

Solihull MBC Fostering Unit

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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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 Solihull Fostering Service, is part of the range of childcare services within Solihull MBC and is the primary source of accommodation and care for children and young people looked after either temporarily or long-term by the local authority. The Fostering Service is part of the Education and Children's Services Directorate and the local authority adopts a corporate approach to parenting. The Fostering Service recruits and assesses prospective foster carers and has 132 approved foster carers. They provide placements for 176 children and young people aged 0-18 years. The care provided consists of four distinct areas of provision and these are mainstream carers, friends and family carers, family link for respite care and the CHES multi-dimensional treatment fostering scheme for children and young people with complex needs.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is an announced full inspection and it focuses on 17 key National Minimum Standards (NMS) relevant to the Fostering Service. These include NMS's relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of NMS 2, 5 and 22 that relates to the management of the agency and the support to foster carers. The inspection monitors the progress made, by the Fostering Service, in meeting the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. The Fostering Service is making good progress in fulfilling the majority of issues raised in outcome areas of staying safe and organisation. There is steady progress and development in specialist fostering services that include a proactive response to a growing demand for placements of unaccompanied young people who are asylum seekers. There is limited progress with family and friend carers although recent recruitment has improved the level of support provided and the timescales for assessments. The fostering service is successful in retaining and supporting foster carers who are skilled and competent in meeting the needs of young people to enable them to achieve positive outcomes.

Improvements since the last inspection

The Fostering Service has made some progress in the quality and development of the service. Through the application of the lean management strategy, effective deployment of staff and focussed recruitment evidence shows there is an increase in the number and suitability of applicants with shorter timescales for completion of assessments. Staff training that includes an initial viability risk assessment of applicants ensures all elements are addressed to include potential hazards. Each

foster carer is issued a foster carer agreement that is signed and dated by all parties. Progress is slowly being made with regard to provision of services to family and friend carers. This follows an increase in the number of staff that are available to support and supervise these carers. The majority of carers are allocated a link worker and receive regular supervision that includes family and friend carers. The Fostering Service works closely with placing social workers and foster carers, at the time of matching and placement. This ensures all aspects of risk and consent for treatment are addressed. They issue guidance with regard to medical, school trips and holiday consents. A range of strategies are used to involve and communicate with young people. This ensures they receive information about the services available. The Fostering Service has developed foster placement agreements, which take the form of placement plans for young people that identify the needs of the young person and how they will be met. Young people are encouraged to be involved in their reviews whilst some are trained to plan and chair their own review. The improvements to the Fostering Service provide dynamic and flexible services to meet the individual needs of young people. As a result positive outcomes are achieved for young people through well planned and well supported placements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Solihull Fostering Service places a strong emphasis on the promotion of young people's health and development. The service has developed ways to evaluate how it achieves good health outcomes for children and young people and supports foster carers to do this. There are policies and procedures which provide guidance to workers and carers on how to promote the health care needs of young people. The foster carers receive health related information in placement plans. However, they do not receive a comprehensive medical assessment or history for the young person to maintain throughout the placement and move on with the young person. This means the foster carer is not always fully informed of how to meet the health care needs of the young people in their care. Records are maintained of routine checks, for example, dentist, opticians, statutory medicals and specialist appointments. Foster carer's help young people to be healthy for example through talking to them about their health care needs.

Foster carers develop good relationships with health professionals. They assist young people with specific health needs to access appropriate professional support, for example, the Looked After and Adopted Team Children's Health (LAATCH). The team provide a range of services that supports young people. This includes the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and a Looked after Children's (LAC) nurse. The service has effective working partnerships with other agencies and professionals to develop health care planning and access to resources for young people. The LAC nurse has recently been appointed to develop and co-ordinate the service for young people. She is keen to ensure that all LAC receive an appropriate service to address their health needs in a timely manner.

The LAC nurse offers a range of services and training for carers and young people in

various areas. For example, sexual health, talking to young people and smoking. Staff and carers access a comprehensive training programme through attendance at health promotion days that informs their practice. This ensures the health and wellbeing of young people. Several new developments to the service are in the process of being implemented. Young people in care, and a range of professionals, are involved in developing policies and guidance for foster carers and youth work professionals with regard to a wide range of sexual health and substance issues.

