

# Wokingham Borough Council Central Placements Team

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 Central Placements and Fostering Service provides substitute family care to meet the needs of Wokingham children and young people who are unable to live within their families of origin on a temporary, short term, respite or longer-term basis. This team takes the lead on finding placements and all short-term fostering including kinship care, the short-break scheme for disabled children and supported lodgings. The Adoption and Permanency Service have responsibility for private fostering and support to long-term carers as well as family finding for all young people under 15 years and Special Guardianship.

At the time of this inspection the number of children placed by the service is 15 and there are 23 foster carers. The fostering service is currently commissioning foster placements for a further 18 children from a range of external fostering agencies.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Since the last inspection there have been substantial changes which are still ongoing. There have been changes to the team structures, staff and management and the service is shortly to move to a different office location. The service has struggled to ensure a consistent service to foster carers and young people through this period of change.

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

At the last inspection the fostering service were asked to write safe caring guidelines for each foster home, to carry out further work with foster carers regarding policies concerning allegations, ensure that there are procedures in place for the commissioning and monitoring of placements made with independent fostering agencies and to review the management and staffing of the team to ensure that they meet the needs of the service.

Safer caring guidelines are now in place for each foster home and leaflets have been sent to foster carers clarifying the procedures when an allegation takes place. Work has started to ensure that contracts are drawn up with independent fostering providers and this work will continue and extend to include the monitoring of these arrangements. There has been a review of the fostering service which has resulted in fundamental changes to the structure and functions of the teams. There is more senior management support and a clear strategy in place to recruit more carers. These changes are ongoing and have not yet been concluded.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Information regarding the health care needs of the young people is included in the foster placement agreement which is completed at the start of a new placement. Foster carers are clear about their role in ensuring that routine medical appointments are made and recorded. Details regarding medical consent are not always clearly documented and available to foster carers. This can cause delays in obtaining prompt medical treatment for young people.

Foster carers and young people are positive about the involvement of the clinical psychologist who works directly with a number of young people. There is a good relationship with the CAMHS (Community Adolescent Mental Health Services) team. There has been an ongoing course looking at attachment facilitated by the CAMHS team which has been well received by foster carers. Further training on health issues is planned for the forthcoming year including first aid training specifically designed for foster carers taking place in January 2008.

There is a dedicated nurse for Looked After Children who is actively involved in promoting health and who is well known to foster carers and young people. There is a walk-in clinic for advice regarding sexual health and substance misuse.

The service has plans for the forthcoming year which include the introduction of health passports for young people and subsidised leisure centre membership for young people in foster placements and foster carers.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

No new permanent staff have been recruited by the fostering service since the last inspection. The personnel files were seen two years ago and contained the required information.

The homes of foster carers are warm, comfortable and suitable for the children who are living there. A comprehensive health and safety checklist is completed as part of the approval process and annually thereafter. The same member of staff carries out all the health and safety checks which ensures a good level of consistency. Some have been overdue this last year but all are now booked to take place.

Matching continues to be a difficult area for this fostering service due to the low number of foster carers available and the lack of foster carers approved to take teenagers. Some short-term placements have been made which do not evidence that good matching has taken place. The foster placement agreement has space to record

matching considerations and to identify any gaps and how they will be filled. There is very little information regarding matching recorded on these forms, even when a trans-racial placement is made.

There are discussions with foster carers regarding safe caring but guidelines have not been routinely written as part of the assessment process. This has caused delays in drawing up these documents which can put young people and foster carers at risk. However, all the safe caring guidelines have been completed and are now on file. The system is changing and with competency based assessments, safe caring guidelines are part of the paperwork that will go to the fostering panel for consideration with all the other paperwork, when approving foster carers. Risk assessments are completed regarding individual placements made but do not always include issues around safe care. This is an area which has been identified for improvement in developing more individualised safe caring policies and dovetailing risk assessments with those undertaken by the children's social workers.

Allegations made against foster carers are recorded in a file of 'critical incidents'. There have been improvements made in the recording of incidents on a standardised form but on some the date and a signature are missing. Foster carers have been sent leaflets regarding allegations and are clearer about procedures.

The fostering panel continues to meet monthly. There have been a number of changes to panel membership in the past year and future changes are planned. Training took place in November 2006 and further training is planned for Spring 2008 when new members are in place.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service makes few placements that are trans-racial or cross-cultural. However, some do take place and there is little information in the foster placement agreement to indicate how the gaps in the placement are met and how culture and racial needs are promoted.

All the young people in foster care have a Personal Educational Plan and foster carers attend meetings, including parents evenings, if appropriate, at school. Educational issues are always discussed and recorded at the regular visits from the foster carers linkworker. There is a Looked After Children teacher in post who provides individual learning and educational achievements are monitored by the educational psychology service. Funding is available for computers although this is not always straightforward. One young person in a foster placement had been refused a laptop to help him with his studies.

There is a short-break scheme aimed at children with a disability and which is managed within a different team. There continues to be one part-time worker who manages the scheme and discussions are ongoing about how the scheme fits within the Central Placements Team.

