



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Southampton City Council Fostering Services

**315 Coxford Road
Lordswood
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 5LH**

Lead Inspector
Lynda Mosling

Announced Inspection
6th February 2006 10:00

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 or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

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

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Southampton City Council Fostering Services
Address	315 Coxford Road Lordswood Southampton Hampshire SO16 5LH
Telephone number	023 8079 9100
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Southampton City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Leigh Clarke
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 24th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Southampton Foster Care Services is part of the Children and Families Division of the Health and Social Care Directorate of Southampton City Council. It is managed within the Resources Unit by a Team Manager who is accountable to the Service Manager (Resources). The service provides a range of fostering services including specialist and intensive fostering schemes. The team recruits, supports and trains foster carers. There are currently approximately 240 young people placed by the service.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection took place over four days and was undertaken by two inspectors. Managers, staff, foster carers and young people were spoken to during the inspection. Six foster homes were visited and a further three carers spoken to. In addition sample questionnaires were received from young people and foster carers. Records including: carers' files, panel minutes and a range of policies and procedures were seen. The inspection included interviews with the councillor/cabinet member with responsibility for the fostering resource, the co-ordinator from Barnardo's, the Looked After Children co-ordinator for education, representatives from the local fostering association, and workers from the specialist teams.

The service appeared to be responsive to the changing needs of the young people placed and has developed a range of projects and initiatives to improve the experience of carers and young people. Most of the carers spoken to felt that the service provides good support and said they felt 'valued' by the fostering team. The team has good knowledge of the needs of young people looked after away from home and try to keep the young people's needs central to the service. Young people visited said they were 'generally happy' in their placements.

What the service does well:

Young people's health needs are assessed either before or soon after placement and appropriate resources are made available to meet these needs.

The staff in the fostering team present as knowledgeable and committed. They have many years combined experience of working with young people and families and each feel their skills are recognised and well used by the team. They reported feeling 'well managed' and clear about their role within the service.

The duty team provides consistent responses to referrals and enquiries and is appreciated by carers who feel they are able to access help and support from the service at any time.

Education for looked after children is a priority for the council and there was evidence that good outcomes are increasing for young people in the system. This is helped by the acceptance of 'corporate parenting' by allied professionals.

The appointment of a specialist in marketing has provided imaginative new ideas for recruitment. More targeted efforts to increase the number of carers will, hopefully, provide more choice for young people.

Involvement of carers in meetings such as: recruitment, development plans, training, support etc. increases the carers' feeling of being valued.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Consultation with young people is developing, helped by the involvement of Barnardos who are commissioned to provide advocacy for, and support to, young people.

Consideration of diversity issues is improving with positive contacts being made with a variety of groups within the city. This has extended to the efforts to recruit carers in the hope that it will improve the choice of placements for young people. Diversity training is offered to carers and evidence shows that this has made a difference to their understanding of young people's needs.

The use of family and friends as carers continues to be promoted, but other methods of providing support, including finances, has been developed so that only appropriate situations lead to approval as foster carers.

The development of a 'payment for skills' system has enabled the service to be clear about the responsibilities and tasks of foster carers and to link the payment of allowances/fees to these.

Targeting of recruitment of carers has improved with the appointment of a specialist marketing/recruitment officer and the setting up of a recruitment forum that includes foster carers.

What they could do better:

Whilst it is appreciated that the service tries hard to place as many young people as possible with their approved foster carers this can lead to placement outside of the carer's approved/preferred range. More consideration should be given to matching the young people's needs with the carer's approval details.

Matching is compromised by the lack of available carers. Further attempts at recruitment should be a priority to address this. The considerations made when matching individual young people to carers should be recorded to evidence the efforts made to make the best of the resources.

To ease some of the anxieties experienced by young people prior to placement, it is suggested that a pen picture/brochure featuring the foster family be made available to young people

The records kept regarding the resolution of conflicts with carers should be clear, accurate and shared with the carers concerned.

Whilst the support from the fostering team was generally felt to be good, the carers and young people voiced anger and frustration at what they saw to be the lack of support and contact from many of the young people's social workers. The council should take these views into consideration when considering re-organisation and allocation of resources.

Some of the decisions about finances i.e. paying for taxis, agreeing to school trips, providing equipment etc. are not within the control of the people who are asked to resolve these issues. An inappropriate amount of time and effort is being spent trying to action relatively simple problems. Review of the budgetary arrangements is suggested.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12.

