

Fostering Services Rotherham

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC047258
Inspection date	09/01/2009
Inspector	Helen Humphreys / Jeffrey Banham
Type of inspection	Random

Setting address	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Crinoline House, Effingham Square, ROTHERHAM, South Yorkshire, S65 1AW
Telephone number	01709 382121
Email	mike.carter@rotherham.gov.uk
Registered person	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered manager	Sue May
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	16/06/2008

© Crown copyright 2009

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

Rotherham Borough Council currently provides a fostering service to looked after children. The service currently has carers providing short or emergency care, long term care, short breaks to children with disabilities and their families and carers providing care to family members or close friends.

The service recruits, assesses and supports carers through a range of services.

The service is staffed by a manager, who is supported by an assistant director and head of service and a staff team of experienced social workers. The team works closely with the adoption team.

Summary

The overall quality rating is inadequate - notice of action to improve.

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

This was an announced inspection carried out over two days by two inspectors. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the action plan created by Rotherham following the last inspection. On this occasion the National Minimum Standards (NMS) in the outcome areas of staying safe and organisation were inspected. The last inspection raised a significant number of actions and recommendations. Since then the fostering service has been under the scrutiny of elected members and managers at all levels. This has also included a significant increase in the resources available to the service. In order to meet the majority of the actions and recommendations, significant change was required regarding the placing of children as well as changes to policies and procedures. In the majority of areas this has taken place. The service has undertaken considerable change in a relatively short period of time and plans are progressing well in number of areas. The service has the capacity to achieve the outstanding plans, actions and recommendations.

However some of the changes are taking time to impact and some deficiencies still remain, particularly with the carers looking after large numbers of children. Although there has been some improvement to risk assessments these are not robust and some matters are not included. The monitoring systems including file audits have not identified some fundamental matters relating to safeguarding. There remains some blurring of the roles of the supervising social workers, placing social workers and carers. Whilst children continue to live in large households with over crowding and a lack of attention to basic safeguarding matters, there continues to be risks to young people.

Improvements since the last inspection

Work has been undertaken on reducing the number of young people placed with carers and ensuring that exemptions to go over the normal fostering limit are accurate and comply with legislation. The number has reduced significantly and some work has been done on exemptions although some clarity is still required. Plans are in hand for young people to move onto more appropriate placements where there will be sufficient space.

Foster carer agreements has been reviewed and improvements were noted although some remain inaccurate due to the number of children actually placed.

The service has appointed a new panel and new members. The panel is now clear and focus on their role and this is having an impact on practice and in particular care planning for some young people.

The statement of purpose and children's guide have been revised and now contains accurate information for carers and young people.

A new member of staff has been appointed to be responsible for training for carers and this appointment has impacted on the organisation and delivery of training. Since the last inspection a significant number of carers have undertaken training in first aid and safe caring, which has contributed to the overall safety of the young people placed.

Safe caring policies and risk assessments have been revised and are now in place. However not all risk assessments are robust and some do not include all pertinent matters.

Staff have undertaken training on completing assessments on prospective carers and there is a move to include more analysis in the assessments and include reference to the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) competencies.

A new policy is in place so that friends and family carers receive an appropriate service, including an allocated worker and improved access to training.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The recruitment and selection processes were reviewed at the last inspection and found to be appropriate.

The authority has undertaken a considerable amount work since the last inspection to reduce the numbers of carers looking after more than three children. Plans are in hand for remaining children to be moved on appropriately to new placements, although there has been delay. However some deficiencies were found in the remaining situations. These included some serious over crowding with one household still caring for 10 children, with up until recently one bathroom. Some adults without a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure are living in the fostering households and holiday accommodation used for up to 6 weeks had not being inspected or visited. It is not clear if the young people involved had been visited by their social workers. The service does not as yet have an effective system in place which would identify these deficiencies.

