



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **St Helens Council Fostering Service**

**St Helen`s Council  
73 Corporation Street  
St Helens  
Merseyside  
WA10 1SX**

*Lead Inspector*  
Mrs Lynn Paterson

*Announced Inspection*  
30th November 2005      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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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	<a href="http://www.csci.org.uk">www.csci.org.uk</a>

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

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

<b>Name of service</b>	St Helens Council Fostering Service
<b>Address</b>	St Helen`s Council 73 Corporation Street St Helens Merseyside WA10 1SX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01744 456 526
<b>Fax number</b>	01744 611 550
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	St Helens Council
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mrs Christine Taylor
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service
<b>No. of places registered (if applicable)</b>	0
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

## **Date of last inspection**

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

St. Helens Social Services Fostering Team are based in a older type terraced property situated in the centre of St. Helens town, close to car parks, bus and train stations making it open and accessible to visit.

The office accommodation covers the ground and first floor and provides limited space for the fostering and adoption staff to carry out their role. The fostering team comprise of specialist workers who are trained and experienced in the areas of fostering with their main functions being to recruit, assess, train and support foster carers. Professional and experienced administrative staff provides assistance and support to the team.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection of St. Helens Fostering agency took place over a seven -day period commencing on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005. The inspector was provided with assistance from the service manager and the Recruitment Team Manager who was also acting in the capacity of Support Team Manager whilst awaiting a replacement for the manager who had recently left the Authority.

The inspector read files, policies and procedures and other documentation, interviewed fifteen social workers, met with six children and visited eight foster carers in their homes. Interviews and discussions were also carried out with senior officers and health and education specialists, observational sessions were undertaken of panel meetings, training, looked after children reviews and group work sessions and forty four questionnaires were looked at. The information gained from this process is recorded below.

## **What the service does well:**

The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose that was reviewed in September 2005 and now holds full information including updated details of staffing, requirements of the outcomes framework and service development.

The service utilises the services of a Marketing Officer and a recruitment agency and the recruitment methods for foster carers are innovative with systems in place to ensure public awareness by way of advertising, public stands, word of mouth etc. This is followed by a prompt response to all applicants who receive a full information pack detailing the procedures involved in becoming an approved foster carer. One carer spoken with advised that she was provided with clear details of the requirements to include the assessment process and the training involved. She said that this enabled her to have full understanding of the approval process and felt that the information sharing was carried out in a very professional way. However the service continues to have a recruitment difficulty in line with bordering local authorities and as a consequence they are in the process of reviewing their recruitment and payments systems to ensure marketing reflects the needs of the service.

Staff, have clear job descriptions and lines of authority are clear, however it was noted that due to the recent departure of the Team Manager, some staff feel that the team spirit has been affected and staff are not able to receive the level of support that they are used to.

Foster carers said that they think staff of the service are most knowledgeable and supportive and that staff treat the foster carers with respect and acknowledge that they provide a service for children. Foster carers questionnaires included comments "staff of the fostering service are always reliable which is more than I can say for the child's social worker", "Staff support us and treat us well", "The staff call at our homes and listen to what we have to say and give advice and support if we need it", "My family placement worker has been wonderful and never misses an appointment", "Regular visits from link worker, someone always available to talk to on the phone and coffee mornings arranged to keep in touch with other foster carers". General comments received from foster carers indicated that the family placement workers had good knowledge of the needs of the children and young people placed in foster care and as a consequence were a great source of help to them.

Staff spoken with displayed good knowledge of their role and appeared fully committed to the provision of support, training and encouragement to the foster carers.

Observations of training and training records and discussions with foster carers revealed that training was ongoing both through pre and post approval. Foster carers said that training was interesting and useful.

Records, observations and discussions revealed that new carers are approved through pre approval training, statutory checks and assessment and assessment form F's seen were completed to a very high standard

All records and other documentation seen appeared well managed at the time of the visit.

Observations of the fostering panel identified that the panel was well organised and managed in a way which empowered all the members of the panel in the decision making process.

Overall comments from discussions and questionnaires was that the service was well managed and provided a high level of support, advice and encouragement for the foster carers and the young people living in their homes.

