

# Bury Social Services - Fostering

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	20/11/2006

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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

Bury fostering service recruits, assesses, trains and supports carers to provide a wide range of services to looked after children and their families. There are currently 138 approved households providing time limited interventions, respite, short term and permanent placements for 210 children and young people. Fifty three are living with family and friends carers.

There is a short break scheme specifically developed to keep young people out of the care system and a home from home scheme that provides regular and planned short breaks to disabled children and young people. Both of these work in partnership with families to ensure they meet identified needs.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This judgement is reached following an announced inspection which looked at compliance with all the Regulations and the key National Minimum Standards and the service's response to the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection.

Bury local authority fostering is a well managed and safe service and most children are happy and settled in their current placement. Carers and staff are satisfied with the support they receive from the fostering service to ensure children and young people's welfare continues to be safeguarded and promoted.

The fostering service ensures particularly good outcomes for looked after children in respect to enjoying and achieving and clear plans are in place to improve their consultation opportunities.

### Improvements since the last inspection

Three requirements were made at the last inspection of which two have been satisfactorily addressed. Staff files now include all the details as required by the Regulations to help ensure a safe and suitably qualified workforce. Second, young people now sign key documentation to show they are consulted on, understand and agree to the plans in place. The remaining concern from carers and young people about the frequency of social worker visits has now been raised at senior management level within the authority.

Three recommendations were also made. Safe caring policies are now in place but improving delays in payments to carers and the fostering team moving to more

suitable premises are still being addressed.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall there are satisfactory arrangements in place to help ensure fostered children and young people remain fit and healthy. Most are happy with the meals provided and enjoy a range of physical activities including dancing, running, wrestling and kick boxing. The fostering service promotes healthy lifestyles by funding fees and subscriptions to sports activities and providing free swimming.

Some young people say they 'always' get support and advice about being healthy but others say they only 'sometimes' do and 'they should go on about being healthy more'. They are registered with a doctor but some need dentist and optician's appointments. Most immunisations are up to date but not all have had their annual statutory medical.

Carers are aware of the need to maintain health records to inform children's statutory reviews. These are monitored during supervisory social work visits.

Information to carers is included in their handbook and training courses on offer include emotional and mental health needs, first aid, sexual health, epilepsy, drug awareness and promoting health needs. Speakers also regularly attend carers' support groups to build upon carers knowledge and skills. Recent examples include a nutritionist and a nurse discussing HIV/Hepatitis B. Some carers who administer prescribed medication, however, are not suitably trained.

Services available to carers and children to help ensure assessed needs are met include the looked after children's nurse, a psychologist, a substance misuse worker and an outreach worker from the children and adolescent mental health services. The extra mile service also provides ongoing nutrition groups where young people preparing to leave care or already living independently can learn how to make nutritional meals on a budget.

A new smoking policy in line with the British Adoption and Fostering Association's guidelines to ensure no children under five are placed with carers who smoke. The few remaining carers who do will be offered support to stop, including a smoking cessation group.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall there are satisfactory arrangements in place to help ensure fostered children and young people and all members of the carer's household are kept safe. Most

children say they are well cared for and know who to talk to if they are not happy about something.

Carers sign a foster care agreement acknowledging their commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children placed with them. They provide homes which are clean and comfortable. Children and young people like their bedrooms which include lots of age appropriate furnishings and equipment. Health and safety checklists are undertaken as part of the annual review process to ensure homes are free from avoidable hazards but some potential risks include an open stair case and trailing wires. Health and Safety training is provided to carers and information is included in their handbook.

The manager of this fostering service is suitably qualified and very experienced and is committed to ensuring that children and young people are carefully matched with carers capable of meeting their assessed needs. Placement meetings include any additional services needed to meet specific needs and are recorded on placement agreements. Those designed by the short break service are particularly detailed outlining potential risks and clear expectations to keep everyone safe. Most children also benefit from a gradual period of introduction to their proposed new home so they can make an informed view about the placement.

Carers receive safeguarding training and safe caring policies are in place which are updated as part of the annual review process and after a new placement but they are not linked to written individual risk assessments. Allegations and complaints records are in good order and there are no recorded incidents of restraint in the last 12 months.

Some carers, however, report that they do not receive the information they need prior to placement to help ensure everyone in their household is adequately safeguarded and young people's assessed needs are planned for and met.

Robust recruitment and selection procedures are in place and the staff files include all the details as required by the Regulations to help ensure a safe and suitably qualified and experienced workforce. They are not indexed, however, or well ordered and some confidential information is misfiled. Some panel files did not include proof of qualifications as required by Schedule 1. REG Certificates of registration needed for qualified social workers to continue practising are not available on some of the files.

