



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Walsall MBC Fostering Service**

**Children`s Resources  
Walsall MBC, Civic Centre  
Darwall Street  
Walsall  
WS1 1RG**

*Lead Inspector*  
Chris Fuller

*Announced Inspection*  
27th February 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](http://www.dh.gov.uk) or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

**Name of service** Walsall MBC Fostering Service

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Walsall MBC, Civic Centre  
Darwall Street  
Walsall  
WS1 1RG

**Telephone number** 01922 658239

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**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Walsall MBC

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

**Type of registration** Local Auth Fostering Service

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

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection** 24.1.05

## Brief Description of the Service:

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to the development of a comprehensive fostering service to children/young people and their families. The local authority aims to recruit foster carers from as broad a representation of the community as possible, in order to meet these diverse needs. The main task of the fostering service is to provide children/young people with family placements. This is achieved through the recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a wide range of prospective foster carers.

The statement of purpose includes details of the fostering service. provides a range of placements. The February Post Panel Summary of service provision stated including **87** Temporary, **44** Permanent and **10** Short Break. It currently provides **251** placements for children and young people (excluding short term breaks). There are **149** Resource carers (including **8** back-up carers) these provide a running total of **251** placements. The **10** short-term break carers provide **15** placements for short-term breaks. Placements are provided by **149** approved foster carers of which **13** are African/Caribbean, **4** are Indian, **3** are Pakistani, **3** are dual heritage and **126** are White/European.

During the past inspection year April 2005 to March 2006 there have been 17 new approvals with 27 placements gained and 15 closures with 23 placements lost.

The carers are supported by one strategic manager children's resources, manager family placement services (a new post) and three team managers, 7.5 senior practitioners, 18.5 qualified social workers, 5.75 family support officers; a training officer, a marketing officer, a peer support development officer, 2 family assessment officers and a co-ordinator of foster carer reviews.

The two fostering teams, the Recruitment and Training team and the Fostering Support and Development support team provide and support the whole range of placements, including emergency, temporary and long term/permanent placements for children and young people aged between 0 and 18 years. The Fostering Service also has a permanence support team providing support to Permanent Foster Carers, Family and Friend Carers and Adoption support cases.

In addition, the service offers short-term breaks and a matching service for children with disabilities. Specific arrangements have been made to meet the particular requirements of individual children, including structural alterations, aids, adaptations and personal support.

Other aspects of the service are the provision of a single referral point for referrals for all types of placements of looked after children, excluding short-term breaks, which go through a referral meeting process. Matching is an important aspect of the service for in house resources, external and out of borough placements.

Walsall fostering service offers the opportunity to foster carers for career development and a professional fee. Training is promoted by the organisation through a comprehensive training/development programme established by the training officer. A dedicated supervising social worker provides ongoing supervision and support to the foster carers to carry out the fostering task. Annual reviews of foster carers are completed.

# SUMMARY

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

This year the Commission for Social Care Inspection is making a proportional inspection based against a selected number of the National Minimum Standards. The focus remains on assessing the quality of care provided through the experience and outcomes of children and young people and focusing on aspects of service provision that require further development, or pose the most significant risk. The new report format has addressed the key standards in an order that reflects the main principles of "Every Child Matters". Some of the standards have not been inspected on this occasion.

The third annual inspection of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service; it took place the week beginning 27<sup>th</sup> February 2006. The Fostering Panel of the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2006 and Foster Carers Committee on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2006 were observed. A small number of children and young people met the inspectors during the visit to the placement foster carers. This was a proportional inspection of key inspection standards; including a review of the action plan and progress made with statutory requirements from the previous inspection.

The Management Team were thorough in the planning and preparation for the inspection. The pre inspection information was provided as requested. The Inspectors wish to thank all those who gave the time to participate in the inspection and also those who completed questionnaires. Once again there was a good response to feedback questionnaires with returns from children in placement (17), foster carers (18) and placing authority social workers (24). All records requested were made available by the fostering service. Management and staff were enthusiastic and keen to share and provide information of the achievements of the service, the projects and the service developments. All members of the organisation including foster carers and children/young people in placement assisted fully and responded constructively.

During the past twelvemonth period the Fostering Service has continued to make improvements to the practice, service provision and delivery whilst maintaining the protection and welfare of children and young people as the core objective of the service. There is marked progress in the infrastructure of the service and operational systems and practice. Further work has been done to address statutory requirements and recommendations. The foster carers and staff have taken on board the aims and objectives of the service development plan produced by the management team. Proposals have been formulated into projects and some have developed to meet new service outcomes such as the Foster Carers Centre and the town centre Recruitment and Marketing Shop. Two major statutory requirements that remain outstanding are the unsuitability of the fostering service premises and the provision of a foster placement agreement. It was acknowledged and agreed

with management that these must be given priority and compliance would significantly impact on many aspects of the service. At the present time the lack of progress in these matters significantly impacts on other aspects of the provision and outcomes for children and this is reflected in the scoring.

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

The Walsall Fostering Service has developed a competent and trained management and staff team that have the relevant skills and knowledge to be efficient and effective in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities.

The fostering service team are successful in establishing a good working relationships with foster carers to provide suitable family placements for children and young people of Walsall. One young person stated " They love me, look after me, keep me safe and give me nice food".

Supervision and support systems have been developed for foster carers; staff and management monitor and promote good practice. Staff stated they feel well supported and consulted and appreciate the opportunities for development and secondment.

There is an excellent resource of knowledgeable and experienced foster carers with good networks in local communities. A number of these already provide informal support and mentor new foster carers. The skills and abilities of foster carers is being maximised through a review of abilities and capacity. A placing officer stated " The children's needs are attended to in a manner which is sensitive to their life experiences and appears to be very child focussed" and of the fostering service "There are good working relationships with both professionals and the birth families".

The Walsall Foster Carers Association represents and encourages foster carers to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the role of the foster carer and the service.

There are clear beneficial outcomes for looked after children from the corporate parenting approach with effective partnerships between education, health, housing and social care. For example the development and provision of suitable premises, access and equipment for short term care placements.

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



The management team have been effective in developing the service and the staff group through appointment of strategic posts such as two Customer Care Officers. The securing of a shop front in a town centre venue in Freer Street as a "walk-in centre" places marketing and recruitment in the heart of the community.

Already staff are confident that changes in the process and recording of referrals and response to public interest and enquiries has produced results with an increase in the number of new applicants and interest from experienced foster carers.

The Foster Care Association has a good effective working partnership with Walsall fostering service. Excellent progress has been made through joint working of the peer group support worker working closely with the committee. The link worker provides access to resources, facilities and information and enhances the relationship between foster carers and the fostering service.

The Foster Care Association has had an excellent year making improvements in a range of areas. Following the formation of a Committee and establishing the Walsall Foster Care Association they have submitted and achieved Charitable status. This had a significant and positive impact on their eligibility to apply for funding.

The Foster Care Association identified a venue in Ryecroft to base their service. This is an exciting development for foster carers in Walsall with the prospect of providing benefits to all aspects of the service provision and ultimately for Looked After Children.