The fostering service provide good quality foster placements for the young people looked after according to extracts from a booklet recently written by St. Helens young people currently living with foster carers. Comments included "I love the way my carers always make me feel happy, they are nice, kind and caring", "I have realised that being in care is a great thing because I am with people I love and that care about me", "My foster carers look after me, I have surprises and go on holiday with them", "This is my home, I am happy", "My carers are always there for me, I think they are cool and brill, They may not be my real parents, but I really love them still".

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

The statement of purpose has been revised since the last inspection and is a well- presented and informative document.

Fostering procedures have been updated and the service has introduced a monitoring system to identify the progress of enquires about application to become a foster carer to the approval stage.

The recruitment of foster carers has been updated with the local authority contacting with a recruitment agency. This has created a change of design of advertising, emphasizing the needs of children and skills required.

Staff of the fostering service, complete the assessments for kinship/relative carers. This assessment was previously carried out by The Children's Services Field work teams but new systems have been developed to ensure that form F assessment's are completed by staff of the fostering service and input and support after approval is provided by community support workers.

Community support workers, who are not qualified in social work, have been appointed to work with family and friends carers, however this is not perceived as an improvement by some staff of the service, who feel that some family and friends carers may need a higher level of support from qualified and experienced staff. This was discussed with the management team who advised that work allocation would be reviewed in line with the ongoing service development.

Foster carers preparation training has been revised to implement evidenced based assessments and ongoing training has also been revised to incorporate the requirements of the outcomes framework. The fostering service have also addressed the requirements of the outcomes framework by way of staff supervision and appraisal, team meetings and carers support visits

Foster carers award events have been introduced with an awards evening being held in June 2005. The purpose of this event was for the authority to acknowledge the commitment that all approved foster carers demonstrate.

Foster carers spoken with said that it made them feel valued and appreciated.

Foster carers annual review procedures have been updated to incorporate the outcomes framework.

Other areas of improvement to the service include an update of fostering procedures to incorporate kinship carers assessment and support, private fostering, whistle blowing policy update and a revision of the consistency and safe keeping of records for carers. Foster cares spoken with revealed that they felt the new information was clear, useful and relevant.

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

The premises, continues to be dismal and overcrowded and does not afford space for private meetings. This has been addressed by senior -management

and plans are in place to transfer the service to a more suitable accommodation. It should be noted that foster carers are becoming a scarce resource also country wide independent fostering agencies have recruitment programmes that offer good levels of support and higher levels of pay to foster carers. There are an increasing number of children needing to be looked after and in order to address the needs of these children there has been an increased reliance on foster care agencies. St. Helens Fostering Service should therefore continue to address the level of payments, and incentives made to foster carers, which are currently below those paid by the independent sector. This would assist to provide in borough placements and reduce the reliance on more expensive external provision. Foster carers spoken with were aware of the higher fees paid by other fostering services and advised that they knew of people who had approached these services with a view to becoming registered to provide foster care. The Authority needs to continue to modernise the service to attract more foster carers to offer more diverse placements for the young people in borough.

Whilst the service appears to function well it was noted that an assistant director, service manager and team manager have left the department since the previous inspection. As a consequence staff are uncertain about their individual support systems. It would be recommended therefore that the authority recruit and stabilise a suitably qualified and experienced management team in the near future.

One young persons support worker spoken with was uncertain about the nature and purpose of the fostering service or of his remit to the young person in placement. Whilst the fostering team appear pro-active in their pursuits of promoting the service, because of the integration of the Children's Services with Education Services it appears that more needs to be done in this area to clarify some issues. It would be useful if more work could be done to develop a better understanding of roles.

It was noted that recruitment and retention of children's field social workers has been problematic and this has impacted unfavourably upon their ability to support the children placed with foster carers. Whilst this is not directly seen as a shortfall in the fostering service it creates extra work for the staff of the fostering service who are wrongly seen to be responsible for the support of both the carer and the young person in placement. It would be helpful therefore if the managers of the respective teams meet to discuss a strategy to ensure that roles and responsibilities are identified to staff, foster carers and young people looked after.

