FOSTERING SERVICE

North East Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service

Directorate of Children`s Services
Fostering & Adoption Service
Viking House
51 Church Street
Grimsby
DN32 7DD

Lead Inspector
Mr Michael McCleave MBE

Key Announced Inspection
4th December 2006 09:30
The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation
This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for Fostering Services. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service
North East Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service

Address
Directorate of Children`s Services
Fostering & Adoption Service
Viking House
51 Church Street
Grimsby
DN32 7DD

Telephone number
01472 325555

Fax number
01472 325605

Email address
penny.sheardown@nelincs.gov.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)
North East Lincolnshire Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable)
Ms Penny Sheardown

Type of registration
Local Auth Fostering Service
SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection  13th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

North East Lincolnshire Council manages the fostering service.

The service provides a variety of foster placements including: mainstream fostering, long-term fostering, contract care, remand, single placement care and short-term breaks. The last is a service for children where parents remain the main carers for the child.

The service operates out of premises situated in the centre of Grimsby. Although the premises are accessible in terms of location the building does not lend itself readily to foster carer training and formal/informal meetings and groups. Alternative and more appropriate venues are used for this purpose.

North East Lincolnshire pay foster carers the following basic weekly rate of allowances:

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In addition Professional Fees are paid as follows:

- Contract £172.60 (Per child per week)
- Contract Plus £299.28 (Per household per week)
- Single Placement £630.05 (Per household per week)
- Exceptional Task Allowance £109.60 (Per child per week)
SUMMARY
This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

The data gathered to inform this inspection of fostering services was based on interviews with:

The Head of Service (Children’s Services), Family Placement Social Workers, The Senior Medical Officer (Head of the Looked After Children’s Health Team), Service Manager (Looked After Children in Education Team), Chair of the Foster Panel, The Responsible Individual (Agency Decision Maker), foster carers and children who are fostered, the Manager of the Short Breaks Service and a Team Leader of the Children’s Participation Team. Questionnaires were received from professionals, and from young people. A selection of records was also examined. A telephone interview was held with the Leaving Care Manager.

Those foster carers and young people spoken to were very complimentary about the support received from the fostering service and in particular the Link Workers. Quotes received included “they support me to death” “my link worker always responds to any request for help or advice”.

The children enjoy living in warm friendly and caring homes with families who look after and support them.

An experienced and committed manager, who is supported by an equally dedicated team of social workers and administrative staff, leads the fostering service. There is an enthusiasm among the team members for their work with the foster carers to achieve the best for the children.

The outcomes for children are very good in each of the key outcome areas from Every Child Matters.

What the service does well:

The health care of the children is very good and all appropriate services are provided with the support of the Health Care Team who monitor all the children’s health. This service ensures that no child who is fostered is denied health resources. This service is highly regarded by foster carers. Quotes from foster carers: “fantastic service” “Dr. W. is brilliant”.

Excellent links have also been forged with the CAMHS team.

Education of children in foster care is enhanced by the Looked After Children in Education Team and the resources committed by the Local Authority is commendable. This service ensures that all the children fostered have an education plan. Where a child is not in full time education the team, work with
the school to reintegrate the child back into the system with good support. Excellent links have been forged with local schools. A homework club is available for children and the local authority provides all young people with access to a computer. The team is currently developing innovative ideas to improve the overall communication with young people using an integrated web site.

Children and young people benefit from a well-run service, which is always developing and seeking to improve delivery. They benefit from a service, which is forward-looking, and foster carers said that they receive a good service from very supportive staff. The fostering social workers are enthusiastic and passionate about their roles in working with the foster carers to achieve good outcomes for the children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

All the previous Requirements and Recommendations have been met.

Training modules for foster carers have been reviewed in respect of:

- Care leavers
- Bullying

A “buddy” scheme has been developed whereby experienced foster carers are linked up with new carers to assist and support them. This is good practice.

In order to improve the matching process in long term cases. A multi-agency meeting takes place to identify the child’s needs and to decide on the resources needed from each of the agencies that can be used to make a placement work.

The development of an integrated IT communication system to enable children to communicate on the NE Lincolnshire web site is well underway. This will mean that children and young people will be able to give their views and opinions on all sorts of topics about how they are cared for and to say how the service can be improved.

What they could do better:

Consideration should be given to re-designing the weekly diary report to include the outcome headings from Every Child Matters. Foster carers should be encouraged to record what outcomes achieved with the young people.

