

# London Borough Of Redbridge Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Paul Clark
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/02/2010

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The London Borough of Redbridge's fostering service is part of the Redbridge Children's Trust and provides placements for looked after children and young people. The service has one team which is responsible for the recruitment and training of foster carers and the support, supervision and review of approval. At the time of the inspection, there were 115 children placed with 81 in-house carers, which includes family and friends. There is a service level agreement with an independent fostering agency to provide short breaks for disabled children.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

The large majority of children and young people who are looked after by this borough live with foster carers and benefit from stable placements. The young people report that they generally feel safe and are looked after in accordance with their individual care plans. Foster carers receive regular and appropriate training and supervision. Staff recruitment and vetting are thorough and the performance and delivery of the service is monitored; there are action plans in place.

There are some significant shortfalls in connection with the completion of assessments of foster carers within prescribed timescales, the numbers of carers who have completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, the availability of the children's guide in varying formats and the attendance of children at their care plan review meetings. The manager is aware of these shortfalls and plans are in place to further develop the service.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that all carers are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (NMS 20.2)
- ensure that the children's guide is available, where appropriate through suitable alternative methods of communication (NMS 16.6)
- ensure that the fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer's application to be assessed (NMS 14.4)
- ensure that children communicate their views on aspects of their care and support by attending review meetings. (NMS 1.3)

### Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **adequate**.

The large majority of children and young people who are looked after in Redbridge live with foster carers (83%) and benefit from stable placements. Although there are various arrangements in place to consult children about their care and their wishes and feelings, there have been several instances where children aged between six to eight have been excluded from review meetings. Children say they have support from their carers or there is a participation worker with whom they can share their views.

Most children and young people say they are comfortable in their foster homes and are treated as part of their fostering family. Children say they have the information they need about their foster carers, although not all knew a great deal at the initial time they were placed. The service does not currently encourage carers to construct written personal profiles which could help children in making decisions about choice of placement.

The borough has a service level agreement with an agency to provide a short-breaks service for children who have disabilities. There are also a number of mainstream fostering households who are skilled in caring for children with disabilities, thus ensuring that disabled children who are fostered have a good level of care.

Children and young people are supported by carers who have a sound knowledge of their background. Information relating to the care history of children who access the service is comprehensive and informative, which helps young people to have a good knowledge of their history and develop a sense of identity. Foster carers and social workers have been trained in undertaking life story work, which also helps children to have an understanding of their background.

The vast majority of children are placed with their siblings. There are a large number of households who can accommodate sibling groups of at least three children, and all of these are currently caring for these larger sibling groups. Keeping sibling groups

together helps children to have effective family links and a sense of identity.

Children say that they are supported in maintaining contact with their birth relatives, and carers assist with transporting them to contact meetings. This helps to ensure that children maintain family links and keep in touch with their backgrounds. Children say that they experience a wide range of activities and holidays in their foster placements. Several young people spoken to were members of social or sporting clubs. This helps children to integrate into their local community and improves their self-confidence. There is a Child in Care council and young people who belonged to this group said that they were consulted by social workers regularly. This gives children a forum for raising any concerns about things that are worrying them. In order to ensure children and young people enjoy stable placements, foster carers show consideration and awareness of the religious and cultural beliefs of the young people in their care. This helps children to feel that cultural differences are respected.

Most children and young people are generally healthy. In order to meet children's health needs, carers are able to access for children placed with them a wide range of relevant services provided by a consultant paediatrician and a looked after children's (LAC) nurse. The paediatrician will carry out a medical check on all children under five and a General Practitioner will check older children when they become looked after. The LAC nurse will conduct medicals for placement reviews. There are effective campaigns taking place focusing on smoking cessation, drug and alcohol use, sexual health and healthy lifestyle programmes which help to promote children's physical and psychological health.

Children are well supported in making educational progress. The large majority of fostered children attend school or college. The headteacher of the virtual school measures children and young people's educational progress. Data demonstrates that young people cared for by Redbridge's fostering service have much better educational achievement than the national average for looked after children. Personal education plans are in place for each looked after child and these plans are appropriately reviewed. Older children and young people are being prepared for independence through a skills programme based on everyday living. The headteacher of the virtual school ensures that pathway plans are in place and are appropriately reviewed.

