



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Hertfordshire County Council Fostering Service**

**County Hall  
Hertford  
Hertfordshire  
SG13 8DP**

*Lead Inspector*  
Marian Byrne

*Announced Inspection*  
1st February 2006 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 2006      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

**Name of service** Hertfordshire County Council Fostering Service

**Address** County Hall  
Hertford  
Hertfordshire  
SG13 8DP

**Telephone number** 01992 555555

**Fax number**

**Email address**

**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Hertfordshire County Council

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Karen Devereux

**Type of registration** Local Auth Fostering Service

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      24th November 2004

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

Hertfordshire Family Placement Service provides a service responsive to the needs of children who require a family placement. It aims to recruit sufficient carers to offer placement choice; aims to provide a placement that meets cultural, religious and racial background, where possible to provide local placements to maintain family networks.

The service operates from four premises within the county quadrants and provides respite care, short-term placements and kinship as well as long-term placements.

# SUMMARY

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

This was a very positive inspection. The inspection was carried out on various dates throughout the month of February 2006. The inspection including visits to foster children, foster carers, County Hall and to two local offices, the inspector attended one fostering panel. This was the fourth inspection of the Hertfordshire County Council Children, Schools and Families Family Placement Team (Fostering Service). The requirements left at the last inspection were met. Two additional requirements were left following this inspection. Where standards were not inspected, where standards were met or no changes have occurred full details can be obtained from the inspection report dated March 2005. The Service Manager has a background in the management of children's services. She has the appropriate qualifications including an NVQ 5 in management. Staff spoken with during this inspection were positive about the manner in which they are managed. The family placement team adheres to the comprehensive County Council policies and procedures – copies have been provided of the relevant documents. The Family Placement Service operates from three premises within the county and provides respite care, short-term placements, kinship as well as long-term placements. This inspection focused on one area office. All children and foster carers in this area were sent a questionnaire. Questionnaires were sent to all offices where there are placing officers (social workers). Approximately 30% of questionnaires were returned. All the children confirmed that they were satisfied with their placement. All stated that they were given choices and could contribute to how they lived their lives and all stated that they were given opportunities to wear clothes of their choice. This was confirmed on visits to children. Most confirmed that they were aware of their placement plan and educational plan. Where applicable, they were working towards a leaving care plan. All young people confirmed that they were able to participate in their review if they chose to. Some issues were raised in the questionnaires and they were passed to the service manager to follow up. No issues of a serious nature were raised. Foster carers questionnaire and visits confirmed that they were aware of the young person's care plan. Most were positive about the recruitment process. All confirmed that they had received a thorough assessment, induction, training and on-going supervision from the family placement worker. All confirmed that they were aware of the young person's care plan. Most were positive about the recruitment process although some stated it had taken far longer than anticipated. All confirmed that they had received a thorough assessment, induction, training and on-going supervision from the family placement worker. The inspector attended a foster panel where two placements were presented.

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

All foster carers stated that they were well supported by their social workers and that they had regular supervision. Those spoken with said that when their social worker was unavailable that there was always a duty worker available to offer support. Training was said to be very good and very relevant. All staff spoken with were very welcoming and appeared to be very dedicated to offering the best possible service to both the children and foster carers. The staffing group is well established and there is little turnover of staff resulting in a service that can offer an excellent knowledge of the foster carers, ensuring that making matching children to carers is based on this knowledge. The registered manager kept in touch with the inspector throughout the inspection received the feedback from the inspection with interest getting as much detail as possible and had started to act on this before the inspection finished.

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

The last inspection was very positive, the requirements left at the last inspection were met.

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

The inspector inspected four staffing files. These were very difficult to follow and to ascertain if the necessary security and identity checks had been carried out. The Agency is reminded that this information must be available for inspection. Foster carer's files inspected did not contain details of health and safety reviews. Foster carers informed the inspector that the review does take place, however this evidence of this must be included in their on files.

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 outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

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

The fostering service ensures that foster children receive health care to ensure

### **EVIDENCE:**

The documentation provided as part of the inspection process included extensive information for both young people and foster carers on promoting health and social development. This is also included in the initial training programme for foster carers and is included in the handbook 'What Carers Need to Know'. One supervising social worker mentioned in the questionnaire sent out that he had concerns regarding the health of foster children who were placed with a family of heavy smokers. While it is understood that Hertfordshire's policy is to avoid placing children under three with families where there are smokers, it is recommended that there is training on the dangers of passive smoking to children.

