



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

City of York Fostering Service

**10/12 George Hudson Street
York
YO1 6JL**

Lead Inspector
David Martin

Key Announced Inspection
12th February 2007 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

| Reader Information | |
|---------------------------|---|
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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 | City of York Fostering Service |
| Address | 10/12 George Hudson Street York YO1 6JL |
| Telephone number | 01904 613161 |
| Fax number | |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | www.york.gov.uk |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | City of York Council |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Mary McKelvey |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Fostering Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 30th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The City of York Council operates its fostering services through two teams that are part of the Community Services Department. The Family Placement Team recruits families to work with children who are looked after by the local authority and the Sharing Care Team recruits families who offer short term breaks for children with disabilities. All the carers who are recruited, approved and supported by these two teams are approved to act as foster carers.

The weekly fees range from £27.37 to £424.89

SUMMARY

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

The lead inspector telephoned the manager of the City of York Fostering Agency to agree the date for inspection. Further contact was made before the inspection to plan times for the inspectors to meet with young people and talk with carers, social workers and other staff.

The inspector went to the Family Placement Team office at Hollycroft, York on the morning of Monday 12th February 2007 and finished the inspection on the morning of 16th February 2007. During this time the inspector:

- Met a small number of young people.
- Spoke to the manager of the Family Placement Team and the family placement workers
- Looked at some files and other records.
- Watched how young people and carers got on together.
- Talked to the person in charge of the foster panel and the Agency Decision Maker
- Talked to some carers.
- Met the Sharing Care practice coordinator.

As well as visiting carers' homes and talking to people, the inspectors sent out questionnaires to ask young people, social workers, carers and their views about the service.

The inspector would like to thank everyone who took part in this inspection.

What the service does well:

- City of York Fostering Service provides very good care for children and young people.
- Carers and young people get on very well together.
- The service listens to young people and takes their opinions seriously.
- The carers are good at making sure that young people staying with them are safe.
- The Service makes sure its carers get all the help they need to look after young people well and make sure they are healthy.
- Carers work well with local schools to make sure that young people can continue their education.

Young people said:

- I have a really good social worker and I have an excellent foster family.

- My carers and teachers encourage me to do the best I can in my school work.
- I feel well cared for because they give me a chance to choose things that are for my benefit.
- I am happy where I am and I have come a long way because of my foster carers.
- I feel safe and loved by my foster mum.

Carers said:

- Sharing care – ‘it’s a thorough scheme that supports both families, great training and safety procedures’.
- York foster care service is well run and offers a good service.
- The linkworkers have been most helpful with any problems. They have helped me gain confidence in fostering and have been a mine of information.

What has improved since the last inspection?

City of York Fostering Service likes to make improvements to the care young people receive. In the last year it has:

- Appointed a children’s rights worker to help young people express their views.
- Improved the information given to carers before a placement is made
- Made sure that fees are paid on time
- Increased the number of health needs assessments of young people.
- Encouraged new fostering and sharing care applicants to attend panel meetings.
- Made sure that there is more out of office hours support for foster carers.

What they could do better:

Overall the City of York Fostering Service makes sure children and young people are looked after very well. It is very good at most of the things it needs to do and is aware of things it needs to do better. As a result of this inspection, the inspectors suggested that the following actions should be taken:

- The Fostering Panel should have training in equality and diversity
- Carers should be helped to know what to do when a fostered child is taken into police custody.
- Carers should be helped to know what information they can share with fostered children.

- There should be more staff in both the Family Placement Team and Sharing Care Team.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12. Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

Children's health needs are fully met. This judgement has been made using available evidence as well as a visit to the service.

EVIDENCE:

LAC documentation includes information regarding children's basic health needs and children and young people have individual health care plans in place. It is unfortunate that proposals for all LAC children to receive holistic medical assessment have been put on hold because of financial crisis in the Primary Care Trust.

Children and young people are registered with a GP and dentist and are required to have a full immunisation programme and regular dental checks. Foster carers receive training regarding the health needs of looked after children and those interviewed had a good knowledge and understanding of meeting these needs, including drug and alcohol awareness and issues of sexual health. There is evidence on file that appointments are made and kept and that children with specific health needs are able to access appropriate medical treatment.