A medical assessment has been completed for 88.9% of LAC in the last year. The LAC nurse ensures this service is available to all children who are looked after and is flexible in the arrangements, such as timing and venue for these to take place. Evidence is available of detailed assessments although foster carers consider little or no information, with regard to outcomes of medicals, is shared with them. As a result foster carer's do not receive sufficient information that ensures the health and well being of young people is fully addressed. This potentially compromises young peoples health and wellbeing.

Foster carers feel that the information received, at the time of placement, especially in emergency placements is not detailed enough therefore medical and cultural information is sometimes missed. For example, when providing information for unaccompanied asylum seeker minors. Foster carers feel the fostering service share all the information they have but there are often gaps. They have formed their own support network for cultural and dietary issues. Young people's health needs are well met by their foster carers, who are supported by the Fostering Service.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children and young people are safeguarded because the fostering service ensures foster carer's are suitable to look after children and young people and they have an understanding of the importance of protecting young people. The fostering service has a well defined management structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The management are suitably qualified and experienced to manage the service efficiently and effectively. The fostering service manager has a system for obtaining references set out in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and keeps a record of telephone enquiries that are followed up by written references.

Foster carers are assessed when recruited and following approval, at regular reviews. This ensures they remain suitable to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Young people are placed with foster carer's who receive adequate support to meet their needs. This includes their cultural, ethnic and religious identity needs. The fostering service provides training and support in safe caring practices and monitors service delivery through regular supervision, health and safety home assessments and safe working practice agreements.

The fostering service work closely with other agencies to ensure foster carers are supported to provide suitable accommodation and safe environments for young

people. The West Midlands fire service undertake 'Home Fire Safety Checks' of foster carers homes to provide advice on any additional measures to be taken. Foster carers receive training and written guidance in health and safety topics. The foster carer's homes are warm, comfortable environments where young people generally enjoy some private space in their own rooms. However, there are occasions when young people share bedrooms.

The fostering service does not have a specific sharing of bedrooms policy or guidance for foster carers and there is no written assessment of the individual child's needs or those of other children and young people in the home. This potentially compromises the safety of young people and leaves them vulnerable, particularly if the child is abused or has abused another child. The referral format completed by placing social workers has been revised to incorporate explicitly an assessment of risk for the young person. As a result risks are addressed in the placement plan and the welfare and safety of the young person is protected.

Young people are generally well matched with foster carers. The fostering service team and placing social workers give high priority to the matching process. The fostering service uses the child's plan and a placement plan to fulfil the foster placement agreement. This includes information regarding matching considerations. The agreement identifies if there are gaps in the foster carers ability to meet the young person's needs, and what support is to be given to ensure these needs are met. The fostering service provides a range of different services to meet the varied needs of children and young people including: CHESS(multidimensional treatment foster care), family and friends, family link scheme, support care and mainstream foster carers. Young people are also placed in out of borough placements, if this meets their individual needs. The fostering service recognises the shortage of carers to meet the needs of UASC. Where shortages are identified solutions are sought such as targeted recruitment and training and support for staff. Young people are encouraged to be involved in both their own reviews and that of their foster carers. This enables them to express their opinions and to raise any concerns they have about the placement. Foster carers feel pre-placement meetings are effective and that they generally receive all the information they require or, in some instances, is available for them to appropriately care for the young person placed with them.

The fostering service has implemented revised policies and procedures of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Child Protection issues are addressed appropriately with three allegations relating to foster carers during 2007/8. Foster carers and social workers attend training and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for the protection of children and young people. Young people are able to approach foster carers with any concerns and that issues related to bullying and consider they are dealt with. Foster carers are aware of the effects of bullying on children, supporting them to find acceptable solutions. Training courses for foster carers is provided in respect of safe handling and de-escalation skills. This provides foster carers with preventative strategies and physical techniques to help enhance relationships with children/young people in their care. As a result young people are safe living with foster carers and any discipline considered fair. Allegations against foster carers is monitored and appropriate action taken to safeguard the welfare of young people. During the inspection year the fostering service did not submit

notifications to Ofsted within the required timescale including notifications of child protection incidents and outcomes. Failure to ensure timely notification of relevant agencies prevents agencies working together effectively to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. However the fostering service manager identified and addressed this issue during the planning stage of the inspection.

