



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

City of Bradford MDC Fostering Service

**Adoption and Fostering Unit
Aire Building
35 Saltaire Road
Shipley
West Yorkshire
BD18 3HH**

Lead Inspector
Monica Hargreaves

06 March 2006

Announced Inspection

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

Reader Information

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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	City of Bradford MDC Fostering Service
Address	Adoption and Fostering Unit Aire Building 35 Saltaire Road Shipley West Yorkshire BD18 3HH
Telephone number	01274 437343
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Department of Social Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Sarah Patrick
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 18th October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The Bradford Adoption and Fostering Unit is part of the local authority's Resources Division. The fostering unit approves a range of carers who can provide short or long term foster placements for children and young people who are looked after by the authority. The unit also approves carers who are able to offer specialist placements for young people who are presenting high risk behaviours.

The authority also provides a variety of short break placements for children and young people through the Shared Care, Support Care and Crisis Care Teams that are part of the Family Support Division.

In addition a team of social workers is in the process of being appointed who will undertake the assessment and support of Family and Friends Carers.

The fostering service employs a team of family placement support workers who undertake direct work with the children and their foster carers during the course of a placement and there is a psychologist who is employed on a sessional basis within the unit to offer support and advice to carers and young people in placement.

The main office for the fostering service is based in Shipley, although the Support Care and Crisis Care Teams work from an office base in Bradford adjacent to one of the area social work teams.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was announced and was completed by 3 inspectors over the course of 7 working days. Prior to the inspection, the managers of both parts of the fostering service submitted questionnaires to the Commission. A number of questionnaires were also sent out to foster carers, young people in foster placements and placing social workers. The information from these questionnaires has been used in the preparation of this report.

During the inspection, discussions were held with members of the different fostering teams, with their Senior Care Managers, Principal Care Managers and with two Divisional Service Managers. Two inspectors attended the Foster Panel and spoke with the Panel Chair and inspectors were also invited to attend part of a meeting of the main carer group, Bradford Adopter and Foster Carers Association. Visits were made to six carer households covering all parts of the service and two inspectors met with a group of fee paid Shared Care foster carers.

A comprehensive range of documents were made available by the Principal Care Managers. Files and other records were seen and one inspector was given access to files stored on the electronic filing system that is being put in place across the authority.

This inspection considered the key standards and the standards covering requirements made at the previous fostering inspection.

What the service does well:

There are good systems in place to make sure that young people are cared for safely. Carers and workers throughout the fostering services are good at promoting the health, education and development of children and young people who are looked after and foster carers are keen to promote positive family contact. Links with health services are good.

The service makes sure that carers and young people are given frequent opportunities to express their views about how the service is run.

The short breaks services are flexible and well planned and recognise the central role of parents to the care plans of their children.

Recruitment strategies are targeted to reflect the needs of young people and children and carers in transracial placements receive additional support

What has improved since the last inspection?

The fostering panel is now properly constituted and a new IT system has been put in place across the authority.

There has been a reduction in the number of carer households without an allocated supervising social worker and the service is in the process of recruiting a team of social workers who will provide a service specifically to Friends and Family carers.

What they could do better:

The service needs to have sufficient staff in the teams to make sure that all carers, including Family and Friends carers, have an allocated supervising social worker.

The local authority should make sure that all parts of the children's services follow the agreed procedure with regard to the investigation of any allegation made against a carer.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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 at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The health and developmental needs of children who are fostered or who have short breaks care, are well met by the fostering service. Foster carers and workers make sure that young people have good access to health care and that a healthy lifestyle is promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Fostering handbooks contain written guidance on the importance of promoting health care within a foster placement. Carers said that they receive appropriate medical information about the young people they care for and confirmed that they receive training on health, hygiene and first aid. In discussion with carers it was clear that they understand their responsibilities with regard to making sure that the young people in their care are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle and receive the medical services they need. In their responses to questionnaires, young people said that carers help them to keep healthy. One young person said 'they give me healthy food' and others 'they give me good advice' and 'they encourage me to do lots of walking'.

