



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Blackburn with Darwen Fostering Service**

**Jubilee House  
Jubilee Street  
Blackburn  
BB1 1ET**

*Lead Inspector*  
Jeff Banham

*Announced Inspection*  
18th September 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

<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

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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Blackburn with Darwen Social Services
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      11th October 2005

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

Blackburn with Darwen Fostering Service forms part of the Borough's services to children and families. A designated team of staff, the Family Placement Team (Fostering), work specifically to provide the service. Social workers from the team act as 'link workers' providing support, advice, direction and supervision to foster carers.

The Head of Service, Family Support & Permanence, leads the team with everyday management the responsibility of the Team Manager(s). This post was designated as a job share post and was held by two people. Along with the managers, the team consisted of 1.5 principal social workers, 5 social workers, a foster care support co-ordinator, a foster care support officer and a recruitment officer.

At the time of the site visit the team was working with 113 approved households who provided 210 fostering places. Between them they were looking after 96 female and 76 male fostered children.

# SUMMARY

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

The site visit took place over a week and was part of the service's annual key inspection.

The inspector spoke with the Head of Operations, one of the two team managers, one Principal social worker, two "link" workers, the Duty Manager, the manager of one of the family support teams, the chairperson of the fostering panel and one of the panel members, and four local authority foster carers.

The fostering panel met during the week of the site visit and the inspector was present for the whole meeting.

Records relating to foster carers, children and staff were seen.

Survey questionnaires were received from ten placing social workers, three foster carers and three children.

Each section or "*outcome area*" in this report contains a judgement about the quality of the service provided. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence, including the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment and Dataset provided by the Head of Operations as part of the inspection process.

The overall quality of the service provided is adequate.

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

The service has developed effective systems for ensuring children's health and education needs are identified and met. There is a range of resources available to provide good systems of communication and support for carers and children and their education, and there a number of staff who can help carers promote the development of a child's potential.

A number of initiatives have been developed to promote and develop resources for creating effective relationships with the authority's diverse cultural, racial and ethnic population. The numbers of carers from the Muslim community has increased, and this provides a better range of resources for children.

Information to carers is good, and carers say that the system of payments and allowances is good.

The lease care system provides thirty vehicles to support carers in meeting the contact and general transport needs of the children for whom they care.

Systems for consulting with and involving children are good, with regular consultation with groups of children and other facilities to ensure they are engaged and involved.

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

The participation of children in their reviews has improved, and the Department has worked hard to increase the rate of participation of young people in decisions affecting their care.

Work to develop relations with the Muslim community has improved relationships with a group of people who constitute a significant part of the Borough.

The development of specialist health services has resulted in better health care for looked after children.

The payment of fostering allowances has been linked to mandatory training modules for carers in order to improve their involvement in training. A training package has been developed that should encourage more "family and friends" carers to undergo competency based assessment and to access increased fostering allowances.

Competency-based assessments have now been introduced for all new carers.

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

The key area for improvement is the development of the role and responsibilities of the fostering service's "link worker." A more specific list of tasks would enable all staff and carers to understand the difference between "support" and "supervision." This in turn should improve support for carers and the establishment of systems for developing and monitoring good practice. This could lead to better relationships between the various parts of the services for children, and enable link workers to play a greater part in care planning for children.

The management of the service could be better. Significant positions in senior management were vacant at the time of the site visit, and this resulted in a

reduction of the ability to provide the amount of management time to focus on the support and development of the fostering service. Within the team the role and responsibilities of the team managers and principal social workers could be reviewed to make the management of the team more focussed and systematic.

Systems for managing the work being presented to the fostering Panel could be improved in order to increase the quality of reports, and the Panel could undertake training and development to improve the effectiveness of its operation and to enable it to provide a quality assurance function to the fostering service.

The reviewing of foster carers could become more robust and effective with the involvement of an independent reviewing officer.

Systems for recruiting, assessing and supporting "family and friends" carers could be reviewed in order to increase the numbers of these carers involved in the service, to provide more involvement of these carers in training and development, and to improve working practices between the fostering service and the children's teams.

