



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Derby City Council Fostering Service

**Derby City Council Social Services
Children and Young People's Services
Perth Street
Derby
DE21 6XX**

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection
6th November 2006 09:00

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

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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	Derby City Council Fostering Service
Address	Derby City Council Social Services Children and Young People's Services Perth Street Derby DE21 6XX
Telephone number	01332 718000
Fax number	
Email address	Elise.Cresswell@derby.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Derby City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Katie Harris
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service is part of Derby City Council Children and Young People's Services, and provides the following services for children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years in the Derby city and boundary areas

The service provides:

Time limited placements, which includes emergency and ongoing placements.
Respite placements that offer short term breaks to children who would benefit from short breaks away from the family.

Support foster carers who provide link respite care to foster carers and are usually family or friends of the foster family.

Link carers who offer short term breaks for children in need with a disability.

Long term placements, where adoption is considered not to be a viable option.
Children First placements for children with significant disabilities, usually long term.

Project placement for children with emotional or behavioural challenges, who require additional time, and carers with appropriate skills.

The fostering service recruits, registers, and provides ongoing support to new and existing carers. At the time of the Inspection the service supported 167 fostering households providing 235 placements for children and young people. In addition to this 52 children were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies.

SUMMARY

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

Two Inspectors undertook this Announced Inspection over four days, taking 102 hours, not including the Pre Inspection Meeting. This Inspection included an Inspection of the Derby City Council's Private Fostering arrangements, summarised in a separate report.

Inspectors visited four fostering households and looked at four carer files and the files of four children in placement. During the Inspection the Inspectors looked at three additional carer files. In addition to speaking to supervising social workers, the Head of Service and the Service Managers in the Fostering Team were interviewed and some placing social workers were telephoned. Interviews took place with the Looked After Children's Nurse, two Looked After Children's Education Officers, the Fostering Training Officer, the Children's Participation Officer and the Publicity and Recruitment Officer. Feedback about the service was also received from an Independent Reviewing Officer and the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. A number of Personnel files were looked at.

The Fostering Panel was observed and an Inspector attended a Carer Support Group at which a presentation was made about the work of the Derby City Child Sexual Abuse Unit.

The Managers of the Fostering Service completed an Annual Quality Assurance Assessment, data sheets, and Policy and Procedure summaries prior to the Inspection, and information from these documents has contributed to the evidence and judgements within this report.

Forty questionnaires were sent out each to carers, placing social workers and children. Nine were received back from children, five from placing social workers and eight from carers. Some comments have been incorporated into this report.

What the service does well:

The Fostering Service is based in a good sized building, easily accessible to Derby City centre providing very good team and training facilities for the Fostering and Adoption teams and for the administrative support team. This promotes good communication and a positive team identity.

The Fostering Service is clearly structured into two teams and well managed by a small management team. The service is closely monitored on a monthly basis.

The Fostering Service works in partnership with the Looked After Children's Education Team and The Children's Participation Officer. Children's Education is positively supported and prioritised. Consultation with children is meaningful and relevant and innovative. Children's contributions are valued and recognised. The Service has welcomed feedback about fostering placements from the exit interviews undertaken with children by the Children's Participation Officer.

A very good programme of Carer Training has been agreed. In addition to this learning opportunities are made available through different Carer Support Groups. Specialist training is also provided.

A strong Fostering Panel, which is well constituted, receives Fostering Applications and monitors the activities of the Service. The Fostering Panel receives and considers well-documented Annual Carer Reviews giving very good attention to safety of placements.

The Fostering Service provides good practical support and financial support to placements for children and young people who have a disability, including a dedicated Independent Reviewing Officer.

Children said about their placements. 'It's so much better living here'. 'People are careful to me and that makes me happy'. 'My carer loves me and I've just had a cool birthday'. 'I get lots of love and support because I live with extended family'. 'They listen to me and are there when I need them'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Personnel Files contained all of the required staff checks.

Carers are now being provided with a newly constituted post Approval Training Programme that includes proposed mandatory courses including Paediatric First Aid.

A new Children's Guide has been produced in addition to a new Children's Complaints system.

A person with an Education background is now a member of the Fostering Panel. Panel Procedures indicate how recommendations will be dealt with when the Panel is not in Agreement.