The foster carers are asked to develop safe caring policies specific to the placement and young people accommodated. The majority of foster carers files contain a copy of the safe caring policy. However, a number of these are not agreed or signed by the child's social worker to confirm the policy is suitable to meet the child's needs or clearly explained to them. The fostering service ensure that all information is supplied to carers to adequately meet each child's protection needs through the LAC information, child's plan and placement plan provided and is shared at the pre-placement planning meeting. The placing authority social worker provide comprehensive referral information which includes a risk assessment of the individual young person. This ensures foster carers are sufficiently informed to protect all young people in their care. Young people are safe because the fostering service work hard in supporting foster carers by making sure help is available when needed.

The fostering service has clear recruitment policies and procedures to ensure any one working for the service is suitable. All required references are satisfactorily completed prior to appointment. The policy in relation to the management of criminal record bureau checks (CRB) has been revised. This ensures there is a consistent approach to any issues that arise. The human resources section has no system in place to update CRB checks and no formal system to track staff CRB's, prior to October 2006, when they were portable. However, the fostering service does have a system in place and the spreadsheet for this holds relevant clearance information but, it is not fully up to date at the time of the inspection. The staff files are well organised and information is easily identified; those held by the fostering service in respect of panel members are particularly well structured and administered.

The fostering panel has clear policies and procedures to guide its work, which includes the action taken if the panel is not in agreement. The panel's composition meet the required standard and panel members have an appropriate range of skills and experience. All appropriate checks are undertaken regarding panel members. The panel is led by an effective and knowledgeable chair. The panel provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process, to monitor and review the work of assessors and to provide feedback. There is a decreasing back log of foster carer reviews taken to panel which impedes effective monitoring of the service provision. The fostering service does not collate management information about the outcome of foster carers annual reviews or seek the views of young people to identify service shortfalls and areas for future development. Neither does the panel regularly monitor the range and type of carers available to the authority, to ensure the fostering service provides suitable placements to meet the needs of children. The fostering service access regular training for panel members on a range of issues. Children and young people are safeguarded because fostering panels are recruited appropriately, are efficiently organised and as a consequence operate effectively.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service and foster carers recognise and address the wide range and diverse needs of young people and their families. The Solihull approach is implemented through training and service delivery to provide a constructive baseline of service delivery through reflective and responsive practice. This is flexible therefore able to meet the individual needs of young people. The fostering service has developed systems and formats that are inclusive of issues relating to diversity. For example, foster carers are assessed with regard to their values and understanding of diversity and promotion of equality. Whilst same race placements are promoted it is recognised that this is not always achievable. Foster carers are supported with training, information, and resources such as translators and specialist services to address any identified shortfalls. Young people's cultural, racial and identity needs are recorded in the foster placement agreement including information of how foster carers are promoted. Foster carers caring for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds understand their role in promoting and safeguarding the child's cultural and religious identity and dietary needs.

Solihull has a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in care from 45, in 2005, to 154 in 2008. The UASC represent 42.8 five of the looked after children population. Solihull has developed a dedicated UASC service, that takes children from their point of entry, into the country, to assess and address safeguarding issues. For both foster carers and young people communication is a key issue. Communication is facilitated for young people and foster carers through the provision of translators. A telephone interpreting service is available 24 hrs a day, seven days a week for carers. Young people are supported, through the Edulac service who provide English as a second language. This helps to develop their language skills and provides access to the education services. The EC Services Diversity Officer and Corporate Parenting Worker seeks the views of unaccompanied young people in care, to help design a training programme for foster carers on the needs of UASC and young people in foster care. The fostering service has offered training for 'Caring for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children' and 'Red Card – Diversity & Equality training for foster carers'. Foster carers develop skills to meet the needs of children and young people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to raise the level of awareness of equality and diversity among foster carers and to explore the role of foster carers in the care and protection of children from different backgrounds, that includes unaccompanied asylum seekers children and refugees.

