



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sefton Council Fostering & Adoption Service

**Ellesmere House
Crosby Road North
Waterloo
Liverpool
Merseyside
L22 0LG**

Lead Inspector
Mrs Lynn Paterson

Key Announced Inspection
15th January 2007 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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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	Sefton Council Fostering & Adoption Service
Address	Ellesmere House Crosby Road North Waterloo Liverpool Merseyside L22 0LG
Telephone number	0151 285 5269
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Sefton Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Linda Woodcock
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 9.01.06.

Brief Description of the Service:

Sefton Social Services Fostering Team is based in Ellesmere House, Waterloo. The property is a large Victorian building, which is open and accessible and has office accommodation spread over three floors. The premises has a public ramped access which leads to a ground floor reception area and conference facility and has good parking area to the front, side and rear of the building. The team comprise of specialist workers who are trained and experienced in the area of fostering with their main function being to recruit, assess, train and support foster carers. Experienced, professional administrative staff provides business support to the team.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection of Sefton Fostering Service commenced on 15th January 2007 and was carried out over a five -day period. Prior to the inspection discussions had been held with the management team and a timetable had been arranged as to how the visit would be organised. The management team provided pre inspection documentation prior to the commencement of the inspection, which was completed to a very high standard and held clear factual details of the management and development of the service.

The first day was spent meeting with the team manager and staff and reading files. The following days involved discussions with agency staff, supervising social workers attending a children's group, meeting with foster carers training organiser and undertaking visits to meet with foster carers and young people.

Six foster carers and young people looked after files were examined in detail. Agency staff files records were verified, panel files were looked at and panel records viewed.

Six carers had been contacted by telephone for discussion about their perception of the agency and letters had been sent to all foster carers and young - people in placement to gain insight into how they viewed the level of support provided to them from the agency.

Policies and procedures were also looked at during the site visit and a tour of the premises was undertaken.

Fieldwork included discussions with "placing" social workers, and "looked after children's" education officer.

Over eighty completed questionnaires were returned from foster carer's, young - people and social workers.

What the service does well:

Management of administration continues to be highly organised and the provision of documents and information to assist the inspection process was excellent.

All family placement team staff presented as committed to the provision of high quality outcomes for children looked after.

It was noted that Health assessments of children are clear and health plans agreed, implemented and reviewed regularly and records show Designated Looked after Children's Nurse and Designated Doctor ensure children's health issues are prioritised.

Foster carers said there are good links with all support services that offer consultancy to social workers and foster carers in respect of child mental health or behavioural management issues.

Discussion with the training co-ordinator and foster carers revealed Foster carer training includes child protection, drug awareness, recognising bullying, first aid, safety in the home and managing challenging behaviour. Foster carers said this training had been provided as a result of effective consultation methods taking place to gain information as to foster carers wishes in respect of training needs.

Foster carers in general said they felt well supported by their family placement social worker and were provided with information and training to assist them to understand and meet the needs of children and young people who were accommodated in their homes.

Comments from foster carers included:

"I am supported by my social worker who keeps in touch with me on a regular basis"

"I feel comfortable with my family placement social worker, s/he is reliable and offers support when I need it".

Outer school activities and children's/young peoples groups are arranged for the children looked after and young people spoken with said they enjoyed the after school activity provided. Observation of an after school group identified that the young people felt comfortable and at ease with their peer groups and empowered by the support and leadership of the people who managed the group.

Documentation shows the educational achievement, school attendance and cultural experiences of children are monitored on an individual basis and collectively in reports to senior officers and action is taken to address findings.

Most young people looked after said they feel they are treated well, and their views are sought and used to improve services.

Comments from young people included;

"I like the way my foster carer tells me what is going on and what is expected to happen, it makes me feel as if I am in some control of my life",

"I feel well cared for by my foster carers as they always think about me"

"My carers always sit down with me and talk about things and they always support me"

" I love being here. I now eat all my vegetables and don't get sick anymore and I keep my teeth clean, I exercise, I love football, I want to be a footballer".