What they could do better:

Where children who have had experience of abuse, share bedrooms, assessments giving consideration of risk should be evidenced on carer files. Where any other potential risk is identified with regard to children in placement, the management of this risk should be evidenced in either the Safe Care Policy or a risk assessment.

There is a need for the Fostering Service to address some shortfalls in carer recording, and contribution to Life Story work where this is appropriate. Training on carer recording is currently being provided. Carer logs should demonstrate how children in placement are having their needs met and a separate record of Health events should be maintained.

Although there is evidence that some groups of children are carefully matched to placement e.g. long term, short breaks etc, the matching of other children to placement should be more clearly evidenced by the fostering service. Social workers who already have children placed in fostering households should be consulted before additional placements are made.

The Fostering Service should make clear the expectations upon carers to attend for essential training. The Annual Review and supervision sessions with carers should be utilised to support this expectation.

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**

The Fostering Service promotes the health and development of children and young people well, but dedicated Professional Health support is insufficient. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

There is a dedicated Looked After Children's Nurse, employed by Greater Derby PCT, who has overall responsibility for coordinating health care for all of Derby City's Looked After Children and Young People. Within this role the LAC Nurse oversees and follows up children's Annual Health Assessments and subsequent Health Care Plans, which are distributed to foster carers. In addition to this the Nurse is responsible for a wide range of health promotion activities, including provision of general and specific Health Advice and Training to carers. Currently this significant area of work is being undertaken through one twenty-seven hour post, with no administrative support, and is insufficient to appropriately meet the Health and Development needs of Derby City's Looked After population of up to four hundred children. Inspectors were concerned that despite very good and committed partnership working with the Fostering Service, the LAC Nurse did not have sufficient time provide appropriate Health support to foster carers, staff and children, and were advised that a thirty-hour Staff Nurse post is now being advertised to assist with the provision of the service.

Good Health related training is provided to carers including Paediatric First Aid, Substance Awareness, Introduction to Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and advice re Caring for Children with a Blood Borne Virus. A Clinical Psychologist is available to offer direct support and training carers on a regular basis. The Fostering Service also has access to a Child Sexual Abuse Unit dedicated to supporting and providing therapy to children who have been abused and advice to carers and workers. An Inspector attended a Carer Support Group session where a worker from the unit gave an excellent presentation to carers. Good supportive Health Information is available in the Carer's Handbook.

There was good evidence on files of children's Health being routinely discussed during support social worker visits to carers. LAC reviews also detailed Health needs and actions. One carer visited was maintaining a high quality Health record ensuring that all statutory Health Checks were completed and developmental milestones were being systematically recorded. Other carers visited did not keep separate Health records as such and the Fostering Service has been recommended to introduce a system to enable carers to maintain a Health record for children placed, that can move with them when they leave. (Standard 12.4)

Files looked at indicated that in some instances children and young people could face a long wait for input from the CAMHS team, and this could have a negative impact on those assessed as needing this intervention.

In one foster home visited a healthy home cooked meal was being prepared, and the carers said that meals were always freshly cooked and not processed. Children in Questionnaires said, 'My carers keep me healthy before I get unhealthy'. 'Playing football keeps you fit'. 'I try to be healthy'. 'My aunty is a nurse so we are healthy'. 'When I go out and see the school nurse they tell me I am healthy'. 'I go to review meetings and they ask me how my health is'.

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):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Good systems are in place to provide safe placements for children but records could more appropriately evidence the matching process.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Social work staff working in the Fostering Team are qualified Social Workers and registered with the GSCC. The Managers are experienced in the field of childcare and fostering, and are appropriately qualified. They demonstrated a strong commitment to the ongoing development of the Fostering Service.

Personnel files relating to six members of the Fostering and Adoption team were looked at. Although the files were not consistently well organised and accessible, they generally contained appropriate information and checks. However the personnel team were again reminded (see last Inspection report) of the need to include a CRB clearance reference number and to note the level of CRB undertaken when recording CRB clearance. Fostering Managers informed Inspectors that they undertake follow up telephone checks of referees but this was not recorded on personnel files.