Records show that foster carers training is not well attended and it would be recommended therefore that incentive schemes be developed to reward carers for their attendance at training events.

Whilst the service has appointed a dedicated worker for children with disabilities, it would be recommended that the service develop more recruitment and approval of carers to provide this specialist 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.

# **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 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 fostering service trains and supports foster carers to promote the health and development of children.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Documentation viewed showed that preparation training has been reviewed and amended to meet the requirements of undertaking evidenced based Form F assessments. This has been completed using fostering network work- books as a guide and incorporated suggested work techniques/modules.

Foster carers spoken with said they had received pre and post approval training that dealt with issues relating to the health and development of children and young people.

Records and other documentation looked at showed that all children and young people are registered with a dentist and GP. Staff advised that they try to keep the young person with their own GP so notes and other information do not need to be transferred. Staff said that all health needs are rigorously monitored through children's reviews to include foster carers completing a form prior to the review that gives full information about health and development issues of the young people in their care.

All files viewed held full health assessments and appropriate consent for health services procedures and foster carers were able to show that they held and maintained health records for the young people in placement.

A meeting with the looked after children's nurse revealed that she and her staff visited all foster carers, schools and other health professionals and ensured that each child obtained health care appropriate to need. Records showed that healthy care meetings and health strategy meetings and training courses are arranged for foster carers who are provided with flexibility of choice as to what health care training they attend. Foster carers spoken with said they were offered training to enable them to promote the health and development of children and were able to tap in to what training they felt they needed.

Staff advised that they were mindful of the emotional development needs for the children and young people and they ensured that all foster carers received training in life story work to include the recording of factual information, recording all contacts and collecting photographs and memorabilia. They said that this assisted in child development and was most useful for future reference for the young people looked after.

The agencies mission statement includes " Our foster families will be supported to give children and young people attentive and pro-active care; fostering will not be a passive experience for children. Foster carers will encourage children to lead healthy lifestyles; achieve their potential and enjoy their leisure activities, make a positive contribution and ultimately assist them to achieve economic well being". The service has been assessed as exceeding its aims in this section and has therefore been awarded a score of 4.

# 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

St. Helen's fostering service provides effective management and training for staff to enable them to provide suitable safe placements for children and young people and to ensure wherever possible they are protected from abuse and neglect. Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively to ensure that the service provides suitable foster carers and appropriate placements for the young people looked after.

## EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose held details of the qualifications and experience of agency staff and this information together with the agency mission statement and stated aims and objectives revealed that the fostering service is fully committed to the provision of a high quality service. It also states that staff and foster carers are appropriately recruited and trained for the purpose of providing a safe needs led service for the children and young people placed in foster care. Documentation viewed held information of the departure of the Assistant Director, Service Manager and Support Team Manager during 2005. Records show that a newly appointed service manager commenced her duties in July 2005 and interviews and discussions revealed that she has undertaken much work with a view to service development. This would include the remit to recruit and stabilise a suitable qualified and experienced management team. The Adoption and Foster care Team is divided into two, one half being responsible for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and adopters,

the other half being responsible for the support and on-going training of existing foster carers. Each half of the team has a team manager. However due to the departure of The Support Team Manager, extra responsibilities have been passed to the Recruitment and Assessment team manager who whilst handling her extra responsibilities well is eagerly awaiting the appointment of A Support Team Manager to take over the vacant position.

Records viewed and discussions held identified that the service manager and team manager have extensive experience in child -care and are well -qualified, experienced professionals.

Staff advised they were required to provide references and undertake police checks prior to being offered employment and files examined revealed that police checks and references are obtained as part of the recruitment and selection process with all information being held on file. The recruitment and selection policy appeared clear and followed good practice guidelines in safeguarding children and young people. Staff said that all job specifications held full detail of the relevant qualifications and experience necessary for the stated position and staff who were responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff were trained and knowledgeable in this area.

