



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service

**Children's Services
1st Floor, West Wing
Wildwood Way
Worcester
WR5 2NP**

Lead Inspector
Sue Young

Announced Inspection
27th November 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

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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 | Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service |
| Address | Children's Services 1st Floor, West Wing Wildwood Way Worcester WR5 2NP |
| Telephone number | 01905 763763 |
| Fax number | 01905 728819 |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | www.worcestershire.gov.uk |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Worcestershire County Council |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Jean Pickering |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Fostering Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 30th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Worcester County Council Fostering Service provides a range of foster care services to children requiring short-term, long-term and permanent placements. The fostering service's placement team provides a comprehensive placement service including searching for and arranging placements with internal and external residential children's homes and alternative fostering service providers. The service recruits and trains new foster carers, provides a range of training, support services and supervision to existing foster carers and approves family and friends as carers. A short breaks 'support care' scheme is also in operation providing care for non-disabled children and young people and working with children and families towards maintaining the child with the family of origin. The scheme is an essential part of the department's strategic plan to prevent children entering the Looked After System full time. All teams including the short breaks support care scheme are supported by Integrated Services for Looked after Children (ISL), who provide an additional service of support, advice, and training to children and carers within schools and enabling access to community and leisure opportunities.

SUMMARY

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

This summary has been written in the following style to make it easy for children and young people to read.

Three inspectors visited the fostering service between 27th November and 13th December 2006. So that the inspectors could see how well the service was doing the inspectors;

- Visited 4 foster carers; this meant the inspectors could talk to the children and young people who lived with those foster carers.
- An inspector met with staff from the fostering teams, and the managers
- 30 young people returned questionnaires telling inspector what they felt about living with foster carers.
- 96 children's social workers responsible for young people placed with foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors how well they felt the young people were being looked after.
- 52 foster carers returned questionnaires telling inspectors about how much support they received from the fostering team to help them look after the young people placed with them.
- Looked at files and records.

If you want to get a full picture of what is like to live with foster carers with Worcestershire Local Authority you might like to read the full report. You can get this from the address on the front page.

What the service does well:

These are some of the good things that the inspector found out about the fostering service.

- Foster carer's help and support young people with their education. Foster carers talk regularly with teachers and give young people help and support with schoolwork when needed.
- Good support is given through the integrated services for looked after children (ISL). ISL provide support to young people through help, advice and through training to carers
- Foster carers help young people to be healthy. They make sure all children and young people can see a doctor, dentist and optician whenever they need. The fostering service has developed good health support to children and carers through the integrated service for looked-after children (ISL), who support children and carers by ensuring children who live with foster carers are given priority to the services they need.
- The foster carer's homes where young people live were warm and

- comfortable.
- Children and young people said they felt safe and well cared for by their foster carers. The fostering service has developed some good safe caring plans so young people know how to keep themselves safe in the foster carers home.
 - When agreed foster carers and social workers take children and young people to see family and friends.
 - All people including foster carers who work for the fostering service are checked thoroughly to make sure they are the right sort of people to work with children and young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The fostering service has developed a health record for children and young people, for foster carers to record all medical appointments and medication in one document, which can be given to young people at the end of being looked after.
- The fostering service has introduced a new form to ensure children and young people placed with foster carers are kept safe.
- Training has been developed for foster carers to help them look after young people in a safe way.
- Young people approaching adulthood are now supported to achieve independence.
- Since the last inspection there are more social workers and foster carers working for Worcestershire authority fostering service.

What they could do better:

- Social workers, foster carers and fostering social workers must make sure at the beginning of each placement, including respite placements, they record how they will all help care for the young people living with foster carers.
- The children's guide needs to be further developed to make sure the complaints procedure is clear to children and young people.
- The fostering service must make sure the children's social worker gives foster carers all the information they need to look after children and young people properly.
- The fostering service must make sure they record how and why they consider a foster carer can meet the needs of children and young people placed with them.

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.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Worcester Fostering Service is proactive in promoting the health and development of children and young people looked after.

EVIDENCE:

From questionnaires and from discussions with foster carers and staff it was seen that carers are provided with the support they need to promote good health for the children and young people they are caring for. They are clear about their responsibilities and evidence was seen of carers working in partnership with others to promote good health for the children they care for. All children and young people visited were registered with doctors and dentists and appropriate health appointments were kept.