Every fostering household is expected to carry out a Safe Care Policy completed to a standard format, which now incorporates a Fire Exit plan. These were seen on all files tracked and were well documented. Safe Care Policies are routinely reviewed at carer Annual Reviews in relation to children in placement, and looked at by the Fostering Panel. The Fostering Service is reminded that Safe Care Policies should be signed and dated as recommended in the last Inspection report. In one carer file looked there was a placement presenting a high risk of self-harm. While there was very good evidence of close interagency work to respond to this, no risk assessment was on file to demonstrate how the risk would be managed on a day to day basis within the foster home. Inspectors advised that since Safe Care Policies are not used as a tool to manage identified risks, that where there are placements that present significant risks or challenges these could be assessed and managed through a risk assessment attached to the Safe Care Policy. There were also some instances of bedroom sharing in cases looked at where there should have been written evidence of consideration of potential risk, given that some of the young people sharing bedrooms had been subject to abuse in the past.

Health and Safety checks are carried out at every Annual Review and were seen on files looked at. Generally households visited were safe, homely and comfortable; however in one household a shortfall identified at a Health and Safety check early this year still needed to be addressed.

Very good Child Protection training opportunities are made available to carers. Carer training programme includes Child Protection Awareness, Caring for Abused Children, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention and Attachment training. It is planned for some of this to be mandatory post approval training. Inspectors suggested that Safe Care be included as mandatory since some carers at the carer support group, and some visited, still appeared to lack understanding about the value of the policy. One carer visited appeared to lack insight as to how to manage challenging behaviour and Inspectors noted that Behaviour Management training is planned to be mandatory, and the Fostering Service is advised to prioritise carers for this training.

Unannounced visits are recorded in running records and noted at Annual Review. It was noted at Panel that sometimes these have not been undertaken and the Fostering Service is reminded to do these annually. A very good log is maintained at front of each carer file to record any incident or allegation with outcome. This is also presented to Panel with Annual Reviews.

The Fostering Service Duty desk is staffed to receive referrals throughout office hours. Duty referral and placement requests are logged, prioritised and updated each day. The Fostering Team meets every week to discuss placements and this becomes a team meeting once a month to which speakers are invited. There are strong matching systems in place for long term placements and planned placements for children who have special needs and the Service Manager responsible for the duty system attends weekly

Accommodation Panel meetings with other childcare colleagues in order to discuss and plan for potential placements.

Although Inspectors were satisfied that most of the carers visited were generally competent to meet the needs of the children placed with them, and that some of the placements were historical and complex, it was difficult to evidence from files looked at any written evidence of the matching of children to placement, or how potential shortfalls would be addressed. Placement Agreements are referred to in Standard 8 as a source of matching consideration, however copies of these were not seen on all files. Referrals contain some information utilised for matching child to placement, and these are stored separately in the Duty Room. Inspectors are mindful of the pressures for placements on a Local Authority Fostering Service and of the emergency nature of some requests, but note that Standard 8 of the Fostering Regulations implies an expectation that the Service will provide some written evidence of matching processes. The Fostering Service should give consideration as to how this will be achieved. If the Duty referral is adapted for this, then a record could be maintained on carer files. The Fostering Service should also be mindful of the need to consult placing social workers of children already in placement before placing additional children. Social workers commented that they were not routinely being informed about children being placed with children that they were responsible for. Inspectors were concerned about an inappropriate placement within one of the households tracked and shared this with the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Panel was observed to operate in a thoughtful and rigorous manner. The Inspector noted the significant combined knowledge of Fostering Panel members, and their understanding of the importance of the fostering task and the role and responsibility of carers. The Panel Chair has considerable past experience of childcare and child protection work at a senior level. The Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is a Panel member. There is also now Panel member with an education background. Annual Review papers presented to Fostering Panel were of a very good standard and the information required for reviews is searching and relevant. Panel members were noted to identify key issues to pick up on, e.g. safe care, health and safety, education, and support. The Panel worked very well as a team. Panel members meet for training sessions. Monthly reports on the activity of the Fostering Service produced by the Head of Service are provided to the Panel. During the Panel observed by the Inspector, a 'pre approval placement' was referred to and the Fostering Service is reminded that this is an illegal arrangement and also negates the role of the Fostering Panel.

A new Children's Complaints procedure, developed in consultation with children, has now been completed and circulated.

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, 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Children and young people receive a good level of support to meet individual needs within placement and their educational achievement is very well promoted.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service operates to a comprehensive Equality and Diversity document that was reviewed in 2005 at which time significant consultation took place with carers and young people with regard to the needs of young people in care from black and other ethnic minority communities.

