

Borough of Telford & Wrekin Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC043693
Inspection date	30/05/2007
Inspector	Janet Manders / Jackie Callaghan
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	The Mount, 1 Haygate Road, Wellington, Telford, Shropshire, TF1 1QX
Telephone number	01952 641641
Email	paul.kelly@telford.gov.uk
Registered person	Telford & Wrekin Council
Registered manager	
Responsible individual	Jane Wilson
Date of last inspection	30/05/2006

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services 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

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin provide a fostering service as part of the range of family based care for children and young people who need to spend some time away from their family of birth. The Family Placement Team is based in Wellington and undertakes the recruitment, assessment, support and training of foster carers and aim to make appropriate matches between the assessed needs of children and the skills of the foster carers. The Statement of Purpose indicates that the Borough of Telford and Wrekin fostering service offers a range of different types of fostering. A Part-time Fostering Scheme offer short breaks for children at times of family crisis and a Shared Care Scheme allows short breaks for children with disabilities. Short Term Foster Care is provided where children are unable to live with their family at the time they are placed and where the plan is to rehabilitate the children, the Service also provides permanent substitute families for children unable to return to their families. They also provide day care support with a foster carer where this will support the child's parent and prevent reception into care or where such support would assist the child's full time foster carer in the fostering task.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Young people and foster carers are generally well supported by the Fostering Service, with social workers working hard to improve the service provided to young people. However, the overall management and monitoring of the service remain inadequate, with a significant improvement being required to ensure that the service becomes a good, strong service that is able to meet the needs of all young people.

Improvements since the last inspection

The Fostering Service had continued its efforts to improve their matching of young people and foster carers so that the diverse needs of young people including those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are met. Improvements have been made in keeping young people safe by the increased use and detail of risk assessments and changes made in respect of the recruitment process and the checks undertaken on staff.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people's health needs are well met by foster carers, with all young people visited being registered with a local GP, dentist and optician. Where required young people have been referred to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team and are receiving appropriate support.

The Fostering Service has updated its foster placement agreement and when this is completed fully, it includes detailed information regarding young people's health needs and details of who can give medical consent for any treatment required by the young person. Nonetheless, three foster carers did not have written information regarding who could give consent for treatment for the young people placed with them and not all foster carers were aware of the issues around medical consent. Where consent had been given, this had not always been completed appropriately with consent being given in one case to the local health centre and hospital. One foster placement agreement was signed by the business manager, but not until nine months after the placement had been made.

The Fostering Service has not developed a policy regarding assessing young people's ability to give consent for treatment based on Gillick competency as recommended at the last inspection, nor is there room on the current foster placement agreement for a young person to sign to confirm they can consent to their own treatment.

Foster carers are well supported by the service to meet the health needs of young people. Young people's health needs are discussed at supervision sessions, to identify any necessary actions. Health plans were seen on some files but not all. One health plan is filed in the restricted access part of the file. Foster carers receive training regarding providing a healthy environment for young people, first aid and meeting young people's health needs.

Foster carers provide the agency with details of serious accidents and illness regarding the young people placed with them, however, records indicated that this was not always consistent practice in respect of all foster carers.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Improvements have been made to the systems for ensuring all staff working within the service are suitable. Appropriate checks have been undertaken in respect of the managers of the service and all new staff. Criminal Record Bureau checks are renewed on a three yearly basis for both staff and foster carers.

All young people visited were provided with a good standard of care, and most young people had their own bedroom. Homes were safe, homely and of good repair; their safety is maintained by annual health and safety checks being undertaken as

part of foster carers' annual reviews, however, in respect of two foster carers there was no evidence that these checks had been updated.

Risk assessments were seen on all files and there was evidence that these had been updated in respect of some young people. However, the risk assessments does not cover safe caring guidelines as required by the National Minimum Standards and as identified in the fostering services own procedures.