Each foster carer receives training on health and safety and first aid as well as training specific to the health care needs of the child and young person placed with them.

There has been an improvement since the last inspection in ensuring that parental consent is sought for medical treatment, this however is not consistently being obtained at the point of placement. The authority has a new placement record, (part of the integrated children's system) which will be used as the foster placement agreement and which will contain a considerable amount of information regarding a young person's health needs when fully completed. Foster carers in interview and in questionnaires commented to inspectors that they felt they generally receive appropriate information regarding children and young people's health prior to or at the time of the young person's placement.

The authority has made considerable progress in promoting young people's health. A detailed and comprehensive health record for looked after children has been developed and piloted with foster carers, which contains medical consent and a running record of all health appointments and treatments including medication and other health issues such as diet exercise sexual health etc. This is given to foster cares on placement and moves with the young person to respite etc. At the end of being looked after the health record is given to the young person. The health needs of children and young people are also discussed and recorded in supervision sessions with carers.

The service has good health support to looked-after children and carers through the Integrated Service for Looked-After Children (ISL). This is a multi agency team which includes health practitioners alongside social workers, education staff and a community & leisure development worker who support children and carers by ensuring looked-after children are given priority in accessing community and mental health (CAMHS) services, disseminating information and providing training to carers, and in ensuring health assessments are completed.

Following two overdose attempts by young people in the looked after system the assistant service manager has written to all foster carers reminding them of the need to ensure all medication is stored in locked cabinets. During the inspection however it was apparent that the authority need to develop effective processes in order to ensure policies and procedures are followed through.

The service is advised that in the light of the recent BAAF guidance, the policy and guidance regarding smoking should be reviewed and revisited with carers through supervision and training.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The service has developed systems, which will ensure the wellbeing and safety of children and young people in their care. Appropriately qualified and experienced managers and social workers run the service and recruit carers who are committed and suitable to work with children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The service employs a diverse range of carers with a variety of skills and experiences able to meet the complex needs and challenges of the children and young people placed with them. The foster homes visited during the course of the inspection were comfortable and welcoming. Individually foster carers were seen to be producing good outcomes for children.

Evidence was seen on carer's files of health and safety checks being conducted and regularly reviewed. Procedures have been put in place to avoid overcrowding within foster homes.

A corporate policy and guidance on anti-bullying was launched by the authority in October 2006 and will be followed up by training.

All new foster carers have a safe caring policy completed during assessment and safe caring policies for existing foster carers are being developed and placed on foster carers files. These should be given to placing children's social workers on referral.

A detailed and comprehensive risk assessment format has recently been developed and was introduced just prior to the inspection. These will be completed alongside the placement request form at referral and matching stage and will be reviewed on a regular basis. Two completed piloted risk assessments were examined during the inspection. The children's social workers fill in the first section about known and potential risks across a comprehensive range of headings and the second part on placement. It is intended that the new risk assessment format will form individual safe caring policies. The effectiveness of this risk assessment is dependent on it being completed fully by all those involved. If completed fully it will be an excellent working tool to ensure children are safeguarded within their placements. The risk assessment should be completed for all existing children and young people currently in placement. The inspectors expect to see this fully in use and in evidence on children's files at the next inspection.

Policies and procedures are in place on child protection and safe caring. All foster carers receive training in child protection and safe caring as part of their core training and are updated every 3 years. They demonstrated good awareness of actual and potential child protection matters that should be reported.

The service has since the last inspection introduced training in safe and positive handling, which has been very positively received by carers.

Carer's transport documents are checked and seen at the annual reviews.

The fostering service has two tools for matching children and young people to foster placements. A detailed matching matrix is in place for permanency placements and a matching pro-forma for short-term placements. The matching pro-forma for short-term placements is extremely brief. It was clear from discussions with carers and fostering social workers, that consideration is given regarding who is in the household, existing placements, experience of abuse, environment, carer's skills, schools etc. and that good standards of matching are being achieved by the service. This should be recorded in a way that achieves transparency, good matching and comprehensive information.

The matching pro forma for short term placements needs to be reviewed to demonstrate how the placement meets the needs of the children placed considering the five outcomes in every child matters and evidence any gaps in matching and how these are met.

