



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wokingham District Council Fostering Services

**PO Box 154
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1WN**

Lead Inspector
Lucy Martin

Announced Inspection
14th November 2005 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Wokingham District Council Fostering Services

Address PO Box 154
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1WN

Telephone number 0118 974 6750

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Wokingham District Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13th September 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Wokingham District Fostering Services provide substitute family care to meet the needs of Wokingham children and young people who are unable to live within their families of origin on a temporary/short term basis or longer term basis. The service also supports children within their families of origin when this can be achieved by regular periods of family-based care. To this end the service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers.

It is a Family Placement Team which means that most workers undertake both adoption and fostering tasks. There are two Managers – one leads on fostering and the other on adoption. The Managers report to one of two Children's Services Managers.

At the time of this inspection there were 23 foster children placed by the service and there were approximately 27 foster carers.

SUMMARY

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

This was a routine annual inspection of a fostering service and before the inspection questionnaires were sent to all children over 7 years of age in foster care, to foster carers and the placing social workers. The Manager completed a pre-inspection questionnaire and a self-assessment form and sent the inspector key documentation.

The inspection took place over 5 days and the inspector met with:

- The Team Manager and Children's Services Manager
- The whole fostering team and seven workers individually
- Four foster families and the foster children in their homes
- An experienced foster carer who has expanded his role
- The fostering panel chair and observed the panel

A sample of case records, staff recruitment records and policies and procedures were looked at.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is well managed and has a stable and experienced staff team. Foster carers are well supported and have access to a wide range of training opportunities. The annual reviewing system for all foster carers including short-break carers and kinship carers is comprehensive and works well. The health and safety checklist is a comprehensive document which is completed annually and demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring the safety of foster children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

There have been a number of developments and improvements made since the last inspection which have included the out of hours advice line which carers spoken to have found supportive. The Annual Review for foster carers continues to develop with the reviewing officer now operating entirely independently from the Family Placement Team. There have been improvements made to ensure that information is received and shared before the review and this now includes the views of the foster carers own children.

The Support Worker role has continued to expand and now includes the recruitment of new carers and the introduction of profiles for each foster carer which can be shown to young people before a placement.

The allowance scheme payable to foster carers has been revised and is now fully transparent and payment levels are linked to the experience and training of the carers.

The Fostering Panel now has an experienced independent Chair and the panel members appeared far clearer regarding their duties and decision-making processes.

An experienced foster carer has been undertaking some additional duties attending initial interviews with staff and following up telephone enquiries to aid the recruitment of more new carers.

What they could do better:

Although safe caring guidelines have been developed there is still a need to ensure that individual guidelines are written with each foster carer. It was found that some areas in need of attention are due to the fact that the number of Wokingham's foster carers is reducing and there has been difficulty recruiting new carers. As a result, some extensions to approval have been agreed which need more detail recorded as to the reasons why and there should be more written evidence of the elements of matching that are taken into consideration in agreeing a placement.

The foster carers files were well maintained but need to include up to date information regarding approval, the dates of placements and a training profile. It is recommended that the member of staff undertaking the health and safety checks in foster carers homes has some training in this area and that the personnel files contain evidence that CRB checks are renewed every three years.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standard inspected was 12

The foster carers actively support the health and development of the children in their care.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers spoken with were clear about the health needs of the young people in placement and were involved in taking the young people to routine medical appointments. The fostered young people were positive about their health needs being met and a few commented that they are given healthy food to eat. Since the last inspection a group of Looked After young people have produced a health journal to be distributed to all Looked After young people explaining about the importance of health issues and giving advice and information. This is a positive development and helps to emphasize the importance of health issues to fostered young people.

The foster placement agreement includes a section relating to health and whether the carer has consent to medical treatment. There is monitoring of health needs and appointments when visits are made to foster carers by their Link workers and a new Looked After nurse is in post who has met with foster carers. Advice was given that the health needs of young people who smoke are considered, especially if everyone else in the household smokes.