The service promotes the health of children and young people and has a designated nurse to support the appropriate provision of health care.

EVIDENCE:

The health services to Children Looked After by Southampton City includes: a consultant community paediatrician, a designated nurse, clinical psychologist and specialist nurses in sexual health. The health team aim to provide a health care plan for each child placed within 28 days. This is developed following a health assessment by a member of the health team. The assessment identifies the health needs of the young person, including dental, optical and psychological needs. Hospital and clinical appointments are noted and passed on to the carers.

There is a range of options available to support young people in addressing their health needs, dependent on their age. The specialist nurse attends the reviews of Looked After Children where there are health issues.

Carers spoken to during the inspection confirmed that they have support with health issues, although some said that the information available to them at the point of placement had not given an accurate picture of the child's health needs. Foster carers register the young person with the family G.P (unless the child's own G.P is able to continue to provide the service) and ensures that appropriate services are accessed. There is an annual 8 day training programme for existing foster carers organised by the specialist nurse that covers sexual health, substance misuse and mental health.

Young people spoken to confirmed that they are able to see their doctor as requested and are supported by their carers to keep healthy. The responses from young people's questionnaires indicated that they are encouraged to eat a healthy diet and engage in appropriate physical activities.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9 and 15.

Suitability of the manager and staff is tested through the council's recruitment procedures. The service provides a range of suitable foster carers. Matching is compromised by the lack of available carers. There are systems in place to protect young people from abuse and neglect. The people working for the service have been appropriately recruited and the necessary checks taken up.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service has been in this position for approximately 7 years and has a background of working with young people in family placements. She holds appropriate qualifications, including a management qualification. Appropriate checks and references were taken up at the time of her appointment. The staff members within the team said they appreciated her management style which was described as 'laid back, inclusive and knowledgeable'. She demonstrated a thorough understanding of the needs of carers and fostered young people.

During the inspection six foster homes were visited and additional foster carers were interviewed. The carers presented as committed to the children and young people placed and the homes seen provided suitable accommodation for the young people. Young people were pleased to show the inspectors their rooms which had sufficient space and privacy to keep them safe. Where sharing of rooms is required a risk assessment is undertaken to ensure safety

of both young people and the inspectors were involved in discussion about the steps taken to protect young people from potential abusers. It was, however, noted that the shortage of available foster placements can lead to emergency placements being made without much being known about the child. This sometimes results in inappropriate placements being made that can affect the stability of the young people already in placement. A sample of foster carers' files was seen and showed that the necessary checks on foster carers had been undertaken. In each case a thorough assessment of the carers had been undertaken and presented to the fostering panel. Annual reviews were seen on files, although shortage of staff has led to these sometimes being late in completion. Carers spoken to had mixed views on the process of reviewing approval, with some feeling that this was thoroughly and appropriately done, others feeling that they were sometimes left in 'limbo' particularly following conflicts with the service. The inspectors saw evidence on the carers' files that in the majority of cases the reviews are undertaken appropriately. There is, however, room for improvement in this area and it is recommended that the approval range of carers is more consistently considered when matching young people to be placed.

The manager and the staff all demonstrated a good understanding of the benefits of good matching of carers with young people. However, the lack of available resources greatly compromises the ability to put this knowledge into practice. In common with other local authorities the service has to respond to the day to day need to find placements for a range of young people, often in an emergency. The success of the service to find such placements is appreciated, but can come at a price that includes lack of good matches and placing young people outside of the carer's preferred range. This works well in many cases and enables the young people to remain in the city area and close to family and friends. However, when the placements are less successful it can lead to dissatisfaction amongst carers some of whom reported feeling 'pressurised' to take inappropriate placements by the service. From the evidence seen during the inspection it appears that the service makes the best use of their limited resources and that only further recruitment of carers will improve this situation. The efforts being made to make the best of the available placements, including consideration of contact with siblings, support from other carers etc., was evident during discussion with the team members but was not recorded in detail. It is recommended that records are kept to evidence this consideration and record the reasons for the eventual placement choice.

The protection of young people is a principle aim of the service. The systems in place to ensure this include: thorough assessment of carers, training foster carers in safe caring, child protection investigations when allegations are made, no smacking policy, unannounced visits to carers and close working with other professionals. Risk assessments are undertaken with young people who are likely to be at risk, or pose a risk, and foster carers are provided with information about identifying and notifying suspicion of abuse. The foster

carers spoken to demonstrated a good knowledge of their responsibilities to keep young people safe. Young people themselves said they were not subjected to inappropriate punishments and said they felt safe in their placements. Young people said that they would be able to say if they were being mistreated in any way, some reporting that they would 'speak to the other young people' in the household first to gain support to tell an adult.