The local authority has since the last inspection introduced a new computer system "framework I" which has led to inconsistency. This transition has generated variations in documents and paperwork. The local authority has a new placement information record as part of the integrated children's system, which when fully completed meets Schedule 6. Examination of files revealed an inconsistency in the use of the placement information record. Many children's social workers were still completing the old Looked after (LAC) documentation placement plan 1 and essential information part 1 on placement, and not all the necessary documents were being completed at the point of placement. Fostering social workers felt that the availability of LAC documentation is inconsistent at the point of placement; the children's social workers often refer the fostering team to core assessments etc rather than fill out the appropriate documentation causing difficulty in making and assessing placements because the information is not detailed enough. The policy and procedures with regard to foster placement agreement should be reviewed following the introduction of the placement record.

Worcester County Council has a system, which ensures staff recruitment meets matters stated in Schedule 1. Personal files for all new staff were inspected. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks were in place for all new staff at the start of employment.

The fostering service holds personal files on independent social workers and panel members. These files complied with all aspect listed in Schedule 1. A system exists for the renewal of CRB checks for foster carers every three years.

The fostering service has clear written policies and procedures in place for the operation of the fostering panel. The written procedures should cover decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement.

The fostering service operates two fostering panels; one for the north of the County and one for the south, both are conducted by independent chairs. The County Council has carried out the necessary checks on all panel members to ensure that they are suitable to work in the fostering service.

The south panel was observed as part of the inspection and minutes of previous meetings were also examined. The panel members represented the necessary range of services, skills and experience needed to carry out the panel functions effectively. The panel was conducted in a friendly and professional manner with panel members sharing responsibility for questions and queries. Also, panel members and the chair were sensitive and aware of the formality of the process and carers were reassured and supported to participate in the process.

A panel advisor to offer guidance on policy, procedures and practice to members and the chair supported the panel. The panel adviser also coordinated feedback from members about areas of good and poor practice. The adviser was responsible for ensuring that the information went to the relevant team or individual and that the panel received feedback about the issues raised. Previous meeting minutes and a management review report indicated that the panel was fulfilling its quality assurance responsibilities, promoting standards and improvements within the service.

From examination of the panel minutes it was seen that the panel was not quorate on the 14/9/06. The decision-makers advice was sought and the decision-makers view was that if there was a fair representation of social workers and independent members the panel should proceed. The service must ensure the fostering panel conducts no business unless it meets regulation 25(1).

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13,31

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

The service places a high priority on promoting the diverse needs and educational achievement for looked after children and ensuring children enjoy and achieve their personal goals.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides training for foster carers and social work staff in valuing diversity. It is a core competency in assessment and in the preparation to foster care training. Services and foster carers have access to "Sandlands" a community resource that can be accessed for information and support. The centre can provide specific play equipment and resources that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds and identities. The recruitment and development team aim over the next year, to establish good links with black and ethnic minority communities and develop a recruitment strategy for recruiting carers from black and ethnic minority groups.

The authority recognises higher costs associated with caring for children with disabilities and pays 1.5 x foster care allowances for those children in receipt of the higher rate of disability living allowance.

The integrated service for looked-after children, (ISL) community and leisure development worker ensures that looked-after children and their families are able to access leisure and community opportunities throughout the year.

From discussions with foster carers and fostering social workers, it was evident that the issue of diversity is considered during the referral and matching process and during placement. A good example was given regarding of a Nigerian young person in placement who's school had been given some money by the service to promote his identity and background and to raise awareness. Also services had been found to meet young people's personal needs, such as in regards to hair braiding etc. The fostering team spoke about how they raised awareness with foster carers regarding the dietary needs of children and young people i.e. Halal meat.

Files on examination, did not reflect this process and little evidence could be seen on files regarding the consideration of a young person's cultural and religious needs on the referral and short-term matching form. This needs to be better evidenced and documented throughout.

Carers spoken with were able to demonstrate where they had promoted young people's individuality; cultural, and religious needs and feedback from carers in questionnaires felt the authority addressed issues of equality and diversity.

Foster carers visited developed and maintained effective working relationships with schools to ensure children and young people's educational needs could be met. This was demonstrated from discussions with carers and young people, from questionnaires received from foster carers and from reading files. It was clear that carers placed a high priority in ensuring positive educational outcomes for children. Young people's files contained a range of educational information relating to young people's development and attainment.