Comments from foster carers and staff of the service included "we get good support ", "staff are most approachable", "they seem to know everything", "the service is well managed but we could do with more staff"

Records show, that new carers are approved through pre approval training, statutory checks and on-going assessments. This process takes account of the applicants experience, life skills, attitudes and general aptitude for the fostering tasks and roles.

Each applicant is given a list of the competencies they will be expected to demonstrate, the support and allowances available and an explanation of the Departments commitment to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

The assessments address all the requirements of the form F documentation and when completed an independent staff member will visit to ensure the assessment is complete. A report is then provided for submission to the fostering panel.

All household members are included in the assessment and completed assessments considered by the foster panel within four months of the start of their assessment.

Foster carers spoken with revealed that they received announced and unannounced visits from the fostering staff and files viewed showed that records of these visits were maintained with details being recorded about individual safe care policies and practices. Foster cares said that they received good quality training about safe care to include child protection and anti discriminatory practice. Foster carers advised that the fostering team sometimes used a training company who used actors to portray situations. They revealed that they thought this was a very good way to pass on

knowledge about child abuse, as abuse is not all about smacking or physical things and can include other issues that they had not thought about before the training. The inspector observed a training session during the visit which was well organised and provided a course content which was very thought provoking. Foster carers advised that this session enabled them to have updated training in aspects of safe care and they found the training to be most useful.

All homes visited as a requirement of the inspection process presented as warm, well furnished and clean hygienic and homely at the time of the visit.

The statement of purpose outlined the aims of the service to include "to recruit carers who will provide a safe and nurturing environment for looked after children" and "to recruit sufficient carers to match the numbers of children needing a placement". The Missions statement includes "Our mission is to provide good quality alternative families for those children who need to be looked after by foster carers. We strive to fully support and value those families so that they can give the children stability and security by being able to care for them safely even through difficult times in an informed and sensitive way. Staff spoken with advised that children and young people are placed wherever possible with a carer who can meet their needs. However staff advised that if this is not possible, foster carer's will receive assistance and support from staff to ensure they can meet the needs in the short- term whilst alternative placements are being sought.

Staff identified through discussion that they promoted diversity and anti-discriminatory practice. Comments from staff included "we ensure that we promote the child's cultural identity and give the child a positive image of their identity", "We prepare the carer with information to enable them to learn about and share in the child's culture". Staff said that they made sure that foster carers knew about dietary rules, customs, religious observance, the child's heritage and historical foundations prior to placement to ensure that all diversity issues were identified. Staff and foster carers advised that they had received training in "Valuing Diversity and as a consequence could meet the needs of all young people who required foster care.

Policies and procedures viewed included child protection, allegations against foster carers, bullying and whistle blowing policies. Foster carers spoken with advised that they had full knowledge of these policies which were provided in the foster carers handbook.

Observations of the December meeting of the fostering panel revealed that it was well managed and operates by way of clear policies and procedures. It was noted that the relevant documentation for discussion is circulated in advance to enable all panel members to have knowledge of the agenda prior to the meeting. The meeting is held monthly and is chaired by a senior manager who identified her ability to chair the meeting and enable panel members to

share information and be included in the decision making process. Panel members have received training and are experienced and committed people with the membership reflecting diverse values and opinions.

Comments from young people either verbally or on returned questionnaires included "My foster home is just like having my own family", "my foster carers are very good to me and make me feel safe", "its good here, I am well looked after", "I feel that I have got a real family for the first time in my life".

Comments from placing social workers include "the foster carers have established a very positive relationship with the young person", "the placement meets all the child's needs and foster carers are well trained in all aspects of safe care", "foster carers have demonstrated their commitment to the child in placement. As a result the child has settled well and has moved from a school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties into main stream".

# 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**

7.13.31

The fostering service promotes educational achievement, values diversity and where appropriate recognises that birth parents remain the main carers for the child.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose states that St. Helens strives to recruit and retain sufficient foster carers to offer placement choice for children. The agency policies and procedures show that the service is committed to providing carers with the necessary skills to value diversity and promote educational achievement.

Foster carers said that St. Helens Local Authority promotes diversity and anti-discriminatory practice and training is provided in "Valuing Diversity". Staff spoken with said that they received on going training and try to provide a service that reflects the area it serves and all staff take the issue of diversity very seriously.

