



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Shropshire County Council Fostering Service**

**Bourne House  
Radbroke Complex  
Radbroke Road  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY3 9BL**

*Lead Inspector*  
Janet Manders

*Key Announced Inspection*

15th – 25th January and 8th February 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](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

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Name of service</b>  | Shropshire County Council Fostering Service  |
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| <b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>             | Jackie Parker  |
| <b>Type of registration</b>                                   | Local Auth Fostering Service   |

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      20th February 2006

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Shropshire County Council Children's Placement Services aims to recruit a wide range of placements to meet the family placement needs of the great majority of children and young people looked after by the local authority. At the time of the inspection the Service provided placements for 117 young people. Placements are provided by 106 approved foster carers.

The Children's Placement Services team is located in Shrewsbury, but is responsible for providing a service to the whole of the county.

Foster carers receive the Fostering Network recommended allowances and most have access to fee payments on a Payment for Skills scheme, currently payable on four skill levels.

# SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors visited the Shropshire Fostering Service between 15th and 25<sup>th</sup> January 2007. So that the inspectors could see how well the Fostering Service was doing the inspectors

- Visited 4 foster carers and this meant the inspectors could talk to the young people who lived with those foster carers.
- Met with a group of young people who lived with different foster carers.
- Inspectors met with staff from the fostering team, young people's social workers and the manager.
- 29 young people returned questionnaires telling inspector what they felt about living with foster carers.
- 42 foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors about how much support they received from the fostering team to help them look after the young people placed with them.
- 17 social workers responsible for young people placed with foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors how well they felt the young people were being looked after.
- Inspectors looked at files and records

If you want to get a full picture of what it is like to live in foster carer in Shropshire you might like to read the full report. You can get this from the address on the front page.

## What the service does well:

- Young people are helped to be healthy by their foster carers.
- Young people are kept safe by their foster carers. One young person told inspectors that, *"Everything is great where I'm living."* Another young person said, *"It's really safe and they let me do what I'm capable of."*
- The staff and managers work very hard to help foster carers care for young people.
- The foster carer's homes where young people lived were warm and comfortable.

- Young people are listened to by their foster carers and their social workers. One young person told inspectors, "My foster carers always take the time to listen to me." Another young person said, "I speak to my social worker because I trust her to help me when I need it."
- Foster carers received enough money to look after the young people properly.
- Foster carers are able to do lots of training to help them to understand things that are important to young people.
- The Fostering Service makes sure that staff and foster carers are the right people to look after young people.

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

- The Fostering Service has worked hard to put many things right since the last inspection.
- The staff and managers now make sure that foster carers get all the help they need to care for young people.
- Foster carers get written information about how to keep young people safe.
- Social workers make sure that young people are safe when they have contact with their families.
- The Fostering Service make sure that every year foster carers are checked and report written to make sure that they are doing their job properly.
- The Fostering Service has improved how they make sure that all staff and foster carers are the right people to work with young people.

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

- Young people told inspectors that they would like to see their social workers more often. One young person said, "*I hardly see my social worker.*" Another young person told inspectors that he can "*Never get hold of them.*"
- Social workers must give foster carers all the information they have about a young person to help keep them safe.

- Social workers, foster carers and fostering social workers must write down how they will all help care for the young people living with foster carers so that they all know what needs doing.
- The Fostering Service must make sure that young people are placed with the right foster carers who are able to help them to do well.
- The Fostering Service must get more people to be foster carers.
- All young people must receive proper education.
- Young people who are 16+ must receive all the right help to move into their own home.
- Information about a young person must be kept on a file. Information about other young person should not be put in this file.
- Friends and Family who are foster carers must receive the same help as other foster carers.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.



# **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.

### JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

#### 12

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Evidence indicates that young people's needs are well met by the Fostering Service, but a lack of clarity regarding consents for medical treatment could put young people's health at risk.

### EVIDENCE:

In discussion with foster carers, social workers and young people, it is apparent that young people's needs are well met by their foster carers with the support of the Fostering Service. All young people were registered with a GP, dentist and where appropriate had regular optical appointments.

The majority of young people were receiving statutory medicals. The community paediatrician undertakes initial health assessments and the LAC Nurse undertakes the annual reviews of each young person's health plan. A small number of older, young people were choosing not to have a routine check, however, where possible the LAC nurse endeavours to see such young people to develop a Health Plan. It was disappointing to note that not all plans were on file and there was a lack of evidence that social workers were using these plans in a positive manner and monitoring them.