The service has created new risk assessments and these have now been distributed to carers, but do not identify all the hazards including matters like road sense and 'stranger danger'. The service has created 'bedroom risk assessments' to be used when children share bedrooms. The assessments do not record the views of young people or make note of physical matters for example the size and sturdiness of bunk beds.

There is improved practice in matching and there has been a change in the policy in that no more children have been placed in large households since the last inspection, although some do still exist. However there remains some concerns about the matching processes including a child placed on respite with a relative of a carer who did not have a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosures and was not visited. There has been an increase in the number of children placed with independent agencies and appropriate systems are in place to find suitable placements and monitor these. There still remains some confusion about the use of exemptions, although the panel chair is working to reduce the use and bring some clarity to the process.

More training has been offered to carers on child protection and safe caring and the considerable number of carers have taken part. Safe care policies are in place and known to carers. There has been two allegations made by children against carers which have been appropriately investigated. However some poor practice was raised through the investigation process and procedures have been amended. Staff are re-focussing their work to continually address safeguarding issues for young people and this remains an ongoing process for some staff.

The service has appointed a new panel chair who is an experienced social work practitioner who has considerable experience of chairing other panels. Since his appointment in October he has improved the overall style and status of the panel. However some further work is required to ensure that all aspects of children's service accept the work and decision making powers of the panel and it can undertake a thorough quality assurance and safeguarding function. The panel membership is appropriate and the panel chair is developing their contributions and skills.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The statement of purpose and children's guide have been revised and provide appropriate and accurate information for carers and young people.

Since the last inspection the service has been under the scrutiny of elected members, senior managers and managers and staff across the whole of children's services. The service has been subject to an improvement plan and additional resources have been made available, which has had a considerable impact in raising the profile of the service and the work of the fostering team. However at a local level the monitoring systems are not robust as yet to monitor all the matters which directly affect children.

The service now consists of two teams each with their own manager. One team is responsible for supporting carers and the other for recruitment and assessment. This change and increase in management time has allowed the teams to focus on their roles and responsibilities and develop practice. The majority of staff are well experienced and qualified and are employed in sufficient number. The staff team have had additional training and have been involved in reviewing the service. The managers have introduced new systems and processes to bring about change and these will take time to be fully implemented and the impact fully realised. However early indications are that the managers and staff are committed to change and do not want to return to previous practices.

The recruitment team has launched a new recruitment drive led by an enthusiastic manager with an equally clear and focussed team. They have had access to additional resources and material which includes a dedicated web site, posters and

leaflets. Staff have received training in undertaking assessments and are clearer on what is required. At the present time the service still has an insufficient number of carers, but the indications are that the campaign has had some early success.

Carers spoke highly on this occasion and on the last inspection of the good support they receive from staff, who they find helpful, supportive and approachable. Staff in turn indicated that they are now able to better support carers as less time is spent trying to find placements and dealing with matters arising out of multiple placements. However it is still not clear if all staff have made the adjustment that their primary focus should be on safeguarding children and that the relationship between staff and carer needs to change to take this into account.

A new policy and procedure has been created to improve the overall service provided to friends and family carers. Carers are allocated a member of staff as soon as the child is placed, they have access to training and there is an expectation that they will undertake initial training.

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
8	ensure that all exemptions to go over the fostering limit comply with legislation and carers have appropriate documentation (Children Act 1989 Schedule 6)	01/04/2009
6	ensure that all adults living in fostering households have an up to date Criminal Records Disclosure (Regulation 27.2)	01/04/2009
8	ensure that all children (except those placed under Regulation 38) are placed with carers who have an up to date Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure and are visited as stated in the Regulation (Regulation 34 and 35)	15/02/2009
6	ensure that any holiday accommodation used for prolonged use is suitable (Regulation 35 .1).	01/04/2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that risk assessments are robust and include all pertinent matters

- including practical risk management strategies for carers (NMS 9.7)
- establish and implement an effective monitoring process for the fostering service (4.1)
- ensure that the relationship between carers and staff are clear with a focus on safeguarding (NMS 22.3).