



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Luton Borough Council Fostering Service

**Housing and Social Services
Unity House
111 Stuart Street
Luton
Beds
LU1 5NP**

Lead Inspector
Marian Byrne

Unannounced Inspection
16th October – 31st October 2006 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	Luton Borough Council Fostering Service
Address	Housing and Social Services Unity House 111 Stuart Street Luton Beds LU1 5NP
Telephone number	01582 546000
Fax number	01582 547215
Email address	jennyc@luton.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Luton Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Jenny Coles
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 16th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Luton became a Unitary Authority in 1997 following Local Government reorganisation. The Fostering Service Team is part of the Children and Families Division of the Housing and Social Services Department and is based in Unity House in the centre of Luton.

The service recruits, trains and supports foster carers and at the time of inspection had 117 general carers, 30 shared carers, 28 kinship and 25 carers for specific children. In total the service placed 391 children in various placements including residential homes and with Independent Fostering Agencies.

Within this, the service was offering a range of types of foster care including emergency placements, short term or bridging placements, longer term placements, including permanent placements, shared care and short breaks for disabled children, preparing for independence placements, mother and baby placements.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out from the 16th of October to the 31st October 2006. It was carried out by two inspectors. Six foster carers were case tracked, four were visited in their own homes and two were spoken with by telephone. Questionnaires were sent to both foster children and foster carers 25 per cent in both instances. The response was poor with 10 questionnaires returned from children and six from foster carers. Of those who responded all were happy with the service offered to them. None requested a meeting with the inspector.

What the service does well:

The service was aware of most of its areas of shortfalls and had made progress to address them. Policies and procedures are under review and will be available as working documents in the near future. The team has committed workers who are keen to work in the best interests of the children who are fostered. They have ideas on how the service should run and what would best advantage the children.

Feedback from foster carers was in the main positive. The Agency has started to work well with other Agencies to produce health plans for the children who are fostered. Children are consulted and a children's panel works well.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Work has started on meeting the requirements left at the last inspection. A new carer's handbook has been introduced and distribution has gotten underway. Policies and procedures are mid-way to being updated. A nurse has been recruited to complete health plans for all the children who are fostered. Criminal Records Bureau Checks are being carried out in a timely fashion. The Statement of Purpose has been updated. The complaints procedure is being used to address complaints appropriately. The pre-inspection paperwork was completed and returned to the Commission in a timely fashion.

What they could do better:

The team is not being managed effectively. Overall the team is under pressure due to lack of appropriate foster places available locally. The team divided into recruitment and supervising teams approximately a year ago. Staff were very clear with the inspector that this was not working. For this year to date five carers were recruited.

Staff reported that this does not replace the numbers of foster carers de-registering. No review dates had been built into the managing of this change. Managers were unaware of staff's dissatisfaction with the new arrangements and were of the opinion that the system was working.

Recording on files was not always dated and signed and in many cases only first names were used making files difficult to follow. Documentation on file regarding the placement of children in care was not always accurate.

The Agency is taking too long to get prospective foster carers to Panel, and when presenting to Panel Form Fs were not appropriately checked and the Panel had to seek clarification on issues that should have been clear. The Agency was asking carers to go outside their registration without having been to panel.

There were no staff photographs on file

The Agency was not notifying the Commission of Schedule 8 incidents. There was a delay in pursuing CRB clearance for family members.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement would have been adequate had the work being carried out by the nurse been evidenced. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Improvements have been made and arrangements put in place to ensure that all children's health and development is being monitored. The lack of written evidence makes it difficult to make a positive statement on this. Therefore the judgement based on evidence available is that children's health and development is not being promoted effectively.

EVIDENCE:

As identified at previous inspections foster carers were offered training about child development, child health needs and first aid. This training was both part of the preparation training and also as additional training. There was also specific training available from community health staff and the Looked After Health Assessment Team.

Some carers reported receiving specific help and support for themselves, and the young person in placement from the Child and Adolescent Mental health Team. The manager of this service reported that the team was small and referrals were considered weekly. As needed, tailor made intervention packages were produced for a young people and schools, carers, and birth families were included as necessary. The team also offered telephone advice and training. The team also had a remit to reduce and prevent out of borough placements.

Because the figures for the Performance analysis report are collected for the 12 months to September 2006 the health data provided was the same as that detailed in the last inspection report where the percentage of children with immunisations up to date, current dental checks and annual health assessments was above the National average with 100% of the under five's

having an up-to-date developmental checks. The service has the part-time support of a Health Assessment team to ensure annual assessments are carried out. Although it was reported that most young people were having an annual assessment the reports were not seen and there was little evidence of health plans being produced.

Some carers reported having information about health needs at the time of placement while others reported that they were not always provided with this information.