The Authority has developed new guidelines in respect of consent for medical treatment. Whilst this is a useful document in respect of identifying the differences between young people who are subject to a care order and those who are accommodated, it does not include any guidance regarding the delegation of consent to foster carers.

Examination of the files of those young people visited by inspectors, confirmed that there still remains a lack of clarity and considerable inconsistency of practice regarding obtaining the consent for medical treatment for young person and especially regarding the delegation of consent to foster carers. In respect on one young person there was no agreement in respect of the young person's current placement, although there was delegation of consent for medical treatment to the young person's previous foster carers. In respect of another young person in the same placement only the "Director of SSD" could give consent even for routine treatment. Regarding a young person placed with her relatives, the file confirmed that the mother had delegated consent for medical treatment to the foster carers, but the foster carers had not been provided with a copy of these consents.

There was evidence of young people receiving very positive input from the psychologists who are part of the Looked After Children's team, however all parties spoken to felt that their was insufficient staff to provide a service to all young people who require this service. Inspectors were informed that the Primary Care Trust's CAMHS team continued to require a young person to be in a stable placement before they can access the service. This is detrimental to young people as it does not allow for the issues regarding why placements breakdown to be addressed. Further discussion with the service regarding this attitude would benefit all young people.

The Fostering Service provides First Aid training for foster carers, to enable them to appropriately meet the needs of young people.

# 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 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people are kept safe by their foster carers, however, a lack of information sharing and appropriate matching may put some young people at risk.

## EVIDENCE:

The appropriate checks and references were in place for the managers of the fostering service and the service renews CRB checks every three years for managers, staff and carers.

The homes visited by inspectors provided a high standard of accommodation. All the homes were safe and welcoming; most young people had their own bedroom. Where young people do share a bedroom a risk assessment is undertaken. The Children's Placement Services referral form has been updated and contains a pre-admission risk assessment. This now includes a section on assessing the risks of young people sharing a bedroom

Health and safety checks, including insurance and MoT checks, are undertaken as part of the assessment process and this is reviewed as part of foster carers annual reviews. The check also includes a useful section as to whether foster

carers have read the Fostering Service's policy regarding young people missing from home.

The inspectors were told that there had been an improvement in the matching process. Regular duty meetings and the development of foster carers profiles, which are placed on foster carers files and are available to the duty worker, have assisted with the matching process. In discussion with one of the duty workers it was apparent that this had proved helpful in identifying the skills of each foster carer. It is also possible to share the profile with the young person's social worker, however, the profile is not child friendly and it would not be practical to share it with the young person who will be placed with the foster carers. The inspectors were informed that one of the senior practitioners is undertaking work to further develop such a profile. It has been recognised that this also needs to be age appropriate.

However, this inspection found that there had been very little improvement in the recording of the reasons a young person is placed with foster carers, although inspectors were informed that the Fostering Service believed that young people were being well matched in the majority of cases. One placing social worker stated, "People work really hard to provide choice but in reality there is often no choice of placement." A number of foster carers informed inspectors that they felt that young people were not well matched with foster carers and that not all the information was provided at the time of the placement, so that foster carers could make an informed decision as to whether they were able to meet the needs of the young people. A foster carer responded in the questionnaire that the Children's Placement Services must "stop placing children outside carers' skill levels, or do more to increase the ratio of higher level carers . . . children are misrepresented in order to ensure placement". Another foster carer informed inspectors that, "The withholding of information about a young person placed with us led to a Section 47 investigation." Other foster carers made comments such as, "We usually receive basic information and once the child is placed we find out more" and "The information received varies but generally, when a child is placed, it comes to light that more information was available before placement."

Whilst inspectors were able to evidence that some young people were well placed with their foster carers, it is apparent that this is not the case for all young people. The Fostering Service had made 36 extensions and 4 exemptions where young people were placed outside the foster carers approval. Approval ranges are made for a reason and should not be ignored just to allow the placement of a young person when no other placement is available.

Inspectors visited a young asylum seeker, placed with white foster carers, in Shrewsbury. The foster carers were newly approved and the young person was outside the foster carers approved age range. In addition the assessing social worker recommended that there should be a 2 year age gap between

any young person placed and the carers' daughter, however, the young person is the same age as their daughter. Records indicated that placements had been sought in Birmingham and West Bromwich, where the young person's cultural and racial needs could be met. It was not clear as to why these placements were not pursued and why the young person had been placed within a transracial placement. Notwithstanding this, inspectors found that the foster carers had worked hard to ensure the young person's needs were met.