"I f I have a problem my foster parents listen to me and we sort things out, I love it here I have a great bedroom".

"My foster carers are very supportive in all I do. They help with my school and help me to plan my future and what I will do when I leave school".

"My foster carers and I sit down as a family and discuss any issues that arise, good or bad and I feel that I can tell them anything".

"My foster carers always speaks with me and listens to what I have to say. If s/he cannot help them she asks her social worker what she should do".

"My carers love and care for me like I am their son, and are always there if I need them".

Staff said the service has a performance driven culture and staff clearly understand that trying to achieve excellent outcomes is part of the Local Authorities ethos.

Staff said there are procedures in place, which monitor and control the activities of the fostering service. There is a robust management system with Team Manager, Resource Manager and Service Manager having oversight of the team performance.

General observations, conversations and examination of documents reveal the service continues to strive to monitor and review policies, procedures and practices to ensure the responsibilities of the service are fully addressed.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The appointment of a Children's Participation Officer and the implementation of the participation strategy identifies the service have introduced different ways of consulting with children and young - people to enable them to participate in their reviews to include use of text, Dictaphone, and e-mail.

The service has redesigned consultation documents and Under 10 and over 10 versions have been produced. Participation standards' for staff have also been updated and incorporate a children and young people's version.

A "Race Awareness' leaflet has been produced as a result of consultation exercise undertaken.

The service have worked on providing Initiatives with leisure services, which has helped more young people access sporting facilities including

- Looked after children leisure surgeries
- Personal trainer project – two trainers newly appointed to

promote active lifestyle.

Training in relation to safety in the home and managing challenging behaviour has been redesigned following feedback from foster carers and a Health and safety checklist for foster carers has been revised.

The appointment of a Children's Complaints Officer has ensured clear procedures for effective and timely handling of complaints. Staff, are well informed of this process, which has been fully supported with information leaflets for carers, children and young people. "Looked after children" from both residential and family placement have been fully involved in this process.

Procedures around allegations and complaints have been revised to ensure staff and foster carers are fully aware of the process involved.

The Personal Education Plan has been updated and information systems improved to ensure all children have up to date PEP, which is reviewed regularly.

Policies now ensure that Children and young people routinely participate in review meeting.

The service has employed a Coordinator for Employment, Training, and Education of young- people to provide a service to those in foster care.

There is a Social Worker now appointed to the short break scheme that is about to run preparation groups for interested enquirers. These groups will be co facilitated by the assistant team manager, family placement and a member of staff from the disabled children's team.

Records show the Management of budgets centrally has led to greater equity of payments and is on the whole quicker and more efficient.

Records show that a recent supervision audit confirmed staff receive regular and appropriate supervision and have access to training.

The fostering procedures have been reviewed and revised in line with government legislation and guidance and internal developments and good practice.

A permanence panel has been agreed and will be implemented February 2007. The panel will be chaired by an independent consultant who has been appointed and the panel will ensure that permanence plans for children are robust, timely and of good quality.

Fostering Panel members say the fostering panel has benefited from the appointment of an independent Chairperson ensuring full impartiality.

What they could do better:

It was noted that the service had experienced difficulties maintaining staffing levels and some foster carers advised that they had suffered as a consequence. One foster carer said she had in the past received a high level of support from her family placement social worker however because of staff shortages support visits had become very limited.

Other foster carers confirmed that staffing levels had created some shortfalls however most foster carers said the service had provided "the very best they could", in the circumstances.

Comments from foster carers include;

"Family placement is generally good, when you can get hold of someone"

"Lack of staffing means the right hand sometimes does not know what the left is doing",

"Poor staffing levels have resulted in social workers not returning phone calls"

"Support has been patchy due to staffing problems".

"They do their very best in the circumstances".

The management team advised that the family placement team was now almost back to full compliment and they had systems in place to ensure all statutory visits were maintained and staff were able to fully support the foster carers.