The fostering panel is independently chaired and the current constitution ensures a good range of expertise in services to children and families, for example, health, education, advocacy, fostering and experience of being fostered. They also benefit from experienced panel and medical advisors. Papers are produced in advance of the meeting to enable members to fully prepare. They receive regular training specific to their role including special guardianship, matching considerations and awareness of gay and lesbian applicants. Established quality assurance processes are in place including quarterly meetings with the managers of the children's services. The chair

of the panel will also raise any concerns as they arise and confirms a continued efficient response.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

This fostering service ensures that carers respect and preserve each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background and they are supported and trained to help young people deal with discrimination. Most carers say that the fostering service is good at addressing issues of equality and diversity. Multi ethnic resources are available for loan and additional payments made to meet specific needs, including adapting a home to meet mobility needs. Up to date information is given to carers looking after unaccompanied asylum seekers.

There are good opportunities for fostered children and young people to pursue their individual talents and interests including the Duke of Edinburgh award, art and design, running, dance, drama and football and their achievements are recognised in the newsletters and at the annual awards events. The service also keep carers informed about local activities available and a number of looked after children went on a residential activity week in the summer.

The service gives high priority to meeting the educational needs of individual children and young people and they are actively encouraged to reach their full potential. Carers are specifically trained in how to promote education and most children and young people are happy with the help they receive. This includes the provision of laptops or computers, private tuition, learning mentors and a connexions worker in year nine to assist with options and through to pathway planning about further education and careers. Good arrangements are also in place to financially assist fostered young people through university.

The home from home service and the short break service continue to provide flexible, needs led services to children and families as part of a clear, coordinated and individualised support package of care. Parents are appreciative of this respite. The coordinators know the carers and children and young people really well and can therefore ensure good matches.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service actively promotes positive contact with families and friends in line with legal directions and young people's choice. Mandatory post approval training in regard to contact is provided to carers and in the last twelve months 37 carers have attended.

Most carers are satisfied that the fostering service involves children and young people in decisions about their day to day lives and their futures but there is still

some disquiet about the frequency of social worker visits. Comments include, 'it could be improved upon', 'on many occasions they don't see a social worker from one month to the other', 'it is sometimes just a phone call instead of a visit' and clear and simply put by young people, 'I want to see my social worker more'.

Young people confirm easy access to independent advocates if needed. They also say they are often asked their views about living with their carers but not about the development of the fostering service. This is being addressed by the service. Current opportunities include participation in personal education plan meetings and statutory reviews, written contributions to their carer's annual reviews and after leaving a placement. The fostering service also provides a group for looked after children and a group for carers' own children.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall there are satisfactory opportunities for young people to prepare for independence including cooking, budgeting and part time employment. Children are actively encouraged to save from an early age and to develop age and developmentally appropriate skills. Young people are involved in producing their Pathway Plan and additional services are provided to ensure they are fully supported through this transition.

Carers receive written details of revised allowances every April and the structure this year has been amended to meet Government guidelines. Some carers report delays in receiving payments.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Bury fostering service continues to be well managed with clear lines of accountability. An up to date Statement of Purpose is in place which accurately reflects the policies and practices of this service and the children's guide is currently being revised with the involvement of looked after children.

Good, well established and effective systems are in place to ensure the majority of assessments, approvals and reviews are undertaken in a timely and effective manner. Notifiable incidents are well recorded and details reported to Ofsted in line with the Regulations. Overall carers and children's files are in good order and effective monitoring systems in place.

The service has an adequate number of suitably qualified and sufficiently experienced staff who have manageable workloads and receive good support, supervision and training opportunities.

The current offices are well located for the town but are cramped and plans to move



to better accommodation has again been delayed.

The service has a good retention record and consequently have some very experienced carers. They also recruit new carers to ensure a wide range of skills, backgrounds and experiences to meet the diverse and unique needs of fostered children and young people.

Most carers are satisfied with the support and training they receive. Comments include, 'they provide help, support and advice when we need it' and, 'they provide training and support when necessary'. Supervising social workers visit regularly, day and evening support groups are now well established and the service provide financial incentives to carers for the completion of mandatory training.

Bury continues to recognise the value of family and friends as carers, reflected in the fact that half of the approvals in the last twelve months have been from family and friends. They are offered the same training opportunities as mainstream carers and are well supported by a specialist worker of considerable expertise in this area who consequently understands, acknowledges and addresses the complexities of particular relationships and positions within their own families.

## 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 all fostered children and young people have a annual medical and dental and optician appointments as needed (Regulation 15)	31/03/2008
12	ensure all carers who administer prescribed medication are suitably trained (Regulation 20)	31/03/2008
6	ensure carers homes are free from potential hazards (Regulation 11)	18/01/2008
9	ensure carers are provided with sufficient information prior to every child placed to enable them to provide appropriate care (Regulation 17(3))	31/01/2008
11	ensure social workers regularly visit children in the carer's home to satisfy themselves that their welfare continues to be safeguarded and promoted (Regulation 35).	18/01/2008

## Recommendations

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

- ensure certificates of registration are on qualified social worker's staff and panel member's files (NMS 15.5)
- consider producing individual risk assessments following placement planning meetings to inform safe caring policies (NMS 9.7)
- ensure a suitable system is in place to avoid delays in payments to carers (NMS 29.1)
- ensure a timely move to suitable premises (NMS 26.1).