All of the staff interviewed during the inspection were enthusiastic about their role and had a clear understanding of the part they play in the service. The recruitment processes are approved by the council and are co-ordinated by the central human resource team. The manager confirmed that the appropriate references and interviewing procedures are used to ensure the suitability of the staff. Carers are taken through a thorough assessment process that is presented to the fostering panel for approval. There was evidence on records to show that carers are appropriately counselled out of the process where concerns about suitability are uncovered.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 13 and 31.

Evidence indicated that the fostering service valued diversity and that staff were active in trying to recruit and retain a pool of carers that reflected the diversity within the local community. All young people in foster care are supported in obtaining suitable education and training and their achievements formally recognised. Short-term placements and respite arrangements recognise the parents as the main care givers.

EVIDENCE:

The service has developed a range of policies and procedures to promote equality and diversity. Through discussion with a range of staff it was evident that they are trying to create a pool of carers that would reflect the social and cultural diversity that exists within the city. However, there was recognition that many of the minority communities remain under represented. The service has appointed a recruitment officer to develop more effective strategies to increase the number of carers. It is envisaged that a larger, more diverse, pool of carers would provide opportunities for more appropriate matching. A number of experienced carers spoken to indicated that they had offered care to children from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds including unaccompanied asylum seekers. All those spoken to indicated that they were supported by the fostering service to access appropriate services. Foster carers also reported that they had attended training courses on 'valuing diversity' and were positively affected by this training.

Through discussions with foster carers, young people, education co-ordinator for Looked After Children and foster care staff it is evident that the educational

progress of each young person is a high priority within the service. There is a general expectation that each young person being fostered can access an appropriate educational provision. All Looked After Children are subject to an educational assessment which forms the basis of a personal education plan. This plan is then reviewed at regular intervals. The education co-ordinator reported that there was good communication with the fostering team who informed her of new placements being made. If a young person is already in full-time education every effort will be made to continue with their existing school including helping with transport. For those young people with a history of non-school attendance every effort is made to re-engage them in some form of education or training within twenty days. It was explained that part-time attendance at one of the specialised education units will often be the first step in a re-engagement strategy. If required the assistance of other professionals such as educational psychologists will be sought. All young people approaching sixteen receive some pathways planning, although one carer of a young person with severe learning disabilities reported that the provision for young people post 16 was very limited. The transition from children's services to adult services generally appears to cause some anxiety for carers. It was noted that the service recognises the academic achievements of the young people in their care through a number of annual award ceremonies/events. The attention to the education experience of Looked After Children is commendable and the monitoring systems to track progress helps provide an accurate picture of the outcomes for young people. The young people spoken to during the inspection were positive about their education experience. Several had achieved success at school for the first time and were proud of themselves. Three young people spoken to were attending local colleges and another shared her plans to go on to university. This is becoming more and more common for Looked After Children in the city.

The service has a number of respite arrangements including the Dreamwall Project which has provided new and exciting opportunities for the personal development of young people in care. All those spoken to talked in positive terms about its contribution in supporting placements by offering a form of respite that is appealing to young people. The service has a number of foster carers who specialise in emergency and short-term placements. A number of such carers were spoken to during the course of the inspection. Through discussion it was evident that emergency placements often placed them in the situation of having had to accommodate young people about whom there was limited information available. However, the carers understood this and were happy to provide information about their experience of the young person to enable a longer-term placement to be found. From discussions with staff engaged in the management of respite provision it was clear that direct communications between the young people's family/carers and respite carers was the norm.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11.

The service promotes contact with the young person's family and friends and supports carers to facilitate this. The service has a range of options to consult with young people, including a contract with a local charity to provide an advocacy service.

EVIDENCE:

It is a clear expectation of the service that contact with family and friends will be promoted. The efforts to keep young people in the city area demonstrates the service's understanding of the benefits of such contact. All of the foster carers spoken to confirmed that they promoted contact with families and often provided transport, food etc. to facilitate this. Young people spoken to said they were able to have contact with their families and explained that siblings fostered elsewhere were often brought together at one of the foster carers' homes to enable them to maintain contact. Most of the young people spoken to have mobile phones and use these freely to contact their parents. Foster carers are made aware of any restrictions on contact at the start of the placement and these restrictions were recorded in the placement plan. Young people were consulted about the contact arrangements and sometimes chose not to have face-to-face contact. Supervised contact is arranged by the child's social worker where necessary. The foster care handbook sets out the expectations regarding contact and the issue is covered in the training given to foster carers prior to approval.