During discussions a number of male foster carers said they do not attend foster care meetings or training events due to work patterns. Consideration should be given to seeking the views of foster carers for their support for
evening or weekend events. By giving these carers some ownership of flexible training sessions, could increase take up of training.

Short breaks carers would benefit from being issued with a disabled person’s car badge. One carer said that the cost of parking, when she took a young person out to places of interest “can at times prove to be difficult and expensive”.

It would be a good idea if some social events could be organised for children of foster carers as a way of thanking them for letting the foster children share their family.

Consideration should be given to increasing the staffing at the Short Breaks to enable more effective recruitment of carers to take place. This is a popular service and needs to expand as resources allow.

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

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

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Being Healthy
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.

Children and young people in foster care have their health and development promoted very well. There are excellent links with health care services.

The quality rating for this outcome is excellent.

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

EVIDENCE:

The children benefit from very good links between the fostering service and the Looked After Children’s Health Team based at the Diana Princess of Wales hospital. All foster carers are given a clear, easily understandable health care plan for each child who becomes looked after. The plan details how the child’s specific and general health issues are to be addressed and the specific roles and responsibilities of key workers. The Health Team is led by a paediatrician who is passionate about the importance of ensuring that the children receive the best care available within resources. Each child is given a Health folder that has relevant health information about who they can contact, and what they need to know about being responsible for their own health. Social workers and foster commented as follows:

“It is a fantastic service – a true partnership”

“We have an information sharing agreement that works”

“100% of children have health care plan, 98% have seen dentist, 98% have immunisations”
“CAMHS – have developed the service together – really good for foster carers, advice and training”

“We can fast track the health system through the team”.

If there are particular health needs which may impact on future outcomes for the child, then these can be identified at the earliest opportunity and specific action is taken to address them, for example, the involvement of specialist health professionals from the CAMHS team or dental care. Creative ways of engaging children and young people about health issues are successful in enabling children to make positive choices about their health. The fact that over 99% of children have a contact with a member of the Health Team is evidence of the good level of service provided to the children. Foster carers can make direct contact with the health professionals on behalf of the children they foster, and take an active role in monitoring their child’s health. There are ‘health days’ and LAC team provide support for sexual health, substance misuse etc. Foster carers where required, receive comprehensive training from the health professionals to support them in identifying and addressing children’s specific health needs.

It is evident that the children who are fostered receive an excellent health input. The fostering service alongside the Children in Need social workers and foster carers, actively work to obtain resources required to promote and secure best standard of care for the children. The service has successfully built partnerships with the key agencies and professionals to further develop health care planning for looked after children.
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.

Children and young people in foster care are kept safe from abuse and neglect and are well protected by the systems in place.

The quality rating for this outcome is good.

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

EVIDENCE:

The staff of the fostering service are subject to the robust recruitment procedures of the local authority, and all appropriate checks are carried out before anyone is employed in the service. The manager and all the social work staff are professionally qualified and registered with the General Social Work Council.

Children are placed with carers who have been assessed as being best able to meet the child’s needs, ensuring the welfare of the child is safeguarded. The foster Panel is proactive in this assessment process and as the Panel Chair said, “we would have no hesitation in rejecting any application if it were felt that the applicants did not meet our stringent standards”. Applications are only made after initial training and are completed in approximately 12 weeks,
social workers said, "the objective is to get the right information and the assessment can be an ‘emotion journey for some prospective foster carers and can be very enlightening. Some are counselled out in the process to ensure as far as possible that the best potential carers are put to the Panel. The Panel have a preliminary discussion to identify relevant issues and allocate questions, the foster carers can if they wish, join the meeting and remain throughout the questions, discussion and decision making. Assessment reports seen are very thorough and well presented. The Panel routinely gives feedback on the quality of information.

Foster carers were very satisfied at the information provided before a child is placed to enable them to care safely for them, including good information about health, behaviour and key information about family background.

The matching process is enhanced by a multi agency resources forum that meets to consider all long term placements, and for other cases on a selective basis. This group comprising of representatives from separate agencies meet to decide and agree on the resources necessary to support the placement. This is good practice.

The issue of bullying is taken seriously, and foster carers spoken to are sensitive to, and aware of the effects of bullying and confirmed they have attended training on this subject. All foster carers are required to undergo mandatory child protection training.

