

# St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC056246
<b>Inspection date</b>	02/06/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham / Monica Hargreaves
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Atlas House, Corporation Street, St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 1LD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01744 671199
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Susan Richardson
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	21/01/2009

---

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](http://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

St Helens Social Services Fostering team are based in Atlas House, St. Helens, close to the town centre. The fostering team's function is to recruit, assess, train, supervise and support foster carers who provide care for children and young people. The team also assesses and supports private foster carers and raises awareness amongst the public and other professionals about private fostering. Short break carers provide respite placements for children with disabilities.

The service currently supports 155 approved fostering households who look after 185 children. Of these, 64 children are with family and friends carers.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The fostering service promotes the health, safety and well-being of children effectively with good and outstanding outcomes for young people. The recruitment strategy continues to address the ongoing recruitment of carers for a range of children and young people and the service has continued to grow. Children are supported to maintain healthy lifestyles and to have their health care needs met. Children and young people have access to a range of leisure facilities and are provided with a leisure pass which further encourages healthy lifestyles. Education is actively supported and promoted and this has resulted in increased attainments and access to further education. Young people say that they are consulted and able to express their wishes and views clearly. This includes involvement in their reviews and decisions made regarding their daily lives. They are also able to have their views recorded to contribute to foster carer reviews.

The recruitment of foster carers is good with an increase to the number of carers providing placements to young people. Assessments are detailed and provide analytical information to enable the panel to make appropriate recommendations following robust scrutiny to the agency decision maker. Reviews are generally held within appropriate timescales. Effective support is provided by the family placement team to foster carers and children. Foster carers receive good levels of supervision and have access to a range of training to enable them to further develop their skills and knowledge.

The fostering service has many strengths and its practice in supporting foster carers and children is good with some outstanding features. Some minor shortfalls have been identified because the agency does not: ensure that all carers are aware of the payment structure and additional allowances available; provide an appropriate format for the recording of medication; or ensure that appropriate delegation of

authority to make day-to-day decisions is in place for all carers. There is some inconsistency with regards information that young people receive regarding their foster placements and some said that it would be helpful if they had some pictures and information about the family prior to them arriving at the home whilst other young people said that this information was provided to them. Approval for foster carers is clearly identified although when there is a change of approval this is not always completed in a timely manner.

The organisation and management of the service is good and senior managers are aware of the strengths and shortfalls within the service. Proactive plans are in place to address the shortfalls identified and the fostering service has a clear development plan in place.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the previous inspection there were eight shortfalls identified. These have been addressed by the service. However, due to the updated Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, two of these shortfalls no longer apply. All children and young people have updated health care plans in place and these move with young people whenever there is a change of placement. Written references for staff are followed up by a telephone call to confirm the reference. All panel members have appropriate Criminal Record Bureau checks in place prior to commencement of panel duties. The children's guide is in a range of formats to provide information to children receiving a service. Foster carers receive regular supervision from appropriately qualified social workers and have access to adequate social work support. The fostering service administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the service as required by The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The health care needs of the children and young people are effectively identified, supported and met. Foster carers are provided with appropriate health care information regarding children and young people placed. There is good consultation with the looked after children nurse and health care assessments are undertaken at an early stage of admission to the service. Annual health care assessments are completed to ensure that health information for each child and young person is current. All young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician and where additional health care support is required, for example by the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, appropriate referrals are made. Foster carers receive training on first aid as well as health and safety and young people spoken to or who responded to surveys said that they felt that their carers looked after them well. One young person said, 'when I had an operation my carer stayed with me in hospital and really looked after me well when I got home'. Another young person said, 'my carer is really kind and looks after me if I am sick or not feeling very well'. Foster carers are aware of the importance of maintaining records of health care appointments, illnesses or accidents as well as when medication is administered.

However, there is some inconsistency in the format used for the recording of medication administered. The fostering service is aware of this and are developing a robust procedure to ensure consistency of practice.

Children and young people are supported to lead healthy lifestyles including diet and nutrition and exercise. Carers support the young people to access a range of leisure and recreational activities to promote healthy lifestyles. The young people have also been involved in the designing and development of a healthy meals cook book for use by carers and young people to promote healthy eating. Menu plans include a range of recipes from other cultures. Children and young people say that they enjoy their meals and are encouraged to eat healthily.