The fostering service work closely with 'Save the Children' who run a successful advocacy and support service for Solihull UASC called 'Birmingham unaccompanied minors project' (Bump). Staff from the UASC team work well with the fostering service and carers to promote knowledge, understanding and relationships. Young people and foster carers confirm that the fostering service is sensitive to issues of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality and that they are involved in developing a responsive and flexible service.

The fostering service recruitment programme for staff and foster carers is based on mapping of placement needs and it successfully targets a diverse range of carers and staff through specific advertising and marketing. For example setting up stalls at Sikh and Muslim events and festivals.

Young people in foster care are encouraged to access hobbies and interests that develop their personal skills and abilities and promote their self identity and positive self esteem. The fostering service in conjunction with foster carers and the placing authority workers provide a wide range of resources, equipment, funding and information to assist young people to access leisure opportunities.

The Fostering Service place a high priority on young people's education by working closely with education services and colleagues to achieve positive outcomes for young people. The education service annual report 2006 – 2007 reflects the success of the work of the education service for looked after and vulnerable children and provides useful information for planning of services. Young people who are looked after are generally maintained within their school environment to provide continuity and stability as far as possible. Young people feel they benefit from continuity of education and are able to maintain contact with friends and the local community. For UASCs, school placements are identified as soon as possible, once they are placed.

Young people excluded from school or those who experience difficulties in mainstream school attend the 'Craig Croft Pupils Referral Unit'. Foster carers value the support they receive from Craig Croft and the service provided to young people. Some foster carers feel the service is limited and would welcome a full school day that is provided for young people to attend. The unit are proactive in supporting children in school by addressing issues before they reach crisis point. Foster carers contact staff directly for advice and support.

The outreach team visit LAC in their school/education environment to monitor performance, provide support and attend reviews. For young people placed out of borough an agreed level of support takes place. The outreach team provide a dedicated worker for the UASCs. Young people receive support to identify an appropriate education setting to ensure a personal education plan (PEP) or pathway plan is developed.

The outreach team has driven a new system for PEP's and regular meetings are held in school when social worker, parent/carer, school staff and a member of the outreach team attend. The views of young people are sought and taken into consideration as part of the planning process. The foster carers are directly involved and aware of the contents of the PEP and their part in its implementation and what is expected of the young people. The completed PEP is held at the Craig Croft Unit. These improvements to the process and involvement has produced plans that are current, meaningful and effective for all LAC and young people. The fostering service is supportive of this role and provides guidance to foster carers to assist them in enabling young people to fulfil their potential.

Young people confirm they are given good support and their achievements are recognised. The fostering service celebrate the achievements of children & young people in care with awards events three times a year for a range of achievements that includes educational achievements. Young people keep their certificates and awards in portfolios and foster carers support them with home work assignments, attendance at school events and access to resources such as computers and libraries. The fostering service promote the skills and abilities of young people through leisure activities and interests, for example, dancing, swimming, music and horse riding lessons.

Parents are appropriately involved and consulted and work in partnership with the fostering service, particularly in respect of the short-term breaks service. Foster carers are skilled in maintaining good working relationships with parents to establish clear defined roles and responsibilities in the short term relationships of schemes. For example, family link and the potentially long term relationships of the shared care scheme. Young people's individual needs are well met by their foster carers, who provide good support to enable them to meet their educational potential and to develop skills through leisure activities.