Information gained from foster carers in discussion or from questionnaires revealed that the service did not always give clear information about the Childs/young person's background or care needs and this had caused some difficulties with the placement. Whilst some foster carers said they had received adequate information prior to placement others were disappointed with the information sharing.

Comments from foster carers include:

"We were given basic information the day the child was placed, part 2 of the care plan arrived one month later. We had difficulty in knowing how to respond to the child's emotions",

"Very little information has been given, I have found that I need to find out for myself".

"Only receive basic information, however most of the time it is the only information the placement officers have"

"We usually get a phone call from Family Placement team with some information and sometimes feel as though we are only told on a need to know basis about someone we are taking into our family"

"Quite often we are told that information is not available".

Discussion with the management team identified that they understood that background information was not always readily available for them to pass to foster carers and they see this as an area in which they need to develop communication systems to ensure all available information is shared.

Foster carers said they felt the service did not provide payments for equipment or additional expense in a consistent manner and it was stated that foster carers had to use their own knowledge of the payment system to attempt to get money for "special need". Carers said they also felt the payment slips did not clarify what the carers had been paid for and requested that they be more detailed to ensure understanding. The management team advised that they were in the process of introducing new payment system to resolve the uncertainty and provide a consistent payment service.

Children and young people were asked if they knew their social workers and if they felt they were listened to and asked their opinions.

Comments again were varied however the majority of children/young people said their social workers changed on a regular basis as staff moved on and they did not get sufficient visits to enable them to get to know their social worker. One in three children knew the name of their social worker and comments received included;

"They call and see me sometimes but I never really know when",

"They call but don't really listen as they do not seem to get things done, like signing consent forms and things".

"Social services are always off sick and things take ages to get done".

These issues were discussed with the management team who agreed that staffing shortages and the difficulty in recruiting a stable qualified staffing group had impacted unfavourably upon the children's social work. They advised that National and local difficulties in the recruitment of qualified and experienced staff impacts on the ability to maintain sufficiently experienced staff within small specialist teams. However recruitment drives continue with the aim to enable all teams to be fully staffed and therefore able to fulfil their commitment to the children and young people looked after.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

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

The service ensures foster carers are trained and supported to make sure the health and development of children and young people is promoted. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service promotes children's health and development.

EVIDENCE:

Records show health assessments of children are carried out and health plans agreed, implemented and reviewed regularly.

Staff said the Designated Looked after Children's Nurse and Designated Doctor ensure children's health issues are prioritised.

Health records show that children are immunised and have regular health screening and dental and optical checks and foster carers spoken with said they were trained and supported to ensure that the children's health needs were met at all times.

Foster carers said they have access with CAMHS (Children and Adolescent mental health service) that offer consultancy to social workers and foster carers.

Staff advised that The Service Level Agreement with Barnardo's 'Keeping Children Safe' project is an additional intervention to support the emotional well being of children and support their carers. Young people spoken with said they are given advice and support in accessing appropriate local health services and are supported to "live a healthy lifestyle".

It was noted that a Looked After Children's Magazine', produced by children and young people for children and young people has a dedicated 'Healthy Living' section. In addition, contact details for the Looked After Children's Nurse are also in the magazine.

Foster carers said they are trained to ensure children are provided with guidance and support to promote healthy living and said that a Multi agency 'Healthy Care' training programme for foster carers heavily focuses on healthy eating, general health and promotion of leisure activities. Foster carers said they are provided with a health care portfolio to use to promote the health and development of young people and revealed that they are trained and encouraged to work in partnership with health care staff in the best interests of the child.

The service has Performance Indicators in respect of medical and dental attendance, which show a 94% take up for children in foster care.

Staff revealed that The Sexual Relationship Policy has been revised and distributed to carers.

Ongoing Sexual Health in Care group meets and provides training to foster carers on this issue.

Healthy living girls group met regularly to work with identified young people.

Policies procedures and files examined and discussions and information obtained from foster carers, social workers, children and young people show the fostering service continue to promote the health of children and young people and maximise their development.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3.6.8.9.15.30.