All carers have safe care policies in place and annual health and safety checks are completed to ensure that the children and young people are supported to live in a healthy and safe environment.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people are effectively safeguarded. All foster carers are aware of their role and responsibility in supporting and safeguarding young people. Foster carers receive training both within initial skills to foster and specific safeguarding training. Young people report that they feel safe. One young person said, 'I feel safe and happy here because my foster carers are always by my side and are super supportive'.

All foster carers have safe caring policies that are individual to the family and the children and young people that they support. These are discussed with the supervising social worker and the young people. They are reviewed on an annual basis or more often if there is a change in the household or needs of the young person. This ensures that the safety and well-being of young people is effectively promoted.

There is a policy and procedure in place if young people go missing from care. Foster carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they are confident in following them in the event of this happening.

Foster carers are aware of the procedure for the reporting of any significant events. Information is provided as part of the safeguarding training and also discussed with carers by their supervising social workers. There are robust systems in place for the monitoring of these by the management of the service and this ensures that any areas of concern are addressed promptly to promote the welfare and safety of children and young people.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are provided with support to access a range of leisure facilities. This includes leisure passes to enable them to use the local leisure centres. Children also say that they have lots of other opportunities for leisure activities, for example, going to the cinema, football matches and concerts. This is valued greatly by the young people and a number of young people said in their questionnaires that they were treated like one of the family and given lots of opportunities to try new things.

There is a policy and procedure in place enabling delegated authority for foster carers to make timely day-to-day decisions such as agreements for school trips with an appropriate format in place. However, a small number of carers were unaware of this which could impact on the ability to make these decisions in a timely manner. Carers did say that they did not have any difficulty in getting authority from the service and felt that it did not impact on the children and young people but felt that it would be better if they held this authority.

The fostering service effectively promotes the educational needs of young people. Carers are provided with clear guidance in the promotion of education and effectively support young people with homework, school attendance and educational reviews. The development of the child friendly personal education plans has further enabled young people to be fully involved in their education. The service also supports young people with additional tuition to enable them to achieve their full potential. One young person said, 'I get helped everyday in school and when I get stuck on anything everybody is there to help me'. School attendance is closely monitored and action taken to address any issues that arise. Educational attainment for children and young people continues to rise and support is provided to young people to gain placements in further education, including university.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The views of young people are actively sought through various mediums children's groups and advocacy services. Children and young people say that they are listened to and their views are sought. For example one young person said, 'I feel that I can discuss anything with my carers and they will listen to me and help me'. Another young person said, 'I can talk to my carers and they listen to me and help me to make decisions by giving me lots of information.' The development of a 'Children in Care Council' has been supported by the appointment of a young person's consultation officer. This has enabled a wide range of children and young people to give their views on how this should be developed and run. These consultation events were held with children of different ages and used a range of communication methods to ensure that all children and young people were able to contribute their views.

Children and young people know how to complain. Information is provided in a number of age-appropriate formats. This ensures that the information about how to complain is accessible to children and young people. One young person said, 'I will sit and discuss things with my carers and also teachers and social workers, it depends what I am unhappy about but I know that I will get the support'.

Contact is effectively supported. The service has a dedicated contact support team who provide appropriate support with supervised contact and arrangements to get to and from contact. Contact arrangements are known to foster carers and they also support contact effectively for young people. Young people said that they knew what their contact arrangements were and that they felt that they received good levels of support to maintain contact with family and friends.

Wherever possible, young people are provided with information about their placements. Over the past year the service has worked with foster carers to develop information booklets to provide to children and young people with information about themselves. However, some children and young people who have been placed for some time say that this was not consistently available to them and they would have appreciated this information. All carers providing a short break support give this information to children and young people prior to placement.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has excellent links with the leaving care team and this ensures that young people receive the support, advice and guidance they need in preparation for adulthood. All have up-to-date pathway plans that are kept under review and reflect the current needs of the young people who are actively involved in the development and review of these. Young people from the age of 14 to 25 years are supported by a dedicated young person's team that consists of leaving care workers, Connexions, housing and health workers.