Diversity training is incorporated into pre and post approval training. The latter two-day course includes a session where carers consider how they can challenge stereotyping and nurture all aspects of children's identity, encouraging them to value diversity. Although there is ongoing work to recruit culturally appropriate carers Managers reported that where children are in placements that might not meet their cultural or religious needs, measures would be put in place to address this shortfall.

The Carer Handbook contains a very good section on 'Caring for a Child who has a Disability' and training sessions and support discussions are made available to carers who care for children with a disability. Carers, who provide placements for children with a disability, meet as a special support group. They recently met to 'Brush up on Makaton'.

No children tracked at this Inspection were receiving short breaks services, however Inspectors acknowledged clear referral processes and matching considerations for placements. Although the Children's Disability Service is now positively integrated and managed with the Health Authority, the Fostering Service works in close partnership with the team. Consideration is now being given to the development of services for young people who have autism. There was evidence of good financial support being made available to carers of children with disabilities for appliances and home adaptations where appropriate, and also to support outings and activities.

In one of the cases tracked the carer reported how a play worker from the Early Years Team had visited her on a weekly basis to support a placement of a young child who had a disability. This had been a positive experience that she had used to support a future placement. Another piece of very good work was noted where a carer had worked closely with the mother of a Sikh baby in placement, to meet the baby's cultural needs.

There is a dedicated Independent Reviewing Officer who undertakes the LAC reviews of children who have disabilities. The person appointed has the capacity to communicate in Makaton and to use the Picture Exchange Communication System and routinely visits individual children before the review.

A dedicated Education of Looked After Children Team supports the Fostering Service, offering support and advice to staff and carers, and working closely with schools. Inspectors observed a number of impressive projects and initiatives. These included The Gatsby Project (jointly funded), which works to improve educational outcomes for all of Derby City's children, a Homework Club, Film Club and monthly surgeries for social workers. In addition to this the small team actively promotes completion of Personal Education Plans in time for LAC reviews, has implemented systems to work with designated teachers, and provides good, relevant training to staff and carers on a regular basis. Time limited work with children can take place in the home or at school to support children not to get excluded. There is now an expectation within new carer contracts, that fee paid carers will be available to care for children during the initial period of any exclusion from school. Children's achievements are celebrated at a special 'Showcase Event', however rewards are individualised and provided when most appropriate. Inspectors had sight of training and conference documents, and action plans, that confirmed a commitment by Derby City Council to actively raise the profile of Looked After Children's education.

Carers visited worked well with schools and showed a good awareness of children's educational needs. Good work had been undertaken on some Personal Education Plans. One child who was on a part time education timetable was supported by day care arrangements, and the carer had been promptly supported when the child was out of school.

Children said in questionnaires, 'I get help at school and at home'. 'I get help with my homework'. 'I can ask for advice about my homework'. 'They (carers) encourage me to read'.

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, 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Contact arrangements are well documented and appropriately managed. Children and young people are very well consulted and actively encouraged to participate.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

No issues with regard to contact were identified during the Inspection in relation to cases looked at. Where there were difficulties these were complex and historical and appeared to be being appropriately managed. Some good written records of supervised contact visits were seen in one file looked at. Training for carers about contact issues is provided pre approval and is now planned for the post approval programme.

The Fostering Service pays carers a realistic mileage allowance for undertaking the transport for contact arrangements.

Derby City Council has a Children and Young People's Participation Policy. This is an excellent document that commits to listening to children and young people and indicates that their involvement will be valued, and their views responded to. Participation processes and opportunities are detailed. There is a dedicated Participation Officer for Children Looked After who has established good working relationships with children and staff. She informed Inspectors about a range of initiatives and activities that promote consultation with children and young people. The KICK group (Kids in Care in Kontrol) is a very focussed and motivated group of twelve to twenty one year olds that meets fortnightly and is involved in many activities. The group contributes to a colourful magazine 'Focus On Us' and has worked with Fostering and Social Work staff and City Councillors in a range of meetings, events and activities. Most recently the group has produced an animated DVD that will be shown in local cinemas to encourage people in Derby to become foster carers. Inspectors saw the DVD and thought this was an excellent achievement.

Children and young people also have access to independent Advocacy service through the VOYCE project, an independent agency commissioned for Looked After Children. There is also a new Children's Complaints procedure in place.

