



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sefton Council Fostering & Adoption Service

**Ellesmere House
Crosby Road North
Waterloo
Liverpool
Merseyside
L22 0LG**

Lead Inspector
Mrs Lynn Paterson

Announced Inspection
9th January 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk 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 Sefton Council Fostering & Adoption Service

Address Ellesmere House
Crosby Road North
Waterloo
Liverpool
Merseyside
L22 0LG

Telephone number 0151 285 5269

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

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

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Ms Linda Woodcock

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Sefton Social Services Fostering Team is based in Ellesmere House, Waterloo. The property is a large Victorian building, which is open and accessible and has office accommodation spread over three floors. The premises has a public ramped access which leads to a ground floor reception area and conference facility and has good parking area to the front, side and rear of the building. The team comprise of specialist workers who are trained and experienced in the area of fostering with their main function being to recruit, assess, train and support foster carers. Experienced, professional administrative staff provides business support to the team.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection of Sefton Fostering agency took place over an eight -day period from 9th January 2006 to 18th January 2006. Assistance was provided from the fostering and business services management team.

The inspector read files, policies and procedures and other documentation, interviewed fourteen social workers, met with fifteen children and visited eight foster carers in their homes. Interviews and discussion were also carried out with senior officers, children's participation officer, children's complaints officer, independent advisors and foster carers group members. Observational practices were carried out on foster carers strategy meeting, training sessions, team meetings, children's groups, the fostering panel meeting and forty- one questionnaires were looked at. The information gained from this process is recorded below.

What the service does well:

It was noted throughout the inspection that the family placement team was highly organised in the management of information and administrative staff were proactive and effective with the facilitation of documentary evidence to assist the inspection process.

The overall management systems in the team were seen to be impressive and staff demonstrated they worked well as a team and had a sense of drive and mission to improve chances for children.

Staff spoken with revealed they understood the philosophies underpinned in their mission statement and worked with well defined, interlinking strategies and systems, which were known and used by all members of the service.

Foster carers spoken with and information gained from questionnaires highlighted that family placement service had a good reputation and foster carers felt valued and supported in their role. Comments from foster cares included "the team are all good, if one is not available them another one will assist you", "Our family placement worker is great, nothing is too much trouble for her", "the team make us feel valued and a part of their service". "The service has a good reputation which is very much deserved". "Look at the foster carer retention figures, no one ever leaves, the service is so good".

Young people spoken with and information gained from completed questionnaires revealed that they felt safe and secure in their foster

placements and comments included "I love being here, this is my home", "My carers really look after me, look at my room isn't it great", "I feel loved and cared for ", "they have given me another chance in life".

Staff feedback identified that the management team are very well respected for their vision and management skills and staff comments included "our managers are great, they work hard to improve the service and carry out their role in a transparent manner to make us all feel included in the modernisation of the service", "the managers lead the team well and are also very nice people", "I feel very much part of a team in which I am managed and supported by people who really know what they are doing".

The service has a clear statement of purpose that identifies the service aims and the service identified that it has good policies and procedures, a low turnover of long standing carers, good recruitment and retention of staff and a commitment to the provision of foster carers to meet assessed need of the young people looked after.

Foster carers and other professionals who work alongside the service said that they feel the family placement team more than fulfil their aims as stated in their documentation.

Records and other documentation viewed revealed that the pre approval assessment of foster carers was completed to a high standard and included relevant pre approval training and statutory checks being carried prior to their commencement as a carer.

Observations of staff, examination of policies and procedures and discussion with foster carers and young people identified that the service have been proactive in their pursuits to modernise the service and to develop systems to cover the vast range of tasks and statutory responsibilities which have recently become an additional part of their service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The statement of purpose was updated in November 2005 including an abridged statement of purpose.

An induction policy has been introduced for team managers and a managers development group is in place to enable key issues to be raised and discussed.

The agency has updated procedures in the recruitment of temporary or agency staff and now ensures that the agencies have followed up written references and requires physical evidence of CRB prior to commencement of work.

Procedures on children missing from home, has been drafted on a multi-agency basis in line with good practice guidelines and has been provided to foster carers.

New education strategy for looked after children is in the process of being distributed to foster carers which includes information about additional tuition and educational support and an internet guide "safe surfing".

Out of hours support systems have been updated to include the inclusion of foster carers being available on a rota basis to give advice and support as required.

