



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service

**Beldray Building
66 Mount Pleasant
Wolverhampton
WV14 7PR**

Lead Inspector
Janet Manders

Key Announced Inspection
16th October 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk 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 | Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service |
| Address | Beldray Building 66 Mount Pleasant Wolverhampton WV14 7PR |
| Telephone number | 01902 553130 |
| Fax number | |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Children`s Services, Wolverhampton City Council |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Fostering Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 12th July 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service provides a range of foster care to children and young people aged 0-18 who are looked after by Wolverhampton City Council. The service provides short-term, intermediate, long-term, shared care (including children with disabilities) and kinship care placements. At the start of the Inspection the Service was providing full-time placements for 221 children, and a further 24 children with learning disabilities were linked with shared care placements. There were also 51 externally purchased placements. The Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and development of all its foster carers. On 1 September 2004 the service had 168 registered foster carers. There is a single Fostering Panel. The Service is led by the Fostering Team Manager, who manages 2 Practice Managers, 8 social workers and administrative support workers.

SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors visited the Wolverhampton Fostering Service between 16th and 24th October 2006. So that the inspectors could see how well the Fostering Service was doing the inspectors

- Visited 5 foster carers and this meant the inspectors could talk to the 9 young people who lived with those foster carers.
- A group of 10 young people who lived with different foster carers.
- Inspectors met with staff from the fostering team, the manager and staff from the Foster Care Centre, where staff give a lot of support to foster carers and young people.
- 35 young people returned questionnaires telling inspector what they felt about living with foster carers.
- 10 social workers responsible for young people placed with foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors how well they felt the young people were being looked after.
- 60 foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors about how much support they received from the fostering team to help them look after the young people placed with them.
- Looked at files and records

If you want to get a full picture of what is like to live in foster carer in Wolverhampton you might like to read the full report. You can get this from the address on the front page.

What the service does well:

- Foster carer's help young people to be health and help them with their education. One young person who did very well in her exams told inspectors that "I would not have been able to do this without the support of my foster carers."
- Another young person told inspectors that "my foster carers fight for me tooth and nail and they have helped me every step of the way." Another said "I am loved no matter what."
- The staff and managers work very hard to help foster carers care for young people.
- The foster carer's homes where young people lived were warm and comfortable.
- Young people told inspectors that they felt safe living with foster carers and that any punishments were fair.
- Foster carers received enough money to look after the young people properly.
- Foster carers are able to do lots of training to help them to understand things that are important to young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The manager and staff in the fostering team have worked hard to make things better for young people.
- There are more social workers to help foster carers to look after young people and keep them safe.
- There are more foster carers for younger children so that they sometimes have a choice of placements.
- There are more foster carers from different backgrounds so that young people can be placed with people like themselves.
- Social workers in the Fostering team are working together to look at different way of helping foster carers to look after young people in a better way.

What they could do better:

- Young people told inspector that they would like to see their social workers more often. One young person said "My social worker has not been here."
- Social workers must give foster carers all the information they have about a young person's health and to keep them safe.
- Social workers must make sure that all the proper checks are done so that they know that staff and foster carers are safe to look after young people.
- There must be enough social workers to give foster carers plenty of support when they are looking after young people.
- The Fostering Service need to find more foster carers who will look after teenagers, so that they do not have to live in a children's home.
- The Fostering Service should look at how well a foster carer is doing their job every year so that if things need to change, they can get the right help to make things right.
- Social workers, foster carers and fostering social workers must write down how they will all help care for the young people living with foster carers so that they all know what needs doing.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The health needs of young people were well met through their foster carers, but the provision of medical information at the point of placement should be full and consistent to ensure no health needs are overlooked.

EVIDENCE:

Young people's health needs were well met by foster carers, with young people confirming that they received good health care and saw their GP, optician and dentist as required. Foster carers also reported that there had been an improvement in the access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) since the last inspection. The support provided by this service enables foster carers to better meet young people mental and emotional health.