Short-term breaks are provided through the family link scheme. Placements are well planned with clear agreements between parents and foster carers. The placement plan clearly states foster carers responsibilities and both parties sign a specific agreement in respect of these issues. All parties are aware that the parent remains the main carer for the young person. The fostering service recruits a number of new applicants to provide an increase in the numbers of foster carers that are able to offer family link placements. This has improved the extent and availability of a service that is highly valued by children and their families. They propose to use additional funding from the 'Every Disabled Child Matters' to further develop the shared care scheme. Recruitment of a full time contract carer, who specialise in taking children with more complex disabilities, enables them to access foster care support, in addition to the residential and home based respite that is currently available.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service and foster carers promote and sustain young people's contact with their family as set out in the care plan and placement plan. The placing social worker completes a risk assessment as part of the referral procedure and this includes the arrangements for contact. All relevant parties contribute to the plans prior to the placement, when any shortfalls can be addressed, arrangements agreed and respective roles and responsibilities determined. The placement plans improve clarity of tasks to be completed and resources available such as, escort, supervision of contact, venue and travel arrangements. Young people's views and wishes are sought and taken into consideration in respect of contact arrangements with family and friends. The fostering service has recently produced draft supervised contact service procedures to ensure good practice is provided to young people through clear

guidelines. Foster carers are given guidance and training in developing and maintaining appropriate relationships to support the contact arrangements and to facilitate positive experiences for young people. The Support Breaks scheme has proved very successful in maintaining young people within their families in the medium to long term. Foster carers maintain detailed records of the contact arrangements and the impact on the young person; these are reported to the placing social worker and inform future review of arrangements and decision making in the interests of the young person.

The Children's Involvement & Development Officer is a strategic post with specific responsibility for promoting the participation of looked after young people. The officer monitors the issue of the LAC pack to young people and the replacement or revision as young people become older. Solihull LAC Packs can be modified to reflect the age, needs and skill of young people and the placing social worker selects appropriate items. Young people find the information is useful and most helpful for those ten years and older.

The fostering service has a range of strategies for engaging directly with young people and seeking their views both in respect of their individual care and placement plans and in respect of the fostering service. Young people are issued with relevant information and the fostering service has explored a range of different strategies and resources to engage and involve them.

The fostering service has produced a children's guide in an attractive child friendly format which can be customized to reflect the needs and abilities of the young person.

Young people are involved in the compilation and the recent review of the Child's Guide 'Foster Care the Reality – A young person's guide to being fostered'. The revised version is updated with current information of contact details for Ofsted; a copy is given to all fostered children when their initial placement plan is undertaken.

The fostering service uses a range of mediums to engage with young people and encourage them to participate in processes and improving the service delivery. These include contributions to newsletters, production of information DVD's as well as training to chair and conduct their own reviews. Young people are empowered through development of their skills and knowledge

The fostering service is aware of the importance of providing adequate access to translation and advocacy services to meet the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers and seeks to address this at strategic and operational levels of the service. Young people feel vulnerable and find it difficult to challenge or express their views openly for fear of risking their status to remain in the country. The fostering service link the young people to specialist services such as Birmingham Unaccompanied Minors Project (BUMP) and arrange translation services to ensure they receive correct information and can share any concerns. The fostering service are responsive to meeting service users needs and contracted new translation services following feedback of unsatisfactory quality of services. Information leaflets are translated into six different languages and the fostering service recognises there are at least 26

languages being used in the borough. Access to English language courses is also promoted as a long term goal for improving young people's skills and independence.

The fostering service has clear policies and procedures for complaints and these are detailed clearly in the Statement of Purpose and in the Child's Guide to the fostering service. Complaints are generally addressed within timescales and a written response is given. Young people give several people they feel they are able to approach and talk to if they have concerns, however, young people with language needs or undetermined legal status feel vulnerable and unable to express contrary views or concerns. The fostering service provide information about advocacy services and access is arranged if issues are brought to their attention. However the majority of young people are confident their foster carer or placing social worker will help with any concerns they have.

The fostering service and carers are very effective in promoting young people's contact with their family as set out in the care plan and placement plan and young people are actively encouraged and empowered to express their views regarding their care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The Statement of Purpose is updated annually and most recently in January 2008. It is very well produced and covers all areas outlined in the standards and regulations. The section relating to complaints is clear however the procedures do not provide contact information for Ofsted, the regulator, as identified in previous inspections. The Child's Guide to the fostering service 'Foster Care – the reality – a young person's guide to being fostered' has been revised and updated to include information relating to Ofsted contact details. The Looked After Children pack is user friendly and can be amended to reflect the abilities and needs of the young people. The presentation is excellent in a ring binder folder, with colourful pictorial images contains removable packs/sections relevant to child's age and stage with relevant topics.