The Participation Officer recently undertook an Exit Interview project, carrying out twenty exit interviews with looked After Children who had moved placement. The exercise was managed sensitively and constructively. This gathered their views about the placement while providing some quality assurance information for the Fostering Service. Inspectors read the feedback from this exercise and noted that the Fostering Service was very receptive to looking at any issues arising out of this. It is possible that the exit feedback process will continue.

Children are routinely consulted at their Annual Reviews and Inspectors suggested that a similar consultation activity could be undertaken at the time Carer's Annual Reviews whereby both fostered and birth children's views about their placements could be sought. Children said 'My carers listen when I am upset or when I ask for something'. 'They listen to me when I speak to them'. 'I talk to people who I trust and say how I feel' 'They listen to what I say when I need them'.

Carers and all staff working directly with children have been provided with 'Total Respect' training, which involved Looked After Children, and included work on participation, effective listening complaints, communication, and advocacy. Some young people attended a recent 'Training the Trainers' course and this has equipped them to be involved in staff and carer training sessions.

Children tracked were invited to contribute to their LAC reviews. Not all wished to participate. In one case tracked a young person now refuses any contact with social workers after a complex care history, and experience of high levels of change of social worker. The young person said that in addition to this visits were frequently cancelled and changed and that she had no wish to engage with social workers any more. She felt let down by the care system and had not been provided with the support she needed. Her files to some extent corroborated this experience. Her carer was noted to advocate on her behalf.

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, 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Young people are encouraged to learn independence skills.

Good written information is made available to carers about payments and allowances

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Appropriate work is being undertaken by carers to support young people growing up through encouraging them to undertake small domestic tasks such as washing, ironing, cooking. One carer was actively supporting a young person to gain employment for when she left care. Pathway Plans were seen on files. Inspectors noted that there is no pressure for young people to leave care at sixteen, and that support from the Leaving Care Team would not be initiated until a young person is close to their eighteenth birthday. In special circumstances, e.g. a young person undertaking A levels examinations, a placement could be extended beyond the end of academic school years, with agreement at Assistant Director level.

Carers receive good clear information annually about carer allowances and additional grants, and guidance as to how these should be allocated. Some good examples were seen during the Inspection of individual payments and one off sums being made to fostering households for e.g. equipment, adaptations and transport provision. Fostering allowances have been improved since the previous Inspections and it is the intention that these will match the Fostering Network minimum rates. Most carers receive an additional Annual loyalty Bonus. A fee-paying scheme has recently been introduced whereby carer payments are linked to their contracts according to different levels of payments. The contracts detail expectations of carers on the scheme, including minimal attendance for training.

One carer visited raised the issue of the increasing expectations placed upon carers providing placements for babies and very young children, to facilitate a high level of contact arrangements, but noted that they receive a significantly lower allowance than that allocated for older children.

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):

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

An experienced and committed Management Team leads and monitors the Fostering Service well. Good support is offered to carers although carer attendance for training could be better.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose reviewed in June 2006 provides very good information about the aims of the service and how this is provided. Additional statistical information is included. An excellent colourful new Children's Guide has been produced and children were actively involved and consulted in the production of this.

There is a good management structure to lead the Fostering Service with clear lines of accountability, and a strong approachable well qualified management team. Staff confirmed good levels of support and supervision and access to training courses. The Fostering Service social work teams are experienced and established. Although there is no Annual Appraisal system in place as such, Managers said that training needs are routinely evaluated in supervision and that Away Days are held on an annual basis. Managers consistently and actively monitor the service, and monthly reports about fostering activity are provided to the Assistant Director Children and Young People's Services and to the Fostering Panel. The Carer's Handbook gives good definitions about the respective roles and responsibilities of the placing and the fostering social workers.

Regular formal staff meetings are held within the service, and in addition, managers and social workers also attend meetings with other teams and agencies.

The Fostering and Adoption Service is now carried out from a dedicated spacious refurbished building, previously shared with another team. There are now rooms available for the Fostering and Adoption Panels, carer and staff training and other meetings. The staff teams are comfortably accommodated in pleasant rooms.

It was noted that in the cases of several young people tracked, most of whom presented with complex or challenging needs, many were supported by workers from childcare teams who were not qualified social workers. Inspectors noted the potential impact of this on the role and responsibility of the supervising social worker.