Recruitment and retention strategies continue to be reviewed as a good practice issue. A regional website has been set up and a number of high profile media interviews have been undertaken as a way to raise the profile of fostering.

The authority has appointed a children's participation officer and a children's complaints officer, both appointments are seen to have a most positive effect on the service.

An outline of the purpose of care plans has now been included in the children's guide. Young people said this helped them to have more understanding of the looked after process.

The service is now part of the Safeguarding Board, which will implement intensive training in respect of child protection.

The service now has a designated worker focusing on short break schemes for children with disability and it is envisaged that this will lead to a strategy for increasing the number of short break carers.

What they could do better:

It was noted the service had been proactive in its pursuits to modernise and as a consequence has improved policies, procedures and practices to a high standard.

Due to these high standards recommendations for further improvements are minimal.

Foster carers advised that they were sometimes confused as to the breakdown of their payments/allowances as it appears that one figure is recorded on the payment slip. It would be recommended therefore that the payslip identify the different payments to ensure they can be checked and agreed as correct.

Foster carer post approval training take up appears low and it would be recommended therefore that the service pursue this by discussion at the foster carers training forum to agree on a training strategy to suit most needs.

Whilst the fostering panel was seen to be well managed it would be beneficial to utilise an independent chair to ensure full impartiality.

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.

The fostering service has policies and procedure in place, which promotes the health and development of children looked after.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation examined revealed that Sefton Family Placement service have amended the health promotion procedure to incorporate the new proposed role of the Looked After Children's Nurse service in processing Health Assessment for looked after children. The policy states that when a child/young person becomes looked after by the Local Authority it is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure signed consent be obtained from the parent/responsible person, to the release of health information to include details of immunisations, developmental status, ongoing medical conditions and treatment and outstanding or upcoming health and dental appointments.

Examination of young people files identified that this process occurs with the signed consent form being held on file.

Staff spoken with advised that a copy of this information is passed to the looked after children's nurse to clarify if there are any particular treatments or immunisations or other issues that parents object to.

File records show that initial health assessments are carried out within four weeks of placement and all refusals are swiftly followed up to ensure that all young people who are part of the looked after system have their health needs assessed and promoted.

Documentation viewed revealed that staff members of the family placement team provide a health care portfolio for the foster carer to use. This identified the service was pro active in promoting the health and development of young people. The portfolio held clear details of health care consultation groups and

training courses to include consultation for foster carers in respect of children who may have mental health needs, training for carers to feel confident and comfortable in the delivery of sexual health and relationship education in line with the policy on sex education and contraception for looked after children and invitations for young people to attend healthy living groups.

Foster carers spoken with said that they were trained and encouraged to promote children health and health care staff worked in partnership with them to ensure all the children's health care needs were met.

A number of foster carers said they knew that training in sexual health was available but had not felt comfortable attending the course. They could not explain why they felt uncomfortable but said they did not feel that it was their job to explain "the facts of life" to children or discuss some personal sexual issues. They said that this was seen to be the responsibility of the school or of the child's social worker. This issue was raised with the family placement team manager, who will address this further in foster carers meetings, support groups and via teleconferencing systems. However this is not seen to be a shortfall of the service.

Documentation viewed showed that all children and young people are registered with a dentist and GP, and health records on file were clear and consistent. Foster carers spoken with revealed that children and young people's health needs were monitored and reviewed by social workers and the looked after nurse through statutory visits and reviewing systems. They said that foster carers receive good training in monitoring young people's health and development and general health promotion. They said that training included courses in first aid, health and hygiene, health promotion and communicable diseases.

Foster carers also advised that they had received training and information in respect of setting good examples and providing advice in respect of issues relating to smoking, drinking and substance abuse.

Policies and procedures examined, discussions with foster carers, agency staff and other professionals and documentation viewed showed the family placement service has robust policies and protocols in place to ensure that the health care and development needs of young people are addressed and met and the evidence provided for this standard revealed the service had exceeded expectations and has therefore been awarded a score of 4.

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

Sefton fostering service provides effective management and training for staff and foster carers to enable them to provide safe, suitable placements for children and young people. The fostering panel is well managed and organised efficiently and effectively for its purpose.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation viewed revealed that Sefton Children's services has developed the staying safe component based on the new legislative framework outlined within the Children Act 2004, and the Working Together guidance currently in draft format until April 2006. The documentation held detail of the authorities work in establishing a local safeguarding children board,(LSCB) in partnership with other agencies to replace existing non-statutory Area Child Protection Committees. (ACPC's). Staff advised that the work of the LSCBs aim is to improve the overall wellbeing of all children in the local area in line with Every Child Matters Outcomes and has a special focus on the staying safe outcome.