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

The service is managed and staffed by suitable people however the staffing levels of the service are insufficient to enable the service to fully provide foster carers with full information to ensure young people are fully protected. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation examined shows support services in place to reduce the need to accommodate children are effective.

Staff said the “being looked after panel” is valued and utilized as a supportive and helpful process to meet the needs of children and young people. The panel’s role in gate keeping resources is good. Family support is mostly offered in a timely and coordinated basis.

The fostering service has robust child protection procedures in place and staff and foster carers spoken with were able to identify they had received full training in all aspects of child protection.

Foster carers spoken with and information obtained from questionnaires identified that foster carers felt the training and support they received in respect of child protection enabled them to understand what child protection meant and to gain knowledge as to how to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to deal with allegations and disclosures.

Records show the number of foster care placements within the borough is sufficient to meet demand but only through the use of selected fostering agency placements.

The management team said that effort was being made to improve the in-house supply of foster carers.

Records seen and discussions held with Children looked after foster carers and family placement staff reveals that staff and carers are suitably trained, qualified and generally well supported for their task.

Documentation shows quality assurance aspects of care placements and child protection are regularly monitored and reported upon by the independent review service, which challenges practice and circulates its reports to senior managers, ensuring a strong link into service improvement. Pre inspection documentation revealed that the service has clear systems in place to ensure the safety and suitability aspects of all the placements, practices and staff are monitored and reviewed as an ongoing process to include:

Care placements being monitored on a regular basis including those outside the local area.

Recruitment of staff (including agency workers) and foster carers include thorough checks and references and CRB updates as appropriate.

Looked after children being provided with information about systems that are in place to enable them to report concerns about their care and treatment.

Children missing from care and home procedures are available and relevant information about this sent to every foster carer.

Protocol in place on "working with sexually active young people under the age of 18".

Safer Care practice guidelines leaflet introduced for foster carers.

Safe surfing information (poster) advising children and carers of Internet safety.

Training for foster carers includes child protection, drug awareness, recognising bullying, first aid, and safety in the home and managing challenging behaviour.

Full time complaints officer for children is in post and responds appropriately to issues raised by young people or their families or carers.

Records show changes of care placements are clearly managed and minimised as far as possible and include support for the children and young people concerned.

Training records reveal foster carers are suitably trained and supported in understanding and meeting the particular needs of children and young people.

Children and young people spoken with and information obtained from questionnaires revealed they are provided with full information about policies protocols and practices to enable them to be safeguarded.

Staff records show that each family placement worker has a clear job description and holds relevant qualification to carry out their designated role.

Staff confirmed they have an identification card that they show when working and visiting families.

Foster carers said they had not recently experienced their normal good levels of support from their family placement workers. Staff advised the staffing levels had not been sufficient to enable them to fully carry out their remit. However records show that the team had worked hard to meet the statutory requirement of the service.

Foster carers further revealed inconsistencies in the support provided by the children's social workers and said they changed so often that it caused confusion to both the foster carer and the child looked after.

Comments received from foster carers reveal that they are not always provided with clear details about the care needs of the child and they feel this sometimes impacts unfavourably upon the matching process.

Comments from foster carers include:

"We were given basic information the day the child was placed, part 2 of the care plan arrived One month later. We had difficulty in knowing how to respond to the child's emotions",

"Very little information has been given, I have found that I need to find out for myself".

"Only receive basic information, however most of the time it is the only information the placement officers have"

"We usually get a phone call from Family Placement team with some information and sometimes feel as though we are only told on a need to know basis about someone we are taking into our family"

"Quite often we are told that information is not available".

Discussion with the management team identified that they understood that background information was not always readily available for them to pass to foster carers and they see this as an area in which they need to develop communication systems to ensure all available information is shared.

Records show that new carers are approved through pre approval training, statutory checks and on-going assessments and all assessments address the requirements of the Form F documentation. Completed assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel who scrutinise the applications to ensure the person/s nominated are suitable to become foster carers and their premises are fit for purpose.