Foster carers spoke positively about the support given to young people in education through Integrated Service for Looked-After Children (ISL). ISL provide support to young people through mentoring, advice and through training to carers. Priority is given towards looked after children in schools and inspectors saw good examples of carers liaising and working in partnership with school staff. Personal education plans (PEPs) were in place on young people's files

The educational achievement of children and young people is monitored through ISL.

Young people's questionnaires described ways in which they are supported by their carers to complete homework.

The fostering service has continued to develop its short break scheme "Support Care" for non-disabled children living at home. Although managed separately to the fostering service a line of accountability has been established. Staff and carers work closely with parents in meeting the needs of the children looked after within the scheme.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. There is a clear strong motivation within the fostering service to maintain contact. The service has developed very good consultative practices. A high regard is placed on listening to children and actively involving them in the development of service provision.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence was seen from reading files and through visits to carers and young people of a strong motivation within the fostering service to ensure contact between children and their families is maintained. The department supports carers in dealing with any difficult contact issues. Support workers are available to supervise contact where this is deemed appropriate and the views of young people are sought when determining contact arrangements.

Foster carers were able to describe the procedures for contact and promoted and supported the arrangements for individual children. Carers receive training on managing contact as part of their pre-approval training and outcomes of contact are recorded appropriately.

There are clear procedures in the foster cares handbook, which sets out how contact arrangements are to be established, maintained and reviewed. The requirements for contact is considered at matching and discussed in supervision with carers.

Feedback from questionnaires indicated that young people generally felt they were listened to and taken notice of by their carers. Out of thirty-one completed questionnaires, twenty-six reported that carers always or usually listen to the views and opinions of young people.

The authority has an advocacy service, which is accessible to all LAC to provide confidential advice, support and mediation, provided by NSPCC on a contracted basis.

The authority employs a LAC participation worker who works proactively to make sure that looked after children and young people are fully involved in consultations wherever practical; in the past year LAC young people have contributed to the selection of bids to promote the work of the teenage pregnancy unit; a gap analysis in Worcester city on provision for young people, and a Connexions consultation. One looked after young person is involved with the Worcestershire Youth Cabinet and young people who were looked after by Worcestershire contributed to the Child's Voice Conference.

Children and young people are consulted on issues, which affect their lives, by their own social workers from the children and families teams. Looked after children and birth children of foster carers are encouraged to provide written feedback to the foster carers' annual review. Young people are encouraged to be involved in their own LAC reviews and participation is monitored. In 2005/6 97% participation was achieved. Whilst young people's views are sought regarding their day-to-day care on a formal basis at their statutory reviews, they are not usually consulted regarding their views of a proposed placement, as there is rarely a choice of placement. Changes to those invited to LAC reviews, and venues to involve more children and young people in the child protection process, were made as a direct result of consultation.

Children's services are planning a third celebration evening for looked after children. This has been led by a group of thirteen looked after children and young people who have influenced every aspect of the event. This event seeks to reward children for achievement of any kind and is well regarded by children, young people, staff and carers.

Feedback from questionnaires and from talking with children and young people indicated that young people know how to complain and evidence was seen that children and young people were able to effectively access the complaints procedure. Twenty-three young people said they knew how to make a complaint out of thirty-one questionnaires returned. The assistant service manager monitors complaints on a regular basis and liaises with the complaints officer.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

14,29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The authority has an after-care service that supports young people who are approaching adulthood or more independent living arrangements. Carers are paid fees, allowances and expenses as specified.

EVIDENCE:

For those young people who are approaching adulthood or more independent living arrangements there is an after-care service that supports this process. Young peoples needs in relation to achieving independence are assessed and included in a written pathway plan. Young people and carers are involved in the development of the plan and the document is reviewed and updated to reflect changing needs and circumstances.

A young person who was in the process of “transition” was seen to be receiving good support from his foster carers. The foster carers indicated their satisfaction with the support from the fostering service and the after care team.

The aftercare service continues to develop a range of accommodation and services that can be offered to young people. This includes opportunities for some young people to stay with their foster cares through different arrangements such as in supported lodging schemes.

Training for new carers to support young people to develop independent living skills is being delivered. Relationships between the aftercare team and other professionals are conducted in a way as to ensure young people receive services that match their circumstances.

The fostering service has a written policy on fostering allowances, which are publicised and provided to each carer.