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:

12

The service provided in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence including the site visit.

Carers are supported by link workers to ensure that children's health care needs are identified and met. Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities in supporting children.

The system of documentation given to and completed by carers needs to be more rigorously monitored to ensure children are safely cared for and carers have all necessary consents.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The *Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA)* said that 96% of looked after children in foster care have an annual health assessment undertaken by either a health visitor or school nurse.

Children's files showed that health needs were identified as part of the assessment process, and the records of the statutory reviews for "Looked after Children" demonstrated that health issues were taken into account, that foster carers and social workers worked to ensure proper care and treatment was provided where it was required, and that a child's progress was regularly monitored.

Children were registered with a GP, dentist and an optician where necessary.

Training is provided for carers on a child's health and development. A rolling programme of training includes sessions on the mental health needs of young people and talking to young people about sex and relationships. Carers and children are supported by the specialist LAC nurse who is able to offer advice and guidance and can liaise with all health services.

One young child has considerable health care needs including gastric tube feeding; developmental delay, blindness, brain and other organ damage and has epileptic seizures. The foster carer is able to provide effective and dedicated care that ensures the child's health care needs are met. The foster

carer has not been given all the "Looked after children" (LAC) documentation that is required by the Department's written policies and procedures. The absence of "LAC" documentation is a significant feature of the placements seen as part of the site visit. (see "Staying Safe" below.) In this case the lack of documentation means that the carer does not have signed medical consent to treatment, even though the child is subject to a Care Order. There was however no evidence that the child's care had ever been compromised as a result.

The carer has developed considerable knowledge about the child's complex and constant care needs and demonstrates an ability to care that ensures the child is well cared for. The detailed knowledge of his daily care has however never been written down. This means there is a potential for problems to arise should the carer be unable to care for him, even temporarily for whatever reason. The monitoring of records held and kept by carers is covered later in the section on "Management".

Placing social workers provided comments about foster care placements. One wrote that "*carers are supported by link workers to ensure healthy lives are led in the placement and the child's health needs and dietary requirements are given to the carer at placement.*"

Another wrote, "*Foster carers provide help with healthy eating and exercise.*"

The Head of Operations wrote in the AQAA completed by him "*Access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is not as effective as it should be. The development of the LAC Psychology service is intended to address this issue but progress has been slower than anticipated.*"

## 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 and 30.

The service in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence including the site visit.

The "LAC" system needs to be more rigorously implemented to ensure carers have all the information on children placed with them and risks to them and children are minimised.

The operation of the fostering Panel could be reviewed and developed to enable it to continue to provide an effective quality assurance function to the fostering service.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The local authority has clear recruitment and selection procedures that ensure people working in the fostering service are safe to do so. Staff files demonstrate that all checks and references are undertaken, that CRB checks are updated, and that telephone validation of references is done.

Written health and safety checks are undertaken by social workers as part of the initial assessment and approval process. Records of the checks are kept on file and considered as part of the foster carer annual review.

Foster carer training covers health and safety issues and carers are clear about the importance of this area, and their responsibilities to keep children safe.

All of the foster carers' homes that were visited as part of the site visit were clean, adequately furnished and well maintained. Children have their own rooms that are well equipped and personalised.

The authority provides a number of lease vehicles to enable carers to be able to transport numbers of children. This significant resource is managed from within the fostering team and is clearly appreciated by carers.

Blackburn and Darwen Children's Services uses the "Looking After Children" (*LAC*) system of documentation to provide carers with information about the child for whom they were caring. The specifics of this system, and what documents were required and when, are set out in the foster carers' handbook. Each carer seen as part of the site visit had various parts of this information missing, or never having been provided, despite some placements being in existence for some time. Foster carers were not able to easily access the information, and in none of the four homes visited was it stored securely. This was pointed out early on the Head of Operations who ordered secure lockable storage for every foster carer. The boxes were delivered before the end of the site visit.

The lack of complete and thorough information available to carers means that the system is not operating effectively, and this presents a potential risk for carers and children.