Records show the fostering panel comprise of a mix of professional people who have knowledge and understanding of the fostering service. Records show that the fostering panel receive training updates in relation to the role of the panel and any changes to the service. Past observations of the fostering panel found it to be well managed and it was noted that the service had complied with a recommendation made at the last inspection and had appointed an independent panel chair.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7.13.31.

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

The service truly values diversity and works hard to promote the educational achievement for children using the service. Short terms breaks are well managed. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The service identified it values diversity and Information and procedures clearly state all applications to foster are considered on their merits.

Staff advised that Sefton’s diversity campaign is now routinely incorporated within all forms of advertising including general advertising and recruitment drives, publicity material, leaflets and exhibition stands.

Publicity material was of a high standard and was seen to invite enquiries from a wide range of individuals and staff advised that efforts are made to target particular cultural backgrounds to raise awareness about fostering.

Social workers and foster carers advised that they are offered training on valuing diversity on a regular basis and are encouraged to attend.

Staff revealed that Race perceptions participation consultation was completed with children and young people and as a result the children designed a ‘race

awareness' leaflet entitled 'Did you know...' This leaflet is circulated routinely via the participation newsletter, children's information packs and children's magazine.

It was noted that A 'Diversity Awareness' page is included in the looked after children's magazine which is written by children and young people for children and young people.

Records show a specialist worker is in post to increase numbers of respite carers for children with special needs. Staff advised that there has already been an increase in excess of 50% in the number of carers approved and there are more assessments in process. A specifically tailored preparation process has been put in place for these carers.

Comments received from a foster carer confirmed the service acted upon its equality and diversity policies and practices with the comment "we recently looked after a young person with a background of different culture and ethnicity. Family placement and social services were very keen on meeting every aspect of his/her diversity."

Staff said they utilised good practice in addressing the religious/cultural /relationship needs of all children and young people looked after.

Foster carers said that support for the education of looked after children is generally good with all schools having designated teachers for looked after children.

Comments from foster carers include:

"We attend personal education planning meetings and enjoy good liaison with the schools"

"Support by attending P.E.P's and award evenings, showing interest in the child's educational interests at reviews and when visiting the child"

"Service have provided extra tuition for some subjects when requested and have given young person a lap top".

Comments from young people looked after include:

"I always get the right help to assist me to be successful in my education"

“I get help with my education from most of the adults I know”,

“I am given help but I would like to be able to change schools if possible”

Documentation seen shows the multi-agency support team provides effective access to additional teaching, information technology and distance learning materials. There are effective initiatives, Positive Futures and No Limits, to raise the self-esteem of these young people. The strategy to involve looked after children in the Aim Higher initiative is well established through the Superstars project, which provides training on study skills and mentoring. The achievement of looked after children is in line with national targets and indicators.

The service has an ongoing involvement of “No Limits” project supports children and young people in education. Additional tuition and rollout of laptops has continued and the Aim Higher programme targets year 11-13 pupils and provides additional support.

Foster carers said Looked after children have an effective Personal Education Plan (PEP), which is implemented and support is provided to foster carers to ensure that children participate in education and achieve to their potential.

Foster carers revealed that children and young people are given information about various cultural and leisure activities and given practical support and encouragement to develop their individual areas of interest.

Staff advised that the educational achievement, school attendance and cultural experiences of children are monitored on an individual basis and collectively in reports to senior officers; action is taken to address findings.

Whilst participating in a teleconferencing session with foster carer’s, it was noted that an education specialist was a guest speaker. The session proved to be interesting and informative and feedback from foster carers revealed they felt the information was most useful.

Documentation shows that the agency works in partnership with Children with Disabilities Team and share training tailored to meet specific needs of each carer and young person. Records show that the agency has a limited number of carers with specific approval to provide short-term breaks to meet the assessed needs of families as a support to parents who retain parental responsibilities and all of its central functioning and as a consequence has developed a specific post to enable more short term carers to be recruited and trained.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10.11.

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

Consultation is promoted and contact arrangements are well managed. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people spoken with and information obtained from questionnaires revealed that the child/young person's networks with family and friends are generally good.

