended to March 2006 and when the Director resigned the interim arrangements were extended until July 2006." These interim arrangements have been further extended until March 2007, pending additional reorganisation of the Department of Education and Children's Services.

The staff team reported that the appointment of an acting team manager in March 2006 had benefited the team. This contract was initially until September 2006 but had been extended to December 2006. An assistant team manager had been appointed to the family and friends team in October 2006. One full time and one part time appointment had also been made since the last inspection. The acting manager reported that the team continued to use independent social workers to undertake assessments as the rate of applications for family and friends foster carers had significantly increased.

There has been a significant improvement in the systems in place to improve the completion of foster carers' annual reviews. These reviews are conducted by the supervising social worker as the funding for an independent worker had been withdrawn. There had been some improvement in obtaining the views of children and young people placed for these reviews. In some cases these views and those of the placing social workers were sought after the reviews had been done with foster carers. This should be reconsidered. Additionally some reviews were presented to panel three months or more after the review had been done. There are a number of foster carers shown as "on hold" on the register. For some this was recent and there were clear reasons for this. Others had been hold for over a year and had not been reviewed because they were "on hold". These foster carers also need to be reviewed. Foster carers with the Leaving Care Team and Crisis Carers also need to have their first reviews taken to panel with subsequent reviews passed to panel as part of the management information on reviews.

The Commissioning officer informed the inspector that the local authority has a list of preferred providers. Inspection reports from agencies are requested before a placement is made and are used to inform the decision making process. The Commissioning Team draws up the first contract. In the case tracked the young person had moved to another foster carer with the same agency. There was no evidence that the Commissioning office had been informed at the time the placement changed. A new contract had just been drawn up although the placement had been made a year previously. The Commissioning Officer is reliant on the placing social workers to update information relating to young people in independent fostering services. There was no foster placement agreement on the young person's file. The systems for gaining appraisals of the placements from placing social workers and information from recent inspection reports are insufficiently robust to provide an effective quality assurance process.

Staff reported that they were well supported and that there had been a commitment to professional development. The inspector was told that this had changed in respect of management training for assistant team managers. The foster carers visited by the inspector shared their training portfolios. There is a commitment to provide specific training for supported lodgings carers and family link carers. There is a plan to develop a structured induction package for staff new to the fostering service.

The inspector spoke with the administrative staff. At the time of this visit they were a team of four, two of whom had been appointed six weeks before this inspection on a six-month temporary contract. Their appointment had been very welcome as, due to the reorganisation, appointments had not been made to fill vacancies created by staff leaving. The staff had had to prioritise the tasks required of them in consultation with the social work staff. Foster carers reported that the loss of administrative staff had had an impact on effective communication with the fostering service. This had improved with the appointment of staff.

There were mixed views expressed by foster carers about how effective communication was between social workers of the fostering service and the placing social workers. Some reported good communication, others poor communication. Focused interventions leading to improved outcomes for young people were improved when there were frequent opportunities for formal and informal discussions. This was achieved most effectively when both social workers were on the same site, the Leaving Care Team for example.

All the local authorities policies and procedures are available electronically on "Trove".

At the time of this visit the fostering service was fully staffed. The introduction of the workload management system was generally seen as a supportive and useful tool in addition to regular supervision and team meetings. The ongoing

interim arrangements at senior management level allied with ongoing restructuring and reorganisation was causing some anxiety and concern in the team.

Foster carers expressed a range of views about the training provided by the fostering service. Some said it was good. Others reported that core training was difficult to access and experienced foster carers wished to have a greater variety of training. A number of foster carers have or are in the process of obtaining NVQ level 3 in Caring for children and young people. Support, supervision and the Carers Link network were given by foster carers as examples of how well the fostering service helps them to care for children and young people placed with them.

The service manager reported that the service had a steady stream of enquiries from people interested in fostering. The team was prioritising those from a minority ethnic background and those expressing an interest in fostering teenagers. The Commissioning Officer told the inspector that a quarterly provider forum is held at which the placement needs of the local authority are outlined. There was no evidence that this information is used by the fostering service to structure a targeted recruitment drive.

There is a clear competency based assessment process in place. The assessment presented to panel during the inspection did not meet the standard required by the panel in that significant information had not been included. The panel asked that the assessment be re-presented to them at a later date with full information in place.

The support group for foster carers with long-term placements is well established and is much appreciated by those who attend. The support group for family and friends carers is also valued by those who attend and there are plans to expand this support group. The support group for carers of teenagers has had few meetings since the last inspection as they have struggled to attract sufficient foster carers to the support group. This was being reviewed at the time of this visit. The Reading Link, support offered by foster carers to foster carers, has a monthly newsletter, a website and offers monthly telephone calls to all registered foster carers. Foster carers appreciated the role of Reading Link, particularly the phone calls to foster carers without a child in placement as they reported they had limited contact with link workers. They also provide an out of hours service during the evening and weekend, in addition to that provided by the Emergency Duty Team.