### **Quality of service**

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

The service recruits carers who meet the needs of looked after children. The levels of supervision that carers report indicates that it is regular and appropriate, as is the training and supervision that they receive. Carers are provided with free membership of an organisation that gives them personal advice and guidance about fostering which enhances their fostering task. The service actively recruits carers from minority ethnic communities and these carers adequately reflect the composition of the borough's looked after child population. This ensures that children are placed in

homes which reflect their birth culture.

The assessment and preparation process for carers is thorough and informative and several carers commented that this was of benefit later when they were approved to care for children. However, some reported that the assessment process took a long time. Some applications presented to the fostering panel have taken longer than eight months to be assessed. These delays prevent available carers being able to meet the need to care for children. Foster carers' assessments are of a reasonable quality. The fostering panel have clear policies and procedures and a central list of members in accordance with regulations. Minutes of panel meetings record details of discussions of issues raised by panel members. Some carers' assessments have been returned with requests for more information as some of the reports lacked analysis.

Foster carers have access to a range of health and education services and the headteacher of the virtual school. This helps to meet looked after children and young people's needs. Family and friends carers are assessed appropriately and receive support from social workers within the service. Only a small minority of approved foster carers have completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards in foster care. Carers feel they are well supported by supervising social workers although they felt that the out-of-hours duty service provided by the borough did not provide them with active support.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Looked after children and young people commented that they felt safe and that they know how to complain and how to talk to people to express any concerns regarding their care. Children can access an independent advocacy service. The service has a designated Children's Rights Officer to whom looked after children may raise concerns or complaints and who will follow up any concerns about children who report that they are being bullied because of their being fostered. Complaints are investigated and responded to generally within timescales. Foster carers' training as part of their recruitment includes a focus on safeguarding, safe caring and current child protection practice; this is refreshed over time and takes place before and after approval. Foster carers also receive training in the effects of attachment and loss and birth trauma on children. This ensures that carers have a clear understanding of safeguarding and that they demonstrate an awareness of current practice and the impact of abuse on a child's development. Looked after children and fostering team social workers say that the numbers of allegations of abuse and neglect raised by young people against foster carers is low, these are dealt with effectively and children and carers are well supported by the process of enquiry. A clear process for dealing with allegations ensures that they are handled in a manner that is in the best interests of looked after children and foster carers.

In order to check that the care of young people is safe, unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place more than once a year and there is a system to record this. Children are always seen alone by placing social workers and asked if they feel safe

in placement. Concerns about foster carers' care practice which is identified by supervising social workers is shared with management and this can result in the reconsideration of carers' approval. Staff and carers' recruitment and vetting are thorough and organised to ensure that staff appointed and carers approved are vetted correctly and are aware of their responsibilities to keep looked after children safe.

Foster carers were aware of their responsibilities to report children missing from their care and there are procedures in place to be followed should this occur. The manager of the service states there is a collaborative relationship with the police in place and that they take seriously the safety of looked after children who go missing. There were mixed views reported from carers regarding the varying response times of the emergency out-of-hours duty service and this may have a negative impact on the care that fostered children receive.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the local authority fostering agency are **adequate**.

The performance and delivery of the fostering service are monitored and reported upon every three months, thus ensuring that the level of care that fostered children receive is constantly being monitored. There are also action plans in place which identify areas for development. There is some evidence that children and young people are involved in this process, which ensures that their voices are heard in order to develop the service and to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes.

In order to help to make sure looked after children's needs are known and practice is professionally applied, social work staff in the fostering service are appointed with relevant child protection knowledge, experience, qualifications and registration. There is evidence of an induction process for new staff and regular appraisals take place at least annually. Monthly staff supervision takes place and there are fortnightly team meetings. This ensures that children receive good quality care from carers whose work is supervised by skilled professionals.

Foster carers mostly say that feel part of a professional team in working with and helping children and young people. Support group meetings and ongoing training and information events are available for foster carers and this further ensures that children are cared for by an informed and professional service.

Managers of the service have developed a working relationship with other agencies including the police, education and health to ensure a joint approach when assessing and meeting looked after children's needs.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guides are now clearly written, frequently reviewed and describe the service aims and objectives. The children's guide is not available in the different formats that would make it more accessible and inclusive for children below reading age, or who have a reading difficulty for whatever reason.

There were eight recommendations made at the last inspection which have all been addressed. This has resulted in a positive improvement in the service for young people who are fostered. As part of this inspection and in order to further improve the service for children and young people, there are four further recommendations identified.



## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for local authority fostering agencies.