Records viewed showed that the service makes arrangements on an individual basis to identify the need for any specialist service.

The manager advised that the assessment process was thorough and would identify any issues that may be problematic and these issue would then be raised discussed and dealt with at panel.

The children's guide to the fostering service gives information about foster care and of the young persons rights to be supported in their daily living to include educational achievements.

Foster carers said they were trained to support the young people to do well in their education and to achieve their maximum potential. Training records show that carers training includes the role carers have in ensuring regular attendance and support at school to include that it is not acceptable to remove children from school for holidays and days out during term time. Support is also provided to carers to help them to feel more comfortable contacting schools.

Foster carers said that they had positive relationships with school staff and other educationalists and they said they valued the training input they received from the Educational Psychologist.

The Authority has a "Right to read" project, which provides celebratory events and reading materials to children and carers. Staff of the fostering service liaise closely with the Looked After Children's advisory teacher and monitor the child's attainment. Staff spoken with said that they raise the importance of education with foster carers through supervision and training and all foster carers are expected to have strong links with each child's school, attending parents evenings and school social functions either with or on behalf of the child.

The authority utilises the skills of the looked after children's education officer to ensure that all attendance and educational issues can be dealt with in a professional and consistent way. Documentation viewed revealed that the looked after children's education officer had developed protocols with schools to ensure that school attendance and educational attainment for looked after children was maximised.

A comment received from a placing social worker identified that a young person living in foster care had achieved high standards in education supported by the foster carer and the looked after children education officer and as a consequence the young person had felt empowered and very proud.

Information obtained from the pre inspection questionnaire indicated that foster carers training now include preparation training to equip young people for independence. As a consequence information is provided to foster carers from a staff member of the young peoples team about financial literacy and independence as per the outcomes framework.

Record show that the provision of short -term breaks is dealt with by the Children with Disabilities team and a dedicated worker is provided to manage this service provision. It would be recommended that the fostering team develop more recruitment and approval of carers to enable them to manage the provision of this specialist service.

## **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**

10.11

Foster carers are trained and supported by staff of the fostering service to promote and facilitate contact and consultations.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The department has a contact policy which outlines in what circumstances contact should be promoted and risk assessments to be undertaken to safeguard and protect children.

Documentation viewed, to include foster carers post and preparation training, annual reviews and children's statutory reviews revealed that the service supports contact between children and their parents and clearly records all contact arrangements on file.

Foster carers spoken with advised that they had received training on all issues relating to contact, however many foster carers expressed concern in respect of the transportation provided to facilitate contact from children's services staff. In discussion it was said that sometimes staff do not turn up on time or not at all to take the young person to the contact and as a consequence the young people felt let down. Whilst this is not seen to be a shortfall in the fostering service it was discussed with the team manager who was able to cascade this information to the appropriate line manager for action.

Foster carers and young people expressed general satisfaction with the contact arrangements and said that they always worked well if "the children's support workers turned up".

The children and young persons guide held details of consultation process and of whom the young people could consult with. Completed questionnaires from young people held information, which indicated they were fully consulted with

by their foster carers about all aspects of daily life and were consulted by staff of the fostering team. However they indicated that the young peoples social workers were not consistent in their role due to frequent staff turnover. Verbal and written comments from young people included "my own social worker does not visit me very much but my foster carers social worker always speaks with me, I can tell her anything", "my foster carers always asks me what I want", "my social worker keeps changing", " my foster carers talk to me all the time", " my foster carer ask me for my opinions on everything". "The foster care people are great, they ask you about how you are and how you are being looked after and are nice". " I am just part of this family".

Records viewed and information gained from staff and foster carers discussions revealed that the authority have experienced problems with the recruitment and retention of children's fieldwork staff and this has impacted unfavourably upon the support provided to the young people from their allocated worker. Foster carers advised that as a consequence staff of the fostering service, are on occasions supporting both carer and foster child. This was discussed with the team manager who passed on the concerns to the appropriate line manager for action.