The fact that the number of foster carers has declined further since the last inspection, is likely to result in less placement choice, with it becoming more difficult to match a young person with a suitable foster carer. As the Fostering Service still relies on LAC documentation, it is imperative for the reason for the placement to be recorded and the action to be taken to meet any gaps in the foster carer's ability to meet the young person needs. The requirement made at previous inspections in respect of the use of a Foster Placement Agreement has still not been implemented. In discussion with the manager, it is apparent that considerable work has been undertaken in respect of developing a Foster Placement Agreement, however, senior managers have not yet agreed this.

Inspectors remain concerned that correct procedures are not being followed when a young person is placed outside a foster carers approval range or over numbers. Whilst all exemptions and extensions are reported back to the Fostering Panel, in one particular case, where an exemption was required, there had been no agreement sought. Inspectors were informed that this was because 2 of the young people were siblings. However, the regulations do not allow for this, unless all 4 young people placed were siblings. Documentation completed when an exemption or extension is required rarely contained all the documentation required to enable inspectors to be confident that the needs of all young people within the household had been considered prior to the making of the placement.

Whilst the Fostering Service endeavours to arrange for young people to meet their foster carers prior to placement, this is not always possible, especially when the placement is made in an emergency. However, it was disappointing to note that there had been no introduction of a young person who was an asylum seeking with foster carers although foster carers had requested this and the young person had remained in a bed and breakfast placement for a 2 week period prior to placement.

All the young people visited by inspectors and those who responded to questionnaires stated that they felt safe and well cared for within their placements. 4 young people reported that they were being bullied at school, but that either their foster carers or their social worker was dealing this with.

Information provided to inspectors indicated that there had been 8 allegations made against foster carers in the past 12 months. All these had been fully investigated and all but 1 of these allegations were unsubstantiated and the

foster carers continue to foster for the Authority. In respect of the final allegation, no further placements are being made with the foster carers, but the young person already in placement will remain until he is 18 in a few months time, as this is his wish.

There remain issues regarding the time delays in investigating such allegations, and the procedures had not been followed in all situations. Inspectors were informed that external training has been provided for team managers in an attempt to overcome this issue and that endeavours are being made to resolve issues in a quicker, but nonetheless, thorough manner.

Safe Caring Guidelines Have been developed and are being used by foster carers. These are based on a comprehensive pro-forma developed by one of the senior practitioners. Further work is required to ensure that foster carers record all matters in a comprehensive way, considering their own circumstances and any other young person in the household, rather than relying solely on the pro-forma. In addition it is necessary for the guidelines to be signed by the young person's social worker; whilst there is space for this on the form none of the completed guidelines had been signed by the young person's social worker.

As part of the inspection a number of staff files were inspected, including those of a new social worker and two new administrative staff appointed since the last inspection. Inspectors found that the files were in good order, with each section clearly labelled.

Two written references had been obtained for all three personnel and all had been scrutinised and approved by a team manager, however, only one of the six references had evidence of a follow-up by telephone.

At the last inspection it was noted that there was no evidence on file of the exploration of gaps in the employment history of two appointees. At this inspection it was evident that some effort had been made to rectify this omission but the necessary detail to confirm the situation in one case was still outstanding. The Children's Placement Services must ensure that all applicants supply full dates of starting and leaving employment such that any gaps can be readily identified and explored.

The agency's procedures include the undertaking of a review, by the line manager, after a new appointee has been in post for seventeen weeks. Two of the most recently appointed personnel were still within the review period and there was a record of the review on the file of the third. However, the review of a member of staff who was in the probationary period at the time of the last inspection, had not taken place at the correct time. According to a note on the file, verbal confirmation of a successful review period was obtained eventually from the line manager, but no written record of the review was in evidence.

A requirement from the last inspection was that the Fostering Service should undertake another CRB check in respect of one member of staff but in this instance, submitting all the names by which he was known. There was evidence on file that the Service had done this although the Criminal Records Bureau responded that it was not able to carry out another check purely on the name by which the person is known informally.

Copies of the certificates, confirming the qualifications of which applicants were making a claim, were in evidence on all files inspected. However, in one case, there was no evidence of confirmation of a Diploma level qualification claimed by one appointee. It was noted that, although there was a space in each application form for the Service to record that certificates had been seen, this had not been used for this purpose. The Fostering Service must ensure that qualifications claimed by applicants are verified by the sighting of the necessary certificates.

The lead inspector attended the Fostering Panel and had access to the minutes of the 3 previous Fostering Panels. The Panel is a joint Panel operated with SACCS Family Placement. An independent member, with wide experience of children's services, chairs the Panel. The Panel includes a good range of representation from other agencies, including a care leaver. Evidence gained indicated that the Fostering Panel was well organised and all members participated fully, with evidence of robust questioning of workers where there were gaps in the information provided to the Panel.