The training officer is commended for turning around this aspect of the service. There was clear evidence of service development and improvement. Feedback from fostering service staff and foster carers was extremely positive all being very impressed with the training programme available, joint training, partnership with other local authorities, response to specific training needs, mapping of needs and provision of facilities.

A framework for the delivery and achievement of NVQ for foster carers, staff and management appears to be established and happening after many years of delay and difficulties.

The Administration team has made significant progress over the year with changes in management and a manager just being appointed to post. Other significant posts have been filled with a consequence of less agency staff and greater consistency in working practice from a skilled and knowledgeable administration with an understanding of the service and the systems.

Most significantly there has been an improvement to the service provision to Family and Friends. All of the latter are now allocated a link worker and the majority have had a review during the past inspection year.

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

The Children's Guide remains outstanding it has been produced in draft form but since the development worker left in June 2005, it would appear this has not been prioritised or reallocated to be completed. Children involved and consulted in the development of the guide have not yet seen the outcome of their contribution.

The inspectors were very disappointed the fostering placement agreement had not been implemented. The new Foster Carer Placement Agreement format was due to be implemented a year ago. However it was considered to be unsatisfactory and existing systems have been revised instead such as the referral/matching form. This process remains unsatisfactory and does not meet the national minimum standards.

It has not been possible to re locate the premises for the fostering service although all of the other teams have been relocated. The premises continue to be unsuitable for its stated purpose and it remains in a poor state of repair and maintenance. Once again the inspectors identified some serious health and safety issues that had not been addressed and presented a hazard in respect of use of the premises by staff, foster carers and service users. Management stated there are new proposals for works to be done for refurbishment of the premises.

There were several concerns expressed and or observed in respect of contracted services ranging from cleaning of the premises, taxis used for transport of looked after children and providers of staff/carers for contact arrangements. The quality of service provided and monitoring of the contract arrangements should be reviewed.

The fostering service is making every effort to find a suitable skilled replacement for the short-term break scheme. However it is important in the meantime that adequate cover is provided to ensure regular supervision, support, review and monitoring of the service is provided to maintain the good quality provision that has been established.

Greater clarity is needed regarding the status of qualified and unqualified staff with clear guidelines for definition of social work tasks. Evidence and monitoring of levels of involvement of a qualified worker should be kept. The supervision policy and agenda does not address the role and needs of the unqualified staff.

The Administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement needs to be improved to ensure information is current and

accurate. Fostering service staff must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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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 fostering service has made progress with promoting development and health of children and young people in foster care through ensuring they access relevant services and an accurate medical history is maintained. Information and training is given to raise their awareness and encourage healthy lifestyles.

## EVIDENCE:

The appointment of the Looked After Children Nurse is having a positive impact on health service networking and outcomes for children's health.

A sample of foster carers were visited and records seen that demonstrated good links with health services, sharing of information and accessing appropriate services and facilities.

The format for the individual child care records held and completed by foster carers has been improved and provides a comprehensive record of a child's care needs in line with "Every Child Matters" and incorporates the health records for each child placed. A team manager stated obtaining consent to medical treatment is the responsibility of the area s/w and senior management in children's services. There is no written guidance for this, but the fostering service ensures foster carers are aware this. Some details about children's medication is recorded on foster carers supervision notes. For example: administration of Retalin to a child. The foster carers liaise closely with health care professionals and the school nurse. No concerns about this issue has been raised by foster carers.

Training is provided to foster carers in respect of special health care needs of children in placement. In particular foster carers providing short-term breaks are able to meet a range of medical care needs; this may include invasive medication. The registered person confirmed that these duties are covered under the local authority fostering service public liability insurance.

Some concern has been expressed by foster carers and staff of the limited service from the contracted National Children Homes. The services do not cover weekends and evenings probably the most important time for short-term breaks and respite services. This means that quite often children cannot be visited in placement. Management confirmed that this was under review through the commissioning process.

Walsall's multi-agency strategy for Children with a Disability 2005 –2006 works towards the Outcomes Framework from Every Child Matters and reflects and promotes the Vision for Inclusion and the strategic vision articulated by Walsall's Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership. The strategic five-year plan has specific objectives to be achieved through the provision of co-ordinated services. It aims to reduce levels of poor health and the promotion of healthy lifestyles underpinned by early intervention. This will be done through establishing a data base, improving the availability of information and guidance, implementing a key worker system, improving the way services are delivered through early intervention and child health promotion through the role of the School Health Advisor. The plan has clear objectives and timescales and involves interagency working and commitment. Already it has impacted on the Fostering Service provision through provision of new records, the Looked After Children Nurse, recording of the medical history of each child looked after, annual medicals and health checks. This permeates all services through to encouraging healthy eating and lifestyles and raising awareness of foster carers.

Central to the above is the child with models of practice being centred around the child. Each child has a health fax folder this was developed following consultation with children and young people. A health professional shares the information with the child and helps them to record what they want to. The service has also ordered "Billy balderdash".

## 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 fostering service has a good framework of systems to provide suitable foster carers and staffing to work with children and young people. The implementation of a fostering placement agreement would enable appropriate matching of placements and effective care plan to ensure outcomes are achieved for children and young people.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose includes a revised management structure with a new post of manager of the family placement service. This post completes a strong management structure for the service. A new manager is due to be appointed to the Permanence Support Team. The management team have proved formidable in developing the service in an open, creative and inclusive style. At all times the protection, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people remain the primary function of the service. Systems are in place to ensure all of the required checks and references are done to ensure satisfactory clearance. Records are held centrally at the Civic Centre but were made available upon request.

The fostering service has reviewed a range of documents and recording formats including the referral form, foster carer's agreement and post placement meeting record to ensure the assessment covers any individual environmental issues.

The following recommendations have been addressed: The fostering service policy and procedure and practice information has been provided to foster carers in the form of a disc and a handbook providing guidance. This includes a policy on the impact of the standard, for "no room sharing" for a child in placement, on individual approval category.

The fostering service has developed a structured approach to record keeping and training plans with management, staff and foster carers taking responsibility to inform and identify need and monitor progress.

Interdepartmental working partnerships are being developed with an emphasis on corporate parenting. The Housing department have been engaged to review the housing strategy and explore how this can support the foster carers role e.g. housing grants and prioritisation linked to the fostering task.

The information recorded on Looked After Children formats has improved however processes and recording formats are being reviewed and updated with PARIS and the introduction of the Integrated Children's System ICS. This takes a single approach to undertaking the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. The fostering service is exploring purchase of a database with links to the integrated system. New recording and monitoring systems will be reviewed to ensure they cover the requirements of schedule 6.

Relationships with Area social workers are general good. Although LAC forms are not always completed appropriately. The fostering service understands the pressure the Looked After Children team are under in respect of workloads and feels they do their best in providing accurate & detailed information. The quality of the referral forms vary between individual area social workers. There are errors on the information provided; in the small sample of placements seen it was noted a variation was authorised for one placement where the child was the same age as the foster carers child. Notably, considerable work had been done successfully by the supervising link worker to make this a positive placement. On another occasion records show that a child designated white was actually dual heritage. This links into the "Excellence not Excuses" ethos and the quality impact assessment on matching.