In the last year, there has been more involvement and liaison with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) who are represented on the Looked After Children's Panel.

A range of training has been provided to foster carers regarding health issues and a number of courses had been attended in the last year by the foster carers met with including training in first aid, assertiveness, loss and bereavement and sexual health. Advice was given to ensure that first aid training is kept up to date.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standards inspected were 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Overall, the fostering service has effective systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe. There is still a need for safe caring guidelines to be put in place and there should be more written evidence regarding the matching considerations.

EVIDENCE:

It was a requirement at the last inspection that the personnel issues raised in that report were addressed. The requirement was found to be met although there still needs further work in this area. It was found that personnel files now contain photographs of applicants (there are still a few more to obtain), the reference request form sent out has been changed and now does ask all referees to state any known reason why the person should not be employed to work with children and there is now a procedure to ensure that written references are followed up by telephone. A sample of personnel files were seen but only one new member of staff, a administrative assistant, has been appointed to the fostering service since the last inspection.

There are clear recruitment procedures in place to ensure that references, a medical check and a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check is carried out prior to employment. However, the newest worker had no references contained in her personnel file. It was confirmed that these were received but a number of personnel tasks are delegated to the Team Managers and the information does

not always end up in the personnel file. It was also noted that the longer serving members of staff, including the Team Manager, Children's Services Manager, and the Assistant Corporate Head had no record of a police check being renewed every three years. It is a recommendation that the CRB's are renewed every three years and that evidence of this is contained in the personnel files. It is also advised that there are clear lines of accountability regarding ensuring that the personnel files contain all the necessary information.

The inspector visited the homes of four foster carers. All were warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children who were living there. A comprehensive health and safety checklist is completed as part of the approval process and annually afterwards. This is an excellent form which covers all areas including pet ownership, medication storage and car ownership. Advice was given that the form is extended to include building extensions and seeing confirmation that all the appropriate approval has been sought. The same member of staff carries out the completion of all the health and safety checklists and it is recommended that training in health and safety is provided for this member of staff.

The fostering service has not been able to recruit many new foster carers in the past year and so there are a limited number of placements available. The foster placement agreements do contain details of matching factors and gaps, but it was found that there was not sufficient information contained. For example, one child in a short-term trans-racial placement had not had the gaps explored and addressed fully, in sufficient detail. There were other placements where two young people of very similar ages were placed with foster carers and there were difficulties. This is another area where there should be more detail recorded regarding the matching considerations. It is acknowledged that meetings with the children's social workers had taken place to discuss the placements but in terms of the matching considerations, there needed to be more detail on the foster carers file to evidence that the child was being carefully matched to a carer capable of meeting their individual assessed needs and the impact of having two young people of similar age in the same foster placement.

It was a requirement made at the last inspection that safe caring guidelines are developed. This has been done as a policy and there is still a need to ensure that foster carers have their own individualised guidelines in place. There have been no allegations made against foster carers since the last inspection and following the requirement made at the last inspection, a written policy has been developed regarding the actions to be taken if an allegation is made about the behaviour of a foster carer towards a foster child. This has been written in consultation with the child protection co-ordinator. Training in child protection is provided to all foster carers including the opportunity to attend multi-disciplinary training. Opportunity to attend a workshop on bullying has also been provided to foster carers.

It was a requirement made at the last inspection that the working of the fostering panel is reviewed. This has been done and a new independent Chair has been appointed and the Panel was relaunched in May 2005. It was evident from observing the panel in operation that the Chair is experienced and that the rest of the panel were clearer in their responsibilities. The panel has a number of independent members including the Chair, an expert in health and education as well as a care leaver and a foster carer from another area. Advice was given that all the fostering panel require all the recruitment checks to be undertaken on initial recruitment and a renewal of a CRB every three years. This information was not viewed on this inspection and will be requested at the next inspection.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standards inspected were 7, 13 and 31

The fostering service works with a range of foster carers and children/young people with diverse needs and identities. Particular attention is paid to the needs of disabled children. The educational needs of fostered children are promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service makes few placements that are trans-racial or cross-cultural. It was clear that identity issues relating to religion or culture are recorded in the foster placement agreements. There has been no training provided for foster carers in the area of diversity or discrimination in the past year and advice is given that this is considered.

