



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Peterborough City Council Fostering

**Peterborough City Council
Floor3, Midgate House
Midgate
Peterborough
PE1 1TN**

Lead Inspector
Lindsey Blickem

Key Announced Inspection
6th November 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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Peterborough City Council Fostering
Address	Peterborough City Council Floor3, Midgate House Midgate Peterborough PE1 1TN
Telephone number	01733 746179
Fax number	01733 746090
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Peterborough City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Sue Foster
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 5th December 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Peterborough Fostering Service is managed within the Children's Social Care Division of the Local Authority's Education and Children Department.

The fostering service is responsible for the recruitment, approval and supervision of foster carers in order to provide foster placements for Looked After Children and Young People. The service has discrete specialist foster carers categorised as long term (permanent), extended term (task-centred), short term, friends and family, respite, remand, parent and child, link (disability) and emergency care.

Full details of the Fostering Service are contained within the Statement of Purpose.

SUMMARY

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

Two regulation inspectors, Jacqui Barry & Lindsey Blickem, undertook this inspection. Five fostering households were tracked as part of the inspection and five young people's cases were looked at in detail. Interviews were conducted with fostering staff including the manager, service manager and assistant director of children's services. Each fostering household tracked was visited and interviews were conducted with foster carers and, where appropriate, the children and young people in placement. The case files for both foster carers and young people were inspected.

What the service does well:

The foster carers seen during this inspection provided safe and comfortable environments for children and young people.

Young people were generally well supported to attend education by foster carers.

Contact arrangements were well supported and carers demonstrated a high level of flexibility in this area.

The fostering team demonstrated a high level of commitment to the fostering task despite high workloads.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The negative impact on the team of the previous manager's departure had considerably diminished since the last inspection.

There was a City Councillor sitting on the fostering panel.

The senior management within the City Council were aware of the problems experienced by the fostering team and plans were in place to increase resources.

What they could do better:

The fostering service had suffered chronic under investment for a number of years. Consequently there were an inadequate number of fostering staff and foster carers relative to the demand for placements.

The number of children and young people in certain fostering households was far too high and the placement strategy being employed was putting foster carers under an unacceptable amount of pressure.

The communication from placing social work teams was very poor and had created potentially dangerous situations for carers.

The support for young people moving into adulthood in terms of further education and training was inadequate.

The foster carer assessments for supported lodgings were significantly less detailed than in the mainstream service and there were no separate guidelines in place for this service.

The arrangements for transporting children and young people to and from contact arrangements were inadequate.

There was no strategy in place to consult with children and young people looked after.

Children and young people looked after in foster care did not know how to make a complaint.

Investigations into allegations made against foster carers continued to take too long and had a direct impact on reducing the range of placements available to children and young people.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. Young people were encouraged to enjoy healthy lifestyles and there was good access to specialist health advice.

EVIDENCE:

There were generally good arrangements in place for children and young people in relation to their health needs being met. The access to health professionals was good and carers commented that the LAC nurse was an invaluable resource.

Some carers were given appropriate information about children's health needs prior to placement although this was not true in all cases. There were examples of pre placement information available to carers being very poor and consequently putting placements at risk of disruption. Carers had however coped with these situations well.

The choosing to foster pre-approval course, covered health issues for young people in care.

Children and young people who completed a questionnaire reported living a healthy lifestyle.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30

Quality in this outcome area is poor. Foster carers provided safe and comfortable environments for children although the information sharing from placing social work teams was very poor creating potentially dangerous situations. The strategy for placing children with foster carers was flawed given the shortage of resources.

EVIDENCE:

The five households visited as part of this inspection provided a safe and comfortable environment for children and young people.

The demand for foster placements within the City Council was very high and the fostering service was consequently under enormous pressure. The demand for placements had a direct impact on the numbers of children and young people living in one household. Two of the five cases seen during this inspection were of newly approved time limited carers. Both households were over the 'usual fostering limited' and in one of these households there were nine children altogether, five (four babies under one year old) placed by the fostering service. The practice of putting particular households over numbers had become routine and had placed carers under an unacceptable level of pressure.