Although there continues to be difficulty in recruiting enough carers to meet the demands on the service, and it is not always possible to provide any placement choice or ideal match for children, the service continues to strive to recruit good foster carers. The Publicity and Recruitment Officer has worked closely with the Fostering Managers to assist with recruitment initiatives. Carers and children have also assisted in the recruitment process and children have recently produced a recruitment DVD that has been referred to earlier in this report. The Inspectors saw the Recruitment and Marketing plan for the Fostering and Adoption service and noted the good marketing initiatives developed to attract prospective carers. These included leaflets imaginatively distributed, posters, events, use of media including Internet and television. Fostering Managers commented that this year there had been a very slight increase, after some years of none, in the approval of new carers.

Currently the Assistant Director Children and Young People's Services, who is also the Fostering Panel Agency Decision Maker, gives agreement to placements with Independent Fostering Agencies when there is no suitable existing internal resource. The Fostering Service Managers carefully seek and identify appropriate placements. At the time of the Inspection fifty-one placements were being provided by an IFA. The Assistant Director confirmed that he receives fortnightly tracking updates on all Independent Fostering Agency placements, however Fostering Service Managers were concerned about the lack of capacity to monitor the quality of independent placements and to subsequently pick up issues should the placement break down. It was later confirmed with Inspectors that a Contracts Officer already in post, will be taking an active role in the future commissioning and monitoring of fostering placements with Independent Fostering Agencies.

Carers spoken to during visits and the Carer Support Group said that they valued the support offered them by the Fostering service. Carers in questionnaires said 'we get finance, training and support groups', and 'I love fostering, I enjoy what I do and support from my Link worker is invaluable'. But another said 'we would like more access to social workers and specialists'. Carers are provided with a very good Carer's Handbook, regular newsletters, specialised Support Groups, and a dedicated out of hours service, during which time a fostering social worker is available to speak to and advice carers in a crisis.

Inspectors met with the Training and Education Officer who coordinates Fostering Training along with one of the Fostering Managers and other key people. Some carers have recently attended the 'Training for Trainers' course and now participate in delivery of pre Approval carer training. An excellent new post Approval training programme has been drawn up for implementation next year and several courses have been deemed as mandatory, including Recording Skills, Child Protection Awareness, Attachment and Valuing Diversity. Fostering Managers are in the process of clarifying with carers, the expectation that they will attend a minimum number of training courses in any one year. This expectation is currently incorporated into contracts for carers of the fee paying scheme, and Managers are now considering how to ensure that all foster carers take up training that relates directly to the needs of specific children in placement and promote positive outcomes for them. Inspectors noted the very poor uptake of training opportunities in some case files looked at.

Files looked at were well organised, well maintained and easily accessible. All case files are stored securely in a separate small locked room. Inspectors noted that records of supervision sessions in fostering files were not always easy to locate and suggested that these be recorded on coloured paper for easy reference. Unannounced visits, although in evidence in some cases, were not routinely carried out, and the Fostering Service was reminded that these should be carried out on an annual basis.

Complaints and Allegations and Incidents are recorded and filed on a shared form. These were well documented.

Only one carer visited was maintaining appropriate records. Another carer was keeping a basic shared diary for a family group but had passed this on to her supervising social worker. Recording should be child specific and appropriate to the needs of the placement and may in some instances be minimal. Inspectors noted that work and training is currently being undertaken to remind carers about their responsibilities in relation to recording and keeping logs. No Life Story work was being undertaken by placing social workers for some young people, although carers were keeping memorabilia. In another long-term placement Life Story work was erratic and no family photographs had been made available for this work by carers. Carers should be made aware of their role and responsibility to contribute to the Life Story work process, through training being made available to them and through contact with their supervising social workers.

There are twenty-four Family/Kinship placements being supported by the Fostering Service. One of these was tracked during the Inspection. This was a good placement that had been appropriately supported by the Fostering Service. Family carers are paid the same rates as mainstream carers and may access the same support and training but do not receive an annual bonus.

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	3
6	2
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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

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

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

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 introduce a system to enable carers to maintain a Health record for children in placement that can move with them when they leave.
2.	FS6	The Fostering Service should provide written evidence of consideration of potential risk where children and young people who have been abused share bedrooms.
3.	FS8	The matching of children to placements should be more clearly evidenced. Social workers who already have children placed in fostering households should be consulted before additional placements are made.
4.	FS24	Carers should be made aware of their responsibility to maintain records of children placed and to contribute to Life Story work.

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