Foster carers spoke positively about their relationships with supervising social workers. Supervision was felt to be supportive and took place regularly. 87% of foster carers said that the support they received was good or excellent. A record was made of the visits made and foster carers were given a copy of these. A new foster carer had not had a supervising visit until three weeks after the child was placed. The foster carer said she had met the supervising

social worker at meetings during this time and had had regular telephone contact. She also said that the supervising social worker would have visited at the foster carers request. The acting manager understood that all new foster carers should have fortnightly visits initially. There was evidence on the files seen that unannounced visits are taking place and this is monitored in the reviews that are taken to panel. All foster carers have a foster carer's agreement in place. Information about the Commission has not been kept up to date.

The carers visited by the inspector had a copy of the new handbook. This was felt to be useful and the information well presented and easily accessible.

Foster carers reported that they received their payments promptly. The local authority enrolled them as members of the fostering network. There was evidence that the fostering service had offered and sought (through the fostering network) the provision of independent support to foster carers during an investigation. This was proving difficult to achieve.

There is clear information about complaints and allegations. The management information systems for the monitoring of these and other matters to be monitored (e.g. restraints, accidents and illnesses) need to be developed. The One set of carers had resigned following an allegation. There needs to be more robust management of this type of situation and a clear policy framework about the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carers register.

The main case records for children and young people are held electronically. The electronic records were not seen on this occasion. At the time of this visit the fostering service maintained some of these records in paper files. These met the required standard. Foster carers spoken with had a good understanding of the need to keep appropriate memorabilia to enable children to reflect on and understand their individual history. This was well evidenced in the photographs that had been taken along with written comments. Foster carers knew that the information was to be stored securely and had been given equipment to achieve this.

The electronic social care record had not yet been implemented for the fostering service; foster carers' files contained the information required. The records are held securely.

The recent appointment of an assistant team manager for the family and friends team has been viewed very positively. There is a clear commitment to recognising the particular relationship and position of family and friends carers. One family and friends carer who had recently been approved told the inspector that the process had been conducted sensitively and that she was happy with the way the assessment had been undertaken. The family and friends assessment format needs to have details of the dates of employment to

fully comply with the schedule. The foster carer told the inspector that everyone had been really helpful and that interpreters had been provided to ensure that the whole family was enabled to participate.

# 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>	3
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	2
<b>15</b>	3
<b>30</b>	2

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	2
<b>11</b>	3

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

<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>	2
<b>17</b>	2
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	X
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	2
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	3
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	X
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	2

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.	FS3	10(1)	The local authority shall appoint one of its officers to manage the fostering service.	31/03/07
2.	FS8	33(b)	There is to be a record of the matching process to demonstrate that the placement is the most suitable having regard to all the circumstances. This requirement is to be met by 31/01/07 and is ongoing.	31/01/07
3.	FS9	17(1)	Foster carers are to be provided with increased opportunities to participate in core training within six months of approval.	31/03/07
4.	FS9	42(1)	A system for including allegations made by young people placed with foster carers not within the family placement team in the current management information system needs to be developed.	28/02/07

5.	FS15	20(3) Schedule 1	All sessional workers personnel files should have all the information outlined in the Schedule. Outstanding requirement. Previous timescale of 30/04/06.	31/01/07
6.	FS10	14	The fostering service shall evidence how contact is promoted between the child placed with a foster carer and his parents, relatives and friends.	28/02/07
7.	FS21	29(2)	The structure and timescale of the annual review process is to be reviewed. Foster carers "on hold" are to be reviewed.	31/03/07
8.	FS25	42(1) Schedule 7	The management information systems for matters to be monitored need to be developed.	31/03/07
9.	FS32	27 Schedule 3 (8)	The family and friends assessment format needs to have details of the dates of employment.	31/12/06

## 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.	FS12	Signed parental consent for the provision of physiotherapy should be obtained.
2.	FS6	A risk assessment in relation to the boiler in a bedroom cupboard should be carried out, including the risk from carbon monoxide.



3.	FS30	The length of tenure of panel membership should be reviewed to ensure that there is opportunity for good practice to become established and consolidated.
4	FS30	A system for sharing information with the panel about the outcome of foster carers annual reviews should be established.
5.	FS30	The panel minutes should record the agency decision maker's response to the recommendation of the panel.
6.	FS16	An effective quality assurance process for placements in independent fostering services should be developed.
7.	FS17	The fostering service should develop a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of young people for whom it aims to provide a service.
8.	FS22	There needs to be a clear policy framework about the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carers register.

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