Comments include:

"We meet up and have a few hours together each week and my foster carer helps me to get there",

"I have contact with my brothers and we go out together sometimes",

"My foster carer makes sure that I see my family".

Foster carers said they had received training in respect of contact and most foster carers said that the contact arrangements were fine. However it was noted that some contact arrangements had been changed at the last minute without the foster carer being advised and other contact arrangements had become difficult because of distance.

In general the contact networks appeared to be well managed and foster carers said they were normally assisted and supported by the local authority to ensure children and their families/friends stay connected.

The looked after children's service utilises the skills of children's participation officers which has been seen to have a positive effect on the service.

Staff spoken with said Children and young people looked after by the local authority have good opportunities to make a positive contribution and have helped to re-design documentation used at statutory reviews.

Records show the work of the participation officer is having a favourable impact upon children/young people being able to "have their say". Comments received from foster carers and young people were generally favourable about the participation standards and most people felt that they were assisted to contribute their views about the service and how it was delivered.

Children and young people spoken with confirmed they had access to an effective complaints system and records and records show it is monitored and reviewed to make it more accessible and useable by children and young people. Young people spoken with confirmed complaints are taken seriously and resolved to their satisfaction.

Records show that young people are involved in the production of leaflets and publications including Teenage Guide 2 Life magazine and reveal that Children's participation in reviews is consistently high.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

14.29.

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

The service has clear arrangements in place to ensure young people are assisted in their preparation for adulthood. Foster carers allowances are provided, however more details of payments are necessary to ensure that all carers receive a consistent allowance. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers said the transition arrangements for young people leaving care are generally good and all young people have specific pathway plans.

Staff revealed the service is well resourced to provide practical help, support and access.

Documentation shows the leaving care team is a multi-agency team that includes leisure services. It provides lifestyle and tailored packages of support for young people.

Young people said these packages are generally good and they can get help and advice from various sources to enable them to prepare for adulthood.

Some Foster carers said they were trained to support the young people looked after to gain life skills in preparation adulthood and revealed that Financial support is available to assist young people who are able to remain in their foster placements.

However other carers said they had not received much training although they did not feel this disadvantage either themselves or the child looked after.

The management team advised that it is the intention to review training needs to ensure all relevant carers attend the proposed training to help them prepare young people for the future and to be aware of the support services available.

Foster carers gave mixed responses to the question of payments made by Sefton Local Authority to foster carers. Comments include:

"How can a child prosper when the child and ourselves have to pester for what and should be something they are entitled to, hopefully our participation officer is on route to change things for us"

"We are enabled to provide an environment in which the child will prosper because of the good allowances. Extra money for special equipment if needed"

"The payments made are inconsistent, we need to know what we are entitled to and the service should make sure we get it".

"The payment slips do not clearly identify what we have been paid and this sometimes causes confusion".

The management team said they were aware of a few expression of concerns from foster carers and there is ongoing discussion and liaison with both Central Financial Services and e-Services sections to improve the payment system to foster carers to ensure speedy payments by BACCS. It is also the intention to improve information of financial remittance advice (Swift Foster Carer Payments).

It was noted that Fostering allowances have increased by a total of 25% over the last two years. The payment of enhanced allowances to foster carers has now been centralized to ensure equitable and appropriate targeting of resources. The management team advised that Fostering allowance would be increased in April 2007 to bring payments in line with government guidance.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1..4.5.16.17.20.21.22.23.24.25.32.

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

The service is very well managed and monitored however staffing shortages have somewhat impacted upon the service delivery. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Records and discussions with staff revealed that staffs are aware of the Council and Children's Services statement of purpose and of its aims and objectives.

Staff said the service continued to develop to implement improved information sharing and lead professional and common assessment.

Information provided in the pre inspection documents shows that there is regular discussion by senior management and elected members about the fostering services; to ensure that resources are allocated appropriately.

Senior management have developed good partnership working with public, private, voluntary and community sectors. All plans are linked to the key strategic priorities and display ambition, prioritisation and address issues of capacity.