The Foster Panel is well managed with effective membership who take their responsibilities seriously. The Chair ensures that applications are scrutinised and challenges the fostering service where appropriate. The Panel receives information relating to exemptions and extensions as well as issues that have arisen at an early stage. All panel members are subject to relevant checks and receive induction and ongoing training. (A Panel meeting was not attended during this inspection).
Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13, 31.

The service promotes the racial, religious and cultural identity of children and gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of children and young people to help them to achieve their potential.

The quality rating for this outcome is excellent.

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

EVIDENCE:

The service actively seeks to recruit carers that can meet the diversity needs of the children in their care. The policies and procedures promote diversity and equality and stresses importance in achieving a high standard of care for children. One young person who is from the Muslim faith expressed full satisfaction at the way his religious needs are met by the fostering service. He said “I am so pleased that my foster mum and social worker helped me to find a mosque so I can practice my religion, this means a lot to me”.

The local authority has invested resources to ensure as far as possible that children who are looked after receive the best outcomes in respect of their education. The Looked After Children in Education Team (LACE) is based in a dedicated building that has an IT suite, and classroom facilities to enable children who have been excluded from school to continue to receive an education until other plans are made. The team has Looked After Children
Education Assistants who work with the children and resources have been approved to employ more teaching staff. The facilities are very good and indeed, and the manager of the team makes it clear that the ethos of the team is “no child is denied education”. Some examples of work completed by children were of a high standard. All children are provided with an education plan and strong links are established with local schools. Each child who is fostered is supported to achieve educationally regardless of cultural background, gender or disability. The LACE team are very proactive in setting up contacts with a school if difficulties occur with a child and, ”all stops are pulled to deal with the situation” (quote from a foster carer). Children are able to receive excellent additional support during out of hours school time at the LACE centre by attending a homework club and getting additional help from the teaching assistants. The computers are freely available to search the Internet for course work. The local authority provides all fostered children with access to a home computer. One young person has produced a very good portfolio in computer graphics and the LACE team have been successful in negotiating for this young person to attend the Grimsby College for part of his school time to develop his graphics skills. This is commendable and shows imagination and a creative response to this young person’s individual needs.

The impact of changes of school on educational development, achievement and friendships is recognised and good support is provided for children to adjust to any changed school environment.

It is evident that the foster service and carers value education and understand the importance of their role to enable children to achieve their educational potential.

The authority hosts an annual ceremony to give awards to looked after children to celebrate their achievements during the year. This is commendable.

The fostering service also provides short breaks for parents who have children with a disability and this service is well managed from a separate office location in the town. This service works closely with parents who remain responsible for their children and provides periodic respite care for the children with carers who have been subject to the full fostering assessment.

The short breaks service is managed and administered by a small team. The demands being made for support by families, is increasing and there is currently only one full time social worker employed, one admin support, 1.5 placement support coordinators and the manager. The manager said that recruitment of carers was somewhat problematical due to the heavy demands being made on the team leaving little time to organise recruitment campaigns. An increase in staffing of even a 0.5 social worker would enable recruitment to be given a higher priority.
An issue raised by one carer is the high cost of parking her car when taking children out on trips to places of interest. Consideration should be given by senior management to the provision of a disabled car parking badge for use by short breaks carers when they take children out.
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.

Children and young people have very good opportunities to make positive contributions to the service of care they receive.

The quality rating for this outcome is good.

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

EVIDENCE:

Maintaining and developing family contacts and friendships are integral to the service provided. This is emphasised through the training and support given to foster carers. Children’s views and wishes are sought with regard to contact with their family and friends and they have a say in how contact is organised.

The service encourages the children to give their views on their placements and care plans. The Children’s Participation Team supports children who are looked after to meet as a group and they have the use of a dedicated bungalow where they meet and plan activities and have discussions on a range of topics of their choice.

The Children’s Directorate is positive about listening to children and plans are at an advanced stage to develop an integrated IT system where children can post their views and comments on a variety of issues. This web site will be used by the children to participate in the planning, management and evaluation of services and activities when fully set up.

Children spoken to said they are supported by their carers and social workers to give their comments at reviews and other planning forums concerning them.
Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

14, 29.

Young people are supported to prepare for independence. The foster carers are paid appropriate allowances and expenses to enable them to provide a good level of care for the children.

The quality rating for this outcome is good.

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

EVIDENCE:

The young people in foster care enjoy stable family placements. Their carers are expected to work with them to prepare them for independence.