Young people said they knew how to complain and had been given full information about how to make a complaint. They said that they knew about the fostering service and what fostering was about and what to do if they felt things were going wrong.

Young people said they were given the opportunity to attend their reviews and make their views known but if they did not wish to attend then they were asked if they wished to give written information or have someone speak on their behalf.

The team manager advised that the authority held regular child consultation groups to enable views to be aired. A meeting was arranged with a leader of the children's consultation group who revealed that the consultation group was well established and had clear protocols to enable the young people to have discussions and make decisions about their future.

Whilst the fostering service ensures good consultation systems in general, it was noted in discussion that a staff member of the children's services, appeared to have limited knowledge of the fostering service or understanding of their remit. Documentation and discussion within the fostering service show that they are pro-active in their pursuits of promoting the service but because of the recent integration of the Children's Services with Education Services it appears that more work could be done to develop a better understanding of roles. It would be recommended therefore that information about the roles and responsibilities of the service be presented to all children's fieldwork teams and associated children's services for discussion at their respective team meetings.

# 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**

The system for providing foster carers allowances and expenses is well managed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Financial records viewed were clear accurate and well managed at the time of the visit.

The manager advised that the financial viability of the service is assured because of the Local Authority status and as such operate within the financial regulations of the Borough.

Foster carers said that they received clear information about payments and receive their allowances on time.

It was noted that discussions were ongoing as to the modernisation of the service to include incentive and skill based payments.

# 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**

1.2.16.17.19,21.24.26.

The fostering service is well managed and has a clear strategy to work with and support carers, as detailed in the statement of purpose. Children's case records are comprehensive and well maintained. However staffing levels are currently insufficient to enable staff to provide or obtain appropriate support.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose contains information about the staffing of the agency to include detail of qualification and experience. The Support Team is currently without a team manager and consists of 3 full time and one part time social worker, a foster care training officer, 2 community support workers, 1 finance officer and 5 sectional support workers.

The Recruitment Team consists of a team manager 2 full time and 3 part time social workers, 1 marketing officer, 1 social services assistant and a part time clerk typist. The Adoption Permanency team are also accommodated in the building. A Service Manager has overall responsibility for then management of the service.

Records show that the majority of social work staff had appropriate qualification and considerable years experience of child care. 4 staff have obtained Post Qualification 1 award and 2 staff are undertaking The Child Care Award. 1 staff member is undertaking NVQ level 4. All staff spoken with identified that they are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out their role.

All relevant documentation viewed prior to and during the inspection showed that the service was managed effectively.

Discussions with staff revealed that they received on- going supervision and support, however they said the current vacant Support team managers post was creating an unfair amount of line management responsibility for the service manager and Recruitment Team manager and this position, coupled with the problems with the recruitment of children's field social workers was impacting unfavourably upon them.

Staff said that they felt the workload allocation was inconsistent and as a consequence some workers were overloaded with work and found it difficult to attain the many responsibilities of family placement work.

The management team advised that this situation was being reviewed and it was hoped that the vacant position would be filled and workload management issues would be looked at to ensure a fair allocation system wherever possible.

Records show that family placement staff turnover is low and staff said they work well together and give each other support even though they sometimes feel overworked. Staff revealed that they are provided with relevant training and study leave and have clear guidelines about their roles and areas of responsibility.

Discussions with foster carers and information gained from returned questionnaires identified that the general opinion of the service was positive. Comments received included " It is a good service, people are always available to talk and listen", "My link worker is very good, she makes me feel valued by the service and is around when I need her", "Staff do an excellent job even though there is a shortage of staff", "most of the people who we have worked with have done very good jobs but they are so stretched because they have too many cases", "St. Helens Foster and Adoption Team support foster carers

as much as they can", "The staff I deal with are available to me all of the time, I cannot ask for more".

Foster carers spoken with and file records viewed revealed that carers received a consistency of visits made by the family placement team and all carers verbal and written comments indicated that they felt supported and at ease with their link worker. All records of visits were seen to be clear and concise and staff said that they had received training in recording to ensure consistency of practice.