As a result of requirements made at the last inspection, the Fostering Service ensures that where a young person is placed with foster carers outside the foster carers approval, that the matter is returned to the Fostering Panel for its consideration. The Panel has also adopted revised procedures regarding what action should be taken if the Panel are unable to reach a joint decision.

Annual Reviews of carers, which are not required to be considered by the Fostering Panel, are presented to a Sub-panel consisting of several Panel members, and the minutes of these meetings are presented to the Panel for their information. The sub-panel does not have any legal status, but is considered to be an example of good practice by both agencies.



# 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 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people's individual needs are generally well met by the their foster carers, with foster carers providing good support to young people to enable them to meet their educational potential. However, ongoing support must be given to those young people who are unable to attend full time education.

## EVIDENCE:

The Service works within the Authority's procedures for promoting equality and diversity. Valuing diversity and promoting equality is a major part of the assessment process of foster carers. Post-approval foster carer training includes sessions on "Equal Opportunities". All other training sessions ensure that the importance of working to meet young people's diverse needs is the basis for all presentations.

Evidence received during the inspection confirmed that all the young people visited were receiving individualised support to enable their needs to be met. Anger management sessions have been provided for 1 young person. Another young person was receiving therapy from the NSPCC. Foster carers work closely with other professionals to provide appropriate care for the young people placed. One young person's review states that the foster carers ensure "clear boundaries and routines are in place to help young people to develop trust and responsibility for their behaviour."

Foster carers who were looking after a young person who was an asylum seeker, were providing good support for the young person and had demonstrated initiative using innovative ways of meet the young person's needs. As the young person did not speak English, the foster carers used a catalogue to identify clothing he liked before taking him shopping for clothes. Whilst this was a transracial placement, the foster carers were seen to be meeting the young person's needs well. The foster carers had been linked to other foster carers within the Authority who had provided care to young people who were asylum seekers. This had provided a good source of support, as there is still limited knowledge within the Fostering Service regarding meeting the needs of young asylum seekers or those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Interpretation services Have been provided where this has been required.

The inspectors were informed that work is almost complete on a local policy for responding to unaccompanied asylum seekers to ensure consistent, culturally sensitive practice.

Previous inspections have found that there is a lack of placements for young people with disabilities; however, the inspector was informed that the Fostering Service is currently assessing foster carers who are prepared to offer placements to young people with disabilities. One of these foster carers was presented to the Fostering Panel observed by the inspector. Communication has also improved between the Children's Placement Services and Children with Disabilities Team to assist with the provision of placements that will meet the needs of young people with disabilities.

Survey responses from young people in foster care, foster carers and placing social workers indicate that foster carers continue to provide good support, for the young people for whom they care, in relation to education. Foster carers give considerable educational support in the home situation, evidenced with comments from young people such as "they help me with my homework and reading", and "they help me with my reading practice". They also advocate on behalf of the young people both with the school and with other agencies, indicated by comments from social workers such as they "attend core groups and encourage young people to attend and attain".

A number of young people, foster carers and social workers took issue with some aspects of education. The latter highlighted the lack of placements as having a negative effect on education with one stating "children often don't have a school, or need a taxi to and from school, because no placement can be found nearer". However, one foster carer saw the use of taxis in a positive light noting, "they have provided transport to enable educational continuity".

Some foster carers and young people felt a lack of support from the local authority, particularly in the case of young people nearing school leaving age. One foster carer stated "we have done virtually all the work regarding getting

further education” and one young person claimed “Shropshire haven’t tried to help me with my future but my foster carers have been trying to help”.

The experience of young people either not in full-time education or struggling with schooling, for whatever reason, continues to give concern, notably the lack of alternative provision. At the time of the last inspection it was noted that it was not uncommon for young people in this situation, to access just one to two hours of tuition a week. Although the tuition service has been expanded since then, it has not yet reached all concerned as highlighted by a foster carer who stated that “excluded young people do not get the education they need . . . two hours a week is not enough”. Whilst inspectors note that improvements have been made, the requirement from the previous inspection remains in place.

At the time of the last inspection there was no collation of data about pupils who had been temporarily excluded, making it difficult to quantify the scale of the gap in education for the young people concerned. The authority has moved to rectify this and data is now collected on a three-weekly basis by the LAC team, from all schools. In addition the Fostering Service have taken a pro-active stance in dealing with issues around young people’s education. Where there are difficulties the Head of Children’s Placement Services ensures that discussion takes place with the relevant person with the Authority in an attempt to resolve any issues.