Concern remains regarding the lack of information provided to foster carers by placing social workers, regarding a young person's health at the time of placement. On the majority of files viewed by inspectors Placement Plan 2 had not been completed or the information regarding the young person's health needs was scant. In one case the Placement Plan Part 2, which should contain detailed information regarding a young person's health, had only the young person's name, gender and date of birth completed on the form. This lack of information could put a young person's health at risk.

The Foster Carers' Handbook has been updated and includes clear information regarding the delegation of medical consent. Nonetheless, not all foster carers spoken to were fully aware of the arrangements for the consent of medical treatment for the young people placed with them. The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers are fully aware of these arrangements and the

need for foster carers to always seek consent for treatment. The updated information does not identify any circumstance where the delegation of consent could be made to a foster carer for even routine treatment. This is considered as good practice in respect of those young people who are in long-term placement. The Service should give further consideration to this.

In discussion with staff within the Fostering Service they were hopefully that the introduction of the Foster Placement Agreement and planning meetings held after 72 hours of placement should address the gaps in information. However, Foster Placement Agreements were not seen on any of the files seen by inspectors. Action must be taken to ensure that where placements have already been made that detailed information is available and appropriate consents are in place.

Foster carer's receive training in respect of first aid, infection control, drug awareness and encouraging young people's healthy living. Information is also available to foster carers regarding issues around young people's sexual health so that young people can be appropriately supported.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

6, 8, 9,15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The Fostering Service endeavours to keep young people safe and has improved its assessment processes to ensure that young people are appropriately cared for however, gaps in respect of updating checks and lack of matching may put young people at risk.

EVIDENCE:

Health and safety checks are undertaken as part of the assessment of foster carers and this is reviewed as part of foster carers annual reviews. These checks were generally seen on file, although the file of a family and friends foster carer did not contain a copy. There is an expectation that the health and safety arrangements in a foster carers home are inspected annually, however, this is not always taking place as required due to either delays in the review process and more often the timing of the 1st inspection, which is generally undertaken as the beginning of the assessment. This frequently results in a time delay of 18 months and occasionally up to 2 years between the initial assessment and subsequent inspections of a foster home's safety.

All foster homes visited as part of this inspection provided a high standard of accommodation and most young people had their own bedroom. Inspectors were told that the Fostering Service have made a decision that wherever

possible young people will have their own bedroom as the Service understands the risk of young people sharing a bedroom, when there may not be a full understanding of their background. However, inspectors visited 2 foster carers where young people were sharing a bedroom and in neither of these cases had a risk assessment been undertaken as required by previous inspections. Nonetheless, the Fostering Service has updated their referral form to ensure that this area is covered when making future placements. It is crucial that in those cases where placements were made prior to these changes, that the situation is reviewed and the risks assessed.

Improvements have been made to the process of matching young people's needs to the skills of the foster carer since the last inspection. This has been assisted by an increase in the numbers of foster carers available to care for younger children. The duty office ensures that the Service receives a detailed referral form from the young person's social worker and manually matches the young people with a suitable foster carer with a vacancy. Whilst this is generally an effective system it would be enhanced if this search were undertaken electronically and that the reason why a young person is matched with a foster carer is clearly recorded as part of the Foster Placement Agreement. It is also imperative that the Fostering Service and foster carers receive all appropriate documentation and LAC paperwork to ensure that foster carers are able to meet the needs of the young people placed. None of the foster carers visited had all the required documentation.

The Fostering Service has made improvements to their systems to ensure that where a young person has to be placed with a foster carer outside the carer's approval, a report is prepared and presented to the Fostering Panel for the approval of the new arrangements. Inspectors found that although the Foster Care Register was updated after the Panel, information on the foster carers files was not always updated. In one instance the foster carers letter of approval, the review documentation and the Foster Care Agreement all recorded the carer's approval incorrectly, even though the young people had been in placement for a number of years.

