

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Services

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC043213
Inspection date	20/03/2013
Inspector	Sue Winson / Lynn O'Driscoll
Type of inspection	Full

Setting address	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Council Offices, Wellington Road, ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE, Lancashire, OL6 6DL
Telephone number	0161 368 8865
Email	
Registered person	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered manager	Joyce Bunting
Responsible individual	Anthony Griffin
Date of last inspection	11/12/2009

© Crown copyright 2013

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.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council has a dedicated family placement service, which is managed by the unit business manager for looked after children. Their main purpose is to provide a diverse range of carers to cater for the needs of looked after children in Tameside and, in partnership with other sectors, to ensure the best outcomes for the young people.

The team recruits, assesses, supervises and supports foster carers and is responsible for ensuring that their training needs are met. Services offered by the team include emergency placements, task centred placements, long term or permanent carers and respite care placements. The service is also responsible for kinship carers, and works with the disability team for respite placements for children with disabilities.

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 fostering services provides children with a quality of care which promotes improved outcomes. Unplanned placement changes are minimised as far as possible. A large majority of children looked after are placed with foster carers or connected people, near to their home areas. Placement choice for children is increasing as the service implements their recruitment strategy.

Most children and young people have positive views about the quality of their foster placements and their relationships with their carers. They gain from effective partnership working between parents and a range of professionals, which also provides them with consistency of care. They make positive progress from their starting point, in many areas of their lives.

Foster carer assessments and training cover the required areas and equip them to meet individual needs. Family and friends carers receive support, supervision and training in line with all foster carers. Similarly, family link carers who provide a service to children with disabilities, have the same support and training, with

additions to meet the complex needs of children in their care.

Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service, have development plans in place and a capacity for improvement. Recommendations have been made in respect of areas which need further or continued development. None of these have been found to impact negatively on the welfare or safety of the children and young people.

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 there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service, and specifically any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service (NMS 25.1)
- ensure that the foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children (NMS 10.5)
- ensure written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing detail action taken by the foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the foster home and any action taken in the light of those reasons (NMS 5.10)
- ensure there is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers (NMS 21.3)
- ensure the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of the fostering panel, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities, and that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references.(NMS 19.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children and young people, including those with disabilities, have the opportunities to live with foster carers where this is the placement of choice and is the best option for each individual child. Placement choice is augmented by the use of Independent Fostering Agencies. This ensures that most children are placed close to their families and schools, where this is appropriate and safe. Rarely are siblings separated, and where this happens they continue to have contact. Most children experience placement stability. Children receiving short breaks are secure in their time away from home. The multi-link provision ensures that those children with complex needs have the same opportunities to have short breaks with carers who are able, trained

and competent to meet their needs.

Children and young people are actively supported and enabled to share their wishes, views and feelings, irrespective of how they communicate. They participate in day to day decisions in their foster homes and say they are listened to. Some have been active in arranging their own statutory reviews, in formats chosen by them. There is an active Children in Care Council in the authority and young people meet with council members and senior managers on a regular basis. They are involved in training and recruitment of staff and have a strong role in the development of services. For example in developing a child-friendly website for children, and requesting funding to raise young people's awareness of child sexual exploitation.

Children and young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are met in foster care. They understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and avoiding risk taking behaviours. Those young people who are pregnant have specialist services available to support them. Examples were seen where young people gain in confidence and self-view. Services are available to assist them to make attachments. All have photographs and mementos to take with them when they leave. They are supported to maintain contact with family and friends, and examples were given where young people (at their request) had re-established contact with family members.

Good levels of attendance at schools and colleges ensures children and young people make progress in their learning and achieve well. Their achievements are celebrated and many have made considerable progress from their starting points. They have high aspirations for their futures and are supported at times of change to ensure transitions are as smooth as possible. A very small number of young people are persistently absent, and they are well monitored to ensure they receive the support they need. Young people gave examples where they have attained apprenticeships with the local authority and have been supported to find college courses that they enjoy. In addition they can remain with their foster carers and receive financial support when in higher or further education.

Engagement in a wide range of leisure activities supports young people's development and social skills, according to individual wishes and aptitudes. They have opportunities to broaden their outlook and enjoy events such as holidays, outings and overnight stays with friends. Young people gain practical and life skills to prepare them for independence and leaving care. They are well supported by the leaving care team and foster carers when they are ready to move on.

Quality of service

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

The fostering service has clear recruitment strategies and are aware of where they need to focus their recruitment. They have recently made progress in targeting recruitment to widen the diversity of their foster carer pool, in order to meet the needs of children being referred. There is positive use of independent fostering

agencies, and decisions about long term care of young people are based on the needs of the child.