Young people say that they are consulted with on a regular basis in preparing for moving on. One young person said, 'the help and support that I have received from my carer has been excellent, I didn't know that I had all these opportunities. I am really looking forward to my future'. Another young person said, 'my carer has helped me to learn how to cook and budget my money well'.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The service has a comprehensive recruitment strategy in place and is continuing to recruit carers in accordance with this. Foster carers said that they were impressed with the timely response to their initial enquiry and felt that this demonstrated that they were valued from the onset. One foster carer said; 'I had been thinking about



fostering for some time, and when I did contact a number of services I was impressed with the way I was treated and the response timescale.' Robust recruitment procedures are in place and this ensures that all appropriate checks, assessments and references are undertaken and appropriately ratified.

There is an effective panel that is purposefully chaired. Members of the panel consist of a range of professional and experienced independent members. This ensures effective scrutiny of assessments and reviews. Information is detailed which enables well-balanced recommendations to be made to the agency decision maker. Recruitment to the central list of members is ongoing to ensure that a diverse range of experience, expertise and those that have received social care services are included in the membership. The development of the central list is currently ongoing.

The service undertakes effective matching of children and young people with carers and this helps to ensure placement stability. However, there was a shortfall identified when a placement was made without a change of approval granted. This change of approval was presented at the panel during the inspection. Young people who responded to surveys and who spoke with inspectors were very positive about their placements. Comments included, 'I am really happy living here and don't want to live anywhere else' and, 'I am a member of this family now and never want to leave'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service works closely with children, young people and carers to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and systems are in place to ensure that these needs are effectively met. The short break service has further developed and provides services for children and young people with complex needs. Parents say that they feel the service is positive and effectively supports the young people during their stay. The short break carers are very positive about the support that they receive from the service.

The Statement of Purpose provides a clear outline of the aims and objectives of the service and complies with regulations and guidance. It is available to carers and is on the website. It is updated annually or more often if required. The children's guide is available in a range of formats which enable children and young people to have an understanding of the service. Welcome packs are provided to young people that are age appropriate and young people say that this makes them feel welcomed.

The manager of the service is suitably qualified, experienced and knowledgeable and undertakes effective monitoring of the service. The local authority is committed to further developing the fostering service and numbers of foster carers providing services to children and young people have continued to increase since the last inspection. Senior managers are very well aware of the strengths and areas of development for the service and a clear development plan demonstrates direction, prediction and priorities for the future.

Recruitment of staff to the service is robust and there is excellent retention of staff to the service. This provides stability in the support provided to carers. This is clearly valued by the carers and reflected within their comments and views of the service.

Carers receive supervision on a regular basis and report that this is very positive and supportive. Supervisions are detailed and reflect all aspects of the foster carer role. This includes training for carers and some carers have completed the Children's Workforce Development Council training for foster carers. There is a core programme of mandatory training, including safeguarding and first aid, that all carers undertake. In addition training is offered over the course of the year and is also provided within foster carer group meetings. Carers find this training very positive because this enables them to reflect on their skills and practice in supporting children and young people.

Carers say that they receive their payments in a timely manner and when there are any issues with their payment these are resolved promptly. However, some carers say that there is confusion regarding additional payments, for example travel allowance and they have received conflicting information. Carers have requested clarity regarding this.

The fostering service is situated within the Children and Young People's services for the local authority within a purpose built building. This ensures that there is effective communication between the family placement team and the social work teams. Staff feel that this promotes positive working practices which in turn impact on the care and support provided to the young people. Records are stored securely and the fostering service is in the process of transferring records onto the dedicated data base. Foster carers are aware of the importance of ensuring that all information provided to them relating to the children and young people is securely stored and this is checked by supervising social workers.

Parents, children and foster carers report that this is a good fostering service. Comments include, 'I have really seen a dramatic change in my child's behaviour and the support provided to them is excellent'.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

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

- ensure that there is a consistent written record of all prescribed medication administered (NMS 6.11)
- ensure that the written policy for payments to carers is clear and transparent, provides carers with criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowances and fees paid (NMS 28.5)
- ensure that, other than in an emergency, a child must only be placed with foster carers whose terms of approval match the child's circumstances (The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services 3.3)
- ensure that, unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, all children are

given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonable request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding (NMS 11.3)

- ensure that, except where there are particular identified factors which dictate to the contrary, foster carers are given delegated authority to make day-to-day decisions regarding health, education and leisure (The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services 3.10)
- maintain a list of persons who are considered to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ('the central list'), including one or more social worker who has at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience. (Regulation 23 (1))