Managers and staff said that they work closely with the Looked After Children's health team, who have the prime responsibility for making sure that young people who are fostered can have access to the full range of services they need. Carers who offer a short breaks service to children and young people with disabilities, confirmed that they have good support from specialist health services. This also includes additional training to help them to care for young people who have additional health needs.

Social workers, managers and carers spoke positively about the work that is undertaken by the psychologist who works within the fostering unit.

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):

6, 8, 9 and 30

There are good systems in place to make sure that young people are safely cared for. The local authority's procedure for investigating allegations made against carers should be followed by all parts of the authority.

EVIDENCE:

Staff and carers confirmed that all carers undertake training in child protection during the initial assessment and approval process. Conversations with carers and feedback from questionnaires showed that carers understand their responsibilities in relation to child protection. Carers are also clear about the need to support young people in relation to bullying. One carer described the actions she had taken in relation to concerns about bullying that she had identified about the young person in her care. Safe caring guidelines are contained in the foster carer handbook and files examined showed that carers complete individual safe caring policies for their households.

The fostering service has clear policies and procedures regarding the investigation of allegations that may be made against carers. Carers spoken with were clear about what action would be taken in the event of any allegation being made and said that the authority can make independent support available to them. The Bradford Adopter and Foster carer Association also offers support to carers during the investigation of allegations. Staff working in the fostering unit said that although the procedure is very clear, there have been occasions when there has been some delay over investigations as staff and managers within the area offices do not always

agree that these investigations should be initiated by the area teams. This matter was discussed with the Unit Manager at the end of the inspection.

Staff working within the fostering unit spoke about the importance that is attached to matching children to available placements and make efforts to make sure that young people and carers are properly matched. In responses to questionnaires, some carers said that they have at times been asked to take young people out of their approval range or over their numbers. There was evidence that exemptions are sought and monitored. The inspector was told that in the mainstream fostering unit, occasional shortfalls in available resources can result in some placements not being as well matched as staff would wish. There was some evidence to suggest, that some placements which staff have felt were not ideally matched have had positive outcomes for young people placed.

The manager and staff at the unit said that there are not sufficient placements within the authority to meet the needs of children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups. The unit is working to address this shortfall through the recruitment strategies. Where young people are placed in transracial placements, staff from the Placement Support Team visit the household to make an assessment of the additional support that will need to be put in place. Files examined during the inspection showed evidence of this support, such as education for one young person in relation to their culture and religion and another carer who attended cookery classes to help them to meet the dietary needs of the young person placed with them. The manager and staff acknowledged that whilst much work is being done with regard to transracial placements, the authority will need to continue to identify ways in which such placements can be properly supported.

The manager and staff of the Shared Care and Support Care teams explained that due to the nature of their short breaks services, they are able to match placements carefully and to make sure that parents and families are fully involved with the family match that has been identified.

Since the last inspection, the unit has appointed an independent person to chair both foster panels. The chair is very experienced and has worked at a very senior level in children's services. Inspectors attended a meeting of one of the Panels. This was well properly constituted, with a good mix of independent members and representation from health and education services as well as fostering services. The discussion was thorough and the decision making clear. Carers are invited to attend Panel and inspectors were told that many choose to do so. They are asked to give feedback on their experience of the Panel process, by means of a questionnaire. The Chair makes sure that managers receive information about any issues raised by Panel. The Agency decision maker confirmed that the quality of minutes of Panel meetings has improved. Panel training events are planned.

A number of carer households were visited as part of the inspection. These were all comfortable, well furnished, clean and warm, providing good, homely accommodation for young people. Carers confirmed that they are required to complete annual health and safety checks on their homes and that social workers regularly ask to see the sleeping accommodation of the young people in their care. Copies of health and safety assessments and of relevant insurance certificates were seen on file.

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 fostering service promotes diversity and carers value educational achievement. The short breaks services are flexible and well planned and recognise the central role of parents to the care plans of their children.