Young people were generally well matched with their foster carers. The duty system has enabled improvements to take place regarding matching as the duty officer ensures that social workers complete referral form with all necessary information. A matching form has been developed to clearly identify a young person's needs, which is then matched with a foster carer with suitable skills. However, it is apparent that the service often finds it difficult to place young people with suitably matched foster carers due to the lack of foster carers. An example of this is where a young person cannot be placed in the right geographical area for attendance at school. This deficit is not recorded or the action taken by the service to modify this deficit. In such circumstances the authority will provide transport to school for the young person. No exemptions to the usual fostering limit had been required since the last inspection.

Foster carers and the service still do not always receive sufficient information to enable proper planning of placements. One foster carer visited reported that she had not been informed that the young person required supervision at lunch time by the foster carer; this was not possible due to the foster carers other commitments and resulted in the young person being moved.

The service has clear child protection policies and staff and foster carers are provided with training in respect of child protection and safe caring to enable them to protect and look after foster children.

Records are kept of allegations so that monitoring can occur, although there is little evidence that action is taken as a result of this monitoring. Regarding a child protection investigation that had taken place after an allegation against a foster carer, no resolution meeting had been held even though the strategy meeting had taken place three months earlier. Records of the investigation were not appropriately filed, thus making it difficult to ensure that all information is available to protect young people.

A robust fostering panel is in place, which is chaired by an experienced independent person. This ensures good quality decisions are made. Membership and tenure of the panel were found to be satisfactory. There have been changes made to the composition of the panel since the last inspection; appropriate references and checks have been undertaken in respect of these members. Observation of the panel and reference to minutes of previous meetings demonstrated that the panel was thorough in its deliberations, however, panel members must declare a conflict of interest, where one is present.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The Fostering Service promotes equality and the importance of valuing diversity within the service. There have been improvements in the number of foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, thus the service better reflects the local population and is more able to meet the ethnic and cultural needs of young people. Training is now in place for foster carers regarding 'Caring for Black Children' and 'Helping Children to Build Self-Esteem' to enable foster carers to meet the diverse needs of young people requiring foster placements. Visits to carers' homes indicated that children are helped to pursue their talents and interests and the authority has developed a wide range of leisure activities that the young people can participate in.

Young people were well supported by their foster carers in respect of their educational achievements. Foster carers were seen to be liaising closely with young people's educational establishments to ensure that all necessary information is shared so that young people are appropriately supported. Additional support is available to young people through the corporate parenting team. Issues surrounding young people's education is discussed regularly at foster carers' supervision, however, the expectations of foster carers in respect of a young person's education is not clearly recorded, as foster placement agreements are not fully completed in respect of most of the young people visited.

Young people with disabilities who are provided with a service through the shared care scheme receive good support from their shared care foster carers. The scheme has recently seen an increase in recruitment, allowing wider access to the service. Additionally a foster carer has been recruited on a contract basis to increase the scope of provision. Foster carers reported that they received good support from supervising social workers and that training opportunities have recently been developed. Nonetheless, the foster carer visited reported that she was not always able to access appropriate equipment to assist with meeting the young person's needs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are supported well by both the fostering service and foster carers in their contact with family and friends. The fostering service has developed a policy regarding promoting contact, which outlines the responsibility of foster carers. Contact arrangements are sometimes complex and time consuming; often imposed by the court; this can lead to tension with social workers as foster carers cannot always facilitate such complex arrangements, resulting in the need to make alternative arrangements. Risk assessments are undertaken as part of the foster placement agreement, however, as not all young people have a completed foster placement agreement a risk assessment is not in place to protect all young people. Contact is discussed at regular supervision visits and at young people's reviews.

Young people's views are sought by both foster carers and the fostering service, and there was evidence that their views had been taken into consideration. Nonetheless, further work would enhance the service's ability to assist young people to feel valued; this is especially the situation when a young person is first placed with foster carers and those young people with disabilities who have limited communication skills. Young people have access to the Rights and Representations Worker if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are being supported to move successfully into independent living with support from their foster carers and the 16 plus team. Young people have access to a training flat to assist in developing their self care skills. Information as to what support young people require is contained in both their pathway plans and foster placement agreements.