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

The provision is good.

The children in foster placements are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts. Foster carers say that the arrangements for contact are working well and are included in the foster placement agreements. Details of contact are discussed and recorded at linkworker visits.

Wokingham has a Children's Rights Service which offers advice, information, support and advocacy to any young person Looked After by Wokingham District Council. Two participation groups take place on a regular basis and a separate corporate parenting children's group is being established. During the last year, the children's groups have been involved in devising the questionnaire to be completed by young people in placement at foster carers annual reviews. Further work is planned reviewing the children's guide to fostering.

The young people in foster care feel listened to by their foster carers and they know how to complain. Achievement books are being introduced which aim to promote the positive achievements of young people in foster placements.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

There are no key standards in this area.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The fostering service has a Statement of Purpose which is updated on an annual basis. The children's guide is currently being reviewed by one of the consultation groups of young people in care. The foster carers handbook and other documentation such as foster care agreements refer to CSCI, rather than Ofsted.

There have continued to be significant changes to the structure, operation and staffing of the fostering service. The family placement team has been redesigned to separate long term and permanent placements from short term and placement finding. The Central Placements and Fostering Service is responsible for short term fostering placements including short-breaks for disabled children and the supported lodgings scheme whilst the Adoption and Permanency Service holds responsibility for family finding, private fostering, support to long-term foster carers, Special Guardianship and permanent kinship care arrangements. The manager of the fostering service left in August 2007 and a replacement manager of the Central Placements and Fostering Service has not been recruited. An interim part-time manager is in post. There is further instability to the management structures as both

the Head of Corporate Parenting, who at present is line managing the interim manager, is a temporary appointment, as is the Head of Specialist Services. Whilst it is evident that senior managers are taking a more active role in overseeing the fostering service, there is still more work to be undertaken to complete all the changes taking place.

The staff team are much depleted in the Central Placements and Fostering Service with two experienced members of staff leaving as well as the manager. Two new staff have been appointed to replace them but both are temporary staff. There is limited diversity within the staff team in terms of race or gender.

Wokingham has recognised that the fostering service does not have a sufficient number of foster carers, especially those approved to take teenagers, to meet the number and needs of the young people requiring a placement. In the year ending March 2007, five new foster carers were approved, but eight foster carers were lost due to retirement or resignation or other factors. In order to increase the number of foster carers, an independent agency has been engaged to carry out assessments.

There continues to be a high use of independent fostering placements. There has been work carried out developing a commissioning strategy with the independent sector and discussing contracts. There is still work to be undertaken in this area to ensure that individual contracts are set up and that these placements are appropriately monitored.

The changes within the fostering service has meant that some foster carers have had as many as three different linkworkers in the past year. The linkworker visits have been less regular and some foster carers have felt less well supported than in previous years. However, there are positive comments regarding the support provided by individual workers and the continuation of the telephone support line that operates during the evenings and weekends. A regular foster carers support group has been started following consultation with foster carers. There have been few training events this year due to the staff changes.

The annual reviews for foster carers are undertaken by a reviewing officer who is independent and part of a separate team. There have been delays in the reviews taking place and a number are now overdue. Reviews have been used to check whether CRB or medical checks are in need of review. Due to the delays in annual reviews taking place, some of the checks are out of date.

The foster carers files vary in the quality of the information recorded and front sheets and terms of approval are not always up to date. There are no systems in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, including foster carers files. Training profiles are not on the foster carers files. Some foster carers submit monthly reports but there is no consistency regarding expectations in recording information.

There are separate files maintained to record complaints and critical incidents which include allegations. There are not good administrative systems in place to monitor events such as the renewal of checks for foster carers, the dates of annual reviews,

or the matters to be monitored by the registered person, at present.

## 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	provide each foster carer with appropriate information regarding the arrangements for giving consent to the child's medical or dental examination or treatment (Regulation 17(3))	22/01/2008
8	ensure that the foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match (Regulation 34(3))	22/01/2008
9	review the procedures around safe caring guidelines to ensure that they are all individualised and dovetail with risk assessments undertaken by the children's social workers (Regulation 12)	22/01/2008
16	ensure that the work carried out is continued regarding the commissioning and monitoring of placements made with independent fostering providers (Regulation 40)	22/01/2008
16	review the management and staffing of the team to ensure that they meet the needs of the service (Regulation 19)	22/01/2008
21	ensure that annual reviews for foster carers take place at intervals of not more than a year (Regulation 29(2))	22/01/2007
25	ensure that administrative systems are set up to monitor events which include the matters set out in Schedule 7 (Regulation 42)	22/01/2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that the information provided by the fostering service is reviewed and is up to date (NMS 1)

- ensure there is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, including foster carers files, and remedial action is taken when necessary (NMS 25)
- ensure that there are training profiles for each foster carer on file (NMS 24)
- ensure that foster carers are given consistent expectations regarding recording and the submitting of monthly reports (NMS 24)