The matching of children and young people to placements was significantly affected by the availability of placements. The fostering service was good at identifying particular skills of carers and there were some good examples of carers being matched to children and young people. However the high number of children and young people in particular placements suggested that the service were unable to make appropriate matches given the significant shortfall in resources.

There were specific examples of pre placement information about the needs of children and young people being very poor. This was despite the young people being known to the City Council for some considerable time. The failure to share this vital information had led to a placement being put under unacceptable pressure and was a potentially dangerous practice. It was noted that the responsibility for this failure was with the placing social work teams.

There was one example of a foster carer's assessment being undermined by poor information sharing from the looked after children team to the fostering team in relation to an allegation against a carer. There was also evidence to suggest that investigations into allegations made against carers continued to take too long. There were a number of foster carers suspended as a result of allegations and the failure to address these matters quickly and effectively had a direct impact on placement availability. The fostering service recognised that this was unacceptable and were taking the necessary steps to address the problem.

There was one example of there being no guidance available to carers about their rights when allegations are made. Guidance had been made available to some carers although there appeared to be some doubt about how widely it had been distributed. Carers spoken to knew whom to contact in the event of a concern and were clear about how to manage difficult behaviour.

Three personnel files were seen as part of this inspection, all of which contained the required recruitment and vetting information.

The fostering panel observed as part of the inspection functioned efficiently and effectively. Experts in health, education and other key related areas provided a valuable contribution and balance to decision making. There was a healthy and robust level of challenge to information gaps, facilitating good decision making. A City Councillor had join the panel since the last inspection.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 & 31

Quality in this outcome area was good. Children and young people in foster care were appropriately supported to attend education. The link scheme continued to provide a valuable service the children and families.

EVIDENCE:

Valuing diversity was covered as part of the choosing to foster course and issues of discrimination were set discussions for every carer's supervision. One set of carers seen were caring for a child from a different ethnic background to their own. The carers ensured that the child had the right hair and skin products to look after his physical needs in a way that supported his cultural background. The carers had also played music to another child from non-white British background, after consulting with his family about this. The link scheme had undertaken some preliminary work to engage families from different ethnic backgrounds in the service and it would be interesting to see how this area of work develops.

Carers spoken with had had good experiences of the ETLAC team. All of the school aged children and young people seen were engaged in full-time education and carers understood the importance of supporting this.

The link scheme continued to operate efficiently and offered an invaluable service to children and families. However it was disappointing that the scheme was unable to develop further given that the coordinator's continued to support mainstream carers in addition to her responsibilities for the link scheme.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is poor. Foster carers demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in supporting contact arrangements although the transport arrangements were inadequate. There was no strategy in place to consult with looked after young people and young people were not aware of how to complain.

EVIDENCE:

There were established contact arrangements in place for the children and young people seen as part of the inspection. Some contact arrangements were very demanding for the carers and for some households where there were high numbers of children the arrangements could be seen as highly disruptive. However the foster carers were evidently flexible and were appropriately responsive to the need for contact to take place. A number of carers raised issues about transport being unreliable and there were a number of different individuals providing transport, affecting consistency for young children.

There was a process in place for young people to be consulted with as part of the annual review process and LAC review. However, very few children and young people who responded to the questionnaires knew how to make a complaint. There seemed to be a lack of strategies in place to consult with looked after children.

The City Council had very recently commissioned a service to provide looked after young people with an advocacy service, it was too soon to assess what impact this had on children and young people in foster care.

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):

14

Quality in this outcome area was poor. Young people were not being appropriately supported into adulthood by the 16+ team.

EVIDENCE:

One case tracked as part of the inspection was a supported lodgings carer, approved as a foster carer for young people who were sixteen or seventeen years old. The need for this specialist service was clear and the young person seen in supported lodgings had obviously benefited from this arrangement. However the young person reported that she would be required to move out of lodgings when she reaches nineteen years of age, half way through a college course. This seemed to be to be particularly insensitive move on the part of the 16+ Team given that the department had looked after her for thirteen years.