Young people, 18-year-old, can remain with their foster carers if they are in education or training, with the foster carers receiving ongoing allowances. However, the kinship foster carers of one young person visited during the inspection were not receiving this financial support and there had been considerable delay on transferring the case to adult services although a referral had been made.

Foster carers receive payments in line with Fostering Network recommended rates and above the minimum rates required by the government. Foster carers have received detailed guidance regarding the allowances and what they cover. Foster carers receive payments promptly.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The Fostering Service has a detailed Draft Statement of Purpose, which gives a comprehensive overview of the Service, however, it still does not contain information regarding the number of complaints received about the service or the outcomes of investigation of complaints. The document has also not been endorsed by elected members. A Children's Guide is being prepared but at the time of the inspection had not been distributed to young people to enable them to understand what the Fostering Service will do for them.

The Fostering Service keeps a record of allegations made against foster carers and complaints against the service, with notifications of significant events being forwarded to the appropriate authorities. However, inspectors found that there were no robust systems in place for monitoring the performance of the service. Records of complaints were poorly organised, with no clarity as to the action taken or the outcome for some of the complaints. Whilst file audits have been undertaken

regarding some files as part of the preparation for the inspection, information was still missing from most files or as stated throughout the report not fully or accurately completed. Forms are not streamlined to allow teams to work effectively to ensure young people and foster carers are appropriately supported. The service does not have strong leadership to enable the service to make significant improvements.

The Fostering Service presently has 113 households approved to provide foster care placements; an increase of four in comparison with the previous year. This provides 119 young people with placements. The service has received a considerably higher number of referrals for placements in the past 12 months. There are 28 young people presently placed with independent fostering agencies, as the Fostering Service were unable to provide a placement at the time the placement was required or a placement which would meet the young person's needs. The Service has entered into a contract with an independent agency to provide additional placements, this is predominantly for teenagers.

Staff are organised effectively and there is a clear management structure. Managers are experienced and qualified in the supervision of staff. Whilst the team has been reasonably stable over the past year, increasing pressures resulting in increased referrals and lack of administrative support is putting increasing pressure on social workers. The team has not the capacity to cover sickness or staff vacancies; the long term illness of the duty officer resulted in a deterioration in the service offered by the team in the early part of 2007. One foster carer commented the initial process of becoming a foster carer was very slow and she did not have a visit from the social worker until two months after a young person was placed with her. Both young people and foster carers commented that it took the authority too long to make decisions.

Due to work loads within the team, most of the assessments of new foster carers are undertaken by an independent assessor, whilst these are generally of a good standard, one report presented to the fostering panel did not explore significant issues including safeguarding issues.

Foster carers reported that they are well supported by supervising social workers, with most foster carers receiving supervision on a monthly basis, but this is not the situation with all foster carers, even though the supervision contract states that monthly supervision should take place. One foster carer stated that although she had been told that the young person placed with her is making excellent progress 'you do not know what happens behind closed doors so where are the safeguards for the young person.' Whilst some foster carers received unannounced visits, there was no consistent evidence of unannounced visits taking place. Foster carers and young people receive focused work around life story work and challenging behaviour from the support worker. This work is valued by all parties.

All foster carers have a foster care agreement and efforts have been made to ensure that all foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis. There have been five complaints from foster carers or the parents of young people since the last inspection. Four out of the five were clearly resolved. The action taken and the

outcome in respect of one complaint were not clearly recorded.

A comprehensive training programme is in place for foster carers and there is a clear expectation that foster carers should attend three pieces of training per year; if this is achieved foster carers receive a financial bonus. The fostering service has developed a policy regarding the consequences for foster carers of not undertaking the mandatory training. Nonetheless, none of the carers visited as part of the inspection had completed three pieces of training in the last 12 months.

Separate files are in place for each foster carer and young person. Varying standards of social work records were maintained either electronically or on paper. Foster placement agreements were in place for all young people placed, however, not all were completed fully, therefore, it was not always clear who was responsible for undertaking specific work with a young person. The authority has recently introduced a new foster placement agreement, however this is not compliant with the regulations.