Young people in their returned questionnaires suggested that carers did support their health needs and ensure they were registered with a GP and had regular dentist and optician appointments.

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):

3,6,8,9,15,30.

Quality in this outcome area is difficult to judge as some the documentation inspected did not reflect the current situation. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

The office visit did not produce enough evidence to be sure that foster children are staying safe, however visits to homes and data from questionnaires indicate children are staying safe. In the main the Fostering Panel is effective but needs training.

EVIDENCE:

No new managers had been recruited since the last inspection in January 2006. Then it was found that procedures relating to the recruitment of the managers was robust with evidence and qualifications on file.

The records inspected did not contain information to show that the accommodation where foster children live is inspected annually. One file showed that the placement was for a child under 12 months of age, the date of birth showed that the child was then 14 months old there was no paperwork in place to indicate that the child's needs continued to be met. This placement was visited and it was found that that child was no longer in the placement and that the family had a new born baby that had been placed there two weeks previously. The carer's file did not have this information on it. The detail on

foster carer's files relating to placements was found to be inaccurate or out of date.

Another file inspected showed that a child arrived in a new placement from another foster placement was unwell when he arrived. This was case tracked back to find that he informed the foster carer that his previous foster carer hadn't time to take him to the doctors. The inspector further case tracked that foster carer and was unable to find evidence that this incident of what could have been a serious health incident had been pursued.

The team is under pressure to place children and registered foster carers appear to be approached to take children out side their registration. There is a delay in getting some registrations and changes in registrations to panel. The information supplied to panel was not always sufficient for the Panel to make a decision and further questions had to asked. The team took a long period of time to get a Criminal Bureau Check on one family member of a foster carer. The family appeared to stall the proceedings and when checked the person did have a convection.

The files inspected did not contain any evidence of matching, the high demand on the service means that matching is not what staff would like, however all family visited had a cultural appropriate match or were aware of the child's cultural needs.

Staffing files contained all the appropriate information with the exception of photograph.

The Panel works well and were aware of their role. The asked effective questions to ascertain information that should have been on the Form F. One Panel member had not received any training in his role on the Panel.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Wherever possible the young people were placed with carers who matched their religion, culture and ethnic origin. Where this was not possible carers were supported to respect and preserve these needs.

EVIDENCE:

There was no evidence that the service actively sought, through recruitment of carers, to meet the diverse needs of the young people within the service. However, because of the multi-cultural nature of the borough of Luton, general recruitment provided carers from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The service was not always able to match the young people with a perfect carer in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin and culture but would offer support when this was the case. A duty log detailed how carers had been considered for a particular placement and the reason specific placements were made but this information was not on the child or carers file. As part of the feedback to the service manager this suggestion was made. Since the last inspection the service had had difficulty placing the unusual high number of babies that had been refereed during the year

As noted at previous inspections Quality Protects money had funded educational staff to support Looked after Children in school who were in danger

of being excluded or who needed extra help to attain key-stage targets. The sampling of young people's files indicated that the service had reacted to reports that young people benefited from educational stability and they had spent a high proportion of the budget on taxi fares that enabled this to happen when carers were not able to provide the necessary transport. Many of the young people files also included education plans. Carers spoken to understood the need to support young people with education and attend parent/school consultation meetings if the birth parents could not. Young people confirmed that carers provided them with a suitable environment to do homework and encouraged achievement. One of the young people, spoken to as part of the tracking, was hoping to have the opportunity to go to university and was looking for a place at Cambridge. He was aware how the department would support this and holiday arrangements.

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):

10,11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Young people were supported, where appropriate, to maintain contact with their birth families.

EVIDENCE:

As already mentioned a high proportion of the services budget was spent on taxi fares. Taxis, in addition to taking young people to and from school were used to support contact with birth families and friends. Independent agencies are also used to supervise contact. Where an agency had been employed to supervise contact there were records of the supervision on the young persons file.

There was evidence that young people were asked to be part of their own and their carers regular reviews and that their opinions and comments were part of any decision making. In addition the view of carers own children were sought and taken to the panel when approving and reviewing foster carers.

As part of the inspection process the inspector joined a group of young people who were or had been in care and made up 'the children's panel'. This panel meet regularly with councillors and offered their opinions. During the inspection the panel meet with the councillors to discuss the new residential provision for the Borough.

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

There was no consistent formalised approach to preparing young people for independence.

EVIDENCE:

Young people spoken to reported that the support they received towards independence was related to the individual carer and not the service. Some reported being shown how to do laundry and cooking while others said it was done for them. The service included a 16+ team to which young people were referred to by the time they were 16. Ideally contact would be made earlier but in reality this did not always happen and the team picked up young people to whom many aspects of their life were in transition.