The service's links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are very good. The CAMHS clinical lead (who is also chair of the foster panel) confirmed that that looked after children referred are usually seen within 13 weeks and carers can now make self-referrals. Foster carer questionnaires reflected an improvement in the information received prior to placement and said that training in attachment issues, provided by CAMHS, was 'excellent and invaluable' in supporting children and young people.

Children's comments included 'My foster carers keep me healthy'. Parents' comments included 'They do everything they can to help [my son] and make sure he has everything he needs. He is well looked after and receives good help when needed'.

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.

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 using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children are protected by the agency's safeguarding policies and procedures. The fostering service provides suitable foster carers although approval status should more accurately reflect carers' skills and experience.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers undergo assessment and approval via the BAAF Form F assessment. All carers are subject to checks via the Criminal Records Bureau and approvals take place via both the fostering panel and the agency decision maker (ADM). The Panel Chair is in her second term and, prior to taking on the chair, was a panel member. She is a clinical psychologist and has long experience of working with children and young people. The Chair described panel's decision-making as 'rigorous' and confirmed that Form F's and other reports coming to panel are of a good standard. The chair is clear that the panel does not operate as a 'rubber stamp' for service decisions: there has been a recent disagreement with the ADM which is ongoing and will come back to panel after a further period of assessment. Approvals generally take 6 months to complete and there are currently no long delays although the Family Placement Team (FPT) were described as 'under resourced' and therefore unable to pursue all initial enquiries promptly. Carers are invited to attend

panel (some choose not to come) and this process is working well. The panel meets every year or so to complete training and has identified Equality and Diversity as a future training issue. The panel is quorate and now has a member with experience of being fostered.

The service prioritises the matching of children and foster families as far as this is possible: this was evidenced via both written documentation and team meetings observed during the inspection. Concerns were raised by one set of foster carers regarding another set of carers. This matter was passed to service manager and the outcome will be reported to CSCI. This seems to be an issue of inappropriate matching: a young person being placed with carers who did not have sufficient expertise and understanding to cope with the child's specific needs and who frequently refused to accept professional guidance re their approach.

All carers receive pre and post approval training in safeguarding children and demonstrated an awareness of their roles and responsibilities in child protection. In addition, carers receive copies of the Fostering Network book 'Safe Caring' and are required to draw up a safe-caring policy for their home, which is reviewed as part of the annual review process. The service takes appropriate action in the event of complaints, allegations and safeguarding referrals and maintains accurate and up to date records including notifications to CSCI. The fostering service handbook clearly states that use of physical punishment is prohibited and carers receive training in managing difficult behaviour.

Children and young people have a variety of means via which to express concerns; these include child-care reviews, contact with the Children's Rights Officer and the complaints helpline. Children also receive guidance via the quarterly 'Who Cares' magazine.

All homes have been subject to an initial health and safety check by the fostering service, which is the ongoing responsibility of the carer and is monitored via annual checks of foster homes by the FPT. Children's comments included: 'I feel safe and loved by my foster mum'.

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.

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 using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service has a good awareness of children's individual needs and is effective in promoting their educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is committed to Looked After Children's educational attainment and the LAC reference group continues to develop a range of initiatives to support this. The service has developed an information pack for designated teachers in schools, for early years educational professionals and social workers, which outlines the importance of PEPs and gives practical guidance on how professionals can contribute to the assessment process. The team is working towards the goal of 100% of looked after children having a Personal Education Plan (the current figure is approximately 85%) and all children's files examined during the inspection process contained PEPs. Carers have done some excellent work in helping children and young people to continue with their education, even where this has been challenging. There is evidence of effective liaison between the service, its carers and schools. Children's comments included 'My carers and teachers encourage me to do the best I can in my school work'.

Carers also encourage and enable children to take part in a range of enjoyable and rewarding activities and they are able to continue with hobbies and interests while in placement. The fostering service has opted to join the Max

Card Scheme, which gives looked after children and their foster families free access to museums, galleries and heritage sites. In addition, the Community leisure officer has compiled a directory of services and facilities available to children and young people in York: looked after children are given advanced notice of events taking place in the city.