The fostering service has developed links with the leaving care team to ensure that the young people are supported and taught the basic skills of budgeting, housekeeping, shopping and generally how to look after themselves in the world of independence and full time work. The transition period when the young person begins preparation to move into their own accommodation can be traumatic, and foster carers are encouraged to be an integral part of this process. The leaving care team is also involved in training foster carers with a view to the future government plans to possibly extend the period for young people who wish to stay in care until 21 years old.

All the carers spoken to say that they receive appropriate allowances on time and any errors are dealt with speedily. Boarding out allowances are added to through contract payments and other allowances for skills. There are a reducing number of carers who are paid the basic boarding out allowance without enhancements. The allowances are intended to enable the carers to
support the children to pursue education and leisure pursuits and to fully participate in the community through access to transport.
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):

1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 32.

The children benefit from a fostering Service that is well managed and staffed by people who work hard to achieve the best possible outcomes for them.

The quality rating for this outcome is excellent.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.
EVIDENCE:

The service vision and values are stated in the Statement of Purpose and this is evident throughout the service delivery and in day to day practice of managers and the staff.

The managers are all experienced qualified professionals who are supported by the wider organisation. All social workers receive ongoing training and they are supported to do the Post Qualifying Social Work Certificate. The training section provides a continuous development programme throughout the year to ensure that staff achieve the requirements of the GSCC training requirements. The Head of Service and Principal Social Workers (team leaders) ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and support good practice. One manager said “the team is cohesive I couldn’t wish for a stronger set of workers” another said “I am amazed that they do as much as they do”. Staff said that their managers are visible and available to children, carers as well as staff.

The Head of Service encourages an open and inclusive culture as demonstrated by the comments of staff and carers who positively stated that their views and contribution to the fostering process is listened to.

There is a high awareness and recognition among managers and staff of what the service does and where development is required. There is a drive forward of ‘how can we improve’. Where development is required there is a clear and achievable action plan in place, which is monitored and reviewed.

Staff confirmed that they have good support from their managers and they can always access a manager for guidance and advice on difficult situations. It was evident from discussions that the staff appreciated the support and supervision from their managers. Monthly formal supervision is in place for all staff and there is a positive approach by management towards the professional development of their staff.

Foster carers were fulsome in their praise for the support they themselves received from their link workers and as one said “my link worker supports me to death” another said, “If they can’t visit me then they are on the telephone asking how I am managing”.

There is a structured induction and training plan for all foster carers and they are expected to take part in training activities throughout the year. However, it was evident from discussions with some foster carers that it was mainly the female carers that attended. The Head of Service needs to carry out a survey of all male foster carers to seek their views on how to structure more flexible
training events to fit in with work commitments. It is important that all carers see themselves as part of the whole team and do not become passive carers. This issue is also with the short breaks carers scheme. Consideration may need to be given to making it mandatory and a commitment, when foster carers are recruited that they have to attend a certain number of specific training courses each year such as child protection, behaviour management and attachment to name but a few.

There are accurate up to date records for each carer and child that contains the required information as specified in the regulations. All foster carers are required to keep a diary record outlining the events of each week. This could be modified to include the outcomes from Every Child Matters. There are plans to have all records in an electronic form and when this is completed, access to these records will be made easier by authorised staff.

The foster team is located in modern office accommodation with good IT facilities. Also within the building are the Children in Need Teams that encourage cooperative working partnerships and good communication with the foster team. The well equipped office enables the foster team to work efficiently and to respond appropriately to foster carer’s needs.

The service assesses situations where family and friends act as carers and support is provided as required. This ensures that children can be assessed for a wide range of family care placements.

This is a well managed service and the feedback information from other professionals, young people and foster carers, indicates that the service is seen as proactive, and ensures as far as is reasonably possible good outcomes for the children and young people.
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

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| MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION | |
|------------------------------||
| **Standard No** | **Score** |
| 10                | 3         |
| 11                | 4         |
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Refer to Standard</th>
<th>Good Practice Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>FS23</td>
<td>Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both should complete all training identified by the fostering service.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>FS24</td>
<td>The weekly diary report should be redesigned to incorporate the outcomes from Every Child Matters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>FS31</td>
<td>Consideration should be given to the issue of disabled person’s car parking badges to short breaks carers.</td>
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When resources are available consideration should be given to increasing the staffing at the Short Breaks Service.