**See requirement 1**

In addition, the absence of *LAC* information means that some carers do not have clear written medical consent to treatment for a child (see "*Being Healthy*" above) and foster placement agreements were not completed for every placement.

**See requirement 2**

It is recommended that copies of the foster placement agreement should be located on foster carers' files so that more effective monitoring can take place.

**See recommendation 1**

The service has developed its work on promoting equality and diversity and ensuring that a number of carers are available to meet the needs of a multi-racial community. Carers are recruited from a range of backgrounds. Training and support is provided for carers taking placements from outside their racial, cultural or ethnic group. Links have been established with local Muslim organisations, a representative of which sat on the fostering Panel.

Written comments were received from placing social workers who felt that there were not enough carers available to meet the needs of all the children for whom the service required placements.

It is recognised that the service must continue to work hard to ensure that a range of carers is available to meet the needs of children who come into the

“looked after” system. The service has developed a recruitment and retention strategy and monitors the effectiveness of its recruitment efforts. In addition the authority has a Commissioning Strategy that enables placements of children to be made with approved external providers should no foster carer be able to meet a child’s needs.

Each foster home has its own safe care policy that is based on the fostering service’s guidance on safe care. Carers were aware that corporal punishment was not permitted, and this was clearly set out in the foster carer agreement. Social workers said that risk assessments on children are completed as part of the initial placement request. Written risk assessments or behaviour management strategies were not held on the files that were seen, and were not available as part of the written documents held by carers. It did not appear that systematic reviewing and updating of written risk assessments is undertaken. One social worker said that risk assessments should be updated as part of the care planning process, but that this could be a “*bit loose*” at times.

**(Refer to requirement 1)**

The fostering Panel meets monthly. The inspector attended a meeting of the Panel during the site visit. It was well administered and chaired, and was quorate. The minutes of the previous meeting indicated that there had been a problem with quoracy, but it had had gone ahead. The issue of quoracy had also been raised at the inspection last year. The Panel Chair said the issue was recognised as significant, and that she was aware of the implications of the Panel not having enough members, The Chair said the Panel would not be able to meet if it were not quorate.

Staff felt that aspects of the management of documentation could be improved. It is not clear to everyone who the “Panel Gatekeeper” is, or that timescales for submitting documents are clear or routinely observed. Monitoring of the reports submitted to panel appears to vary, and responsibility for managing the quality monitoring system could be made more explicit.

**See recommendation 2**

The Head of Operations said that there had been some difficulty in obtaining appropriate medical advice for the Panel. There was no medical adviser present on the day, and a qualified medical practitioner does not routinely see medical reports on carers. This means that Panel may not have access to all the information it requires to make sound decisions about carers and placements.

**See recommendation 3**

The Chair said that the Panel had not had an opportunity to undertake specific training relating to its functions and the way it works as a team. The Panel has not developed a specific and systematic role in providing a quality assurance function to the fostering service. In order to do this it needs

an opportunity to review its own work and to enable its members to be clear about their roles and responsibilities and explore the ways in which they work together to approve carers and place children.

The Head of Operations recognised that the role of the Panel in monitoring placement availability and the aggregated needs of children requiring placements is underdeveloped. He also felt that the quality assurance function of the Panel could be more robust. It has been the practice of the Head of Service to provide feedback to workers and managers whose reports to Panel or performance at Panel has been an issue.

**See recommendation 4**

# 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 and 31

The service provided in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using all available evidence including the site visit.

The fostering service has developed its resources to ensure it is able to meet a child's ethnic, cultural and religious needs.

The policies and practices of the service promote educational achievement and provide a framework within which a range of professionals work with carers to enhance every child's potential.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The service's Statement of Purpose sets out the framework of anti-discriminatory practice within which it operates. Foster carers receive training in the importance of promoting a child's religion, language and culture and helping children to develop the skills to deal with discrimination.

The service has good links with the Muslim community through the Muslim Welfare Institute. A representative of the Institute sits on the fostering Panel, and was able to describe to the inspector the ways in which the Institute and the fostering service work together to promote religious and cultural understanding, to ensure carers are supported and that children's diverse needs are met. The Institute has published a number of articles about fostering that have been jointly developed with the fostering service, and these have raised the profile of fostering in the Muslim community.