The fostering service has a clear management and staffing structure outlining clear lines of accountability. The service provides a number of different types of foster care and staff are organised and are delegated responsibilities appropriate to their skills and qualifications. There are four assistant team managers, responsible for different sections within the team. There are 11.5 full-time, or equivalent, social workers to include one for family link, two full-time, one part-time family and friends carers and one for support carers. The fostering service does not use a workload

management system to determine workloads and assign tasks. The management team monitor and allocate workloads through the supervision process. All fostering staff files contain evidence of regular detailed supervision offering support and advice where required and training needs and updating on current position with carers and children. New staff receive a planned induction and all staff receive regular supervision. Fostering staff receive annual appraisals that are linked to previous appraisals. Children's welfare, safety and developmental progress are safeguarded because staff are well supported.

There are systems in place to monitor and control the service to ensure quality performance. Following application of Lean Management system there is considerable improvement in the various functions of the service with clear benefits for children and young people using the service. The deployment of a recruitment officer has increased the number of enquirers successfully completing the assessment process. The timescale for completing assessments has improved and those outstanding for prolonged periods are being addressed. Progress has been made to improve the timely completion of reviews of foster carers and whilst these are not all current they are planned and due to be completed. The administration of the service is well organised and responsive to the different aspects of the service. The administrator ensures suitable adjustments are made with the introduction and implementation of computer programmes and systems to maintain an efficient service. The fostering service networks extremely well with other agencies to meet the needs of young people, for example, education services and the looked after nurse. Fostering service workers and placing social workers have a clear understanding of each others roles and responsibilities and work effectively together. Some young people do not have an allocated social worker. Foster carers and their link workers highlight the impact of this on the progression of the care plan for young people and for achieving positive outcomes. Overall the fostering service is led effectively by a strong management team that demonstrate a clear vision and understanding of the strategic and operational development of the service.

The Solihull Local Authority are responsive to the identified needs of the service and prioritised funding for recruitment of additional staff. The fostering service are careful and creative in managing resources to ensure the quality of the service remains high. The fostering service has revised its recruitment strategy and recently has been successful in the appointment of three new members of staff with sufficient skills and experience. Agency workers are appointed to address vacant posts and service needs and suitable staff are contracted specifically to complete Form F assessments with a view to control quality and improve timescales. The shortfall in staffing resources and human resource practice are identified and there is a clear plan to address these. These gaps do not adversely affect the safety of the young people. The fostering service remains open to flexible working constantly review the mix of skills and abilities in the team and the needs of the service. The application of Lean Management helps to optimise the time social workers spend on non-social work tasks and look at the most efficient way of working.

The fostering service issue foster care agreements to all foster carers with clear information of the service expectations. Foster carers have a clear understanding of

their roles and responsibilities and generally feel they are well supported by their supervising social worker and the fostering service. Fostering service staff provide twenty-four hour on-call service and foster carers find this very helpful as staff are informed and knowledgeable. The Solihull Foster Carer Association has recently been re-established with a new motivation to engage and involve all foster carers in support and development activities.

Following implementation of Lean management there has been some improvement with foster carers receiving regular supervision and support. However, some supervising social workers do not appear to record when unannounced visits are made. Supervising social workers complete the annual reviews and comments are sought from all relevant parties. The fostering service has established an administration programme for reviews to be completed and all have allotted dates. As yet a number of reviews remain outstanding, however, it is expected once new staff are established in post this issue will be addressed.

The Fostering Service provides information for making complaints in the Statement of Purpose, the children's guide, the foster carers handbook and through issuing individual leaflets. The fostering service staff will try to address any issues as they arise and complainants always are offered the option of making a formal complaint through the customer relations officer. In addition foster carers may access the 'Fostering network' advice and mediation worker. Young people are given access to advocacy services and confirm they are aware of several people they could approach to resolve issues they may have. The Fostering Service received 6 complaints, all of which appear to be dealt with in a timely manner with a written response. The fostering service has looked into all of the complaints and in some cases training and development has been provided to ensure that the service is continually improving. The foster carers handbook also details information about dealing with investigations and allegations with independent support available for foster carers.