Management recognise there is a shortfall in the provision of Muslim and dual heritage placements resulting in lack of choice and under representation. Information, surveys and project management raise the profile of networking with local communities and recruitment to the staff group and foster carers in



order to achieve workforce reform and equable service provision. Social workers also need to be educated and involved in community networking. The local authority takes lead responsibility to host the Black Country Black Children's Conference for the West Midlands Consortium this autumn.

Although at the last inspection it was reported progress had been made in the provision of a Foster Placement Agreement. This was never implemented. Management had been reluctant to implement until it was proven to complement the Integrated Children's System, suitable for family and friends and was standard across the consortium. However no action has been taken to address these points or the problems that arise without a foster placement agreement as listed in the statutory requirements. It was stated that 72hr post placement meetings take place where any placement issues are discussed and any shortfalls addressed. There is a pro forma for these to be recorded and copies left with the foster carers. None of the sample group of foster carers held these records though it was accepted they would not necessarily have been applicable to the placement.

The management stated that better processes for lessons learnt are in place and being developed such as those raised in fostering panel and from reviews of family and friend carers.

The fostering service would seem to provide a suitable number and range of foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people. However it was found in the sample that a health reference was outstanding at the time of going to panel and being approved subsequently remained outstanding and no evidence that these were being pursued twelvemonths later. Management stated this was possibly historical as the administration system, staffing and processes had since improved. Generally the panel date and the annual review would trigger checks and valid / renewal date of references however a flag system to highlight need to chase it would be useful.

The management were pleased to report that the service has reduced the number of variations and exemptions made through the review process and ensuring relevant and appropriate approvals. It does mean the service has to go out of borough more often however this is usually in the event of emergency and unplanned placements.

In respect of Regulation 43 events; children and young people are generally kept safe with only 25 instances of an absence without authorisation. A number of these instances relate to the same young person.

The management confirmed there is a supervision policy in place for unqualified staff carrying out social work duties and maintaining appropriate records of this practice. Supervision policies read by inspectors made no reference to unqualified staff or gave recognition of the specific requirements of this role and when the qualified social worker should take lead responsibility.

In practice it was stated unqualified staff receive regular supervision and development support and this was working well.

The fostering panel was observed and the inspector met with the new chair of the panel. The Inspector read policy and procedures, minutes of panel meetings and the papers for the current panel meeting.

The policy and procedures about the operation of the fostering panel reflect the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. These are included in the Tri X system for the Child Care Manual. Information has also been provided in the foster carers handbook. These make clear the functions and responsibility for decision-making.

The composition of panel members reflects the NMS. During the past inspection year there have been some changes in personnel with an independent Chairperson from a neighbouring borough. The medical expert has left with this position to be filled. A new councillor member is also due to be appointed. Other members consisted of one fostering service social worker, one children's home manager and one fostering service manager advisor to the panel. There are four independent members including a child protection and reviewing officer, a foster carer from another authority and an education representative. One former young person in care is also becoming established as a participating member.

The panel minutes and the Chair confirmed the panel has consistently met the quorate membership requirements though this can be difficult to achieve at times. With a lot of business to cover there are additional meetings planned in over the twelvemonth period and it can be a problem to prepare and disseminate information for preparation for the panel. There has been an improvement with the new independent members regularly in attendance. Panel members appeared conversant with their duties and responsibilities and confident to make informed contributions and ask questions for clarification or raise issues.

The Inspectors noted that the post of fostering panel administrator has been filled improving the process of panel business. The advisor to the panel and administration staff stated the production of assessments and other panel papers has improved. The quality of reports prepared by the fostering agency staff for panel has improved being thorough and accurate with all relevant areas detailed for discussion.

There has been an improvement in panel business where members identify issues for service improvement or lessons to be learnt for practice issues they are noted in the panel minutes and taken back to the relevant officer to be acted upon. The Fostering panel regularly receives a summary report from the reviewing officer about the foster carer's annual reviews and outcomes. They also receive monthly reports from the advisor to the panel on recruitment and assessment and the presenting needs of children for placements as highlighted through the referral process. The fostering service presented panel with a Post Panel summary. The panel system appeared to work effectively and to maintain an appropriate level of independence.

# Enjoying and Achieving

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

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

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

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

7,13,31

The fostering service is making progress at all levels of service in promoting diversity and disability through implementation of strategic plans for enhancement of the service delivery. Excellent work has been done to promote educational achievement for looked after children. This progress needs to be reflected through the fostering placement agreement to record the expectations and commitment to achieving outcomes for children and young people.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Diversity issues are high on the agenda within the fostering service and children's services generally. The management team networks with other agencies in the borough, within the West Midlands region and at a National level. The Children's Resources Service has a project brief for "Excellence not Excuses" for 2006/07. There are several project outcomes proposed including a single children service response to the management of standards of care towards black and ethnic minority children and families, with policy and procedures, protocols, a data base and a workforce reform programme through training and development. The project objectives will be marketed and celebrated through the Black Country black children and carer's conference to share learning. This event will be hosted in the autumn by Walsall MBC.

The fostering service will participate in the above project through use of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) a tool or process. This is used to check out how an existing service or policy or a new one affects groups of people covered by equalities legislation and the Equality and Diversity Strategy of the department. In particular the fostering service is checking out the recruitment and retention of foster carers and adoptive parents from black and ethnic minorities. At the time of the inspection staff presented questionnaires to the Foster Carers Committee and explained the purpose of the tool and asked for their support in conducting the research. There is evidence that the number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds entering care continues to increase. Walsall MBC aims to ensure that a framework of foster carers and adoptive parents is available to meet a child's diverse needs taking into account social, cultural and religious factors. It is recommended that the placements be monitored to measure the suitability of matching in placements and where the needs of the service to make a placement are primary and any shortfall in the abilities of foster carers and how these are addressed.

Looked After Children management information shows that as of the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2006 the % of Looked After Children with a named qualified social worker is 84.5% with a plan of 100% by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. It was stated all cases are allocated by an assessment of risk and priority. This was part of the strategic plan for improvement and the significant increase was made in the past twelve months. This was reflected in the comments from children and young people, Looked After Children records seen and the working relationship between teams. The fostering service does not have a formal process for identifying this shortfall on behalf of those in placement. The lack of an allocated social worker tends to be picked up in supervision of the placement and or at times of review.

The Looked After Children Strategy work can now pinpoint the resources and facilities that are needed such as younger children and sibling group placements. This enables improved planning and marketing programmes with clear targets. As the fostering service improves in all aspects of service delivery there has been a trend for transfer of Independent foster carers to the Walsall fostering service. Some of these have specialist skills, experience and knowledge and are able to offer placements for sibling groups.