The preparation and assessment of foster carers largely equips them to meet the needs of looked after children. Experienced foster carers and young people in care are involved in preparation training, which ensures that applicants understand the complexity of the role. Assessments address their competence and the quality of these is improving, with a better focus and analysis on how people can meet children's and young people's needs. On a very small number of occasions new partners have not been fully assessed and trained, in a timely manner. However, there has been no negative impact on the care of children placed and the service has recently identified and acted on the deficit.

The fostering panel makes timely, appropriate and child-centred recommendations. The chair and members have a wide range of skills which ensures that safe, secure and stable placements are promoted, which are in children's best interests. The chair was described as, 'Well informed, well organised and very inclusive,' by a panel member. Minutes demonstrate considered discussions, and record the reasons for recommendations made. There is no consistent system for recording how panel recommendations have been addressed by the fostering service. The agency decision maker makes timely and robust decisions.

Foster carers were mainly positive about the quality and range of training they receive, and how well it equips them to meet children's needs. There has been improvement in the range and methods of training, due to increased involvement of the training co-ordinator with the fostering team. For example, e-learning is now available. This has led to a better take up of training, amongst all foster carers, and notably amongst family and friends carers. Dedicated family and friends workers in the team have also been effective in this development, which has resulted in children's care being enhanced. All foster carers have a named supervising social worker and visits are carried out at regular frequencies. Not all records of these visits focus on the progress children and young people are making. However, statutory review reports and minutes show that they are making good progress.

Placing social workers and independent reviewing officers were positive about the care that children and young people receive. They described foster carers as dedicated and innovative and gave examples where they had advocated effectively on the behalf of children in their care. Foster carers have access to support groups which provide a forum for training and information sharing. Some foster carers expressed dissatisfaction with the support available out of hours, and said they experienced long delays before getting a response. This has included occasions of crisis and when young people were missing from care. There were no examples given where this has compromised the safety of children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people feel safe in their foster homes, and parents and placing social workers expressed confidence in foster carer's abilities to protect them. They know how to complain and have people they can talk to both within and outside of the fostering service, including children's rights officers. Foster carers know what to do when young people go missing, and there have been occasions when multi-agency meetings have taken place to consider how they can be better safeguarded. Records do not include actions taken when children go missing, or following their return.

The service cannot demonstrate that consideration is routinely given to updating safe caring assessments to consider the individual vulnerabilities of children and young people placed. Nor is there routine monitoring of bullying incidents. Visits are carried out annually to inspect foster homes without appointment. The visits are done by the family group conference co-ordinators and reports are brief. The focus is on the safety of the home, rather than how the foster home continues to meet the needs of children. Examples were given where additional unannounced visits had been carried out by supervising social workers during evenings and weekends where there have been concerns about the care of children.

The fostering service addresses complaints, allegations and concerns in a way which protects children and young people. Separate panel meetings scrutinise the information and make recommendations following investigations, for example, increased training to foster carers. However, the service does not always demonstrate that follow up actions have been taken.

The service does not fully consider suitability to work with children in regard to people on the central list of panel members. There is no evidence that interviews or telephone conversations to verify references have been undertaken. The people concerned do not have direct contact with children and young people.

Leadership and management

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

The service is well managed in some respects. The managers and staff are appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled. Staff say they are effectively supported and supervised. Their caseloads are manageable and priorities are identified and catered for. Administrative staff are very much part of the team and provide effective support which is valued. Managers are available and approachable to them all. All staff are positive about their training and annual appraisals which identify their development needs.

A minority of foster carers, seen and surveyed, do not feel that they are part of the team working with children and young people. Others were positive and felt that their views are listened to. They are clear about delegated authority and value being able to make appropriate decisions, so that young people do not feel different to their peers. The foster carer charter has yet to be finalised, in consultation with

them.

There are some sound plans to move the service forward, with a view to improving outcomes for children. These are not documented in a manner which allows for rigorous monitoring of progress and timescales. Generally, monitoring lacks evaluation and analysis, for example quarterly reports detail process only. Nor do they demonstrate that lessons have been learned from complaints and allegations. Effective corporate parenting is evident with council members meeting with the children in care council regularly and receiving reports from the fostering service. There is a commitment to improving services to children looked after.

The majority of recommendations at the last inspection have been fully addressed. Timescales for family and friends assessments and visits to children are undertaken within regulatory timescales. Children are placed with foster carers where the terms of approval are consistent with the proposed placement and foster care agreements are in place. Written records are made with the reasons for recommendations made at fostering panel. Each foster carer has a named supervisory social worker and they are trained in health and hygiene issues and first aid. Whilst some progress has been made, the recommendation regarding monitoring the activities of the fostering service has been repeated.

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 the inspection of local authority fostering agencies.