Policies and procedures examined included missing children procedures, independent visitors procedures and safe care practice guidelines for foster carers.

Foster carers spoken with revealed that they had been provided with training and information, which defined safe care and how this could be

achieved in foster placements. Foster carers said that this included advice on the practice of physical affection, personal care, babysitting, travelling and issues relating to the correct processes in respect of taking photographs, videos, computers, mobile phones and telephones. Carers said that they found this to be useful as issues were discussed to make them more aware of the correct practices to ensure that children and young people were protected.

Foster carers themselves said that they felt protected by the service as they were provided with information about what they needed to know if allegations were made about them. They said that as well as the information being provided in the foster care agreement and handbook they were offered advice from their family placement worker and could contact the Fostering Network for advice and support from mediation workers.

Documentation seen revealed that young people were also provided with information and advice about safe care issues.

Observations of the family placement team strategy meeting and the foster carers strategy group revealed that placement strategies are discussed and planned for the week ahead, emergency duty team members are provided with foster carer placement availability and safe care training issues are included in the discussions.

Foster carers training records viewed evidenced that foundation child protection training is provided for foster carers with the course aim being to provide the opportunity for foster carer and social care staff to gain insight into some of the issues in this sensitive but important issue.

Foster carers said that the course assisted them to understand how to identify and define child abuse and its effects, recognise the signs and symptoms of child abuse and how to deal with abuse allegations and concerns.

Carers spoken with and information received from returned questionnaires revealed that safe care training included drug awareness, first aid and health and safety in the home and the management of challenging behaviour. Feedback about the content of these courses was that the courses were well presented and most useful.

Foster carers in discussion and information gained from returned questionnaires revealed that they were well supported by the service and received announced and unannounced visits from their allocated family placement workers. Comments included "we get a good support from the service if my worker out someone else will help me". "Staff are all good", "the service is very well managed". "We are constantly asked if we want

more training”, “the staff make you feel valued and support you at all times”.

File records viewed revealed that records of all visits are maintained with details being recorded about individual safe care and risk assessment practices.

Staffing records and procedures seen in respect of the supply of temporary social workers showed that the systems in place were robust and included police checks, provision of references, and GSCC registration and agency verification prior to the commencement of temporary employment with the Family Placement Team. Staff said they had clear job descriptions, which held details of the qualifications necessary for the role. The recruitment and selection policy was clear and identified police checks and references were necessary to be provided prior to any offer of employment and the policy followed all good practice guidelines in safeguarding and protecting children and young people.

Staff advised that all family placement workers are provided with identification cards which they must have with them at all times when working and visiting families.

Documentation viewed held details of the qualifications and experience of staff and this information together with the agency mission statement of aims and objectives revealed that the service is fully committed to the provision of high quality services. Staff advised that they are well supported by their line management structure and the management team exhibited a high degree of knowledge and extensive experience in childcare practice.

The statement of purpose recruitment and assessment section details the process undertaken by the family placement team to recruit foster carers and the information includes” make available as approved foster carers people who can look after a child or young person in a caring, safe, stable, non-stigmatising way in a homely setting. “And “shall only offer those people that it has fully assessed ` and approved as foster carers using as a minimum standard the requirements of the Code of practice” on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers” and having full regard to the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Records show that new carers are ` approved through the pre approval training, statutory checks and on-going assessments. This process takes account of the applicant’s life skills, experience, attitudes and general aptitude for the fostering tasks and roles. The assessments undertaken addressed all the requirements of the form F documentation and when

completed is provided to the fostering panel for a decision to be made about the applicants suitability to be approved as a foster carer.

Staff spoken with, records viewed and discussions held with foster carers, young people, agency staff and other professions associated with the service evidenced that the service ensure that young people living in foster care are appropriately placed, safe and looked after by people who have been assessed and trained to carry out their role.

Observation of the fostering panel showed it was well managed and comprised of a quorum of professional people who had good knowledge of the fostering service and services which were essential to the health education and well being of the child looked after.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7.13.31.