The fostering services' registers for both foster carers and young people are still not compliant with the regulations as they do not contain all necessary information.

As in previous inspections the support offered to friends and family foster carers is of a high standard.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

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.

Std.	Action	Due date
12	ensure that all carers are provided with written information regarding the arrangements for giving consent to medical and dental examination or treatment. Timescale of 01 August 2005 not met. Regulation 17 (3)	17/09/2007
6	review the safety of all homes on an annual basis. Regulation 29 (3)	17/08/2007
8	ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed. Regulation 17(3)	17/08/2007
9	ensure that safe caring guidelines are in place for each foster home. Regulation 12	17/09/2007
9	keep and regularly review information on all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child and any action taken in response.	17/08/2007

	Regulation 12	
13	ensure that the foster carers role in school contact, and in relation to the young persons personal education plan are clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement. Timescale of 01 January 2005 not met. Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6	17/08/2007
10	ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken for all young people prior to contact taking place. Regulation 14	17/08/2007
1	include details of National Minimum Standard 1.4 in Statement of Purpose - Timescale of 01 April 2004 not met. Regulation 3	17/08/2007
1	ensure that all young people are provided with a copy of the Children's Guide, which is fully compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Timescale of 01 April 2004 not met. Regulation 3	17/10/2007
4	ensure that a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 is in place to ensure quality performance within the Service. Regulation 42	17/09/2007
17	ensure that there are sufficient experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the service. Regulation 19	17/10/2007
17	ensure that foster carer assessments contain robust analysis of all issues raised in the assessment and contain all elements identified in Schedule 3. Timescale of 01 August 2006 not met. Regulation 27	17/08/2007
22	ensure that all foster carers receive supervision in line with the authority's policy. Regulation 17	17/08/2007
22	record and monitor all complaints and representations and evaluate their outcomes to inform future provision of the service. Regulation 42	17/08/2007
24	ensure that a foster placement agreement is entered into before any placement is made covering all matters specified in Schedule 6. Regulation 34(3)	17/08/2007
25	produce a register of carers which contains all the information required by Regulation 31. Timescale of 01 September 2005 not met. Regulation 31(2)	17/08/2007
25	keep a record of all young people placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22 and Schedule 2. Timescale of 01 December 2004 not met. Regulation 22(1).	17/09/2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensures that all foster carers are aware of all issues in respect of giving consent for medical treatment for the young people placed with them. National Minimum Standard 12
- encourage parents to delegate responsibility for medical treatment. National Minimum Standard 12

- develop a policy regarding the assessment of whether a young person is Gillick competent. National Minimum Standard 12
- ensure that placing social workers provide all appropriate information prior to a placement being made. National Minimum Standard 8
- ensure that panel members declare all conflicts of interest. National Minimum Standard 30
- review the provision of specialist equipment to shared care foster carers to ensure that young people's needs can be met. National Minimum Standard 31
- record the educational achievements and attainments of young people and make them available to the inspectorate. National Minimum Standard 13
- develop albums or booklets about foster carers and their homes to allow children and young people to have some information prior to all placements, including emergency placements. National Minimum Standard 11
- ensure that family and friends foster carers are not discriminated against regarding the payment of on-going allowances if the young person has reached 18-years-old but remains in education or training. National Minimum Standard 14
- ensure that the Statement of Purpose is approved by elected members. National Minimum Standard 1
- ensure that they produce a Children's Guide that is accessible to younger children and those young people who are less able. National Minimum Standard 1
- review and streamline forms to allow teams to work effectively to ensure young people and foster carers are appropriately supported. National Minimum Standard 16
- ensure that unannounced visits to all foster carers are undertaken, at least once a year and this is clearly recorded on the file. National Minimum Standard 22
- implement the policy regarding action to be taken if foster carers do not undertake the agreed amount of training. National Minimum Standard 23.