Care plans and reviews describe the issues relating to children's religious and cultural needs and that individual hobbies and activities are appropriate to their religion and culture.

The service is able to use interpreters and the recruitment of carers from the ethnic community is increasing. One foster carer looks after a young Muslim child. She was able to describe the issues relating to his specific care, and as there were significant health care needs she had been assisted with understanding the cultural issues relating to all aspects of his care.

The information provided for the inspection shows that all "looked after children" have an allocated school place and that 99% attend school. There have been 33 fixed period exclusions and one permanent exclusion by an out-of-Borough school. Informal exclusions have been eradicated.

There are five Education Support Workers in the "LAC" Education Team, and attendance of children is monitored through a service level agreement with an organisation that contacts every school each day and reports any absence to the carer and social worker.

The service has homework clubs for looked after children and has provided individual tuition for a number of children.

The fostering service has commissioned a looked after children inclusion project from Play and Recreation Services of the borough council and this develops and updates play and leisure plans and assists children to sport and leisure activities.

Care plans and other children's records describe children's educational needs and the support provided by carers and social workers to ensure education is promoted and children's potential is achieved.

The service has an educational psychologist for looked after children. 87% of children in foster care have Personal Education Plan (PEP) and training with other professionals has been undertaken to ensure carers are involved in the preparation of PEPs.

Each child that is doing a SATS test at the end of the current school year has been allocated an education support worker and they monitor progress every month.

The service provides short break care for children with disabilities who live with their parents. One social worker wrote "*The link worker works very closely with the child's social worker and the parents in the planning stages to ensure the child's needs are met.*"

The practices and policies of short break care are based on the notion that parents remain the most significant people in the child's life, and the purpose of each placement is to support parents in continuing to look after their child.

# **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 and 11

The service provided in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence, including the site visit.

The service has a range of policies and practices that ensure that children can maintain contact with significant people where this is in their best interests. A number of initiatives have been developed to involve children and young people in the processes that affect their lives, and as a result there is better and more effective consultation with them.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers are given clear guidance on the importance of promoting and maintaining contact for children with significant people, particularly their parents. Contact needs and issues are identified in assessment and care planning documentation, and the regular statutory reviews cover issues relating to contact.

Carers can use a lease vehicle to facilitate transport for contact. Foster carers were able to describe the arrangements that children have for contact, and were clear about their responsibilities in ensuring contact takes place. Some carers said they had parents to their house for contact meetings.

Given that the issue of the lack of written information given to carers has been identified above, the service should review the availability of documentation on legal orders and restrictions of contact for foster carers to ensure they have all the information they need to help keep children safe.

## **See recommendation 5**

The Department has established a Consultation group allowing looked after children to help design more effective ways of consulting them. The Group

produces a newsletter, "Your Voice", that is distributed to "looked after children" throughout the borough. Consultation also takes place through the "In Care" group that is operated jointly with the National Youth Advocacy Children's Rights service.

The council has an "Engaging Young People policy Officer" who has ensured that "looked after children" are included in the wider consultation process. Social workers said that children were encouraged to participate in the processes that affected the decisions about their lives, and that the percentage of children participating in their own reviews has increased substantially.

# 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 service provided in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence including the site visit.

The policies and practices of the fostering service, and the rates of payments and allowances, support carers in meeting the costs of caring for children.

### EVIDENCE:

The service has clear information about the rates and allowances paid to carers and this is published in the foster carers' guidance. Rates are reviewed every year.

Information on payment slips has been revised so that foster carers now get a more detailed breakdown of the money they have received and are able to check if they have been paid the correct amount.

Carers say they are paid in full and on time so that they are supported in meeting the costs of caring for children. When discrepancies or errors occur they are rectified quickly. Every carer spoken with said they were satisfied with the payment system. Carers recognised that there were different rates available depending on levels of training undertaken and the complexity of the cases in which carers were involved.