The fostering service has a comprehensive pre-approval training programme for new carers. There is also a well-developed ongoing training programme for approved carers with 54 mainstream foster care families attending three or more training events in 2006-7. Foster carers are given the opportunity to complete the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). There are 43 carers (households) that hold an NVQ Level 3 or above. Foster carers take an active involvement in the training. The fostering service offers enhanced carer allowances linked to training attendance, which serves as a useful incentive to attend training and improve the quality of care provided to children and young people by competent carers.

Young people's files are generally well organised and contain the information required. The fostering service has hard copy files and records held on the CARE FIRST computer system and fostering service staff ensure there is effective integration of information. Foster placement plan (Agreement) is normally completed on the day that the placement takes place. These provide the basis for the work undertaken with the young person and are reviewed on a regularly between the foster carer, supervising social worker and the young person's social worker. Placement plan's are now signed by the placing social worker but, are not always

signed in a timely manner. The fostering service provide foster carers with lockable storage facilities for confidential records of young people, however, these are not seen to be in use by all of the foster carers. Foster carers varied in their understanding of the records they are expected to keep and maintain. The foster carers maintain a daily diary of events and share information appropriately with the child’s social worker and the fostering service. Young people are encouraged and assisted by foster carers to keep visual and written memorabilia and to contribute their views and comments to record keeping. The fostering service maintains a foster care register and a young people’s register, both these are comprehensive and easy to use and provide useful management information. The fostering service holds the required records for young people or has access to them such as health assessments. As a result foster carers are not adequately informed therefore unable to fully meet the needs of young people due to the absence of comprehensive information relating to their care.

The family and friends carers section of the service is currently understaffed, however, pro-active management of this service has allocated agency staff to assist and support carers. The fostering service has implemented effective recruitment strategies with the successful appointment of staff and an increase in the number of staff to support family and friend carers. The full benefits to family and friend carers and young people of these strategies are not yet evident. However, the fostering service’s documents, policies and procedures are provided to the family and friends foster carers, including the foster care agreement, safe care guidelines and risk assessments. The family and friend carers do not have specific policies and procedures though the fostering procedures including the sections on family & friends fostering have been reviewed and implemented. Family and friend carers receive the same resources as mainstream carers such as appropriate training opportunities, translation services and payments. The fostering panel has not yet received training in respect of assessing friends and family foster carers, however, training is booked for 20 February 2008. This matter is outstanding from the previous inspection and impacts on the appropriateness of decision’s made, regarding approval or non-approval of family and friend carers that is in the best interest of the young person. The family and friends carers confirms the access to financial support for the purchase of equipment and support from supervising social workers has improved.

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
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12	ensure before making a placement, the responsible authority enters a written foster carer agreement covering the matters in Schedule 6 including the child's state of health and identified health needs Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6(1)(c)	30/04/2008
32	ensure that the responsible placing authority visits the child in the home in which they are placed at appropriate intervals Regulation 35(1)(c)	30/04/2008
32	revise policies and procedures to reflect the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers. Regulation 17(1)	31/05/2008

Recommendations

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

- provide a policy with guidance (including a written assessment) to foster carers in respect of sharing bedrooms (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that the registered person will without delay notify the respective persons indicated in respect of the events as listed in the Schedule 8 Regulation 43(1) Schedule 8
- ensure that the foster carer's safe caring policy is agreed by the young person's social worker (NMS 9)
- ensure fostering service systems for recording criminal record bureau clearance are maintained up to date (NMS 15.4)
- ensure fostering panels receive management information about the following: young people's views of the service; the range and type of carers available; the outcome of foster carers annual reviews and ensure they are approved in a timely manner (NMS 30)
- ensure that all young people including those whose first language is not English understand how to make a complaint (NMS 11)
- ensure the fostering service has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff (NMS 16.4)
- ensure foster carers files include records of supervisory meetings and there are occasional unannounced visits, at least one each year (NMS 22.6)
- ensure consideration is given to providing further training for the Fostering Panel in respect of Family and Friends assessments. (NMS 32)