The education plans (PEP) were generally available in the sample of records of the child/young people seen. Children and young people respond well to the Achieving Excellence Programme and evidence was seen of their involvement and attendance to celebration events. Feedback from foster carers indicated a good working relationship between schools, foster carers and social workers in most instances. However this would be assisted if the Foster Placement Agreements were in place providing detailed information of the role and expectation of foster carers in respect of facilitating the educational needs of children in placement. Foster carers were very supportive encouraging children with homework, extra curricular activities and career development.

Foster carers informed members of the fostering panel that the lack of clarity and absence of written authorisation in respect of permissions for school trips had created and continued to cause problems at school for Looked After Children. These matters should be addressed in a Foster Placement Agreement. This outstanding requirement is reflected in the score. This has been an issue raised by Looked After Children and foster carers in past inspections it is unsatisfactory that this is left to be discussed in a post placement meeting or brought to the attention of a link worker once a problem arises. There is more of a focus in supervision with foster carers on education and career development. The Education Support Team won a national award for excellence in this aspect of care provision.

There was a significant change since the last years inspection as the fostering service staff member that had developed the service and been the lead and in recent years sole link worker for the short break foster carers had left earlier in the year and as yet had not been replaced although attempts have been made to recruit to the post.

Feedback from parents using the service and foster carers indicated that they continue to be very satisfied with the scheme and the service provided. It was noted that in the sample of carers seen one of the reviews had slipped and has only just been rebooked. The short-term break foster carers had clarity about their role and how to access support and resources. Parents spoke of good introductions prior to the placements starting and clear arrangements making a sound basis for a good working partnership with the carers.

Short-term break foster carers stated they are given relevant information and reports prior to discussing placements. Specialist equipment is generally provided as needed. Insurance cover for the administration invasive medication by foster carers is provided by the local authority insurance cover. Short-term break carers have access to the Emergency Duty Team for out of hours emergencies.

The short-term break foster carer visited by inspectors confirmed that she had been living at her current address for approx. 18 months. She confirmed she was providing short-break care for the child in placement and this was the only child that had been matched with her and she has been providing short-break care for six years. The relationship with last supervising link worker was very good, however the worker left in October and the carer has not met the new worker, but has spoken with her on the telephone. All contact with the service has been positive. Payments are made promptly. There has only been one error and this was addressed immediately. The carer liaises closely with the family and are the first point of call if there is any concern about care or health needs. The carer does attend some of the child's reviews. Although the young person is mid teens as yet there has been no discussions about future arrangements for the young person's care upon reaching adulthood.

## **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

Contractual arrangements should be monitored to ensure the contact arrangements are provided in a positive, safe and effective manner. Good progress has been made in establishing a range of opportunities to obtain the opinions and views of children, young people and their representatives.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The implementation of the foster placement agreement would assist with clarity about the arrangements for contact and the foster carers role. The feedback from foster carers regarding contact arrangements was mixed and where there were concerns these were quite serious. The main concerns were about the experience, knowledge and understanding of the staff supervising contact. The lack of consistency in staffing for contact visits. The behaviour and comments made by contact staff sometimes inappropriate and with the potential to place a child or placement at risk. The management team gave assurances that the feedback given was based on historical arrangements and that contact arrangements had improved. There was some evidence of this with one foster carer stating "Contact arrangements had been reviewed and set regularly. The young person is picked up from school by the same person and then returned home. Feedback? No I don't get feedback we were told on training that we should get feedback but we don't". The number and range of Contact Agency resources available in the community will determine to some extent the quality of service contracted. A similar concern was raised in respect of the commissioning of taxis /transport for contact visits and the escort arrangements. Once again the issues of consistency of same driver and escort, condition and suitability of taxi and seating /seatbelts for children and young people.

It is important that management ensure the contract provides best value for Looked After Children through monitoring and review of services.

The fostering service stated they will seek the views of children and young people at different stages of the placement at the point of initial referral, the new referral form is designed to note the child's views and opinions, at the 72hr post placement meeting their views would be sought and heard, at reviews and through independent representatives. It was found that records do not directly record a child / young persons views but will reflect the views of adults speaking on their behalf. It is anticipated this will improve once PARIS systems are in place. The training officer is also exploring with foster carers, the participation of children and young people in production of the life story book. This is a significant piece of work to be done by foster carers and potentially of primary importance to children and young people in their care.

At the present time there is one young person group, "the respect group" generally attended by Looked After Children in residential care. The Looked After Children that are fostered and the children of foster carers do not have a group/s. However during the Skills to foster training if there are a sufficient number of children and young people they are invited to attend a session and discuss their views of and role in fostering. Foster Carers have raised this with the Peer Support Worker and the Foster Carer Association as an issue they would like addressed. Birth children are involved in the assessment process. The fostering service does provide access for children and young people to advocacy services and complaints processes. Wherever possible supervising link workers will try to respond to any issues raised and evidence was seen of this in the sample of records seen.

A new development is the appointment of a Child Participation Officer who will develop children and young people's involvement in service development through consultation and participation. There is also a new Director of the Youth Service and the Multi-agency strategy for children with disabilities all of which raise the profile for the consultation with and involvement of children and young people.

Walsall MBC. will be host to the Black Country black children and carer's conference in the autumn 2006. Children and young people will participate in the event including dance and drama.



# 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):

14 and 29

There has been an improvement in the service with clear working protocols for care leavers. The fostering service has reviewed the fee payment scheme and is improving development and training opportunities to ensure all aspects of the service are equitable.

## EVIDENCE:

Management confirmed that training is provided in respect of preparing young people for independence. There is good liaison with the education department. Most children and young people should have personal educational plans and pathway plans in place which would include preparation for independence. From the sample of foster carers seen, family and friend carers had been given support from the service in assisting two young people (siblings) to attend further education and a third is hoping to go also. The allowances and expenses were equitable to those for foster carers and other Looked After Children. The carer stated "The link worker has been really good, really helps and supports me. I could not have managed without her."

The transition and leaving care team feel there has been an improvement in transition arrangements and the handover is more effective with positive outcomes for further education and in career opportunities for the young people. Feedback from a fostering service supervising link worker supported this view stated " One carer has moved many children on. The Social worker refers them to the leaving care team aged 15 plus. They attend the review then both workers work together for a transfer period. It works well."

There is a good working relationship between the foster carers and the staff in finance section at the Civic Centre. The fostering service has efficient systems for payments, grants, allowances and resources. Foster carers are informed of resources available to themselves and to the children placed and are able to access them. Any errors or oversights are generally addressed without problem. For example one foster carer complained that the flat a young person was allocated was in poor condition and unsuitable. This was found to be upheld and appropriate action taken to improve circumstances.

# 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):**

1,2,4,16,17,20,22,24,25,26, and 32

The management ethos of the service is positive and dynamic with a commitment to improving service provision and providing outcomes for children. This is mirrored in the enthusiasm and energy of staff and foster carers. However the location of the premises for the fostering service continues to be unsuitable for its stated purpose and health and safety issues must be addressed to halt the detrimental effect upon the service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The fostering service policies, procedures and written guidance reflects the statement of purpose and are available to staff through the TRI -X system and if needed in hard copy. This has improved greatly since last year with all staff having computers and being eager to learn IT skills. Management recognise some staff and foster carers are still uncomfortable with the technology. Policy and procedures are made available to foster carers on disc and guidance is given in the foster carers handbook. Supervising link workers will take a laptop and a disc out to look at specific policies and procedures during supervision sessions for training purposes and if a need is identified.