The authority pays an annual retention bonus of £600 to all level 2 carers and above.

The Head of Operations said that some "friends and families" carers are not satisfied with the level of allowances they receive. The current payment structure requires carers who wish to progress from level 1 to level 2 to undergo a competency-based assessment. Although some have chosen to do this, the majority do not wish to do so.



# 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):**

2,4,5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26 and 32.

The service provided in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using all the available evidence including the site visit.

The arrangements for the management of the team at both senior and team level do not provide the most effective framework for efficient organisation of resources and the meeting of the team's responsibilities.

The role of the link worker needs to be reviewed to make it more systematic and consistently applied in order to offer the best possible support for carers and protection for children.

## **EVIDENCE:**

At the time of the site visit the management of the fostering service was influenced by a number of issues.

The capacity of the senior managers to focus on the fostering service had been affected by vacancies at "Head of Service" level. The former Head of Service, with direct senior management responsibility for fostering and adoption, had been promoted to become "Head of Operations." Children's Services had two vacancies for "Head of Service" – one included the position with responsibility for the fostering service- and these vacancies would be in existence for some months as the recruitment of replacements was just beginning. The "Head of Operations" will have considerable responsibility for a number of positions until new appointments are made.

The fostering team itself has two people who share the team manager's role. One is the manager for the first two and half days of the week. One of the team's two principal social workers then takes over as team manager for the second half of the week. The team has one other principal social worker who works four days and is on the point of leaving the authority. Only one person in a management position was in post for the whole of the working week.

Team members said that although all members of the team were supportive the management arrangements could be *"..confused and confusing, particularly at the beginning of the week."* Social workers spoke about the impact of sometimes not having a manager around who could give them guidance, and the fact that the arrangements could lead to some inconsistencies in communication and decision-making.

Files were seen by the team managers and stamped and dated with a "File Read" symbol. There was no indication that any conclusions or amendments had been made after the file had been read and stamped, and on one file one of the team managers had stamped a file on the 6<sup>th</sup> September, and the other manager had stamped the same file on the 9<sup>th</sup> September.

The Head of Operations wrote in the AQAA that there had been *"..particular difficulty with staff recruitment in the last twelve months. Though posts have been advertised well in advance, delays in recruitment process have caused gaps and have resulted in a reduction in the fostering service's ability to allocate all work. Full time equivalent staffing in the fostering service is significantly below the levels proposed."*

Staff said that the authority was a fair employer and that they received supervision and support in accordance with the authority's supervision policy and practices.

Each foster carer had a social worker, or "link worker", who is their main contact and is responsible for carers' support and supervision. There had been no specific "task list" for link workers. Foster carers said they were well supported by their link workers, but the differences between "supervision" and "support" were not clear. One placing social worker that "*It can sometimes seem that protecting the carers is more important (than ensuring stability for young people.)*"

There were variations in the ways in which link workers carried out their tasks. Foster carers did not have children's information stored securely; foster carers did not have full sets of LAC documentation and it was not organised or checked by link workers. Foster carers' recording of child related matters was inconsistent and subject to different practices. There was no evidence that link workers systematically checked or collected the case recording that carers did. Foster carers were not subject to routine annual unannounced inspections, and there was a lack of clarity about what the unannounced visit should entail. There was no systematic monitoring of the existence of foster care agreements or foster placement agreements.

These matters were discussed with the Head of Operations and the team manager during the site visit. The response from the authority was positive and immediate, and the Head of Operations said that he and the team managers were working on a task list and protocol for link workers, who may be renamed as "supervising social workers."

Although there were a number of comments about the effective relationships and working between the different parts of the service fostering social workers felt that they were sometimes excluded from the care planning process. They felt they are not invited as a matter of course to a child's statutory review, despite the fact that the link worker may have a greater and more detailed knowledge of the child and the carers. Link workers spoke about being "*marginalised*".

One said "*We are not the child's social worker so are not seen as so important.*"

One family support social worker said it might be worthwhile developing a system to enable link workers and placing social workers to visit a potential foster carer together to discuss matches. The social worker felt this would promote inter-team working and enable an effective exploration of the child- and carer- related issues involved in placements.