## Staying Safe

### The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3,6,8,9,15,30.

Foster children are protected throughout the fostering process.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

There has been no change in management of the service since the last inspection (March 2005). The Manager of the Service has extensive experience having been a practising childcare social worker in the Local Authority for 10 years - specialising in looking after children- prior to her appointment to a management post and subsequently to Head of Family Placement. She was recruited by Hertfordshire's County Council and has been subject to Local Authority security checks. All prospective foster homes are visited prior to approval. There was no evidence on files inspected to indicate that Health and Safety risk assessments were reviewed annually, though families visited assured the inspector that these reviews do take place. Homes visited by the inspectors met the requirements of this standard in so far as they were comfortable, warm, and of a good standard of cleanliness.

Except in the case of emergency placements, care is taken to match young people taking into account the young person's care plan. All appropriate paperwork was in place. There has been no change in how the foster panels operate. Foster children are protected from abuse. There have been no changes in the past year in training offered to foster carers.

The personnel records of Family Placement Service staff are maintained centrally by Children, Schools and Families', Personnel Department at County Hall.

Four files were selected randomly and seen to comply with schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations with the exception of one file had no photograph of worker, another had no identification papers, and another had no evidence of qualifications.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

7,13,31.

Foster children are fostered in an environment of valuing educational achievements, diversity. Short-term breaks are available for parents as main carers.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There have been no changes to policies and procedures since the last inspection where all the standards were met (March 2005). Efforts are made to match children appropriately culturally and with regard to ethnic background where practicable. Comprehensive information for foster carers is provided. Currently there are a number of children being fostered out of County, plans are to have these children, where appropriate, returned to foster carers in Hertfordshire are successful. This process is driven by the appropriateness of the placements and by the high cost of funding out of County placements. Personal Educational Plans (PEP) are the responsibility of the placing social worker. A number of the young people stated on their questionnaire that foster carers assisted them with their homework. One older foster child spoken was keen to pursue a career in sport he was helped in this by his foster carers who ensured that he was supported to pursue sport in his free time.

A Shared Care Scheme provides short breaks to disabled children.

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

10,11.

Contact arrangements are in place for foster children. Children are consulted over issues relating to their lives.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Where appropriate HCC promotes, encourages and facilitate contact between Looked After Children their families of origin and others who have played an important part in their lives. Contact arrangements were seen to be included in the LAC care plan. Children spoken with confirmed that contact with their family of origin is maintained, or not maintained if it is their wish or in their best interests. Children's views are sought where possible. The difficulty in obtaining the children's views was highlighted in the questionnaire from the children which indicated that they wanted to be regarded as ordinary children and did not want to participate in any activity that sets them apart.

# **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)

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

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

29.

The payments to foster carers are clear and transparent.

**EVIDENCE:**

All foster carers spoken to during the inspection were aware of the expenses/allowances and stated that they were paid on time.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17,21,24.

The Hertfordshire Family Placement Service is competently and appropriately managed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There are sufficient appropriately qualified staff in the family placements teams, this was also verified by the majority of inspection questionnaires returned. There has been no change to County Council personnel policies and procedures in place covering supervision, training etc since the last inspection. The inspector found that the policies and procedures were followed. All foster carers spoken confirmed that they were well supported, received regular supervision and found communicating with their social workers and the office staff easy and productive. Files examined during the inspection contained the assessment and approval information. The appropriate references and checks were also found to be maintained on foster carer files inspected during the inspection. Case files in the Family Placement Team are very dependent upon the information passed from the young person's social worker. However, all files examined contained the information required. Records are appropriately maintained and stored.



# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	3

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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	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>	X
<b>2</b>	X
<b>4</b>	X
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	X
<b>17</b>	3
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	X
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	3
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	X
<b>25</b>	X
<b>26</b>	X
<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	15	5, 7 & 20	The Registered Manager must ensure that staffing files contain all identity and security information detailed in Schedule 1 of Regulations 5, 7 & 20.	30/04/06
2	6	34	The Registered Manager must ensure that there is evidence on file to evidence that annual health and safety checks are carried out on homes where foster children are placed.	30/04/06

**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	6	The Registered Manager should ensure that all foster carers who smoke are aware of the dangers of passive smoking on children.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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