All manager(s) are currently completing the relevant NVQ level 4 in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by the NVQ level 4 and are due to complete in 2007. The only delay is time; although study time is allocated in work hours other duties take precedence. A new manager is due to start by the end of March and release the fostering service manager to focus on outstanding service and personal development issues. Managers have proven themselves to have excellent professional skills that will be enhanced through the training opportunity. There is a management development centre providing a corporate workforce programme for all managers. A full appraisal of management competencies is made identifying abilities and those skills to be developed. Action Plans are linked into the I P M's.

A new recording system has been developed for use by foster carers and there is a programme for rolling it out to all foster carers. The record is comprehensive covering all aspects of a child's placement and is taken with the child to the next placement. The file and records are being issued to foster carers following compulsory workshops in maintaining records. The file includes a record of medication, first aid and medical treatment. The record also has a serious incident form to be completed by foster carers.

The registered person ensures written notifications are provided without delay. There is a policy and procedure for the notification of all regulation 43 and regulation 30 matters. The management and staff in the fostering service team have been pro active and effective in making timely verbal notifications and thorough in following up with written notifications. Further work must be done to develop a process that ensures the outcome of child protection incidents are also notified. 4.1 The senior children's service management have established a procedure for notification of serious incidents and all relevant agencies and parties are informed. Information regarding regulation 43 notification and complaints was presented for the inspection in a useful format with details of outcomes for the latter.

The senior management team have developed a strong organisational structure with a range of strategic posts in additions to those of the core service. This provides a staff group with specific knowledge, skills and experience in the duties and responsibilities of their posts.

Progress has been made over the past twelvemonths with a number of staff vacancies being filled and a reduction in the number of agency staff being used. Staff interviewed stated an average current caseload is 16 foster carers; most with multiple placements. This workload is due to staff shortages (2 vacancies, 1 x maternity leave) and can difficult for staff to manage. Staff consider 10 cases to be an optimum number. The team manager allocates cases and with several cases due at panel it is expected that caseloads will increase. Having a dedicated duty worker relieves some of the pressure on link workers. A new staff member is due to start next month and a new manager.

The issue of the use of unqualified staff was addressed at the last inspection and the senior management team have responded creatively and positively in appointing unqualified staff to trainee posts and supporting them to attain relevant qualifications of value to the service and offering the potential for career development to staff. Clarity is required in terms of the unqualified workers role in respect of supervision, workload, social work tasks etc. For example the supervising link worker is responsible for completing and presenting review reports & attending relevant meetings. In the first instance, the unqualified social worker has been accompanied on visits and to meetings by another worker, or manager. However, the unqualified social worker now attends most meetings alone unless it is agreed that the issues being raised requires the presence of a more experienced worker.

Staff and management reported that Admin support has improved, especially as the posts have been filled by permanent staff. There is now potential for additional administration tasks currently carried out by link workers that could be taken on by administration staff. There are no specific administration staff allocated to the different teams with the fostering service. There has been significant change in this area with the appointment of a new senior administration officer, a designated officer for panel and permanent staff to posts. A new post has been created to provide administration support to the team managers. The administration is well ordered and supports the work of the team. The files and records were clearly labelled and readily accessible with files indexed and generally complete. This would indicate there is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the fostering service. There are plans to increase the administration team to address the new duties of a reception to the service.

The feedback from fostering service staff and placing officer's indicates the working relationship has improved since the previous report. There are mechanisms at strategic level for managers to meet and discuss the issues.

Reference is regularly made to the joint working protocol. The Looked After Children strategy focuses on the individual cases. The process of recruitment and timescales can prove difficult for the Looked After Children team to work with. However effective implementation of the fostering placement agreement will need the support and commitment of both teams to be successful in meeting the needs of the child to be placed and positive outcomes in the placement.

The recruitment of foster carers is monitored and information is provided by the service to the fostering panel. Staff and foster carers are recruited with a variety of backgrounds and experience. There remain a couple of staff vacancies and a maternity leave being carried; one being most notably the short breaks link worker. The team has two agency workers that have been with the team for a long period.

The fostering service is creative in the use of qualified social workers on secondment from residential services and unqualified staff. Two new trainee posts have been developed. Staff reported good access to internal and external training courses.

The Marketing Officer has done some excellent work for the recruitment of carers. Statistical reports have been used to chart the referral and recruitment of foster carers. The ongoing analysis helps the service to identify how best to improve the service needs. It will provide an understanding of which forms of advertising trigger an application and when this is most effective. Comparisons can be made of data on the amount of enquiries received, offers returned, drop out rates / retention, and length of time for applicants to reach approval. The service will also monitor the ethnicity of enquirers and track them throughout application (this is in line with the ongoing impact assessment and examination of the policy of recruitment of foster carers from ethnic minorities).

A campaign plan has been produced for Nov. 2005 –Nov. 2006. This incorporates National Campaign's, Retention events, Advertising, Training, Outreach work, Children Waiting Magazine/Adoption newsletter, Recruitment events and direct mails. The service has supported this with the Freer Street development providing a town centre shop front and two new staff appointments of customer service officer's. A range of local communities are involved through local groups and community events such as Black Sisters Group, Sikh forum, Vaisakhi Display Hindu Forum and the Diwali display. Local carnivals and library events are also used.

A new development is for all staff to be involved in recruitment and briefing is provided prior to attendance at events to ensure a standard approach and uniform information is provided. This task is included in staff IPM's.

Progress has been made with mapping and planning for the high number of external and often geographically distant placements with a view to creating and utilising suitable placements within the borough. The sample of foster carers and family and friend carers visited indicated the service provides a good number of foster carers with a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience.

An example was noted of long-term carers; very skilled in communicating & relating to the children in their care. The foster carer recently received an award to recognise the work she has done and within the service progressed to a Level 4 carer.

There is a clearly set out assessment process for carers. Assessments are completed on the British Association of Adoption and Fostering assessment form (Form F) and this includes competency based work. This takes place at the same time as training. The recruitment worker visits the family as part of this process and aids in preparation for the following training sessions. Prospective foster carers are provided with copies of the Foster Carers' handbook.

There has been considerable progress in the corporate training section following the appointment of designated training staff. A training programme has been developed covering basic topics with some additional specific training being identified to meet individual staff and service requirements. The commissioning of external trainers for the NVQ qualifications has finally addressed the requirement for competent, trained staff. The formal system for the collation of feedback from annual appraisals of individual development needs, for the effective planning of training programmes for staff has been implemented with all staff having completed an appraisal in the past twelvemonth period. Some training is purchased from external providers. Where appropriate and available joint training of foster carers, fostering service staff and children's social workers has proved to be very useful. The training officer also encourages joint training to be attended by other professionals such as children's social workers, education and health care workers. Discussions are taking place with the department's training centre about developing more training appropriate for fostering service social workers.