When the Fostering Service has to use an out of city placement with an Independent Fostering Provider, they use agency's who have entered into an agreement with the West Midlands Consortium. The prospective carers Form F is obtained but it is also recommended that the most recent foster home review is requested.

The authority has in place sound procedures for protecting children from abuse and neglect, which include child protection, anti-bullying, whistle blowing and complaints. Staff and carers are aware of these and their role in protecting children. Young people stated that sanctions were fair and that they felt safe placed with their foster carers. None of the young people spoken to during the inspection or who returned a questionnaire felt that they were being bullied.

Safe caring forms a part of foster carers preparation training, and other courses on caring for children who have been sexually abused are part of the continued training programme for carers. Each household has been sent a copy of the Fostering Network's booklet on Safe Care, but the Fostering Service has still not provided foster carers with a written policy in respect of Safe Care, consequently foster carers have not developed individual guidelines to keep young people and themselves safe.

Information received prior to the inspection confirmed that there had been 14 child protection investigations regarding young people placed with foster carers. These have all been investigated and appropriate action taken. Foster carers are able to access independent support from the Foster Care Centre.

Whilst workers and foster carers felt that there had been an improvement in the information provided to foster carers regarding any abuse a young person has suffered, there were still instances where this had not happened in a timely fashion. The suggestion in last year's inspection that this should be included in the risk assessment and an agenda item for the 72 hour meeting has not been addressed.

The Leisure department has now taken over responsibility for the Fostering Service's personnel files. A meeting between the department and inspectors from Commission for Social Care Inspection took place in August 2006, where guidance was given to the Service as to the expectations of the Commission. In light of this meeting it was agreed that the inspection of files would not take place during this inspection; this will be undertaken as part of a random inspection of personnel files for children's services in December 2006. The existing recommendation will therefore remain in place until this inspection has been undertaken.

The previous inspection stated that *"the review of personnel files on staff appointed to the service since the last inspection showed sound recruitment practices which served to ensure that those appointed were safe people to work with vulnerable children. Some, but not all of the written references had been followed up by phone and it is strongly recommended that this practice is adopted in every case.*

It was also noted that the Criminal Records Bureau checks should not be kept on the main file, but securely stored in a separate file and destroyed once the Commission for Social Care Inspection has had a chance to view them."

Examination of foster carers files evidenced that the Fostering Service does not have a robust system for ensuring that foster carer's CRB's checks are renewed as required. Additionally checks had not always been renewed on other adults within the foster home.

It was not practicable for the Fostering Panel to be observed as part of this inspection. This was due to the October Panel being cancelled due to the Panel

not being quorate. The inspector read the minutes of the last three Panel meetings. There was evidence that due to illness that the Panel had struggled to operate effectively and as with October's Panel, not sufficient members were available to allow the Panel to take place. The Fostering Service should review the membership of the Panel.

Examination of the personnel files of Panel members revealed that whilst CRB checks had been undertaken in respect of all members, in the majority of cases no further checks had been undertaken. The Fostering Service must undertake all checks required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 in Schedule 1.

Both these issues have already been identified by the Fostering Service as part of an action plan for improving the operation of the Fostering Panel.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people's individual needs are generally well met by the their foster carers, with foster carers providing good support to young people to enable them to meet their educational potential.

EVIDENCE:

The Service works within the Authority's procedures for promoting equality and diversity. Previous inspections have identified that there has been a lack of placements for young people from Black Ethnic Minority backgrounds. Since the last inspection the Fostering Service has made considerable efforts to recruit foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. This has led to a marked increase in enquiries from this section of the community, however, it is important for the authority to monitor how many of these enquiries eventually relate to actual foster carers.