The fostering service reflects the area it serves and takes the issue of diversity very seriously and endeavours to recruit a range of appropriate carers to meet diverse needs. The service promotes educational achievement and where appropriate provides short- term breaks in which the parents remain the main carers of the child.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose states that Sefton family placement service “will act at all times in the best interests of the child or young person and will ensure that careful and appropriate attention is given to the wishes and feelings of the child or young person, having regard to their age and understanding, the wishes of the person who has parental responsibility, the gender, race, sexuality any disability and any specific cultural or religious preferences.” Staff spoken with and practices observed confirmed that staff understand the aims and objectives of the service and carry out their practices accordingly.

Documentation viewed and discussions held with foster carers birth parents, young people and other people associated with the service evidence that the service is committed to promoting diversity, educational achievement and parental rights.

Records show that Sefton fostering service endeavours to provide a service that reflects the area it serves and takes the issues of diversity very seriously and staff members spoken with advise that the service has an ongoing recruitment strategy that helps to ensure the service maintains a range of

appropriate carers to meet the diverse needs of the young people looked after. Placement plans viewed revealed that any special arrangements necessary to meet a child's religious, cultural, racial or linguistic needs were recorded and review documentation shows that this is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure needs are fully met. Staff advised that advocacy services and translation services are commissioned as required.

Foster carers said that they had received training in "valuing diversity" and "anti discriminatory practice and pre approval assessment documentation viewed showed that staff carry out robust assessments that highlight any issues which may be problematic. Staff said that any concerns could be addressed prior to any recommendations being made as to the suitability of the person to be approved as a foster carer. Discussions with the manager and staff indicated that systems were in place to screen the suitability of potential carers to include continuous assessment, second opinion visits and submission to panel. The manager advised that if areas of concern were raised potential carers would be advised of the panel process and of the possibility that applications may not be approved.

The statement of purpose states "the learning and educational needs of each child or young person in Foster care are given high priority and children are encouraged to attain full potential." Foster carers spoken with advised that they were trained to support children and young people to achieve their maximum potential. Foster carers said that the fostering service assist carers to offer encouragement, support and advice to young people living in their homes and to provide an environment which is conducive to learning. Foster carers also revealed that they are encouraged to liaise with schools and local education departments to discuss the needs of the child.

Young people spoken with said their foster carers supported them to achieve good educational standards and comments included "I have done so well at school, I feel proud", "I never used to go to school but I go now and I like it". Information gained from discussion with staff and reading the pre inspection questionnaire revealed that the fostering service supports foster carers in promoting educational achievements by providing clear personal education plans for each young person which is backed by the provision of support from educational professionals and the provision of extra tuition, distance learning, pupil referral units. Young peoples education achievements are recognised in an annual "No Limits" Award.

Documentation shows that the agency works in partnership with Children with Disabilities Team and share training tailored to meet specific needs of each carer and young person. Records show that the agency has a limited number of carers with specific approval to provide short-term breaks to meet the assessed needs of families as a support to parents who retain parental responsibilities and all of its central functioning and as a consequence has

developed a specific post to enable more short term carers to be recruited and trained.

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.

The fostering service has clear policies and procedures in place to facilitate contact and promote consultation.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation viewed to include Sefton Fostering Policy; pre inspection questionnaire and placement agreements revealed that the service supports contact between children and their parents and or families. Records show that in most situations, arrangements concerning contact will be written into the placement plan and agreed at statutory reviews.

Placement agreements show that contact arrangements are seen as important and details are provided in placement plans and review documentation.

Staff members advise that they ensure contact is positively promoted. They said that contact was initially agreed then contact arrangements were reviewed at placement meetings, planning meetings and at children and foster carers review meetings. Records show that contact risk assessments have also been developed as part of the initial planning meeting.

Foster carers spoken with and information gained from returned questionnaires revealed that foster carers had received training in respect of contact issues, which was followed on by discussion with their family placement workers. Foster carers spoken with said that contact had been discussed with them prior to approval and information had been shared as to the importance of contact and the reasons why it should be arranged and maintained.

Foster carers and young people spoken with said that contact was arranged on a regular basis and arrangements were made as to where and when the meetings would take place.

Foster carers said that the person who was responsible for the contact arrangement varied as sometimes foster carers facilitated contact and other times social workers and support workers carried it out. Foster carers said that the fostering service provided financial support and transport if required.

The fostering service, have developed new leaflets to support children and young people in expressing their views. The service also utilises the skills of a reviewing officer and participation officer who have taken part in teleconferencing to highlight to carers the importance of children and young people contributing to reviews and engaging in general consultations.