There have been improvements in the consultation options for young people, including the contract with Barnardo's to provide support and advocacy for young people. In discussion with staff from that project it was evident that young people's views are being sought and there is an understanding of the

need to consider young people's views in strategic planning as well as day to day delivery of services. Young people spoken to felt they were able to voice their views to their carers and were listened to about their rooms, food, activities etc. All said they would raise any issues of concern with someone they trusted and were aware of their right to make a complaint. However, many said they did not feel they have a 'good enough' relationship with their social worker to be confident that what they say will 'make a difference'. There were concerns raised by young people and their carers about communication with children's social workers. This is raised elsewhere in the report.

With regard to consultation about placements it was evident through discussions that young people often had entered care in an emergency and had little time to prepare. One consistent theme that emerged was that the trauma of being placed away from their families is worsened by the lack of knowledge about when and where they are to be placed. In the light of this it is recommended that pen pictures be developed about each foster placement and made available to young people prior to the placement. It would also be beneficial to carers to have something similar regarding the young person to provide basic information about the young person's care needs such as likes and dislikes, interests, contact numbers etc.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

29

The service is currently introducing a new 'payment for skills' system for carers. All carers with placements receive the agreed allowances on a regular basis.

EVIDENCE:

All carers spoken to said they receive their agreed allowances on time and are clear about the payments. The service is currently introducing a new payment for skills scheme which is linked to training and proven skills. This will provide different levels of payment for carers. There is an assessment process to calculate the level each carer will be placed on. There has been consultation with carers about the scheme which will be brought in on an incremental basis, due to the funding issues. In discussion with carers it was evident that there is some disquiet about the scheme with some carers unhappy about the level they have been assessed at. However, the scheme aims to pay a reasonable rate related to skills, experience and training and the information is very clear about the expectations of each level. This is helpful to new carers entering the service and will aid the move to provide a more professional service and one that will be more able to compete with local independent agencies. However, there are some carers who have been providing good care to young people for many years who do not wish to further their training and who claimed to feel devalued as a result of the new arrangement. This is understood by the manager and staff, who are aware of the need to retain the carers who have been providing a service for young people for many years. However, the overall benefits of the scheme appear to outweigh the negative and it is hoped that after the initial teething problems it will be seen as the way forward.

Whilst the allowances paid by the fostering service appeared to be timely and acceptable there were issues raised regarding the budgetary arrangements for payment of taxis, school trips etc. The foster carers gave examples of situations where young people were left without transport for important meetings such as attendance at court, police stations, therapy, contact and school. Their efforts to sort this out has been hampered by the difficulty of accessing the child's social worker or their line manager, who have the authority to agree payments to taxi firms etc. The fostering duty team confirmed that they spend a great deal of time taking calls from frustrated carers, with whom they sympathise, but are unable to offer a solution as they have no authority to agree such payments. This situation, and a problem with accessing equipment and funds to purchase equipment, appears to take up a great deal of social work time for a problem that arises frequently and should be easy to remedy. As this is not under the control of the fostering service it is recommended that the council review the budgetary arrangements for these decisions in order to support carers and ease the difficult situations that can arise for young people placed.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

16, 17, 19, 21, and 24.

Staff are well organised and managed to make the best use of individual skills. There are currently some staff shortages but these are due to be reduced shortly, and there is an on-going shortage of carers. The training opportunities for carers and staff are good. The service has a clear strategy for supporting carers but there are some conflicting views about the support offered. The records on young people's files appear satisfactory.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering team has been organised to make the best use of individual skills to meet the needs of the service. There is a duty team with workers available on a day to day basis to answer queries, offer telephone support to carers, take referrals for placements, and provide advice. This is much appreciated by the foster carers spoken to who felt confident that they would be able to speak to someone from the fostering team whenever they phone, even if their own supervising social worker is not available. The consistent membership of the team allows issues to be dealt with, requests for placement followed through and the continuous gathering of information about available carers. The team appeared busy, knowledgeable and supported in their role. Other team members have specialist areas of work including fostering panel adviser, treatment foster care, household reviews, supervision etc. The staff spoken to felt they were appreciated by the manager and the team and felt they had made a positive choice to work in the team. Most of the social workers in the team have previously worked in other areas within the children and families division and bring a great deal of helpful experience to the team, including child protection expertise. Acknowledgement of the problem of supply of carers has led to the recruitment of a specialist worker with a background in public relations and recruitment. This appears to be an imaginative way to try to address the problem, and the ideas and strategies shared with the inspectors looked creative and exciting. It was particularly good to see that young people had been included in the ideas for recruitment. Attention to the follow up of initial enquiries and providing quality information is commendable and will hopefully lead to some success in providing more carers. All of the staff felt clear about their roles and were confident in the management structure of the service.