As the Fostering Service still does not use a Foster Placement Agreement, which complies with the Fostering Service Regulations, there is no clarity as to where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and equipment.

The provision of short term breaks for children with disabilities is contracted to Barnardos, and no longer the responsibility of the local authority’s fostering service. However, some foster carers are approved to provide short breaks for children and young people, in order to support them and their families. The Fostering Service has a clear policy regarding Short-term breaks and states that parents remain the main carers for the young person. The policy also covers issues regarding the operation of this service, including the assessment, supervision and review of the service.

# 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 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The Fostering Service and carers promote young people's contact with their family. Carers and the Fostering Service encourage young people to express their views regarding their care.

## EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements were clearly defined on all files examined by inspectors and young people reported that they were generally able to maintain contact with their family and friends where this was appropriate. In some circumstances young people did experience some difficulty due to the distance they were placed from family and friends. Nonetheless, where this was a problem, either the foster carers or the authority provided transport to ensure that contact is maintained.

The Children's Placement Services referral form has been updated and now includes a detailed section regarding contact for young people, including who they have contact with, any potential risks, the frequency of contact, the expectation of foster carers and the arrangements for the transport and supervision of the contact.

All the young people spoken to as part of the inspection felt part of the family they were placed with and most stated that their foster carers listened to their views and helped them, with 89% stating that their foster carers always or usually listened to them. This percentage fell, when young people were asked about whether young people's social workers listened to them, with only 71%

of young people stating that their social worker listened to them and 7% stating their social worker never listened to them. One young person stated, "He listens to me but doesn't take notice to my opinion." A number of young people stated that they did not see sufficient of their social worker. One young people stated, "I hardly see my social worker." Another said he could, "Never get hold of them." It is hoped that the proposed "Social Work Promise to Looked After Young People" will improve young people's contact with their social worker. Nonetheless, many of the young people did find the support of their social worker as crucial. One young person informed inspectors that, "I speak to my social worker because I trust her to help me when I need it."

The previous inspection found that *"The Fostering Service has organised two groups to support young people who are looked after and for young people who foster. These groups are also used to gain young people's views regarding the service they provide."* Both these groups continue to develop and have proved useful for both young people and the Fostering Service. In addition there is a Care leavers group to support young people leaving care.

68% of young people who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that they knew how to make a complaint, however, this is a slight decline compared to the previous year when 75% of young people stated they knew how to make a complaint. Young people are able to access the Children's Representation and Advice Service if they require support to make a complaint.

Young people are encouraged to attend their LAC reviews. Evidence provided to inspectors confirmed that young people received considerable support from their foster carers to attend these meetings. Where appropriate young people are also involved in their Core Group meetings. This is when agencies involved with the young person's care discuss the implementation of the young person's Placement Plan. This is different from a child protection core group.

# 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 and 29

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people were being supported to move successfully into independent living, however, Pathway Plans do not always contain relevant information, which may result in young person's needs not being met. Young people's needs were being adequately met through the allowances paid.

## EVIDENCE:

The Leaving Care Team supports young people who are preparing to move into independent living, although inspectors were informed that there is no established date when the responsibility for supporting the young people transfers from the case management team to the Leaving Care Team.

Evidence gained during discussion with young people, confirmed that all young people had a Pathway Plan, although this could not be located on one young person's file. Discussions with the young person and his foster carer confirmed that a plan was in place. Pathway Plans are reviewed on a regular basis and evidence was found of this on all young person's files where this was relevant. Nonetheless, it was disappointing that the plans examined by inspectors did not give detailed information regarding moving young people towards independence. The Plans seen by inspectors tended to focus on identifying a young person's present situation but did not contain much information as to what support the young person would need to move into independent living. It was also a concern that in respect of one young person the Pathway Plan stated that the young person had no medical needs or allergies but when the inspector visited the young person discovered that the young person suffers from hay fever and asthma and receives regular medication for these complaints. Another young person's plan did not address the issue of support

for the young person in respect of budgeting, although a recent review had identified that this was required.

Previous inspections have found that, *“Whilst some training has been provided to foster carers regarding their role in preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living, there is still no written guidance for foster carers regarding this.”* This remained the situation at this inspection.

2 young people have been encouraged to seek part time jobs once they were old enough.

The previous inspection reported, *“Carers were generally satisfied with the payments system and reported prompt accurate payments. However, in relation to progression through the payments for skills levels, there seemed to be a number of delays in the system of approving portfolios of evidence. There were a number of expressed concerns regarding the system itself, including the fact that as a payment for skills scheme, there are stipulations that carers at the higher levels must be prepared to foster teenagers, which implies that fostering younger children is easier.”* Discussion with foster carers confirmed that this remained the same at this inspection.