### **See recommendation 6**

Foster carers were subject to annual review. The written review report was completed by the link worker and signed off by the manager. The first annual review was presented to the fostering Panel. The fact that link workers knew



the carers for whom they were responsible, and can develop quite close relationships with them, potentially compromises the objectivity of the review process. Within Children's Services as a whole the practice of objective or independent scrutiny of all case matters has become established. The manager should review the current procedure for review to ensure it offers independent scrutiny of carers.

**See recommendation 7**

The service provides a training programme for carers. At the time of the site visit it was recognised that there could be difficulties in achieving as high an attendance as possible on training courses for carers. The role of the link worker is significant in encouraging carers to attend training, and the service rewards carers with increased payments for those who attend training.

Social workers said they had not all received training in competency-based assessments or in the role of the supervising social worker.

**See recommendation 8**

All children placed had a case file that was managed and held by the placing social worker. A key issue for carers is the extent to which they are recording significant life events and the extent to which that recording, including the completion of life-story work, is encouraged and promoted by link workers. Information on children was not stored securely in carers' homes, and carers recording practices varied considerably. One carer said she did not record anything "*..if she had told the social worker.*" Another had written only three entries for a child who had been with her for four months.

Carers said they had not had any training on recording significant events for the children for whom they care.

**See recommendation 9**

The service has started to use computer-based systems for storing and managing its administrative records. All the information is available, although the manager said the implementation and management of the systems could present problems as the systems were sometimes not compatible, and there were problems in the changeover from paper-held to computer based systems. Some of the documentation on children's files was blank except for the child's name. This was explained as possibly being caused by problems with the computerised systems.

The office premises were satisfactory and all information is stored securely. There are problems with accessing sufficient private rooms and space, and the Head of Operations does not have an office space as private as is required by his responsibilities.

The Head of Operations said that the numbers of court-directed family and friends foster care assessments has caused capacity issues in the allocation of mainstream foster care assessments. This in turn has impacted on the

intended strategic approach to recruitment, assessment and training and on the fostering service's ability to deliver assessments to timescale.

A review of the process of joint viability assessments between placing social workers and the automatic notification to the fostering team of any placements with friends or family may enable the fostering team to manage the workload better, may improve levels of support available to carers and children, and promote better joint working between the fostering team and placing social workers.

**See recommendation 10**

# 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>	3
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	2
<b>15</b>	3
<b>30</b>	2

<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>	2
<b>4</b>	2
<b>5</b>	2
<b>16</b>	2
<b>17</b>	2
<b>18</b>	3
<b>19</b>	2
<b>20</b>	3
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	2
<b>23</b>	2
<b>24</b>	2
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	2
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	2

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	FS9	17(3)	The manager must ensure that each foster carer is provided with all the information on children placed with them in accordance with the Department's procedures.	31/10/06
2	FS9	34(3)	The manager must ensure that it enters into a written agreement with each foster carer relating to every child placed.	31/10/06

### 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.	FS9	The manager could place a copy of each current foster placement agreement on the carer's file.
2.	FS30	The manager could review the process of management of information presented to the Panel.
3.	FS30	The manager could ensure that the Panel has systematic and regular access to the advice of a qualified medical

		practitioner.
4.	FS30	The manager could ensure that the Panel has access to training and development and that it develops a quality assurance function.
5.	FS10	The manager could ensure that carers have written copies of all legal orders and restrictions of contact relevant to any child for whom they are caring.
6.	FS16	The manager could review the working arrangements between the fostering team and placing social workers to improve the support available to children and carers.
7.	FS21	The manager could review the arrangements for reviews of foster carers to ensure they provide independent scrutiny and monitoring of carers' performance.
8.	FS19	The manager could ensure that all link workers are provided with training on competency-based assessments and on the role of the supervising social worker.
9.	FS24	The manager could review the practice and procedure for recording on children in foster care and ensure carers are trained in the process.
10.	FS32	The manager could review the systems for joint family and friends' assessments and support to ensure the process is effectively managed.

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