



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Stockport MBC Fostering Services**

**Stockport Social Services  
Ponsonby House  
Edward Street  
Stockport  
SK1 3UR**

*Lead Inspector*  
Susan Winson

*Announced Inspection*  
27th February 2006      09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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** Stockport MBC Fostering Services

**Address** Stockport Social Services  
Ponsonby House  
Edward Street  
Stockport  
SK1 3UR

**Telephone number** 0161 474 4611

**Fax number**

**Email address**

**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Stockport MBC, Social Services

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)**

**Type of registration** Local Auth Fostering Service

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      6th December 2004

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Stockport MBC has a Family Placement Service which provides a range of placements to meet the needs of children and young people. These include permanent and temporary foster care and emergency placement, kinship care and specific schemes provide for mother and baby placements, teenagers and short break care.

# SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection involved meetings with the managers, staff, panel chair and foster carers, examination of records and observation of panel.

Completed questionnaires were received from two young people in foster care, two foster carers and three placing social workers.

## **What the service does well:**

This is a developing and improving service where managers have a clear direction and exercise effective monitoring. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, as is guidance for staff and foster carers.

The fostering service has experienced and skilled managers and staff who work together to support carers to enhance their skills in order to improve outcomes for young people. Training for staff and foster carers is well established and is valued.

Young people are supported and encouraged to attend school and take part in a variety of leisure activities. Stockport MBC holds award ceremonies for young people who have made progress in education in conjunction with a local football team. Young people who have attended these have enjoyed the experience and are proud of their awards. One young person commented in a questionnaire that foster carers, "encourage me to pay attention and work hard at school".

Staff of the fostering service and foster carers are committed to helping young people to keep positive relationships with their families and friends.

Placing social workers commented positively about the standards of care provided by foster carers, their commitment to meeting the needs of young people and their willingness to advocate on young people's behalf.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Management of the service is more robust, staff are more aware of their responsibilities and the manager has improved systems for monitoring the standards of foster care.

The quality of reports presented to panel has improved and the panel exercises effective scrutiny and decision making.

## **What they could do better:**

Services for children placed in short break care and with kinship carers are in need of development.

The service is continuing with developments to improve consultation with young people and their families, and improve leaving care planning.

The use of risk assessments could be better developed.

Foster placement agreements need to be more comprehensive to include clear objectives and tasks for foster carers and to show how gaps in matching will be compensated for in placements.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

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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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The fostering service demonstrates children's health is promoted.

## EVIDENCE:

Stockport MBC has implemented a new system to ensure that Looked After Children's medical information is available to their carers and is regularly updated. All the information is retained in a red folder which goes with the child when they move. Those inspected on visits to foster carers indicate that this has effected an improvement and that foster carers have full information on health history and assessed health needs.

The service ensures that young people have access to specialised health services to meet assessed needs. Links with mental health services have been strengthened and a multi-agency group meets to look at how support can be provided to children in foster care. There is also a facility to pay privately for therapy for young people in foster care.

Maintaining good health and wellbeing and health promotion is included in the foster carer handbook which clearly states the expectations of the agency.

It is evident that foster carers are promoting healthy living and ensuring that young people's health needs are met. Young people who completed questionnaires said that they are encouraged to eat a balanced diet and have exercise.

## 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

The policies, procedures and practices of the fostering service largely serve to protect young people. The fostering panel is effective.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Personnel files for a sample of staff members were inspected and contained appropriate information, including evidence of social worker's registration with GSCC. A checklist at the front of the file allows for the manager to ensure all checks have been taken up and received.

A foster carer commented on the thorough assessment and training she had received. Assessment reports are competence based, analytical and include direct observations of potential carers with children. The quality of assessment reports has improved since the last inspection. From the records sampled during the inspection, it was evident that all the necessary checks and interviews have been carried out.

Foster carer files contain the family's safe caring policy and it was evident from interviews that foster carers have appropriate strategies in place to protect young people.

Definitions of bullying behaviour are included in the foster carer handbook and appropriate policies are in place. Behaviour management policies are clear and the foster carers visited are using reasonable strategies. From young people's questionnaires, behaviour management measures include getting told off, grounding, removal of treats and being encouraged to respect others.

From consultation with the Safeguarding Children Unit in Stockport, discussion with the manager and from records it is evident that child protection issues, including allegations against foster carers, have been appropriately handled and notifications made to relevant agencies. There are systems in place for the manager to monitor child protection issues in which the fostering panel is involved. A member of Stockport MBC's reviewing and safeguarding unit has recently started to attend the fostering service's staff meetings.

Foster Placement Agreements are not always in place and some do not yet contain clear expectations of foster carers nor details of how the child's assessed needs will be met in practice in the foster home. Neither are there clear plans for compensating for any gaps in matching. Placement risk assessments specific to young people contained little information in two cases where there were issues around risky behaviour.

The fostering service uses accredited Independent Fostering Agencies and has yet to implement policies and procedures for monitoring these placements. The responsibility for monitoring the standards of care lies with the Looked After Children Service Manager and complaints and allegations are effectively overseen by the fostering team manager. The outcomes for children placed with IFA's inspected recently have been positive.