# 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, 2, 5, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32.**

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Management and support of staff and carers is good, however, a shortage of foster carers restricts the improvements within the service and hence the quality of care for young people.



## **EVIDENCE:**

Previous inspections have recorded that, *"The Statement of Purpose provides a concise and useful summary of the fostering service, and covers all the areas required by this standard and associated regulation."* In addition the Fostering Service has produced a Young Person's Guide. *"This is produced in a colourful Filofax-style format, which is very appropriate, and looked-after young people had been involved in the development of the guide. It provides well-written and comprehensive information regarding the looked after system, including a list of sanctions which are not permitted, and what to do if unhappy in foster care. A later section covers several methods of registering a complaint, and an explanation of what an advocate is and how to access an advocate through the Children's Advocacy and Representation service at the NSPCC."* However, the Fostering Service has still not developed a less complex version for younger children, or children with a learning disability. The inspectors were informed that work is presently being undertaken to develop this Guide, however, until this is completed and distributed the existing recommendation will remain in place.

Changes to the management structure of the Children's Placement Services were introduced just prior to the last inspection. These changes appear to be operating well, although due to absences of most key players at some point over the past year staff reported that less progress in developing the Service had been made than had been hoped for. Nonetheless, all staff felt positive about the developments and communication within the Children's Placement Services had improved as a result of these arrangements. However, consideration should be given to the change of line management responsibility of the support/duty workers so that they are directly managed by the team they work with. This would ensure direct operational responsibility for their work to be held within the Fostering Service and improve the communication with and development of these workers.

Staff reported that they received regular supervision, annual appraisals and that appropriate training is available for them to access. Whilst inspectors were concerned at previous inspections that there were insufficient staff to undertake the tasks required, inspectors were assured at this inspection that the team were operating effectively and that there were sufficient staff to provide appropriate support to staff. The findings of this inspection would support this assertion.

As previously reported there has been a decline in the number of approved foster carers, with the current numbers only being at the level approved in 1999. This impacts on the Children's Placement Services' ability to provide appropriate placements for young people. This has been referred to in earlier sections of the report, but the Authority must make renewed efforts to recruit

suitably experienced and skilled foster carers to meet the needs of young people requiring placement.

The last inspection reported *“Established members of staff reported having received training in assessment of foster carers provided by BAAF and a newer member of staff was to undertake this in the next few months. The assessment of foster carers examined by inspectors was detailed and thorough, addressing all issues required in depth and included good analysis of the information and the carer’s skills.”* Evidence from this inspection confirmed these findings, with the exception of an assessment completed in respect of Family and Friends foster carers. The assessment contained little robust analysis of the information gathered and did not include the social workers assessment of the foster carers ability to meet the needs of the young person placed with the foster carers.

Information gained during the inspection, in discussion with foster carers and examination of the foster carers register evidenced that the Children's Placement Services have clear procedures for supervising and supporting foster carers. Foster carers are reviewed annually by an independent manager. The Fostering Panel considers first reviews, a sub-panel considers subsequent reviews, unless there is a significant change in the carer’s circumstances or concerns have been raised, when the Fostering Panel will consider the information. Records indicated these had been undertaken in a timely fashion, however, due to delay in the return of documentation from the young person’s social worker there was frequently a considerable delay in the reviews being considered by the relevant Fostering Panel or sub-panel.

Managers and senior practitioners provide out of ours support in addition to the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). However, both staff and foster carers commented that the support from the EDT was not helpful. The Children's Placement Services are aware of these gaps and discussions have taken place with the appropriate manager to try and address these issues. Foster carers are able to access support from their own support line, operated by experienced foster carers. Foster carers can gain independent support from the Fostering Network’s advice and mediation worker, who is funded by the Authority.

The majority of foster carers stated that they were well supported with 26% of foster carers stating that the Service had improved since the last inspection and 61% stating things had remained the same. One foster carer stated, “We have had good support with this placement with regular visits from the social worker and regular respite in place.” Another carer stated that the Children's Placement Services “provides good support network [and] help with getting relevant information . . .we receive good training”. A considerable number of foster carers stated that they felt that they were not always valued and supported by young people’s social workers. Further work with area teams

would be beneficial in encouraging a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of foster carers.

Work has been undertaken since the last inspection to ensure that all documentation is compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Foster Care Agreement is a useful and informative document, Notices of Approval were seen on files and the Foster Care Register contained all necessary information.