The children's participation officer was spoken with and she identified her commitment to ensuring that children and young people were consulted with and the inspector was delighted to be able to join one of the young peoples consultation groups and see how well this group works. Young people in the group were able to demonstrate how they worked together to express their views and make recommendations for improvements in looked after children's services.

Completed questionnaires received from young people held information, which indicated that they were fully consulted with by their foster carers about all aspects of daily living. The questionnaires also identified that they were regularly consulted with by the fostering team and their own social workers. Comments from young people included "I am asked about everything by my foster mum, she talks to me all the time", " My foster mum is great, she lets me make my own mind up". "My social worker is cool she tells me what's going on and asks me my opinion". "We get given consultation documents that we can fill in and give our opinions".

Letters received and meetings held with birth parents revealed that they felt they were kept informed and consulted with about decisions affecting their children. Comments received from this source were very complimentary about Sefton Fostering service provision and the efficient and friendly staff.

Other consultations methods observed included the use of tele -conferencing systems and review and planning meetings, which foster carers said were a good way of promoting consultation.

Young people said they knew how to complain and had been given a children's guide to the fostering service that contained information about the complaints process.

The fostering service evidenced that they had been proactive in dealing with the promotion of consultation and the systems in place are seen to be commendable.

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)

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 the following standard(s):

14.29.

The fostering service enables young people to prepare for adulthood by facilitating training and support from the leaving care team. Fostering allowances and expenses are paid as agreed.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service utilise the services of The leaving Care team who become involved with the young person looked after from the age of 14 years. Records show that an electronic automatic referral system identifies the young person, however active involvement may not occur until the young person reaches 16 years of age. This team work in partnership with local agencies and independent organisations with the aim of offering young people a holistic service as they move towards independence. Foster carers spoken with said they were involved and were kept informed of all input. Staff advised that the leaving care team provide training for foster carers with young care leavers being involved in the training delivery.

Staff advised that young people who wish to remain with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday and where the foster carers is agreeable, arrangements will be made to “convert” the placement to supported lodging.

The manger advised that the financial viability of the service is assured because of the Local Authority status and as such operates within the financial regulations of the Borough.

The agency has clear guidelines as to payments and to their update and audit process.

Foster carers advised that they are provided with details of their payments/allowances, however some carers said that they were not provided with a break down of payments with one figure being shown on the payment slip.

It is recommended therefore that payments and allowances be shown as separate items for the purpose of clarity.

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

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

1.2.5.16.17.20.21.22.23.24.25.

The service is well managed by people who understand the policies and procedures and aims and objectives of the service and carry out their remit to ensure they provide staff and foster carers who are fit for purpose.

EVIDENCE:

Documentation provided by Sefton family placement team included information relating to the written guidance issued to staff and foster carers to enable them to understand and fulfil their varying roles.

Written guidance for foster carers included the provision of a fostering recruitment pack a preparation group pack, information about the remit of the fostering panel, checklist of essential information issues to carers upon approval followed by a welcome to the service pack. Foster carers spoken with said they felt this information greatly assisted them in their understanding of the service.

The statement of purpose has been amended since the last inspection and holds clear information about the service. This has also been produced as an abridged version and it is the intention of the service to circulate this document together with a feed back form to all people associated with the service. The manager confirmed that statement of purpose was an accurate reflection of the service provision and the family placement team revealed they had full awareness of the statement content. The statement of purpose includes information about the staff of the agency and gives details of their professional qualifications. The family placement team currently comprise of a service manager, resource manager, team manager, assistant team manager, 5 full time and 3 part time social workers, 2 full time and 2 part time placement support workers (1 full time vacancy existed at the time of the inspection). The service also benefits from the services of 2 marketing and publicity officers and a dedicated admin team who were responsible for the collation of information and evidence for the inspection. The service provided by the admin team manager and her staff was perceived to be commendable. Records show that all staff are suitably qualified and experience to carry out their role.

Information gained from completed questionnaires and discussions with family placement staff and foster carers revealed that the management team were admired for their knowledge, professionalism and transparency. Comments received included "the managers here are great, they know what they are doing and we all respect them", "I have worked in other teams and can honestly say that I have never met a more supportive group of people who work hard to improve the service", "they are most knowledgeable and very nice people", "they support us well and make us feel like a team".