EVIDENCE:

There is a policy on diversity and equal opportunity and foster carer training covers these issues. Conversations with carers and carer groups confirmed that they are keen to make sure that the young people in their care are encouraged to develop their skills and that young people living with families from other cultures receive additional support. Individuals caring for young people with disabilities were clear about how they would promote their welfare.

Staff and managers said that they are continuing to work closely with 'Education Bradford' to make sure that young people are able to access education that is appropriate to their needs. The current system means that all children who are looked after by the authority have an identified school placement. Carers said that there can be some difficulties at times for some young people in relation to school exclusions. Staff said that they can discuss these specific cases with a named person within 'Education Bradford'. This was confirmed by that service. The difficulties identified appear to relate to a minority of young people in secondary schools. Carers spoken with showed a positive attitude to the educational achievement of young people in their care, individuals speaking with pride about their exam successes and the progress they have made. Carers also said that they are involved in developing Personal Educational Plans and copies of these plans were seen on file. In

their responses to questionnaires, young people said that carers help them with homework and attend meetings at school.

The local authority provides a range of short breaks services to families, including shared care, support care and crisis care. Appropriate policies and guidance are in place relating to this work. Carers who work with these teams are able to offer a variety of services to children and families, from short visits after school to overnight stays. Supervising social workers within these teams were very clear that parents and families remain central to the care of their children. Carers working with short breaks and support care who responded to questionnaires, said it is important to be able to develop good relationships with families and feedback from placing social workers shows that the services are valued by the families who use them.

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 fostering service promotes contact between children and their families and friends, with good support provided by foster carers. Carers and young people are given frequent opportunities to express their views about how the service is run.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence throughout the inspection that foster carers are keen to promote positive family contact and that the fostering service makes sure that these issues are addressed in assessment and training. Carers who were interviewed and who responded to questionnaires described the ways in which they have helped to support young people to keep in contact with their parents. Placing social workers said that carers work closely with them and understand the importance to children of maintaining contact with parents and families, when this is part of their care plan. One young person said that foster carers had been instrumental in helping him to regain contact with parents and that this had 'really helped'. Files that were examined had details of contact plans.

The service has developed questionnaires to ask for feedback from carers and also asks placing social workers to give written information on placements for annual carer reviews. A number of young people responded to the questionnaires that had been sent out as part of this inspection. The majority of these said that they had been asked to give their views on the fostering service. Their views are also sought by members of the 'Seen and Heard' project, which is jointly funded by Barnardos and the local authority. Carers also commented that the service asks for their views on how it is working.

The Support care team has recently completed a survey of young people who have used their service. In order to increase the response rate, a worker went out to see children and young people and asked for their views on the short breaks service they had had. The results of the survey show that young people feel they have benefited from breaks with other families and enjoy spending time with them. Many young people said they would like to be able to continue seeing them.

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

Foster carer payments are made promptly and equipment needed is provided. The current payment system is said to be confusing and complicated. The authority has devised a new payments scheme that is due to be started later in the year.

EVIDENCE:

The authority has a scheme for payments that includes a fee paid to the carer, plus an allowance paid for the young people. Carers who were interviewed and those who responded to questionnaires said that they receive their payments without delay. Some carers said that they found the current system confusing and complicated although the majority of carers expressed the view that the overall payments made by Bradford are generally reasonable. The only exception to this was a view expressed by some carers working within Shared Care that the allowances they receive do not always cover the costs involved in caring for young people. Carers said that equipment they need is made available.

The service makes information about its payments scheme available to all carers, but the manager and staff agreed that it is complex and therefore confusing. The authority is to implement a new fee structure for carers later in the year. Carers were aware of this scheme and have been asked to give their views. They agreed that the structure is clearer. It includes a doubling of the allowance paid in relation to the child or young person placed with them, that is in line with that recommended by Fostering Network. Some carers expressed a concern that although the allowances paid for children are being greatly increased, the changes made to the structure of fees paid to the carer mean that some are reducing. The manager confirmed that overall, carers

would not receive less than they do at present and most carers would benefit. The new system is tied in with training requirements.

At the time of this inspection, there was still some uncertainty about the exact date when the scheme would be brought in. There had been no decision made about whether or not the scheme would apply to the Support Care, Shared Care and Crisis Care carers.