An agreement for the supervision of foster carers was found on all files examined and confirmed that arrangements were in place to ensure that supervision takes place on a bi-monthly basis. Supervising workers are expected to visit on a monthly basis to offer any necessary support. Unannounced visits are now being undertaken on a consistent basis and these are clearly identified on foster carers files.

Examination of records confirmed that there had been 3 complaints made by foster carers regarding the Children's Placement Services. These have all been investigated at Stage 2 of the Authority's Complaints Procedures. Two of the complaints have been satisfactorily resolved, with the Children's Placement Services making changes to its operation as a result of the complaints. The third complaint remains under investigation by the Customer Services Officer. Records of these complaints clearly identified the outcome of the investigation and the actions to be taken. The Children's Placement Services have no record of complaints made at Stage 1 of the procedures and consideration should be given to recording these, to ensure that appropriate action is taken to continually improve the support to foster carers.

The Fostering Service use The Skills to Foster training programme as the preparation training programme for foster carer applicants. Experienced foster carers co-lead this training. As reported at previous inspections the post-approval training provided to foster carers is of an excellent quality, with foster carers stating that they found the training courses informative and relevant to their work with young people. One foster carer informed inspectors that they receive, "Superb training that we can access." Nonetheless, it is important that consideration is given to developing such training for those experienced foster carers who have undertaken some or all of the mandatory courses required.

As in previous inspection examination of young people's files confirmed that practice remains inconsistent. A number of files had incomplete documentation, whilst others provided a comprehensive record for a young person. Again confidential information regarding another unrelated young person was found on another young person's file.

As stated throughout the report, the Fostering Service still does not use the Foster Placement Agreement as required by the Fostering Services

Regulations, consequently crucial information is not gathered. Not all the documentation examined by inspectors was legible and this area must be addressed

At the time of the inspection work was being undertaken in respect of a register of young people placed with foster carers. However, this is not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Additionally there is no central register, with each of the 3 areas compiling a register containing different information.

The previous inspection expressed concern regarding the lack of support and supervision for Family and Friends foster carers. Evidence gained during this inspection indicated that there has been little improvement in this area. A letter had been sent to Family and Friends foster carers two weeks before the commencement of the inspection offering these foster carers the opportunity to receive regular supervision, annual reviews and training. Whilst inspectors understand the sensitivities in working with these foster carers, the Fostering Services Regulations clearly expect Family and Friends foster carers to be treated and supported in the same as any other foster carer, therefore supervision, reviews and training are not optional.

Examination of the file of one Family and Friend foster carer confirmed that, as previously recorded, an inadequate assessment had been undertaken, the foster carers had only received 2 supervision sessions in over 12 months and the carers approval had not been reviewed. Nor had an unannounced visit been undertaken. This lack of support was further compounded by little contact from the young person's social worker.

Whilst such carers can access training with other foster carers, this is rarely taken up. Experience of support offered in other agencies indicates that such carers would benefit from dedicated training and support. Family and friends carers may also benefit from copies of the Handbook for Family and Friends Carers produced by the Fostering Network, since very few have attended preparation training. Most family and friends foster carers are not able to access the payment for skills scheme, even though many of these placements are complex and require considerable skill from carers to meet the young people's needs and to keep them safe. **REC**

# 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>            | 2            |

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? YES

### 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.  | FS12     | 15                  | The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers, including Family and Friends foster carers receive a copy of all documentation, including parental consent for treatment.  | 20/04/07             |
| 2.  | FS8      | 34 (3) Sch 6        | The Fostering Service must ensure that before making a placement, a written agreement is drawn up (foster placement agreement), which covers all matters specified in Schedule 6. This must include specific reference to elements of matching.<br><b>Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.</b> | 20/04/07             |
| 3.  | FS8      | CA1989Sched 7(4)(2) | The Nominated Manager must ensure that where an exemption from the usual fostering limit is granted the requirements of Schedule 7 are fulfilled.<br><b>Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.</b>   | 20/04/07             |

|    |     |       |   |          |
|----|-----|-------|---|----------|
| 4. | FS8 | 17(3) | The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed.<br><b>Timescale of 20/4/06 not met.</b>  | 20/03/07 |
| 5. | FS8 | 33(b) | The Fostering Service must not request foster carers to accept placements that are clearly outside their approval range and for which they do not have the appropriate skills.  | 20/03/07 |
| 6. | FS8 | 17    | The Fostering Service must ensure that where transracial or transcommunity placements are made the authority must provide additional training, support and information for foster carers as specified in Standard 8.6.          | 20/05/07 |
| 7. | FS9 | 12    | The Fostering Service must ensure that investigations into allegations against foster carers are conducted in line with the Authority's procedures and in a timely fashion.   | 20/03/07 |
| 8. | FS7 | 33    | The fostering service must recruit carers able to meet the range of needs of children looked after by Shropshire County Council, particularly in relation to ethnicity and disability.<br><b>Timescale of 03/12/04 not met.</b> | 20/06/07 |