Same race placements are promoted, but at the time of the inspection could not always be achieved. Those carers met by inspectors who were caring for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds were clear on their role in promoting and safeguarding the child's cultural and religious identity and dietary needs. However, as reported in previous inspections completed Placement Plans rarely showed awareness of racial identity issues or any plans for meeting any gaps, and this is an education issue for both placing social workers and the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service operate a specialist fostering scheme to provide short breaks for children with disabilities needing respite care. There is a dedicated worker for this scheme who is very committed and provided a high level of support for these carers. The scheme is closely integrated with the fostering service as a whole, but appropriate arrangements are made to cover some specialist areas. Carers attend the Skills To Foster training, and have a specially structured final session. The scheme has a 'respite care agreement' and information is provided to carers by parents in a respite care scheme booklet. The service had also been provided with written assessments of the child's needs in the form of initial and core assessments, which had enabled good matching to take place. Unfortunately the Service has had little success in recruiting carers specifically for the scheme. There have been no new carers recruited since the worker started two years ago. The worker informed the inspector that work is being undertaken to identify new ways of attracting foster carers to the scheme.

Evidence gained throughout the inspection indicated that young people were well supported by their foster carers in respect of their educational achievements. Some young people met as part of the inspection had achieved excellent results in external examinations and one young person commented that she would not have been able to do this without the support of her foster carers. Another young person visited had made considerable progress since his placement with foster carers and the school had remarked upon this at a recent review.

The majority of files contained a Personal Education Plan, this is an improvement on previous inspections. Where identified in a young person's Personal Education Plan, young people can receive additional support from the Looked After Children's Education team (LACE). However, one young person had been waiting for this work to commence for a number of months and this had still not commenced at the time of the inspection. One foster carer commented that she had not been consulted over a change of school for the young people placed with her. Both these issues require liaison between the fostering service and professionals in the respective teams so that there is a shared understanding and commitment to support young people placed with foster carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The Fostering Service and carers promote young people's contact with their family, however, further support is required to enable young people to maintain contact with their friends. Carers and the Fostering Service encourage young people to express their views regarding their care.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements were clearly defined on all files examined by inspectors; this information is clearly included in the Foster Placement Agreement, although Agreements were not seen on most of the files examined by inspectors. The Foster Placement Agreement includes a risk assessment regarding contact and how any risks can be minimised. Risk assessments were seen on some files. Contact arrangements are frequently supervised. Support for young people's contact with their families is provided directly by foster carers and also by the fostering service through the Foster Carer Centre.

Most young people spoken to during the inspection informed inspectors that they were happy with the arrangements for contact with their families. One young person, who was unhappy about the level to contact with her family, had been supported to challenge the arrangements at her review. Young people commented that they found it more difficult to maintain contact with friends, due to the distances involved and that they had often moved school when placed with foster carers. The Fostering Service has recently updated its guidance to foster carers regarding young people staying overnight with friends and this is now in line with government guidance.

All the young people spoken to as part of the inspection felt part of the family they were placed with and most stated that their foster carers listened to their views and helped them. One young person stated in their questionnaire "my foster carers fight for me tooth and nail and they have helped me every step of the way." Another said "I am loved no matter what." In addition most young people felt that their social workers listened to them but a number felt that social workers did not take their views into consideration or were not available when they were needed. One young person stated that the social worker was "never there when I need her." Another young person stated, "My social worker has not been here."

Young people in foster care have been issued with a Guide to Fostering, which provides an explanation how to make a complaint. This includes the option of approaching the Commission for Social Care Inspection and has the address and phone numbers of the local offices. However, this should be updated in light of the closure of the Wolverhampton office.

Work has been undertaken to ensure that young people are encouraged and supported to be involved in consultations as part of foster carers annual review. At the time of the inspection new consultation forms had been designed and were currently being consulted on prior to implementation. It is intended that 4 different formats for different age groups will be used. This should make them far more accessible to young people.