One of the carers spoken reported that a birthday allowance had not arrived in time for the birthday but that on the whole allowances were paid on time and carers were aware of additional monies that were available in an emergency or for school uniforms etc. The fostering handbook did not detail what amounts of money were considered appropriate to be given to a child as pocket money.

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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

5,17,21,24,32.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

The management of the service is not pro-active in managing the service resulting in poor recruitment of carers. Documentation on case files is inadequate and out of date.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering team has in the past year re-organised the way it works – splitting the team into two areas pre registration and post registration. Staff informed the inspector that this is not working. Evidence of this is borne out in the results in the low number of foster carers recruited – five this year to date. Staff also reported that the work load now was unevenly matched and that this was starting to cause difficulty in the team. Staff informed the inspector that they do not consider that they are well managed and described the management style as 'chaotic' and 'managing themselves'. Until this is addressed the strategy for supporting carers is more 'fire fighting' than planned. Case records inspected by the inspectors did not contain up to date clear information. As part of case tracking the inspector visited a family to find a new-born baby there rather than the 14 month child expected. The child appeared to be well cared for and was culturally appropriately placed. The poor quality of the paperwork going to Panel – where important details are not included - must be addressed. The Agency is currently awaiting a new recording system where all records are stored electronically, and all relevant papers will be stored together. This may address the anomalies. It was difficult to follow records as full dates were not used and in some cases only first names were used in recording. There was little evidence of linking up information to ensure a clear picture emerged. Kinship carers are given a high priority by the Agency though were delayed in getting to Panel. The Agency now has an up to date Statement of Purpose, this must be signed off by the appropriate person. Carers reported that in the main they were well supported. Files contained supervision notes, training was sparse and was not well attended. The Agency has started to conduct training at the weekend and in the evenings. The Agency plans to look at its systems for payments to foster carers, this includes rewarding those carers who are prepared to undergo regular training. The Management team have not kept the Commission informed of incidents that are notifiable under relation to Regulation 43 of the Care Standard Act 2000.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

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

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	3

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

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.	FS31	15	Carers looking after young people with medical conditions must be provided with medical care plans. This process has started but not yet completed. This requirement remains outstanding from the last inspection.	31/12/06
2.	FS12	15	Carers looking after young people with medical conditions must be provided with medical care plans. This process has started but not yet completed. This requirement remains outstanding from the last inspection.	31/12/06
3.	FS7 FS6	33	When a placement is made the decision processes should be documented and placed on the carers and child's file.	30/11/06

			<p>This standard was not met on this occasion.</p> <p>This requirement remains outstanding from the last inspection.</p>	
4.	FE8	33	<p>When a placement is made the decision processes should be documented and placed on the carers and child's file.</p> <p>This process has started but not yet completed.</p> <p>This requirement remains outstanding from the last inspection.</p>	30/11/06
5.	FS9	12	<p>CRB checks must be conducted on carer's families in a timely fashion.</p>	30/11/06
6.	FS24	43	<p>The management of the service must ensure appropriate documentation is maintained at all times this includes notifying this Commission of all incidents under Section 8 of the Care Standards Act 2000.</p>	30/11/06
7.	FS15	5	<p>The Agency must ensure that staff's files contain a current photograph.</p>	31/12/06
8.	FS1	4	<p>The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide must be reviewed and updated.</p> <p>This standard was met in part the Statement of Purpose must now be signed off by the appropriate person.</p>	30/11/06
9.	FS19	21	<p>The service must update its</p>	31/12/06

			policies and procedures. This process is under way but not yet met.	
10.	FS17	19	The service must ensure that there are sufficient carers recruited and go to Panel in a timely manner to meet the needs of the children who are received in to the fostering service.	31/12/06
11	FS30	26	The service must ensure the Panel Members are fully trained to enable them to carry out their role effectively.	31/12/06
12	FS14	15&16	The service must ensure that the support given to children leaving fostering enables them to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.	31/12/06
13	FS5	5&6	The service must be managed effectively to meet the needs of the children.	30/11/06

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.	FS11	The service must have a policy to enable young people and carers to access records if they request to. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.
2.	FS11	The service should consider the methods used to consult with young people. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.
3.	FS12	All young people in placement have a signed consent for medical treatment. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.

4.	FS15	Staff recruitment files should include a photograph. This is now a requirement.
5.	FS19	The service should explore ways to encourage all carers to attend training. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.
6.	FS19	All new staff should have a recognised induction programme. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.
7.	FS29	There should be a clear understanding of additional payments to carers. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.
8.	FS29	Consideration should be given to paying a young persons birthday allowance prior to their birthday. This recommendation was made at the last inspection.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Bedfordshire & Luton Area Office

Clifton House

4a Goldington Road

Bedford

MK40 3NF

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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