|     |      |              |  |          |
|-----|------|--------------|--|----------|
| 9.  | FS13 | 16 (3)       | The Fostering Service must ensure that any education it provides for any young person is efficient and suitable to the young person's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs he may have.<br><b>Timescale of 20/06/06 not met.</b> | 20/05/07 |
| 10. | FS13 | 34 (3) Sch 6 | The Nominated Manager must ensure that the Foster Placement Agreement clarifies where the financial responsibility lies for all school cost.<br><b>Timescale of 20/5/06 not met.</b>   | 20/04/07 |
| 11. | FS14 | 16           | The Fostering Service in conjunction with the Leaving Care Team must ensure that young people's Pathway Plans include all relevant information.  | 20/04/07 |
| 12. | FS14 | 17           | There must be clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living.<br><b>Timescale of 01.10.04 not met</b>   | 20/05/07 |
| 13. | FS17 | 33           | The Fostering Service must ensure that it has sufficient foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs.   | 20/05/07 |
| 14. | FS24 | 40           | The Nominated Manager must ensure that each young person has a separate and confidential file, which only  | 20/04/07 |



|     |      |    |  |          |
|-----|------|----|--|----------|
|     |      |    | contains information regarding that child.<br><b>Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.</b>  |          |
| 15. | FS25 | 22 | The Nominated Manager must ensure that a register is kept of all young people placed with foster carers which is compliant with Regulation 22 and Schedule 2<br><b>Timescale pf 20/4/06 not met.</b> | 20/04/07 |
| 16. | FS32 | 17 | The Nominated Manager must ensure that all friends and family foster carers receive regular supervision and are reviewed on an annual basis.   | 20/05/07 |

## 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.  | FS12              | The Nominated Manager should ensure that a young person's Health Plan is consistently used, and that it is filed in a clear and accessible section of the child's and the fostering file. |
| 2.  | FS12              | The Nominated Manager should consider the use of Health Consents Cards, which would be more comprehensive, appropriate and convenient than relying on the LAC paperwork.                  |
| 3.  | FS12              | The Fostering Service should ensure that consent for medical treatment is delegated to foster carers where this is appropriate.   |
| 4.  | FS8               | The Fostering Service should ensure that young people have the opportunity for an introductory visit to foster carers where this is possible.   |

|     |      |   |
|-----|------|---|
| 5.  | FS9  | The Fostering Service should ensure that safe caring guidelines are agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child. These guidelines should be reviewed regularly.                    |
| 6.  | FS9  | The Fostering Service should ensure that foster carers consider all matters when developing their safe caring guidelines, including other young people in the household. These should be reviewed on a regular basis. |
| 7.  | FS15 | The Fostering Service should ensure that all written references are followed up by telephone.   |
| 8.  | FS15 | The Fostering Service should ensure that all applicants supply full dates of starting and leaving employment such that any gaps can readily identified.   |
| 9.  | FS15 | The Fostering Service should ensure that qualifications claimed by applicants are verified by the sighting of the necessary certificates.   |
| 10. | FS13 | The Nominated Manager should ensure that all young people who are not in full-time education are offered structured occupation.   |
| 11. | FS1  | A simpler version of the Children's Guide should be produced to meet the needs of younger/less able children.   |
| 12. | FS5  | The Fostering Service should consider to changing the line management responsibility for the duty/support workers.  |
| 13. | FS21 | The Fostering Service should take steps to minimise the delay between the foster carer review being undertaken and its presentation to the Fostering Panel.   |
| 14. | FS21 | The Fostering Service should renewed efforts to improve communication and understanding with the case management teams.   |
| 15. | FS22 | The Fostering Service should record all complaints including those at Level 1 of the Authority's complaints procedure.  |
| 16. | FS23 | The Fostering Service should provide advanced training for those foster carers who require it.  |
| 17. | FS25 | The Fostering Service should ensure that all records are legible.   |

|     |      |  |
|-----|------|--|
| 15. | FS32 | The fostering service should consider giving family and friends carers access to Payment for Skills on the same basis as other carers, thereby providing equality of opportunity, and an incentive for these carers to train and develop their skills. |
|-----|------|--|

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