There are some disabled children who are fostered and it was evident that each disabled child receives specific services and support to help them maximise their potential and to lead as full a life as possible. These measures have included adaptations to foster carers' homes where necessary.

Wokingham provide a short-break scheme which is aimed at children with a disability and which is managed within the Disabled Children's Team. There is one part time worker who manages the scheme and there are strong links with the scheme operated by Reading Borough Council. At present, the short-break scheme has 14 carers and 5 are approved to have children overnight. Assessments for carers wanting to provide overnight care are taken to the Fostering Panel in the same way as other foster carers and there are Annual

Reviews of the carers by an independent Reviewing Officer. All these processes work well and there are ideas for future development. With only one part-time worker, there are some difficulties in fully developing this service but there is good liaison between this worker and the Family Placement Team.

All foster carers receive a copy of the 'Rough Guide to Education' which provides information and guidance regarding education issues. All the young people spoken with were attending school and it was evident that the importance of attending school and achieving their full potential was emphasised. In one placement, there had been issues regarding schooling and the carer was taking the young people to school every morning and was in close contact with the school. Copies of Personal Education Plans were seen on the young people's files.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standards inspected were 10 and 11

Contact with family is encouraged whenever possible and there is good evidence of consultation with the children and young people in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

All the children and young people spoken with during this inspection were having regular contact with members of their immediate family. They said that the arrangements for contact worked well and this was confirmed by the foster carers. Contact arrangements are included in the foster placement agreements and it was noted that the foster carers were managing some complex arrangements with support from the children's social workers and their fostering worker. A training session on contact took place in March 2005.

Wokingham has a Children's Rights Service which offers advice, information and support and advocacy to any young person Looked After by Wokingham District Council. Three participation groups are run on a monthly basis including one group specifically for disabled children. It is a proactive service and the groups are involved in producing information to Looked After children like the health journal and more recently a questionnaire for care leavers.

The fostered young people's views are gained before the Annual Review of the foster carer and consultation also takes place with the children of the foster carers. This is a development in the past year and ensures that the foster carers own children's views are considered. All the young people spoken with were clear about how to complain or raise a concern.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standard inspected was 29

Foster carers receive clear information regarding the payment of expenses and allowances and it was reported that payments are made accurately and promptly.

EVIDENCE:

It was made a recommendation at the last inspection to clarify the payments to foster carers. This has been done and with effect from August 2005, a new allowance scheme has been in operation which is based on 4 levels of carer, with appropriate levels of fee dependent on the experience and training of the foster carers. Movements between levels is based on a recommendation at the foster carers Annual Review and will be ratified by the Fostering Panel. The information in the new allowance scheme is comprehensive and covers all areas.

Foster carers spoken with about the new scheme felt it was fair and acted as an incentive to undertake more training. They confirmed that payments are made accurately and promptly and that any errors made are quickly rectified.

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The standards assessed were 2, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 32

There is a stable and experienced team who are well managed. Foster carers are well supported and there are good training opportunities offered to them.

EVIDENCE:

The Wokingham Family Placement Team has two Managers, one of whom leads on adoption and the other leads on fostering. At the last inspection it was found that there were some gaps and overlaps in the two Managers roles and it was made a recommendation that the areas of responsibility, communication and accountability are reviewed in relation to the fostering and the adoption Managers role. This has been done and work is continuing to be undertaken in this area by the Children's Services Manager. Since the last inspection the fostering Manager has completed the Certificate in Management Studies.