Quality of training is not always considered by staff to be appropriate for link workers. However, training on Domestic Violence was "very good". Staff have been asking for more training in using computers. Assurance had been given to staff the training would be provided before computers were installed. Some staff continue to rely on support from admin in receiving e-mails and for accessing "TRI-X" to download policies & procedures.

There has been excellent progress with the training for foster carers. This is evident within the service and also achieving external recognition. A foster carer recently received an award to recognise the work she has done. She has progressed to a Level 4.

Other carers have been encouraged and supported to attend training sessions and with progression to Level 3. A Recognition Day is arranged to celebrate the achievements of foster carers, such as long service & completion of NVQ training.

The Skills for Fostering training is provided to prospective foster carers in conjunction with the Black Country Consortium. A member of the Recruitment Team is the lead for Walsall on this. The training officer liaises with staff in order to ensure an appropriate link is maintained with this and subsequent training provided by Walsall to their approved carers.

The training officer has produced a training pack for induction, core and level 1 to 4 training for approved carers. Additional and training provided by external facilitators are also arranged and foster carers are informed about these through flyers and in their monthly newsletter. Link workers and foster carers have attended some training courses to develop both their understanding and skills.

The training officer liaises closely with the department's and external trainers (such as NHS health care & independent specialists) to ensure the content meets the needs of foster carers. A 6 month planned training programme has been delivered for this year and a full programme year's programme will be produced for 2006/07.

The training officer reports a growing interest in attended NVQ training. There is a criteria which foster carers must meet before being put forward and meetings are held to ensure foster carers are aware of what NVQ is about. The training officer reported approx 14 carers are on NVQ and 13 are waiting places.

A training development group meet quarterly which consists of the trainer and link workers. Foster carers are encouraged to share their experience by providing input into training courses, i.e.: a foster carer is part of the training team on the induction workshops and one has completed a trainer's training course. Another foster carer is involved in presenting a 2hr workshop on life story work.

AC is also liaising with a recently appointed children's right worker (Rebecca Rice) who is developing children's views and rights workshops. Children will be encouraged to express their views in terms of care and delivery. For example what is considered to be important and what they have found useful when producing a life story book with foster carers.

Achievements of foster carers are celebrated at a Recognition Day.

The training officer states that foster care agreements state a minimum of 3 training sessions must be attended each year. Where carers have failed to attend planned training a formal letter is sent that requires a response from



the carer. Records of individual training has started to be held on the computer, the majority should be available. Link workers are accessing this information for use in reviews and supervision sessions. Link workers are encouraging foster carers to access training. There has been some resistance, however this is being addressed and link workers are identifying training needs with carers and requests are being made for specific training to be arranged to meet individual needs.

The three teams meet regularly every month and there is a set agenda that staff contribute to. Inspectors observed each of the three team meetings. Staff participated in the meeting and discussion points are noted and action to be taken agreed and recorded. There is also an opportunity for a full fostering service team meeting.

Supervision sessions should take place monthly but evidence was these occasionally slip. Team managers operate an 'open door' policy, to enable discussions to take place/advice to be sought in between sessions. Unqualified staff were unable to describe any differences between the level and content of the supervision received and that offered to qualified social workers. Staff are responsible for ensuring visits and supervision takes place and for preparing the review papers. Any issues/concerns can be discussed during supervision sessions with the manager. The unqualified staff are allocated as the named worker for the family and friend carers on the work load. Unqualified staff are encouraged to attendance college to obtain qualifications. However this frequently coincides with team meetings. Personal development opportunities are available for to shadow workers in other teams, such as recruitment & short-breaks. The service/department is financing the social work training course through one of the trainee posts.

Examination of unqualified staff supervision records show these are signed by the supervisor, but not by the staff member. Discussions with regards to case load management and issues raised during visits are detailed. However, there is no supervision contract or any reference to case responsibilities of an identified qualified social worker. An introductory IPM has been completed, which includes completion of a general review of practice, identifies targets & review dates. These have all been addressed and last targets were signed off as complete in January 2006.

There was evidence that the team manager completes a file audit. One aspect monitored is that written copies of foster carers' supervisions are kept available on their files. Staff are asked to bring these to supervision at least on a quarterly basis. These were seen by inspectors in the sample files and copies were held by the foster carers. Monthly supervision records were seen in some instances however the regularity varied. It was unclear why supervision had not taken place. It was explained that visits to foster carers are prioritised. Monthly visits to experienced foster carers are often re-

scheduled to enable visits to less experienced foster carers to take place or for support to be provided to them when attending a child/children's review.

Supervision recording format had improved and covered a range of topics including care practice issues, individual placement care plans and training and development. Supervision records need to be signed by both parties and a copy provided for the foster carer. Generally there has been an improvement with induction, individual performance management and reviews of staff and foster carers.

The management reported that all foster carer agreements should now be signed with a copy held on individual files. New guidance has been provided following a revision of the skills levels /payment scheme. It is considered to be more equitable having listened to and addressed some of the issues raised by foster carers and family and friend carers.

Foster carers confirmed that the Fee for membership of Fostering Network has been paid for all carers and it is expected this will be an annual subscription. This promotes the professional role of foster carers and the support and advisory role of the organisation.

Systems have been developed to record formal evidence of lessons learnt from the findings of complaints and allegations and recommendations for action' to inform future provision of the fostering service. This incorporates feedback from other sources such as panel recommendations and reviewing officer feedback.

The reviewing officer has led some workshops in respect of allegations against foster carers as a service response to concerns and anxieties raised in reviews and following complaints or allegations. This had been a significant issue for foster carers who felt unsupported and uncertain about processes at the time of investigation.

A sample of six files were seen; those held by fostering service link workers relating to the sample of foster carers to be interviewed and the children and young peoples files for case tracking. These included permanent carer, temporary carer, short-term carer, a family and friends foster carer and a short term break carer files. A selection of files were also seen from the recruitment and assessment team. Tri X holds the written policy on case recording.

In the majority of instances the LAC information on the files had improved significantly with clear typed formats with relevant current detail signed and dated. The fostering service has worked closely with the LAC team to establish positive links and prepare for the application of the PARIS system to make the recording and reporting systems more efficient.

Link workers operate a record monitoring system during supervision of foster carers. Files and records are viewed and discussed and any information on children no longer placed with them are returned to the child's social worker or area team administration. A new comprehensive children's file and recording format has been produced and will be rolled out to foster carers through mandatory training or during supervision for implementation. This was seen by the inspectors in one of the foster carer placements and seemed to be well received by the carer who stated " it holds all the relevant information and can be added to and goes forward with the child as they move on".

Further work is being done to develop an Integrated Children's system for managing children's cases. This is a single approach to undertaking the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review. The fostering service staff all have use of computers and are developing IT skills to make efficient use of data model systems.

With improvements in the administration staffing structure and appointments there has been considerable progress in the operation of administration duties and the efficiency of the systems and processes for the fostering service.