From records and discussions with the manager, staff and social workers it is evident that careful matching takes place in consultation with foster carers, and that, where possible, introductory visits take place. A matching policy for permanent placements has recently been launched and multi-agency support plans are being piloted at present.

A written policy is in place for children absent without authority and records demonstrate that foster carers are taking appropriate action to safeguard young people.

The fostering service can demonstrate that it is safeguarding children in foster care through the regular support and supervision visits and the monitoring of child protection, safe care and health and safety issues.

From records and an interview with the Chair of the Fostering Panel it is evident that there is effective scrutiny of foster carer assessments, reviews, allegations and complaints. Minutes of the meetings are comprehensive and reflect the depth of discussions and considerations. The make-up of the panel meets regulation and members bring valuable experience and skills. The panel has consistently been quorate. The manager is continuing to try to identify a person who has previously been in care to sit on the panel. Following the involvement of new panel members, further development is planned.

# 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 values diversity and young people are supported in education. Policies are not in place to ensure that the needs of young people in short break care are met.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Stockport MBC has an emphasis on valuing diversity through the Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and the Disability Equality Scheme which are linked to improved information and training for staff and improving services. A written equal opportunities policy is in place. Pre-approval and ongoing training for foster carers incorporates anti-discriminatory practice.

A commitment to supporting children and young people in education is evident from discussions with the manager, FPO's and foster carers and from records. Foster carers have been active in introducing children to new schools, attending parents evenings and monitoring homework. Educational information is held on the files and there is evidence that education planning meetings are held as necessary. Records show evidence of children making progress in school whilst in foster care.

Joint working with Stockport's education support team serves to enhance young people's educational opportunities and achievements.

The short breaks service which provides for children as part of a range of family support resources has been transferred to the fostering service this year, to assist issues of co-ordination and standardisation.

Short breaks for children with disabilities in Stockport have been carried out by an independent agency until September 2005 when it was transferred to the fostering service. The manager acknowledges that this service requires development once budgets and staffing have been ratified. At present, one worker is supporting the small number of carers who are continuing to provide a service. As an interim measure, an FPO is reviewing the linking arrangements every six months.

The quality and quantity of written information on young people in short break care does not match that of children in mainstream foster care, for example, there is no evidence of interviewing personal referees on file. Looked After Children documentation is not in place, although it is acknowledged that the fostering service has yet to make decisions about the status of children and young people using the short break resources. Foster placement agreements are not in place.

The foster carers who provide short break care have not been approved by the fostering service following their transfer from the independent fostering agency which has now ceased to exist. This needs to be remedied as a matter of urgency and Foster Care Agreements also need to be in place.

Arrangements for the funding of aids and adaptations have still to be put into place, although foster carers are receiving equipment from the general budget at present.

## **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 a commitment to contact and is working to enhance consultation.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The fostering service can demonstrate that their policies on contact are carried out in practice and that young people are encouraged and enabled to retain links with their families in a variety of ways, including sending birthday and celebration cards and telephone calls.

The manager has commissioned a piece of work with Stockport MBC's Strategy and Performance Team to consider how the fostering service can improve consultation with young people and their parents. A strategy has yet to be agreed.

Young people are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews and express their wishes and feelings. Examples of foster carers listening to young people and advocating on their behalf were given.

Stockport MBC has an established complaints procedure and information on how to complain is available to young people, parents and foster carers. The majority of the young people who completed questionnaires, or who the inspector met with in placement stated that they knew how to complain. This information is contained in the children's guide.

# 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 is working to improve preparation for independence. Effective and clear systems are in place for foster carers' allowances and expenses.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Formal leaving care and transition planning remains an area for development within the fostering service. Service managers have looked at the issues across Stockport MBC and are considering how 16-plus workers and foster carers can better work together to meet the needs of young people. It is evident that foster carers are working to enhance young people's life skills and are encouraging age appropriate independence.

A review of foster carer finances is taking place in consultation with foster carers. Arrangements are in place which ensure that foster carers receive allowances regularly and on time.



# 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, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 & 32

The fostering service is well managed and monitored and staff and equipped to supervise carers and support them in caring for young people.

## **EVIDENCE:**

A comprehensive statement of purpose is in place which has been updated and ratified. A children's guide to fostering has been produced and one for parents is presently out for consultation in draft form.

An effective recruitment strategy is in place which the manager stated has raised the profile of the fostering service in the last year. The service has been inventive in using a variety of advertising methods, including cinema advertising, banners along a main road and individual advertisements for specific children. Systems for the monitoring of advertising campaigns inform future planning. Where suitable foster carers are not available in-house, the service uses Independent Fostering Agencies to meet the needs of children.

Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in the collation of information from foster carers to allow the manager to monitor the quality of foster care provision to young people. This system was implemented following consultation with foster carers.

The Service Manager, who is the registered person, has appropriate experience and qualifications and the team manager has gained NVQ level 4 in operational management. They can demonstrate that they are actively and effectively managing the service to maximise resources and improve the outcomes for children in foster care. Lines of accountability have been clarified, as have roles and responsibilities of the FPO's, who said that they are well defined. The management team is to be enhanced in the near future to allow time for development and improvement of the service.