Foster carers are paid an allowance and weekly fee for each child according to the age of the child and level of skills attained by the foster carer. The authority has 3 levels of pay depending on a carer's competency and skill, which is reviewed at the carer's annual review. Foster carers stated payments were generally on time, some delays have been experienced in claiming mileage payments and when "out of the ordinary" expenses were needed.

Family and friends carers are paid only the foster carers allowance in accordance with the age of the child. Feedback from family and friends carers indicated some felt this dual system of payment to be unfair.

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):

1,4,5,16,17,21,22,23,24,25,32

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The service has a management structure with clear lines of accountability. Staff are organised and managed effectively. Recruitment of staff and carers have improved significantly since the last inspection.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has a statement of purpose, which contains clear aims and objectives of the service provided. This had been updated and approved by the council executive in January 2006.

The children's guide needs further development to ensure the complaints procedure is clearly detailed within the guide. This was noted at the last inspection and is still outstanding.

From discussions with members of staff it was apparent the role of giving the children's guide to young people is performed by children's social workers. Children visited did not have an awareness of the children's guides but were aware of how to seek help if required.

A system of monitoring matters in Schedule 7 has been established and for notifying matters listed in Schedule 8.

The fostering service consists of four teams working across the County. Two teams, one north and one south foster care teams, to support carers and assess family and friends carers; an adoption and fostering development team to recruit, assess, train and support carers up to the first annual review, and a placement team which includes a placement service and fostering panels. All teams are located centrally in Worcester, in premises appropriate for the purpose. Inspectors visited premises used by the senior management and fostering teams including the adoption and development team. All teams including the short breaks support care scheme are supported by the Integrated Service for Looked-After Children (ISL) who provide a full service of support advice and training to children and carers.

There are clear lines of accountability, which is known to staff and carers. Managers and staff are accessible to carers and young people. Staff in the fostering service are qualified and experienced for the role

At the last inspection the fostering service had been suffering from a shortage of staff for some time, which had had a direct affect on service provision as a whole. Since the last inspection 9 months ago, the staffing shortage has improved considerably. At the time of the inspection the fostering service team was running at a 10% vacancy rate and the process for supervision and review of foster carers has been revised. The service estimates 85% of all foster carers will have been reviewed in 2006, with a target of 100% reviews in the year from August 2006 to July 2007. All foster carer's first, fifth and any post allegation review are seen by panel. Team managers conduct all other reviews locally. The outcome of these reviews must go to panel to help inform its quality assurance role and be approved by the agency decision maker.

Information received from the service manager stated the recruitment and retention of foster carers is also showing improvement. The total number of foster carers has remained static over the past few months, with the number of active carers increasing by about 5% since October 2005. During the first quarter of 06/07, 6 new carers were approved, compared with 0 in the first quarter of 05/06; 8 assessments of potential new carers are currently ongoing. The adoption and fostering development team have produced a recruitment strategy for 2006/7 which allows for a targeted approach to recruitment and which will be reviewed on a regular basis.

The service uses BAAF Form F and has a clearly set out assessment process for carers in line with standard 17. Assessment reports are competency based and completed to a good standard.

The adoption and fostering development team has developed a newsletter entitled 'togetherness' which aims to keep foster carers updated on developments in the fostering service and gives details of training, events as well as keeping carers up to date on important information and development.

A clear strategy for the management and support to foster carers exists and is documented in the foster carers handbook. The fostering service regularly reviews and updates its foster carer's handbook and policies and procedures.

Foster carers visited were experienced carers and said they felt well supported by their social worker. Several foster carers however commented that the support given to the children and young people placed with them by social workers in the children's and families teams have been inconsistent. The fostering service now offers formal supervision every three months with monthly contact in between.

Files of those without supervising social workers demonstrated that formal supervision had not been taking place on a regular basis. Strategies have been developed to provide support to foster carers without allocated social workers. These include telephone calls from duty fostering social workers, employing agency workers and using independent social workers for discrete tasks e.g. relatives and friends assessments, and post allegation reviews. The authority must develop a strategy to ensure foster carers, including those in support care, without an allocated social worker, receive support and supervision on a regular basis.

Out of fifty-two questionnaires completed by foster carers twenty said that they received excellent support from the fostering team, twenty said the support they received was good and ten adequate.