A sample of records and files were seen by the inspectors. Management explained there is a file audit group led by quality performance to monitor and review the accessibility of records by children and young people and foster carers. Due consideration has been given to the Victoria Climbié Audit with a view to developing a specific effective audit tool for the service. The inspectors found that the management, organisation and presentation of files and storage of records has improved and records are far more accessible. Generally the files held the required Looked After Children (LAC) information, Personal Education Plan's (PEP) and Health Plan. It was found that most files had a preliminary guide to contents and in the main relevant, current documents were in place. However the content of the information recorded in some instances was found to be inaccurate in the sample of files and records seen. For example there were two instances where the address of the foster carer had changed as identified in the case notes and this had not been changed on the register. This has implications for matching and placement referrals. The Code List 58 did not match the register. The information on the front index did not coincide with the contents in the file.

The information and records of one of the short-term break carers in the sample seen was inaccurate and incomplete. The inspectors were provided with the carer's old address. Her file showed she had moved address 18 months previously. The file contained three notifications on her category of approvals following reviews, but not her review reports or details. Last review was 10<sup>th</sup> February 2005 and Skill Level Board met on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2005. The record of a first visit made to the carer's home by the supervising link worker is available, but not dated. A check sheet contained the date a police check had been requested and date the result was received. A risk assessment for

the environment was dated 18<sup>th</sup> November 01, but had not been completed. A placement referral sheet was available but had been poorly completed. The National Children's Home Responsibilities Agreement was dated 15<sup>th</sup> September 1999 and the LA Foster Care Agreement dated 26<sup>th</sup> August 04. There are three recorded supervision sessions, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug & 5<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2005. One makes reference to a child receiving short break care and all state no training has been identified or undertaken. All recordings are very brief. An old training sheet contained two entries, aromatherapy massage 2003 and medication which was not dated. Two transfer/closure summaries have been completed by the outgoing link workers, one dated 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2004 & one dated 26<sup>th</sup> Sept 2005. Neither had been completed fully and no new link workers identified.

The list of carers and children provided for the inspectors listed a different child receiving short-break care from the children receiving the service and those were listed as being placed with another foster family. One child lives with his natural family and only receives short-break care. Neither child's file were available. The yellow file that was provided contained payment receipts from the carer and receipts of payments made to carer for the short term break child and no other information. Also see example given of short family and friends.

Twelvemonths ago the inspectors expressed serious concerns regarding the health and safety of staff and visitors using the building given the condition. The responsible person gave assurances these matters would be addressed. However it was found that whilst all other teams have been moved from the premises and relocated the fostering service team remain in situation and works have gone on around them to make temporary safety measures such as the removal of asbestos ceiling tiles from team rooms and the corridor. However other than cosmetic decoration and an improved heating system the premises remain in a very poor condition. Due consideration was given to relocation to an alternative site but a town centre location with adequate car parking facilities could not be found. It was agreed with the registered person that the Health and Safety Executive would be consulted regarding conditions in the premises and an action plan forwarded for temporary relocation of staff whilst the premises are repaired, improved and refurbished.

A presence in the community will be provided by the marketing team in the shop front location in Freer Street with a walk-in centre for the general public. This should aid recruitment of foster carers.

The Foster Carers Association have also been successful in identifying a suitable venue in Ryecroft accessible to all carers and offering a range of facilities. The Fostering Service has been supportive providing an office for the use of the Foster Carers Committee.

The proposal is for the refurbishment of the Essington premises. This was taken through cabinet for authorisation and monies earmarked. Unfortunately a member of the architect team left the department and there has been a delay in moving the project forward. In the meantime the registered person must seek the advice of the Health and Safety Executive to ensure the premises are fit for working conditions due to hazard of leaking flat roofs along electrical wiring systems and inadequate door closure systems for fire safety exits. Meanwhile there continue to be asbestos ceiling panels throughout the building, window frames that are broken and rotten, flat roofs which leak and strong odour from sewage drainage systems.

It is reported by staff and management that there has been a marked improvement in the heating and ventilation systems. Surface decoration and new furnishings has brightened the work space however the cleaning of the premises is superficial and inadequate leaving the kitchen, toilet and working facilities unclean and unhygienic.

There has been considerable progress with development of the service to Family and Friend carers. Staff have been appointed and allocated as supervising link workers. Reviews are gradually being done and are on target for completion by the end of March 2006. Important changes have been made to the Fee payments from April 2006 removing any disparity with main stream foster carers. This strategy introduces a level playing field for allowances for orders. This has already been agreed by cabinet and should encourage more to apply for special guardianship without being financially disadvantaged. The fostering service team have an improved capacity to carry out assessments. Consideration has been given to commissioning suitable qualified social workers from other teams and also developing a pool of independent assessors.

Family and Friend carers are offered the same training as mainstream foster carers however it is recognised that this may not always be appropriate or suitable to meet their needs. It is proposed to plan a consultation event to identify training needs. This would also be a celebration event to acknowledge the supportive role they fulfil and check out the level and nature of support they would welcome from the service.

Some Family and Friend carers have attended induction & NVQ training. The supervising link workers are looking at specific training modules and how, if necessary, the content may be adapted to be more relevant to Family and Friend carers and what they require with regards to training during the next year. Records are also kept of training attended by Family and Friend carers.

The Family and Friend carers team have 2 link workers an unqualified social worker in training and a qualified social worker. The unqualified social worker has 11 Family and Friend carers on caseload of 13. Many of these carers have never had a link worker and were resistant to having regular contact with a

named worker and monthly meetings/supervisions are taking place. Records are kept of these meetings, signed by supervising link worker and carers. This is kept on the carers file. They are not issued with a copy. The supervising link worker has worked on building relationships and assisted families with advise with regards to debt management & ensuring they are receiving appropriate payments they are entitled to from the fostering service. As the relationships have developed supervising link worker is now able to raise child-care issues with them & training. Family and Friend carers do not receive a copy of the training manual, however, supervising link worker ensures they have a photo copy of the programme. One of the Family and Friend carers has expressed an interest in NVQ training.

As Family and Friend carers need to be reviewed, supervising link workers have found some medical issues that were not concluded or addressed during the approval process. Mental health issues for have not been explored has not attended a medical. The review should have taken place in October 2005 and has recently been rescheduled.