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 and 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people were being supported to move successfully into independent living and young people's needs were being adequately met through the allowances paid.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service informed inspectors that all young people who required a Pathway Plan had one. In respect of the young people seen by inspectors this was definitely the case and young people confirmed that they had been involved in developing their Pathway Plans.

Foster carers receive training and support from the Foster Care Centre's Moving on Group to assist them in supporting young people to move successfully into adult life.

Foster carers stated that they received adequate financial support for caring for young people and that this meets the needs of the young person in placement. One foster carer stated that there had been problems in respect of initial payments to provide necessary clothing for young people placed in an emergency. Whilst foster carers are re-imbursed for the amounts spent it is usually assumed that foster carers are able to meet such expenditures and receive payment afterwards. The Fostering Service should ensure that they are sensitive to foster carer's financial situations and discuss whether an immediate cash payment needs to be made to cover emergency purchases.

Inspectors were informed that allowances paid to foster carers are now higher than Fostering Network recommended rate. A review of allowances and fees is

still taking place. This must be handled sensitively to ensure that the Fostering Service is not only able to recruit foster carers but to retain them.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Management and support of staff and carers is good, however, a shortage of qualified staff and foster carers restricts the improvements within the service and hence the quality of care for young people.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service has undergone considerable re-structuring since the last inspection. The Responsible Individual has retired and the Nominated Manager has moved to another management post within the Local Authority. A Head of Service has been appointed, but he has little experience of fostering. The part time post of Deputy Head of Service is currently vacant. The Fostering Team is managed by an experienced and competent team manager. She is supported by two Practice Managers, one who is responsible for supervision and support and the other for duty and assessment of carers. The evidence of the inspection, including feedback from staff, was that these managers were providing excellent leadership, management and staff care. Nonetheless, it is imperative that the Service identifies a Nominated Manager and Responsible Individual and informs the Commission for Social Care Inspection of these arrangements.

Due to the changes within the management arrangements within the Fostering Service, there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities to enable the development of a strategic over view and plan for the service.

The inspectors were impressed with the commitment of all workers and high morale within the Fostering Service. Staff reported being well supported by both their colleagues within the team and by managers. All staff have engaged in project work to assist in the development of the Service, even though they all have very high caseloads. Staff all reported receiving regular, planned supervision, and participated in regular team meetings, some of which had a training content. The Fostering Service also has good employment practices in the service and there is a comprehensive Health & Safety policy in place.

Whilst there has been additional staff employed as part of the team to assist in the effective delivery of the Service, the Fostering Service remains understaffed. Many of the requirements and recommendations made as a result of this inspection have been made in areas already identified by the Service but which they are unable to rectify due to a shortage of staff.

Due to financial constraints the Fostering Service has a high reliance on unqualified staff, with only two full-time qualified social workers to provide supervision to over 120 foster carers. Two members of staff who predominantly undertake assessments of new foster carers have been requested to supervise 10 foster carers each in addition to their assessment work. This still results in the Fostering Service being unable to provide qualified workers to provide supervision to all the Friends and Family foster carers. This is a considerable concern as these fostering arrangements are often complex and may have a number of issues regarding the safety of young people placed.

The assessments of new foster carers, undertaken by dedicated social workers, were seen to be of a good quality, but lacked any discussion of medical and health issues, which may impact on the applicants ability to undertake the fostering task. Reports must also contain more robust analysis of the applicant's skills to help the Fostering Service ensure that foster carers are appropriately approved and to ensure that there is a range of skills, which enables foster carers to meet the needs of young people placed.

Whilst the Fostering Service is likely to meet targets set for recruiting new foster carers, examination of records indicate that due to foster carers resigning or having their approval terminated, the overall number of foster carers available for placements remains the same. Staff informed the inspectors that whilst it is often possible to offer a choice of placement for the lower age range of young people requiring a placement, there are a lack of foster carers willing to provide placements for teenagers. As a consequence, these young people are often placed inappropriately. Inspectors were informed that young people had on occasions been placed inappropriately within residential placements, as there were no available foster placements. As highlighted earlier in the report there is also a shortage of foster carers within the Shared Care Scheme. The Fostering Service must ensure that they target their recruitment to meet these specific areas.