The supported lodgings scheme had taken a fifteen year old young person despite this provision clearly being set up for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 & 32

Quality in this outcome area is poor. The fostering team was severely under resourced for the workload and the placing social work teams provided very poor information about the needs of children in foster placements.

EVIDENCE:

There was a significant shortfall in staffing numbers within the fostering service which had a direct impact on workloads being too high and the team being stretched. There were plans to increase the number of staff within the near future and agency staff had been appointed on short term contracts to temporarily support the service. It was evident that staff were feeling the strain of high workloads and morale was at times low. The chronic underinvestment of the service in preceding years had an extremely negative impact on the ability of carers and workers being able to maintain good standards of professional practice.

The standard of Form F assessments seen during the inspection were generally good although one assessment had been considerably undermined by poor information sharing from within the department (LAC Team) and a local independent fostering service. The assessment for the supported lodging carer contained significantly less detail than the mainstream assessments. There were no separate protocols in place for recruiting and assessing supported lodgings and therefore it was unclear what safeguards the 16+ Team felt appropriate to put in place in these situations.

The expectations on fostering staff in relation to supporting carers were clear although the level of support had been severely affected by the high workloads within the team.

The high numbers of children and young people in newly approved placements was a clear symptom of a service operating beyond capacity. The approach employed within the service was becoming one of crisis management.

The comments from carers about training were very positive and the availability of appropriate and diverse training courses was very good. It was however surprising to learn that a carer previously approved by an independent fostering agency had not attended any training run by the City Council.

The standard of looked after children (LAC) paperwork was generally very poor. There was little information available about the care needs of children and young people and how those needs would be met in placement. The looked after children team had persistently failed to provide adequate information about children's needs in foster placements.

One carer seen during the inspection was assessed as a friends and family carer. The arrangements in place for two children in this household were excellent.

Staff reported that formal supervision was infrequent; the manager confirmed this although provision had been made for new agency staff to receive regular formal supervision. It was not surprising to learn that the manager had not been able to provide staff with regular supervision given that her workload was

far too heavy. In the absence of an assistant team manager and chronic staff shortages the manager had coped extremely well. The strength in the fostering team was the commitment to the work although the pressure the team was forced to work under was totally unacceptable.

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	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	1
9	1
15	3
30	3

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	1

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	1
29	X

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

Yes

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
1.	FS8	33	The fostering service must increase its capacity to recruit foster carers and ensure that carers are not placed under unacceptable pressure.	01/04/07
2.	FS9	12	The City Council must ensure that investigations of foster carers are concluded in a timely manner. This requirement is outstanding from the previous inspection.	01/04/07
3.	FS9	12	The City Council must ensure that there is more effective communication between the placing social work teams and the fostering service.	01/01/07
4.	FS10	14	The City Council must ensure that there are suitable arrangements in place for transporting children and young people to contact.	01/02/07
5.	FS14	16	The City Council must ensure that young people moving into adulthood are appropriately supported with	01/01/07

			education.	
6.	FS17	27	The City Council must ensure that the supported lodgings scheme have clear protocols in place for assessing carers and appropriate safeguards must be in place.	01/01/07
7.	FS17	19	The City Council must ensure that the fostering service is sufficiently staffed. This requirement is outstanding from the last inspection.	01/04/07
8.	FS17	Sch7(3)CA1989	The fostering service must ensure that the number of children placed with individual foster carers does not exceed the 'usual fostering limit' of three children as stated in Schedule 7 (3) Children Act 1989. This requirement is outstanding from the last inspection.	01/02/07
9.	FS20	20	The fostering service must ensure that all staff are properly supported through formal supervision.	01/01/07
10.	FS21	17	The fostering service must ensure that carers receive support and supervision relative to the number of children in placement.	01/01/07
11.	FS24	34	The City Council must ensure that detailed foster placement agreements are in place for all young people placed with foster carers. This requirement is outstanding from the last inspection.	01/01/07

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.	FS11	The City Council must employ a strategy for consulting with young people including raising awareness about the complaints procedure.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Area Office

CPC1

Capital Park

Fulbourn

Cambridge CB1 5XE

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI