



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

South Gloucestershire Fostering Services

**The Health Resource Centre
2a Newton Road
Cadbury Heath South Glos
BS30 8EZ**

Lead Inspector
Paul
Clark

Announced
14-16 September 2005 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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	South Gloucestershire Fostering Services
Address	The Heath Resource Centre 2a Newton Road Cadbury Heath South Glos BS30 8EZ
Telephone number	01454 866090 or 866095
Fax number	01454 866261
Email address	-
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	South Gloucestershire Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Tamsin Cows & Nicky Godfrey
Type of registration	Local Authority Fostering Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	-
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	Not applicable

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Not applicable

Date of last inspection 1st October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The South Gloucestershire Council Fostering Service is located within the Children's Social Services Division of the Department for Children and Young People (DCYP) which is managed by the Director of Children's Services. A Children's Service Manager (Resources) manages the Family Placement Team (which contains the Fostering Service), the Looked After the Team and the Children's Resources Centres. The management of the Family Placement Team consists of two Team Managers operating as a job share. Each takes lead responsibility for fostering or adoption. This Inspection of the Fostering Services was designed to coincide with an Inspection of the Adoption Services in order to minimise disruption to these services. Two separate groups of Inspectors from the Commission focussed their attention on each specific service. As a result two Inspection Reports have been produced, one for each service. The team is made up of . 5.5 social workers, Administration staff and Training Manager. The Family Placement Team provides a fostering; adoption and short breaks service across the authority. The Fostering Service recruit, assess, train, approve and support foster carers. The Fostering Service includes kinship care and there is a Family Link Service which provides short periods of care for disabled children and young people. A Foster Panel assess and make recommendations about whether to approve applications to foster and conducts annual reviews on approved foster carers.

SUMMARY

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

This Inspection involved two Inspectors conducting questionnaire surveys and meetings with a random sample of young people and their foster carers; meetings with managers, social workers and all other professional and administrative support members within the Fostering Team: meetings with other managers and officers of the Council and professional agencies connected to the Fostering Service.

All of the service's statutory and non-statutory records were scrutinised as were its policies and procedures. An Inspector attended the Foster Panel Meeting and met with the Chair of the Panel.

The Fostering Service sits within a diverse range of children's services provided by the Council. The Inspectors witnessed good levels of communication between these various services. The Inspectors were firmly of the view that South Gloucestershire Council's Fostering Service provides a professional level of care within a well organised and managed structure that is focussed on the needs of young people.

What the service does well:

An excellent foster carer recruitment programme is in place which is well market researched.

Staff recruitment, vetting and appointment systems are professionally organised and appropriately recorded.

The service has produced an excellent 'Being in Care' pack for young people which provides a wealth of advice, guidance and information in a user friendly format (although see comments in the 'What they could do better' summary with regard to the needs of disabled children using the Family Link Service).

Front line social workers are well trained, managed and supported.

Good inter-team collaboration and communication (those teams dealing with children's services) systems are in place.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service is shortly (in collaboration with the local Primary Care Trust) to appoint a Clinical Psychologist whose work will be in addition to that offered by the CAMHS team.

There is now a 'out of hours', peer group support system (also called the 'Helpline Carers') in place for foster carers. This service has access to a Social Services Manager; there is also the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

The council have in place a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the 'Reconstruct Advocacy Service' who offer a freephone support line and direct support to young people.

The existing 'Children's Guide' is currently being redeveloped to offer more information to young people.

The Council are about to set up a 'Leaving Care Training Flat' Project in partnership with 'Kingswood Young Homeless Project' and a local Housing Association.

The service now has its two, job share Team Managers as permanent appointments.

Within the service there is much excitement about the development of the 'Turnabout Project' which is a Government grant funded (equally matched with funding by the Council), 18 month project, which intends to provide intensive foster care for young people with challenging and anti-social behaviour difficulties, based on a model developed by the Oregon Social Learning Centre, USA. *Although this project will be connected to the Fostering Team its organisational structure and methods of intervention are distinct and consideration will need to be given to the way that this Project is to be inspected in the future.*

What they could do better:

The exterior of the Filton office building (used for Child Protection conferences) is in need of development. Several staff told the Inspectors how it gives an 'unwelcoming' impression to people using the service.

Consideration should be given to developing the format of the 'Being in Care' pack so that a version could be available for children and young people with learning disabilities who use the Family Link Service.

There should be a separate 'Statement of Purpose' for the Family Link Service. The resources for the Training Officer would be improved by the provision of a software package which would enable them to have an IT database of social worker's and foster carer's training portfolios.

A written policy should be in place to give guidance on the use of Taxi services for young people.

The Foster Panel to continue its efforts to recruit a Panel member who has experience of having been in foster care.

A clear, written policy should be in place on the use of physical restraint. To further develop the way that black foster carers can be recruited and deployed.

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

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

The service ensures that foster carers are well informed about the health backgrounds and needs of young people placed and that young people have access to all necessary health services.

EVIDENCE:

The personal files of young people using the service were seen to contain details of their health histories. 'Looked After Children' forms (which contain a section on 'Health') had been completed by the placing social workers. Foster carers spoken with confirmed that information on a young person's health was given to them at the time of placement. A Paediatrician conducts a medical examination of each young person at the time of admission. However, the young person may chose not to undergo this (if they are of sufficient age and understanding). The 'Looked After Team' employs a Children's Nurse (part time) who attends to children's health needs on request.

If young people are unable to remain with their existing GP, Dentist and Optician they are registered with these services local to the foster home. Social workers spoken with confirmed that they are able to access the services of the Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) (part of the local Primary Care Trust (PCT)) if they have concerns about the mental health of a young person. Additionally, the PCT are about to employ a Clinical Psychologist who will provide a full time service to the Looked After Children's team and be based in Newton Road.

Foster carers files showed that they have received training in first aid as part of the core skills training programme that they receive. Foster carers spoken with confirmed that they had received this.

If a young person is a smoker at the time of placement a plan of action is made to address this and this is written into the placement agreement. The Registered Managers stated that smoking is actively discouraged and that foster carers are not allowed to smoke in front of young people in their care.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9&15

The fostering service is well run by staff who are appropriately trained and qualified. Foster carers are recruited, assessed, trained and approved by skilled professionals including those who provide the membership of a Foster Panel who make final deliberations on whether foster carers are suitable to be approved.

EVIDENCE:

The Inspectors visited the offices of the Council's Central Personnel Section where the personal files of all staff connected with the fostering service were scrutinised. These were seen to contain records of checks and references, which had been followed up with telephone enquiries. The section has a system now in place to ensure the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are renewed every three years.

A random number of foster carers files were scrutinised. These showed that all foster carers undergo a rigorous assessment process in line with national fostering assessment agreed procedures. Records of checks and references were in place and these had been appropriately followed up.

Foster carers undergo the 'Skills to Foster' training programme which is part of the assessment process. Within two years of approval foster carers have to undergo a 'Core Skills' training programme which includes Child Protection training. It was noted that Family Link Workers do not have Child Protection training as part of their 'Core Skills' training programme and it is

recommended that it be included in this. It is suggested that the Training Programme would benefit from the provision of an IT database which would identify foster carers whose training needed updating.

Final approval to foster is subject to the decision of the Foster Panel which meets monthly. The panel also conducts an annual review of this approval. The Inspector attended the monthly Foster Panel meeting and observed that an appropriate decision making process on final approval was being used which was in line with the National Minimum Standards (NMS). Following the recommendations of the previous Inspection the Chair of the Foster Panel has been actively trying to recruit a panel member who has had personal experience of having been fostered. However, in spite of genuine efforts this has not been possible so this recommendation will remain.

Evidence was seen in case files that the service attempts to ensure that foster carers and young people placed with them have been 'matched' appropriately. There is a Research and Marketing Officer who attempts to ensure that the foster carers recruitment campaign of the service is responsive to the cultural and ethnic needs of the young people who need placement. It was notable that there are few black foster carers on the list of approved foster carers. The managers stated that this was because the population definition in South Gloucestershire is predominately white and that black foster carers who have been approved become frustrated by the long delays (that occur as a result of the 'matching' policy) in finding them a placement and many of them have left to join other fostering services where they can have more regular placements. As a result of this those young people living in South Gloucestershire who do require a placement with a black foster carer may have to be placed by another fostering service which may be some distance from their own community. It is suggested that the service might consider ways to address this shortfall (of available black carers) perhaps by organising a sharing scheme with other fostering agencies who might 'buy in' to South Gloucestershire's pool of foster carers.

The service provides young people with a well formatted 'Being in Care' pack which informs them of their rights and the contact details of the Reconstruct Advocacy Service, who have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to provide independent help and support to young people placed and who will support them should they wish to make a complaint about any issue with their care. However, it is recommended that consideration should be given to developing the format of the 'Being in Care' pack so that a version could be available for children and young people with learning disabilities who use the Family Link Service. Also, there appears to be no mention of the Family Link Service in the Statement of Purpose (apart from naming the social worker responsible) and it is required that there should be a full description of the Family Link Service provided.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7,13 & 31

The service attempts to ensure that young people are provided with full time education and although systems of collaboration are in place with the education department more needs to be done to develop this.

EVIDENCE:

As previously suggested in this report the service should consider ways to increase the number of black foster carers who are approved and remain on the list of foster carers available to accept placements.

The Council has produced a 'Race Equalities Action Plan' within which are specific outcomes expected of the Family Placement Team by way of the way they provide services for children and young people from Black Minority Ethnic groups. How well these expected outcomes have been met will be one of the subjects of future Inspections.

The service provides a Family Link Service whose carers are recruited and approved in the same way as the other foster carers in the service but who receive specialist training as part of their 'Core Skill' training programme to enable them to have the skills to care for disabled children (however, a recommendation has been made earlier in this report that they also receive Child Protection training as part of their 'Core Skills' training). The Family Link Service provides short term care for disabled children and young people who are further supported by the 'KIDS', Domiciliary Care Agency who have a SLA with the Council to provide care and support to disabled children and their families who are living at home and from discussion with social workers and foster carers there was evidence that there are good collaborative links between these two services. A requirement has been made earlier in this

Report regarding the need for full details of the Family Link Service to be included in the Statement of Purpose.

All young people of school age using the service have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which focuses on the educational aspects of the care plan. These plans are reviewed every six months. All schools in South Gloucestershire have a Designated Teacher for Looked After Children whose role is to coordinate services for looked after children and raise awareness among staff about the specific difficulties they face in school. However, it was disappointing to note that one young person that the Inspectors met had been excluded from school before the summer holidays and in conversation with her foster carer, very little effort appeared to have been taken by the Education Department to address this and to try to ensure that a school placement could be in place by the time the school holiday period ended. At the time of this Inspection (some two weeks after the school holidays had concluded) the foster carer stated that no efforts were being made to address the situation and she felt unsupported in trying to resolve it. Her concern was increased by the fact that this is the year when the young person is preparing for her GCSEs. It is required that the service makes enquiries into how this has happened and takes steps to ensure that this matter is addressed in collaboration with the Education Department and that a report of these enquiries be sent to the Commission.

A home to school transport agreement is in place between the children's social services and education departments to ensure continuity of school when a child becomes looked after or changes placement. It was noted that some young people are also supported to attend evening clubs by the use of Taxi and it is recommended that the fostering service produce a written policy on the use of Taxis to ensure the safety of young people.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10 & 11

The service actively promotes a young person's contact with their birth family and makes suitable arrangements for supervised contact where appropriate. Systems are in place to ensure that young people and their families are consulted about all aspects of their care.

EVIDENCE:

The Council employs a full time 'Children's Participation Officer' who told the Inspectors that he is responsible for ensuring that all young people who are looked after by the authority have a forum to express their opinion on the way that their care is organised. This takes the form of regular group meetings with young people. The officer also runs a weekly youth group for all looked after young people and their attendance at the group is supported by the provision of taxis. Numerous mediums (e.g. CD Roms, videos, pamphlets etc.) were seen to be used to ensure that young people are aware of this service, how to access it and how to ensure that their rights are met.

The Officer also supports those young people who have left or who are about to leave care and advises them on issues of independent living. The Council is about to set up a 'Leaving Care Training Flat' Project in partnership with 'Kingswood Young Homeless Project' and a local Housing Association.

From the personal files of young people placed and from discussion with them it was evident that contact arrangements are in place to allow contact with family members. Several young people have supervised contacts the arrangements for which were seen to be appropriate and well organised. Placement Plans were seen to be appropriately reviewed and young people are able to attend these reviews and make contributions to this planning. Birth parents are also invited to attend these reviews unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14 & 29

Systems are in place to ensure that young people are prepared for independent living and that foster carers are made aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

EVIDENCE:

As previously stated, the Children's Participation Officer is available to support young people prepare for independent living and the Council are about to set up a 'Leaving Care Training Flat' Project in partnership with 'Kingswood Young Homeless Project' and a local Housing Association where young people will be supported in living semi-independently for a short trial period. Pathway Plans were seen to be in place for young people nearing the end of their time in care. Fosters carers spoken with said that they are supported by their supervising social workers in preparing young people for leaving care. A document is included in the foster carer's information pack which advises them of those elements of their fee which are intended for payable items which must be spent on the young person in their care.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 17,21 & 24

The service is well managed by qualified and experienced managers who monitor effectively all aspects of the service. The service is continually looking to improve the quality of the service provided.

EVIDENCE:

The service made available to the Inspectors a comprehensive array of information documents about the service provided and all of its policies and procedures. Comment has been made earlier in this Report on the need to give specific information in the Statement of purpose about the Family Link Service. All policies and procedures were clearly written and these were made available to staff. Discussion with staff confirmed that these documents are easily accessible and that they are aware of their contents.

Both of the job share Registered Managers have a professional social work qualification (DipSW) and have at least two years experience of working in children's services. All social workers in the fostering team have an appropriate social work qualification.

The service provided the Inspectors with the 'Children Looked After, Annual Report' (2003/4) which was seen to meet the requirements of Regulation 42. All of the items contained in Schedule 7 (which lists the matters to be monitored by the service) were seen to be being met in the various records and documents made available to the Inspectors.

The service was seen (in the written Training Programmes and in discussion with social workers and foster carers) to provide comprehensive training for social workers and foster carers (although a requirement has been made earlier in this Report that Child Protection training be included in the core skills training for carers in the Family Link Service). Supervision is given at the appropriate intervals and regular staff Team Meetings (one of which the Inspectors attended) support and advise staff about aspects of the running of the service. Foster carers spoken with told the Inspectors that their supporting social workers were always available when required and that cover arrangements were always in place during periods of absence or annual leave. The exterior of the Filton office building (used for Child Protection conferences) is in need of development. Several staff told the Inspectors how it gives an 'unwelcoming' impression to people using the service. It is recommended that the service consider making improvements to the exterior of the Filton office building.

The service provided the Inspectors with a copy of the Council's 'Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked After Children' which showed that the service is funded predominately through existing agency and departmental resources, social services budget and the use of grant funding.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

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

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	1	3(1)(b)	The Statement of Purpose must contain a full description of the services provided by the Family Link Service.	1 November 2005
2.	13	16	That the service will make enquiries into how the young person mentioned in this report was without a school placement and will take steps to ensure this matter is addressed in collaboration with the Education Department and that a report of these enquiries will be sent to the Commission.	1 November 2005

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.	9.2	That Child Protection training is included in the 'Core Skills' training programme for Family Link carers
2.	30	The Foster Panel should include a member who has personal experience of having been fostered.
3.	9	That the fostering service produce a written policy on the use of Taxis which ensures the safety of young people.
4.	1.5	The format of the 'Being in Care' pack should be developed

		so that a version could be available for children and young people with learning disabilities who use the Family Link Service.
5.	26	It is recommended that the service consider making improvements to the exterior of the Filton office building.

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