Both staff and foster carers informed inspectors that they were able to access appropriate training. Preparation training for prospective carers was provided using the Skills to Foster course. A number of staff and carers had participated in the Training For Trainers programme provided by Fostering Network for this course. From February 2005 the Fostering Service had entered into partnership with three other Black Country authorities in providing this training, so that a course was available each month, at varying times and in different locations, to increase choice for prospective carers. Post approval training is comprehensive and foster carers are required to undertake 8 mandatory training courses in their first year as foster carers and 6 in each subsequent year. Foster carers receive a payment for each of the training courses that they attend.

Foster carers informed inspectors that they were well supported in their task by the fostering team. Foster carers receive 3 monthly visits from a support worker and also from a supervising social worker, consequently a visit is undertaken on a 6 weekly basis, or more often if this is required. All foster carers also receive an unannounced visit from their supervising social worker at least annually. The Fostering Service had developed a very useful supervision document which is split into the 5 Every Child Matters headings and all parties commented that this enable the needs of the young people in placement to be monitored. Foster carers also receive excellent support from the Foster Care Centre.

The Fostering Service has developed a useful and informative Foster Care Agreement and this was seen on most files but not on the file of the Family and Friends foster carers visited by inspectors. Additionally, on some foster carers files the original Foster Care Agreement had not been updated with the new Agreement.

The Fostering Service has established the excellent practice of providing an Independent Chair for Foster Home Reviews. The reviewing officer seeks the views of placing social workers, supervising social worker, the training officer and the children of carers. As reported earlier in the report, consultation documents for the young people placed with foster carers have been updated and are now child friendly documents and age appropriate. However, there were 29 foster home reviews outstanding at the time of the inspection, with 7 of these reviews being over 2 years overdue and some are 3 years overdue.

The records for children are maintained by the area social workers and the fostering service holds a small folder of key information. Neither the records held by the Fostering team or the files held by area social workers contained all the Looked After Children paperwork required. There was no Foster Placement Agreement on all but one young person's file. Some of the files were not well organised with information not being filed in the correct sections. It was therefore difficult for inspectors to find relevant information regarding young people. This would be helped if cross-referencing were used to identify where important information may be kept. Evidence gained during the inspection indicated that a number of young people did not have an allocated social worker, with one young person not having had a social worker since he was placed with foster carers in October 2005.

Foster carer's files were generally up to date and well organised, however, as identified in other part of this report, some information was missing or needed updating on some of the files viewed by inspectors.

The Fostering Service maintains a Foster Carer Register, which covers all the required information, except the dates of all foster home reviews as required by the last inspection.

The Fostering Service is responsible for a considerable number of friends and family foster carers, however, due to staff shortages they are not supervised by a qualified social worker. This is not acceptable as there is a requirement that family and friends foster carers are supported in the same way as all other foster carers.