Carers have a good understanding of diversity and equality issues and children's files contain evidence that gender, religion, culture and disability are taken into account when planning for care. The Sharing Care service now has a new manager and continues to provide a high standard of support to children with disabilities and their families. Developments include a Sitting Service pilot scheme, which enables parents to access up to 4 hours support per week. The pilot is completed in March 2007, following which an evaluation will take place to assess its future viability. Sharing Carers are provided with the Shared Care Network books: Safe and Sound and Safe and Healthy instead.

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.

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

10 & 11. Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

The fostering service promotes contact arrangements and is effective in consulting with children on a range of issues.

EVIDENCE:

Carers are provided with training regarding the importance of maintaining links with children's and young people's birth family. Carers demonstrated a good understanding of their role in ensuring that positive contact takes place, even where this is difficult. The development of the Specialist Foster Scheme has done much to reduce the number of out of area placements and this has had a positive impact on children's ability to maintain family and peer group contacts.

The fostering service has recently appointed a Children's Rights Officer who has extensive experience of the looked after sector: she will continue to consult with children and young people regarding their experiences of being fostered and is keen to ensure that the 'feedback loop' is more effective in the future. The service has developed a forum entitled 'Show me that I Matter' and children are taking part in a consultation exercise with City of York's councillors to discuss issues of corporate parenting as well as being included in consultation regarding the recent green paper, Care Matters.

Children and young people take part in the review process either in person or by submission of a questionnaire. Reviews can take place in children and

young people's home environment if they wish and questionnaire feedback reflects that they involved in decisions affecting their future. One parent said that she had been excluded from the review process and this matter is currently being addressed via the fostering service's complaints procedure. Other feedback suggests that there is room for improvement in the involvement of parents.

Comments from young people: 'I feel well cared for because they give me a chance to choose things that are for my benefit'.

'I have a really good social worker and I have an excellent foster family'

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 **excellent**.

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

Young people are assisted in preparing for adulthood. The service pays carers an allowance as specified.

EVIDENCE:

Young people are referred to the Pathway Team at the review closest to their 16th birthday. Following a referral, an education training officer contacts the young person in order to assess their needs in relation to leaving care. Where appropriate, a designated worker assists them in finding employment but young people are encouraged and enabled to make arrangements for their own job interviews and other appointments with support both from their carers and the Pathway team. The Pathway Team has developed a 'Looking Ahead Group' in order to further support young people in foster care and there have been improvements in the involvement of carers in the process of preparing young people for independence.

The fostering service pays allowances as specified in the Foster Carers' Handbook and all but one carer reported receiving these on time. All those foster homes visited during the inspection offered welcoming, clean and comfortable environments for children and young people with adequate space for privacy and personal belongings.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, & 32. Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

The fostering and sharing care services are well managed although current staffing shortages are placing unacceptable pressures on both teams.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering manager is also service manager for Adoption, which inspectors considered to be onerous in view of current low staffing levels. The FPT Senior Practitioner has been undertaking a significant degree of adoption casework and this has compounded the pressure felt by the family placement team who described feeling at risk of 'burn-out'. In practical terms, the staff shortage has impacted on the quality and quantity of routine case recording as well as on the team's ability to follow up initial enquiries by prospective carers. In spite of these resource issues, feedback from carers was highly positive regarding the support given to them by the FPT. The authority should give urgent consideration to the recruitment of a further full time staff member for the FPT to ensure that the quality of assessment and support can be sustained. The Sharing Care service is similarly understaffed and this has impacted on its ability to develop and expand. Both services currently appear to be operating on the good will of staff rather than on an effective staffing policy.

Foster Carers and Sharing Carers receive guidance regarding what to do if a foster child is missing from home although were unclear with regard to their roles and responsibilities if a child or young person is taken into police custody and did not know what information they were permitted to share with children and young people in their care.

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 | 3 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 15 | 3 |
| 30 | 4 |

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

| MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 3 |

| ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 14 | 4 |
| 29 | 4 |

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

| No. | Standard | Regulation | Requirement | Timescale for action |
|-----|----------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| | | | | |

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 | FS8 | Approval status should reflect carers' skills and experience. |
| 2 | FS17 | Staffing levels in both the Family Placement Team and Sharing Care Team should be reviewed to ensure there are sufficient numbers to undertake the work. |
| 3 | FS22 | Carers should be clear regarding their roles and responsibilities when a fostered child is taken into police custody. |
| 4 | FS22 | Carers should receive guidance as to what information they are permitted to share with fostered children and young people. |

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