Family and Friend carers are not issued with a copy of the Foster Carers' Handbook. Supervising link workers have raised the benefits with the team of issuing a revised copy of the handbook to Family and Friend carers. A steering group is being set up to explore the interest & benefit in arranging a celebration day for Family and Friend carers.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

<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>	3
<b>15</b>	2
<b>30</b>	3

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>13</b>	2
<b>31</b>	3

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	2
<b>11</b>	3

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

<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	2
<b>2</b>	3
<b>4</b>	2
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	2
<b>17</b>	4
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	3
<b>20</b>	2
<b>21</b>	X
<b>22</b>	3
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	3
<b>25</b>	2
<b>26</b>	1
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	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	FS1	3(a)(b)(c)	The responsible person must provide a Children's Guide which includes the following; a summary of what the Service sets out to do, information for the child on how to access independent advocacy, how to complain and the contact details for CSCI. 1.5  Timescale of 30/04/05 not met.	31/07/06
2	FS1	3(a)(b)(c)	The responsible person must ensure the Guide is available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.1.5  Timescale of 30/04/05 not met. 1	31/07/06
3	FS4	43 (1) (2) Sch 8	The registered person must ensure the outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers is reported. 4.1 Timescale of 25/01/05 has not been met. 4	30/06/06
4	FS8	Schedule 6 34(3)	The responsible person must ensure that foster placement agreements identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. 8.4	31/07/06



			Timescale of 31/03/05 not met.	
5	FS10	14	<p>The manager must ensure that:</p> <p>The views of the child/young person must be sought and appropriate records kept. 10.4 Detailed information is included in the Foster Placement Agreement with regards to contact arrangements for the child/young person.10.7 Timescale of 31/03/05 has not been met.</p>	31/07/06
6	FS10	14	<p>The registered person must ensure that contact does not take place until the child's social worker has carried out a risk assessment and arrangements made for any supervision that is needed.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure contracted services to provide staff/carers for supervision of contact arrangements are suitable and consistent. 10.6</p>	31/07/06
7	FS10	14	The registered person must ensure contract arrangements provide suitable transport e.g. taxis used for transport and consistent escorts for contact arrangements. 10.8	31/07/06
8	FS13	16 & 34(3) Sch 6	The foster carer's role in school contact, e.g. parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan, is clearly laid out in the placement agreements. 13.4 Timescale of 31/03/05 has not been met.	31/07/06
9	FS13	16 & 34(3) Sch 6	The service must ensure that foster carers are provided with clear information, which forms part of the foster placement agreement, of who holds	31/07/06

			responsibility for giving consent to take part in such trips. 13.5 Timescale of 31/03/05 has not been met.	
10	FS15	20 (3)(b)	The manager must ensure that suitable policies, procedures and guidance are produced in relation to the supervision of unqualified workers carrying out social work duties and maintain appropriate records of this practice. 15.5, 15.6 & 15.8 Timescale of 31/05/05 has not been met.	31/08/06
11	FS15	20(3)(b)	The registered manager must ensure clarity is provided in procedures regarding the status of qualified and unqualified staff with clear guidelines for definition of social work tasks. 15.8	31/08/06
12	FS16	34(3) Sch 6	The registered person must ensure there is a clear understanding between fostering service social workers and the children's social workers of how they can work effectively together for the effective implementation of the Foster Carer Placement Agreement Format. 16.15 Timescale of 30/04/05 has not been met.	31/07/06
13	FS20	21(4)(a)	The supervision policy and agenda does address the role and needs of the unqualified staff. 20.3	31/08/06
14	FS25	22 Sch 3	The registered manager must ensure the records kept of checks and references show they have been obtained and their outcomes. 25.11	30/06/06
15	FS25	22 Sch 2	The registered manager the administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement needs to be improved to ensure information is current and accurate. 25.6	30/06/06

16	FS25	22	The registered manager and fostering service staff must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files. 25.6	30/06/06
17	FS26	23	<p>The responsible person must ensure that hazards are assessed and remedial action taken in respect of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asbestos ceiling panels throughout the building which have been assessed as safe as long as they are not moved or damaged</li> <li>• Window frames broken and rotten.</li> <li>• Flat roofs damage surface covering.</li> <li>• Cleansing / repair of sewage drainage systems (to prevent odour).</li> </ul> <p>26.1 Timescale of 31/06/05 has not been met.</p>	31/05/06
18	FS26	23	<p>The responsible person must ensure that the following items receive attention:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Repair flat roof (permanence team room).</li> <li>2. Assess and repair cracked wall plaster in hallways and stairwell.</li> <li>3. Replace the floor surfaces in the toilets and kitchen with sealed washable floor covering.</li> <li>4. Replace the sinks with worn enamel or metal surfaces.</li> <li>5. Replace top corridor carpet.</li> <li>6. Make safe uneven slabs on walkways and in courtyard.</li> </ol> <p>26.1 Timescale of 31/06/05 has not been met.</p>	31/05/06

19	FS26	23	The registered person must consult the Health and Safety Executive regarding the status of the premises for the health and safety of those working and visiting the premises.	06/03/06
20	FS26	23	The registered person must provide an action plan to the Commission for Social Care Inspection with timescales for the relocation of the fostering services. 26.1 Timescale of 31/05/05 has not been met.	31/03/06
21	FS26	23	The registered person must ensure the contracted services for cleaning of the premises are monitored to ensure the premises are maintained clean and hygienic. 26.1	31/07/06
22	FS31	19(a)(b)	The registered person must ensure contracted services for children with disabilities meet the service needs for children and foster carers.	31/07/06
22	FS31	19(a)(b)	The registered person must ensure there is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff: employ a suitable skilled replacement for the short-term break scheme. 17.2	31/07/06
23	FS32	17	The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service address and recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers. 32.1 Timescale of 30/04/05 has not been met.	30/09/06
24	FS32	17	The responsible person must ensure that support and or relevant training are provided to family and friend carers. 32.3	31/07/06

## 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	FS6	The service is advised to review its current recording format to ensure the assessment cover any individual environmental issues. 6.2
2	FS6	It is recommended the service ensures that detailed written records are kept of the assessment undertaken and outcome on each child/young person's records. This must include the views and wishes of the child/young person in accordance with their age and level of understanding. 6.5
3	FS14	It is recommended that there should be a period of joint work where the involvement of both the childcare social worker and the Leaving Care worker continues to ensure that carers understand the changing requirements of supporting the placed child towards adulthood. 14.2
4	FS14	It is recommended that the information system of the Transition & Leaving Care team should have an information system on education needs that dovetails with that of the Education Support team, so that carers can continue to support placed children's educational needs. 14.4
5	FS16	The maximum frequency between supervisions should be included in section 4 ("Frequency/Duration") of the supervision policy. 16.8
6	FS18	Consideration should be given to the provision of a staff changing area. 26.4 & 18.5
7	FS19	Review three different inductions offered; a corporate one, one for the Department and one for the Fostering Service with a view to rationalising this situation.19.2
8	FS21	A copy of the National Minimum Standards should be made available to all foster carers. 21.2
9	FS21	Review the support offered through respite provision to foster carers. 21.2
10	FS22	Foster Care Agreements should be updated to meet the 2002 Regulations as carers are promoted to new Levels with the new expectations and responsibilities that go with that. 22.4

11	FS22	The manager should provide foster carers with the opportunity to discuss their concerns in relation to complaints and allegations of abuse. 22.9
12	FS29	Consideration should be given to the involvement of finance staff in the induction training of carers. 29.2
13	FS30	It is recommended that the quality assurance and monitoring of the panel functions is to be developed. 30.5
14	FS31	It is recommended that carers are provided with information regarding insurance cover provided in respect of the administration of invasive medication. 31.1 & 6.7
15	FS7	It is recommended that the placements be monitored to measure the suitability of matching in placements and where the needs of the service to make a placement are primary and any shortfall in the abilities of foster carers.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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