Foster carers revealed they had received pre and post approval training, however records show that foster carers have a poor attendance record at non- mandatory training. The team manager advised that consideration is being given to the provision of a bonus payment for carers who attend training. This may be helpful in encouraging carers to attend all training sessions organised by the service. It was noted that the foster carers training calendar for 2005 had been designed to take account mandatory training requirements and attention given to the Outcomes Framework for Children's Services.

Observation of a specialist -training course in Diversion and Diffusion of difficult and challenging behaviour revealed it was a well -presented course, which all carers in attendance said they found to be most interesting and useful.

Documentation viewed in respect of carer's assessment process revealed that the recruitment, assessment and vetting systems used by the service were of a good quality.

Foster carers spoken with advised that they are provided with a foster care ` agreement which gave detail of what level of support they could expect from the fostering service. Carers advised they held monthly support group meetings but had struggled with attendance so they now hold informal coffee mornings and drop in facilities. Records show that the carers have an event's committee to organise children and foster carers formal events such as outings and Christmas party and a foster carers forum is held quarterly to provide opportunity for carers to hold discussions with staff as to the development of the service.

Staff advised that a foster carers award event was held for all foster carers to acknowledge the commitment they demonstrate. Foster carers spoken with said they were presented with a book containing a collection of children's thoughts and they felt valued by this.

Young people spoken with and comments received from returned questionnaires revealed that young people were generally contented with the foster care provided to them but were not to sure about their own support mechanisms Comments included " we like being here", "I am well looked after", "my foster carer and her social worker support me as I do not see my social worker very often". "I am not sure who my social worker is now, they

change about a lot". " I have seen three social workers over the past few months, they keep on leaving". General comments indicated that the young people felt their allocated social workers were inconsistent in their contact but felt that the support was provided by their foster carers and the family placement team. This information was passed to the team manager who cascaded it to the appropriate team manager for action.

Foster carers spoken with said they were generally provided with clear information about the young people, prior to placement to make sure wherever possible that assessed needs could be met. Foster carers said that they were fully supported by their family placement worker who would obtain full information about the child in placement if they felt that not all details had been shared by the children's social worker.

Foster carers advised that they were provided with training to enable them to record and store information in a clear and consistent way. Recording systems included diary entries and life boxes to record details of significant events.

Case tracking methods included examining six young peoples files. All information on file was clear and held signatures and dates as appropriate.

The premises were noted to be dreary, dismal and overcrowded with a minute reception area to great visitors. Interview space was very limited and a meeting room also served as a file storage area. Staff accommodation was poor and staff and foster carers said that the building was perceived to give the wrong impression of the fostering and adoption service.

# 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>	4

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	4
<b>8</b>	3
<b>9</b>	3
<b>15</b>	3
<b>30</b>	4

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

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

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

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	3
<b>2</b>	4
<b>4</b>	X
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	2
<b>17</b>	2
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	3
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	4
<b>22</b>	X
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	3
<b>25</b>	X
<b>26</b>	2
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	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
1.	FS17	27	The responsible person must ensure that the service employs sufficient qualified staff and foster carers in a skill mix to meet the needs of the service.	30/03/06
2	FS16	17	Staff are managed and supported in a way that ensures effective service provision. This requirement includes the provision of a workload management system.	30/03/06
3	FS26	26	The responsible person must ensure that the premises used for the service are appropriate for purpose	30/03/06

## 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	FS11	It is recommended that the service utilise additional consultation methods to ensure that all peripheral services are fully conversant with the services aims, objectives and purpose.
2	FS19	It is recommended that training courses for staff and foster carers are promoted and encouragement and incentives provided for attendance at training events.
3	FS29	It is recommended that foster carers allowances are reviewed and updated as an ongoing process.
4	FS30	Whilst the fostering panel was seen to be well organised and managed it would be recommended that consideration be given to utilising an independent panel manager who is not associated with the fostering service.
5	FS31	It would be recommended that the fostering service develop an in-house process for the assessment and provision of short -term break foster carers.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Knowsley Local Office  
2nd Floor, South Wing  
Burlington House  
Crosby Road North  
Liverpool  
L22 0LG

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://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