There have been some staff shortages in the past 12 months. This situation has arisen as a result of closing some resources elsewhere in the children and families division and needing to plan to re-deploy staff. This is understood by the manager and staff but has, understandably increased the pressure on the remaining staff. This situation is likely to conclude in the next few months and the staff said they know the staff that are going to join them and are looking forward to it. In the meantime there has been some use made of temporary staff to try and bridge the gap. Any negative effect of the staff shortages has been minimised by the willingness of current staff to take on more responsibility and to help out in emergencies. The shortage of foster carers is covered in Section 8 of this report.

A report on the training offered to carers shows that there have been numerous courses available to carers during the last 12 months. These include: preparation for adult life, skills to foster, basic first aid, drugs awareness, promotion of health in young people, record keeping, introduction to child protection, introduction to diversity etc. Carers spoken to said they had many offers of training and some took up everything they could. The

courses were generally felt to be useful and appropriate. Carers particularly enjoyed courses that they shared with social workers and would like to see more sharing of learning. Carers said they felt able to request specialist training if it related to their fostering task. Many carers have gained or are intending to gain the NVQ3. Carers, in response to the questionnaires, said that they had attended training prior to being presented to the fostering panel. Many commented that it is still 'a shock to the system' when the first child is eventually placed.

The service has a clear strategy for supporting carers. This is outlined in the foster care agreement and the foster carers' handbook. In most of the contact with carers the inspection found that support from the fostering team was felt to be good. This view changed when there was any conflict between carers and the service, with some carers feeling that they had 'fallen out of favour' with the team following complaints being made. A small number (3) of carers asked to give their views during the inspection in addition to the carers chosen at random. These carers had on-going issues with the team and may decide to make formal complaints in the future. In all cases there have been attempts to look at the situation and try to resolve the issues. However, themes including feeling bullied by the team, and not getting clear messages about the quality of their care were common to the three carers. Differing views were expressed about these carers by the staff and this has obviously been picked up by the carers. In all cases the carers had been advised by the team of their right to be represented by independent people i.e. fostering network and had been seen by senior members of the team. Although these issues were raised by a small minority of carers it is recommended that the process used to resolve conflict with carers be reviewed, particularly with regard to shared records of events.

Some positive comments about the fostering team include: 'they are always there for me', 'I love having contact with them' and 'I feel I am part of the team'.

The other issue of concern about support was with regard to the children's social workers. Young people visited talked of constant changes of social worker, not having a 'good enough' relationship to tell them how they feel, and, for some, a total disregard for social workers regardless of their role. Although this is not within the control of the fostering team it is recommended that the council take account of the views of young people when re-organising their services and allocating resources.

Young people's files are not kept in the fostering team but are the responsibility of the child's social worker. The Swift computer system has allowed more sharing of information between the teams and the fostering team can access up to date records about the children placed. Information provided to the fostering team at the point of referral is often sparse and the fostering team spend time trying to chase this information to pass it on to the carers.

The carers said they are often asked to care for a young person where little is known about them. This obviously makes both the carers and the young person even more vulnerable but is often the reality of responding to a crisis. The Looked After Children reviews and the information kept on the carers' files gave useful information about the young people.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

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

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

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

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

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

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.	FS6	The approval range of carers is more consistently considered when matching young people to be placed.
2.	FS8	Records to be kept to evidence the consideration given to matching young person's needs with available carers.
3.	FS11	Pen pictures of foster carers to be developed and made available to young people prior to placement.
4.	FS21	The process used to resolve conflict with carers is reviewed, particularly with regard to records kept of actions taken and decisions made.
5.	FS21	The council take account of the views of young people with regard to support from their social workers when re-organising their services and allocating resources.
6.	FS29	The council review the budgetary arrangements for decisions such as paying for taxi fares, activities etc. in order to support carers and young people in placement.

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