The manager stated that 90% of mainstream foster carers' reviews have been carried out within the required timescales. Due to staffing shortages there are outstanding reviews of child specific carers.

The proposed increase in staffing levels of the fostering service has not been implemented due to budget considerations and the service is using agency staff and commissioning foster carer assessments from a local charitable organisation which has expertise in this field. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the management of these staff. Recruitment has resulted in two new workers being appointed recently and it is evident that the manager is looking to bring a balance of skills and expertise to the team.

Records of supervision are maintained which demonstrate that the Family Placement Officers (FPO's) receive regular formal supervision and have performance development reviews. Supervision is also a forum for the manager's monitoring of practice within the agency. These staff said that they are well supported and that the managers are available for advice.

Supervisory visits to foster carers are carried out at a minimum of six weekly intervals. Comprehensive written records of the visits demonstrate that FPO's are monitoring the standards of care and foster carers' training and personal development. Support and supervision agreements are in place which clearly outline the commitment and expectations of the fostering service in relation to foster carer training. Staff have recently been on supervision courses to increase their skills in supervising foster carers. Foster carers who were visited or who completed questionnaires were positive about the support they receive.

Records demonstrate that team meetings take place regularly, are well attended and are used to update all staff on vacancies, changes in legislation and policy and to evaluate foster carer training.

The foster carer handbook is a comprehensive and informative document which has been updated to reflect new policies and procedures. It is written in clear language, information is easy to find and synopses of policies are included.

The service has a clear commitment to supporting and supervising foster carers. Foster carers have access to regular support groups. Foster carers are encouraged to gain NVQ's. The fostering service has a comprehensive training programme for foster carers and, in addition, they have access to training provided by Stockport MBC Social Services Department staff development team, which includes joint training with social workers. The fostering service brings in specialist trainers for topics such as understanding and helping traumatised children. Mandatory training includes child protection, first aid, contact issues, education and health. Foster carers were positive about the training they receive.

The agency has a team plan which is linked to Stockport MBC's service objectives and which includes timescales and action planning. Priorities for the year include work to improve matching and placement stability.

The manager outlined that due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining FPO's to work specifically with kinship carers, this is now shared among the fostering team members. FPO's have had a briefing on kinship care and training is arranged. All kinship carers now have an allocated worker and support groups specific to kinship care are in place. The service is clearly working to improve the standards in kinship care, or where appropriate, advise and assist carers to take up alternative legislative routes to maintain young people in their care.

Unannounced visits are monitored through foster carers' annual reviews and the manager stated that not all child specific carers have been visited unannounced in the last year.

The service has a policy on foster carer recording and has implemented a new system which foster carers and FPO's are adhering to. Comprehensive case records for children are maintained.

The administrative team is largely shared with other services within the building, however, specific staff have responsibility for areas such as panel administration, foster carer payments and statutory checks. Staff stated that they are busy, that their workload is increasing and that their manager is involved in prioritising tasks and supports them in their work. It is evident that the administrative staff are struggling to keep up with their workload. Their manager is doing regular telephone duty and other tasks which has resulted in a lack of formal supervision sessions. FPO's expressed dissatisfaction with the administrative support.

The manager outlined that Stockport MBC is considering a move of premises for the fostering service. There is sufficient equipment and safe storage and the files and records are well organised. Suitable arrangements are in place for the security of the building and safety of staff.

# 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

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

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

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>13</b>	4
<b>31</b>	1

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

<b>ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	2
<b>29</b>	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

**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(3) and Schedule 6	Stockport MBC must ensure that foster placement agreements comply with Schedule 6 of Regulations. (Not fully achieved by 01/05/05).	01/06/06
2	FS32	15(1)	Stockport MBC must ensure that all carers are provided with appropriate information to meet the needs of young people in their care. (Not fully achieved by 01/05/05).	01/06/06
3	FS31	28 and 29	Stockport MBC must ensure that all short break carers are approved and reviewed by the fostering panel.	01/07/06
4	FS32	37	Stockport MBC must ensure that Regulations and NMS are complied with in respect of carers who are friends or family and that positive developments are consolidated. (Not fully achieved by 01/05/05).	01/07/06
5	FS16	29	Stockport MBC must ensure that all reviews of foster carers take place at intervals not more than one year.	01/06/06

## 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	FS8	Stockport MBC should ensure that the policies and procedures for placements with independent fostering agencies are completed and put into operation.
2	FS7	Stockport MBC and the fostering service should review the provision of aids and adaptations to foster homes.
3	FS9	Stockport MBC should ensure that risk assessments and risk management planning are carried out as appropriate.
4	FS14	Stockport MBC should continue with plans to improve leaving care planning.
5	FS11	Stockport MBC should continue with plans to ensure that the opinions of young people, their families and others concerned in their welfare are routinely sought.
6	FS16	Stockport MBC should consider the adequacy of administrative support.
7	FS31	Stockport MBC should ensure that there are policies and procedures in place in respect of short term breaks and continue to improve the service.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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