Discussions with staff identified that senior managers have individual work plans, which link their work to the key corporate and departmental objectives. Policies, procedures and the mission statement reveal the service has a performance driven culture and a clear understanding by all staff that trying to achieve excellent outcomes is part of Sefton's ethos.

The management team have procedures in place to monitor and control the activities of the fostering service. With the team manager, resource manager and service manager having oversight of the team performance.

Each manager has a job description and levels of communication and accountability are well established. The Team Manager has day-to-day responsibility for the management of the team including allocation of work, supervising and supporting staff, and managing budgets. The Resource and Service Managers provide additional support and oversight as well as contributing to the future developments within the service. There is a clear system of deputising in the absence of managers. There are financial procedures, which are laid down by the authority, and the fostering service complies with these. Budgets are monitored monthly and reviewed annually and reports are submitted to senior managers to identify future resource needs. Foster carers are notified annually of the boarding out rates.

The foster carers handbook and statement of purpose identify the need for carers, managers and staff to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

Staff use clear assessment procedures to ascertain the suitability of prospective foster carers and all files seen held detailed assessments.

The case files viewed showed the standard of these assessments was excellent, giving sound evidence of the competencies of the foster carers.

Whilst the agency has clear practices when conducting assessments, and maintains all information that contributes to the Form F assessment there appeared to be inconsistencies in the time scale in which the assessments were carried out. This was discussed with the management team who advised that they had noted the inconsistency and in future would review the timeliness of the process of assessment of foster carers from initial contact to approval status to ensure it is more consistent.

Existing foster carers in general said agency staff, respect them as a valuable source of support and information and carers are regularly encouraged to attend training and support new carers.

Discussions with the training co-ordinator about foster carer training sessions identified that foster carers were offered ongoing training to enable them to utilise their skills to good effect.

Foster carers said they were provided with training calendars but would like to see more localised training venues as they would like to be able attend more training events to gain new skills.

Foster carers spoken with and information received from questionnaires confirmed they were generally supported by the fostering service. However they felt that staffing shortages had recently impacted unfavourably upon this support. They said they were provided with an on call systems that provided information, advice and assistance and gained support also through regular visits and formal supervision in which training needs were identified and any concerns discussed.

Events such as foster care support groups and teleconferencing meetings are arranged by the service but it was noted that very few foster carers take advantage of these facilities.

Comments received from foster carers in discussion and information gained from returned questionnaires about carer's general perception of the fostering service included: -

"It gives valuable support",

"We find that they enable us to cope with all the responsibilities by ourselves but they provide support when it is needed",

"The service does all it is required to do"

"They provide support workers when required if they are available",

"We have always been given all the support we have needed"

"They provide finance to look after young people as well as sometimes other resources. Training available is generally good"

"Provides a basic maintenance payment"

"Staffing shortages have created difficulties but they do the best they can in the circumstances".

Case files examined were clear and held all the necessary information. All records examined were maintained to a very high standard and this enabled the process of tracking events and outcomes to be an easy exercise.

The administration systems were seen to be excellent.

Staff advised that family and friend carers are fully approved at panel and are subject to all the procedures associated with the approval process to include health and safety checks carried out in their homes and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and references being provided. Staff advised that family and friend carers are offered all the training provided by the agency however records show, take up of training is low.

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	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	4
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	3

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

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

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS8	8(b)	The registered person must ensure that all known information about the child/young person is provided to ensure the matching process is fully carried out and make sure a child is placed with a foster carer who is suitable to meet their needs.	15/03/07

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	FS17	It is recommended that the fostering service continue their recruitment drive to ensure that the staffing levels are sufficient to provide the adequate support to foster carers and young people looked after. This will also assist the time management in relation to the prospective foster carers pre assessment process
2.	FS29	It is recommended that payment slips contain a break down of payments and allowances provided to ensure they could be checked and approved by the recipient.
3	FS29	It is recommended that the service provide a payment guide for foster carers to ensure they know their entitlements.

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