Preparation training for prospective foster carers is provided using the skills to foster course. The service has developed a comprehensive programme of core

and developmental post approval training. The timing and schedule of training courses has been reviewed and the service now run some courses on evenings and weekends to take account of those unable to attend training on weekdays.

Examination of files demonstrated that unannounced visits are still not being evidenced on foster carers files as having been taking place. A system must be developed for unannounced visits to take place to those foster carers who are without an allocated social worker.

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care. The authority has separate files for carers and young people. Case files were well organized and maintained.

Foster carers are expected to record daily events and incident (Schedule 7) reports. Although the service has developed further guidance and procedures on recording inconsistency was seen regarding the standard of recording by foster carers. It is suggested that training on record keeping be developed.

The exchange of information between carers, family placement social workers and children's social workers is effective. Children's social workers reported a good working relationship with the fostering service. Most children's social workers indicated that they receive good or adequate information from the fostering service about the children being looked after. Ninety-five social workers from children and families teams completed questionnaires and six reported receiving excellent information from foster carers and fostering social workers. Forty said the information received was good and thirty-one adequate. Only two social workers said they received inadequate information about the children being looked after by the fostering service.

Examples were seen of individual carers supporting children to keep appropriate memorabilia and life story work was evident.

One family and friends carers file was examined and carers visited during the course of this inspection. The form F1 assessment was comprehensive and completed with assessed competences. The up-take of references was excellent. Good robust procedures to safeguard and protect children were seen.

The kinship foster carer visited felt well supported with practical help and advice and guidance.

Family and friend's carers are able to access the same information, training and ISL support as other carers. They are invited to attend the foster carers forum meeting held on a quarterly basis although many do not feel these meetings are relevant to them.

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 | 3 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 15 | 3 |
| 30 | 3 |

| ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 7 | 3 |
| 13 | 4 |
| 31 | 3 |

| MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 4 |

| 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 | X |
| 4 | 3 |
| 5 | X |
| 16 | 2 |
| 17 | 3 |
| 18 | X |
| 19 | X |
| 20 | X |
| 21 | 3 |
| 22 | 2 |
| 23 | 3 |
| 24 | 3 |
| 25 | 3 |
| 26 | X |
| 27 | X |
| 28 | X |
| 32 | 3 |

Yes

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. | FS8 | 34 Sch 6 | Foster placement agreements must be in place at the point of placement and include all matters listed in Schedule 6. (Timescale of 01/09/05 not met). | 31/01/07 |
| 2. | FS12 | 17(3) | The fostering service must ensure the arrangements for giving consent to medical treatment is in place at the start of placement. | 31/01/07 |
| 3. | FS12 | 11 | The authority need to develop effective processes in order to ensure policies and procedures are followed through. | 31/01/07 |
| 4. | FS16 | 26,29 | The outcome of reviews conducted by team managers must go to panel to help inform its quality assurance role and be approved by the agency decision maker. | 31/01/07 |
| 5. | FS22 | 17 | All foster carers, including those in support care, without an allocated social worker, must receive support and supervision on a regular basis | 31/01/07 |
| 6. | FS22 | 11 | The fostering service must ensure all foster carers, including support care, have at least one | 31/01/07 |

| | | | | |
|----|------|-------|--|----------|
| | | | unannounced visit a year from a supervising social worker. | |
| 7. | FS30 | 25(1) | The service must ensure no business is conducted by the fostering panel unless it meets regulation 25(1) | 31/10/07 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

| No. | Refer to Standard | Good Practice Recommendations |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| 1. | FS1 | The children's guide should ensure the complaints process is made clearer. |
| 2. | FS6 | The service is advised that in the light of the recent BAAF guidance, the policy and guidance regarding smoking should be reviewed and revisited with carers through supervision and training. |
| 3. | FS7 | The consideration of a young person's cultural and religious needs on the referral and short-term matching form needs to be better evidenced and documented. |
| 4. | FS8 | The matching pro-forma should evidence any gaps in matching and demonstrate how these gaps are filled. |
| 5. | FS8 | The policy and procedures with regard to foster placement agreement should be reviewed following the introduction of the placement record. |
| 6. | FS9 | The risk assessment should be completed for all existing children and young people currently in placement |
| 7. | FS24 | It is suggested that training on record keeping be developed for foster carers. |
| 8. | FS30 | The written procedures should cover decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement. |

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