All documentation seen relating to the management of the service was clear and identified that the service is managed effectively and efficiency by people whom fully understand their management role.

Staff spoken with said they were offered varied training and were provided with good effective supervision and support. Staff said that they worked well as a team and assisted each other as appropriate. Comments from staff included "we are all team players which makes it much easier to provide a good service", "we share our knowledge and skills and work as a team", "this team is very supportive".

Comments received from foster carers about their perceptions of the family placement service were most positive. Comments included "My family placement worker is wonderful, so reliable, I don't know what we would have done without her", "they never let you down, they come when they say they are coming and always get back to you if you need them", "If my worker is not available when I ring then someone else on the team will help me". Some comments were made about part time workers not having time to spare, although foster carers said it did not impact unfavourably on them but they knew that some part time family placement workers had to be very good with their time management.

Staff spoken with said that the support systems utilised comprise of each carer having an allocated link worker who monitors and supports the carer. Placement support workers are allocated as appropriate to provide practical support. Teleconferencing systems are in place as a further support mechanism to enable foster carers to speak to each other in the comfort of their own homes.

All comments received from foster carers confirmed that they felt valued and supported by the family placement team.

File records were viewed and it was noted that recordings of visits by family placement workers were clear and consistent and staff revealed that they had received training in recording to ensure that all details on file were clear and relevant.

Foster carers advised that they were offered a lot of training both pre and post approval. However training records seen indicated that relevant and interesting training was arranged but there was little take up in the attendance of foster carers.

It was noted that the fostering service utilise the skills of an independent person to chair foster carer support groups and identify future training needs. Observations and discussion with this group revealed that the group is well organised and managed to ensure that all views are aired and constructive comments are passed on to the management team to facilitate any appropriate action.

In discussion it was noted that the management team are very much aware of the shortfall in the take up of foster carers training and whilst they ensure that all carers are fully trained in mandatory issues they are attempting to arrange innovative ways for other training to be cascaded to carers. It was stated that training venues could be reviewed and incentives provided to foster carers to build up their training portfolio. This however is not seen to be a shortfall of the service.

Children and young people spoken with and information gained from completed questionnaires revealed that they felt very much supported by the family placement team and by the children's participation officer. Mixed views

were expressed about the support provided by the young peoples social workers with some comments being positive about their contact and support and other comments being slightly negative about their input. Comments included "I am supported by my social worker who sees me quite regularly", "I feel that my social worker is around to help me "I don't see my social worker very often, my foster mums worker helps me a lot", "I don't know who my social worker is, they are always changing". Young people said they were embarrassed by having to have signatures provided by social workers for school trips etc and were unhappy about not being able to sleep over at friends home without them being police checked. All young people spoken with said that these policies and practices made them feel different. Young people were advised that these practices are a part of the corporate looked after children process and Sefton Family Placement team are aware of these issues and are attempting to find a solution. This is not seen as a shortfall of the service.

Foster carers advised that they were usually provided with background information about the young person prior to placement and if this did not happen prior to placement then the relevant information was shared as soon as possible.

Foster carers spoken with and observations made in their homes revealed that they had been provided with a safe storage system to enable them to keep all relevant documentation secure.

Six children's files were examined in detail and all contained full information that held all appropriate dates, details and signatures.

Young people spoken with said that they were encouraged to know and understand about their past and they were assisted by their foster carers to keep appropriate memorabilia for their future reference.

Foster carers spoken with and information gained from completed questionnaires identified that the foster carers felt well supported by the service and comments included "They are very supportive and know when we need advice, without us even asking", "the fostering service has a good reputation for being reliable and supportive", "I have been a carer for quite a long time and the fostering service has always been alright but now it is excellent", "everyone we meet is nice and helpful and we know we can ask them anything without us feeling embarrassed".

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	4
6	4
8	3
9	4
15	4
30	3

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
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	4
2	4
4	X
5	4
16	4
17	4
18	X
19	X
20	4
21	4
22	4
23	3
24	3
25	4
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

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
-	-	-	No requirements were identified.	09/01/06

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	FS23	It is recommended that foster carers are consulted as to what they think is the most effective way to provide them with training and as to what methods would encourage take up.
2	FS29	It is recommended that payment slips contain a break down or payments and allowances provided to ensure they could be checked and approved by the recipient.
3	FS30	It is recommend that the fostering panel is chaired by an independent person to ensure total impartiality.

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