There have been no changes in staff in the fostering service since the last inspection. All staff undertake a mixed caseload comprising of both fostering and adoption work. All the staff are female and almost all work part-time. At the time of the last inspection in September 2004 a new recruitment officer post had been filled but unfortunately the person resigned in December 2005. It was decided that the support worker post would include recruitment of new carers and this is working well. However, since the last inspection only one new set of foster carers and two kinship carers have been recruited and since April 2005 there has been an increased use of Independent Fostering Agencies. It was felt that this is a critical time and it has been identified that it is essential that new carers are recruited and there have been strategies put in place to achieve this.

At the last inspection there were examples found when placements had been made outside the agreed approval range and it was made a requirement that there are clear procedures in place which are followed when changes to foster carers approval are sought. Although it was clear that there has been a clear policy agreed and that there was evidence that the Children's Services Manager agrees the extension of approval, this was not found to be the case every time and there was not sufficient detail on file regarding the circumstances requiring the extension to be given. In addition, none of these extensions had gone back to panel for approval. This requirement remains outstanding.

All the foster carers spoken with said that they felt well supported and were extremely complimentary about individual workers. Since the last inspection, a new out of hours support line has been set up which is staffed by the Family Placement Team during evenings and weekends. This has worked well and foster carers were positive about the service and felt reassured by knowing that it was available if needed.

The Annual Reviews for foster carers continue to routinely take place and the reviewing officer is now completely independent and is part of a separate team. The Reviews continue to develop and are working well with good minutes of the meetings seen on foster carers files. The Team has a Support Worker who also leads on Recruitment and this role is all encompassing and provides a lot of additional support to carers.

An experienced foster carer is currently working less than five hours a week going to initial interviews with new carers with other members of staff and following up telephone enquiries.

It was a recommendation made at the last inspection that separate records are kept which bring together data on allegations and on complaints and this is now being done.

Foster carers receive good training opportunities and training needs are covered at the Annual Reviews. This year an annual training programme specifically aimed at foster carers was not produced and foster carers were encouraged to apply for a wide range of courses, not solely aimed at carers. This has enabled some multi-disciplinary training to take place but it is anticipated that next year there will again be an annual training programme provided. Training attended is now considered as part of the allowance scheme and so is closely monitored. Since the last inspection foster carers have been offered a Btec course on Advanced Skills – Foster Carers, as an alternative to NVQ. As this is distance learning undertaken mostly by computer, additional IT training has been provided. Foster carers were positive about the course.

It was a recommendation last year that there are training profiles for foster carers on their files as it should be possible to see all the training courses attended by carers over the years contained in one record. This has not been carried out.

Case records were seen for a sample of foster carers and all were in good order. However, it was noted that not all the files had a front sheet clearly stating the approval status of the carers including any extensions or a list of placements of children. It is a requirement that these are clearly recorded. It would also be useful to include the date of the most recent health check and CRB on the front sheet. The inspector was informed that file audits are intended to be carried out to ensure that the files are up to date and contain all the required information.

The Family Placement Team supports a number of young people in kinship placements. The carers are usually assessed and supported in the same way as any other carers and they have now been brought into the annual reviewing system. The kinship care policy, which has been in development for the past two years, has now been finished and was seen in draft form.

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	3

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
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	X
29	3

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

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	FS17	29(4)(b)	There are clear procedures in place which are followed when changes to foster carers approval are sought. (previous timescale of 17/02/05 not met)	14/03/06
2	FS8	34(3)	There is written evidence to indicate the elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing a placement and identifying any gaps where foster carers need additional support.	14/03/06
3	FS9	12	Safe caring guidelines are written for each foster home.	14/03/06
4	FS24	30(2)(3)	The foster carers files contain accurate information regarding approval and any subsequent changes and a record of each placement.	14/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS3	There is clear evidence in the personnel files that CRB checks are renewed every 3 years.
2	FS6	Health and safety training is provided for the member of staff undertaking the health and safety checks in foster carers homes.
3	FS23	There are training profiles for each foster carer on file.

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