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 | 2 |

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

| 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 | 3 |

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

Yes

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

| No. | Standard | Regulation | Requirement | Timescale for action |
|-----|----------|------------|--|----------------------|
| 1. | FS12 | 15 & 17 | The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers are given appropriate information regarding the state of health/health needs of any young person placed or to be placed with them | 10/01/07 |
| 2. | FS8 | 33(b) | The responsible person must ensure that the Service has complete LAC documentation, including Care Plan, for each child placed. Timescale of 13.1.05 not met | 10/12/06 |
| 3. | FS8 | 34(3) | The Fostering Service must ensure that Foster Placement Agreements are completed for all placements and include details of the matching process. | 10/01/07 |
| 4. | FS9 | 12(1)(a) | The Fostering Service must ensure that information is provided on LAC forms and other documents supplied to carers to adequately meet each child's protection needs. Timescale of 13.1.05 not met. | 10/12/06 |
| 5. | FS15 | 27 | The Fostering Service must ensure that there is a robust system for renewing CRB checks for all foster carers and adults | 10/12/06 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------|---------------------|---|----------|
| | | | within a foster carer's home. | |
| 6. | FS30 | 20 Schedule 1 | The Fostering Service must ensure that all panel members have checks carried out in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1 | 10/12/06 |
| 7. | FS4 | 10 | The Fostering Service must identify a Responsible Individual and Nominated Manager for the Service and inform the Commission for Social Care Inspection. | 10/12/06 |
| 8. | FS17 | 19 | The Fostering Service must ensure that it has sufficient staff to operate effectively. | 10/02/07 |
| 9. | FS17 | 33 | The Fostering Service must ensure that there are sufficient foster carers with the right skills to meet the needs of older young people requiring a foster placement. | 10/02/07 |
| 10. | FS17 | 27 Sch 3 | The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carer assessments contain all elements identified in Schedule 3, including exploration of the impact of health issues. | 10/01/07 |
| 11. | FS21 | 29 | The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis. | 10/02/07 |
| 12. | FS22 | 28 (5)(b) | The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers sign the updated Foster Care Agreement and that a copy is kept on file to evidence this. | 10/01/07 |
| 13. | FS24 | 34 (3) Sch 6 | The Fostering Service must ensure that all young people in placement have a Foster Placement Agreement, which covers all issues required by the Regulations. | 10/01/07 |
| 14. | FS24 | 19 | The Authority must ensure that there is a sufficient number of competent and experienced social workers so that all Looked After Children are supported by a social worker. | 10/02/07 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------|----------|---|----------|
| 15. | FS25 | 31(2)(b) | The register of foster carers must include the dates of all reviews of approval since April 2002. Timescale of 3.11.05 not met | 10/02/07 |
| 16. | FS32 | 19 | The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers including friends and family foster carers are supervised by an appropriately qualified social worker. | 10/02/07 |

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. | FS12 | The Fostering Service should ensure that all foster carers are fully aware of the arrangements for the delegation of medical consent for young people. |
| 2. | FS12 | The Fostering Service should consider the delegation of medical consent to foster carers for routine treatment for young people in long term placement where this is appropriate. |
| 3. | FS6 | The Fostering Service should ensure that a review of the safety of foster carers home is undertaken on an annual basis. |
| 4. | FS6 | The Fostering Service in conjunction with placing social workers should ensure that a risk Assessment is undertaken in respect of all young people in placement who share a bedroom. |
| 5. | FS8 | The Fostering Service should consider the use of an electronic system of identifying foster carers who have a vacancy to enable detailed matching to take place. |
| 6. | FS8 | The Fostering Service should obtain the most recent foster home review when considering a placement with foster carers from an Independent Fostering Provider in addition to the Form F. |
| 7. | FS9 | A policy should be written, and safe caring guidelines drawn up for each foster home, agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child. |
| 8. | FS15 | Written references should be followed up by telephone. |
| 9. | FS15 | CRB checks should be files separately and securely, and |

| | | |
|-----|------|--|
| | | destroyed once viewed by CSCI. |
| 10 | FS30 | The Fostering Service should review the composition of the Fostering Panel to ensure that it can operate effectively. |
| 11. | FS7 | The Fostering Service should ensure that young people's racial, ethnic and religious needs are recorded and how any gaps can be met. |
| 12. | FS11 | The Fostering Service should amend the Guide to Fostering to ensure that it accurately reflects the current arrangements for contacting the Commission for Social Care Inspection. |
| 13. | FS19 | Fostering Support Workers should receive training in legislation and practice in relation to fostering. |
| 14. | FS25 | Foster carer files should be checked as soon as possible, and any inaccuracies and omissions corrected. |
| | | |

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