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):

16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 32.

The service is well managed and has well qualified and experienced staff teams. Carers are recruited from a wide range of backgrounds. Some carers do not have an allocated supervising social worker.

EVIDENCE:

Managers and supervising social workers working within the service are qualified and appropriately experienced. Social workers said that there can be times when supervision sessions are delayed, but they confirmed that formal supervision does take place and that they are able to get support when they need to. The authority has procedures for the completion of annual appraisals with staff. Members of staff across all teams confirmed that these happen. Although they said they do feel supported by their managers, staff indicated that vacancies within the main fostering teams have led to increased pressures. This combined with successful recruitment campaigns has meant that some prospective carers can wait a considerable time before their applications are progressed.

The fostering service has a worker who has responsibility for advertising and marketing and another worker who arranges the monthly information meetings and coordinates all the initial applications, for both fostering and adoption. Carers are therefore able to have one point of contact in the initial stages of their application. The recruitment policy is successful in that it attracts a number of potential carer households each month. However, this success in itself can mean delays for some carers in processing applications, as the recruitment strategy is to target particular groups of carers where the need within the authority is greatest and to fast track applicants from these groups. At the time of the inspection, the focus was on recruiting carers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and also carers who express a wish to care for teenagers. This strategy is obviously aimed at helping the authority to improve matches for children and therefore improving their experiences of foster care. As identified earlier, social workers within the main fostering teams expressed the view that due to some shortages of staff, they are not able to keep pace with the demand for approval of all the potential carers. Some carers also expressed the view that they had waited a very long time before their application was progressed.

The majority of carers who were interviewed or who returned questionnaires said that they feel well supported by the fostering teams. A small number of carers said they had been without a supervising social worker for some time, although they also said that they had been able to get support from the team when they had needed it. There was evidence that carers are visited regularly, and that carer reviews take place annually. Not all carer files examined had evidence that unannounced visits take place annually and not all files showed evidence of management audits.

The main fostering teams and the Shared Care team are based in two large buildings that provide appropriate accommodation. Buildings are kept secure. The Support Care and Crisis Care teams are based in another part of the city, close to one of the area social work teams. This building is also secure and appropriate for its purpose. Since the last inspection, the authority has put in place a new IT system that is being rolled out to the fostering teams in 2006. Staff said that they have not yet had training and support staff and managers

said that there have been some 'teething' problems with the new system. However, it is anticipated that when this is fully in place across the authority, it will greatly assist the management and storage of information. One inspector was given access to young people's files that are already stored in the electronic system. These files showed that case recording is not always up to date, although there was evidence of management audit and supervision in the recording.

Managers confirmed that the authority is committed to considering family and friends as first choice carers for children, where this is appropriate and in the overall best interests of the young person. There was evidence that this happens in practice. At the time of the inspection, family and friends carers were being assessed and approved by social workers from the area teams. The small number of family based carers who responded to questionnaires, indicated that they did not feel they could always get the support they needed for themselves as carers. It was also difficult to find separate files for the carers themselves as these become part of the child's file. The authority is addressing this deficiency in the service by recruiting a team of social workers who will work specifically with family and friends. There is a manager in place who has two agency workers drawing together all the information on current family and friends carers. The Principal Care Manager confirmed that interviews were due to take place at the end of the inspection and that they were hopeful of being able to appoint to all the posts.

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	3

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

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

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	X
29	3

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS17	19	The fostering service must employ a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced social workers and make sure that prospective carers are approved within a reasonable timescale. (Requirement from previous report.)	29/09/06
2	FS22	19	Sufficient staff must be available to make sure that every carer has an appropriately qualified supervising social worker. (Requirement from previous report)	29/09/06
3	FS32	19	The local authority should make sure that each family and friends carer has an allocated supervising social worker.	29/09/06

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	Good Practice Recommendations
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	Standard	
1	FS9	The local authority should make sure that all parts of the children's services follow the agreed procedure with regard to the investigation of any allegation made against a carer.

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