



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wokingham District Council Fostering Services

**PO Box 154
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1WN**

Lead Inspector
Lucy Martin

Announced Inspection
20 - 24th November 2006 9:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained 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

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Wokingham District Council Fostering Services
Address	PO Box 154 Shute End Wokingham RG40 1WN
Telephone number	0118 974 6750
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Wokingham District Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 14th November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Wokingham District Fostering Services provide 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 basis or longer term basis. The service also supports children within their families of origin when this can be achieved by regular periods of family-based care. To this end the service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers.

It is a Family Placement Team which means that most workers undertake both adoption and fostering tasks. There are two Managers - one leads on fostering and the other on adoption. The Managers report to one of two Children's Services Managers.

At the end of October 2006 there were 65 children and young people in the care system. Of these 21 were placed with carers approved by Wokingham District Council and 23 within independent fostering providers. Wokingham has approximately 30 foster carers.

As this fostering service is a Local Authority there are no fees charged for placements.

SUMMARY

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

Before the inspection questionnaires were sent to all children over 7 years of age in foster care, to parents, foster carers and the placing social workers. The Manager supplied pre-inspection information and sent the inspector key documentation.

The inspection took place over five days and the inspector met with:

- The Team Manager, Children's Rights Officer, Independent Reviewing Officer, Safeguarding Manager, Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Manager and the Joint Head of Targeted Services
- Those Family Placement Team members who attended a team meeting and four workers individually.
- A worker from the Short-Break Scheme.
- Three foster households and two of the foster children in their homes.
- A group of foster carers.

Samples of case records and policies and procedures were looked at. Feedback was given to the Team Manager at the end of the inspection. No Senior Manager was available to attend.

What the service does well:

The timing of this inspection coincided with the restructuring of Children's Services and it was not known where fostering will fit into the new structure. This was a difficult and unsettling time for all staff and it is to their credit that they managed the inspection so well.

Foster carers continue to feel well supported and were complimentary about individual workers. The telephone support line staffed by members of the Family Placement Team during the evening and weekends has been a good development and carers feel reassured by knowing that it is available if needed.

The annual reviewing process for foster carers works well and it also includes short-break carers, kinship carers and supported lodgings carers. Contributions to the review are given from all parties including the fostered young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

There has been little development this year due to the restructuring of Children's Services and to the shortage of staff within the Family Placement Team. Areas that have improved include the additional support provided to carers from a Clinical Psychologist attached to the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. Individual and group sessions have been provided to foster carers and it is hoped that the role will be extended in the next year.

Competency schedules have been introduced for foster carers and provide a standardised and objective measurement of the skills and abilities of the carers.

Work has been undertaken by the Reviewing Officer in consulting with young people in foster care about how to gain and use their feedback in foster carers reviews. This will form the basis of a future questionnaire to pilot.

What they could do better:

The fostering service does not have sufficient staff to develop the service or sufficient foster carers, especially those approved to take teenagers. As a result, there is a number of placements made with independent fostering providers. There is no formal process of commissioning or monitoring these placements at present and this is a serious shortfall.

The overall management arrangements need to be reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the service and that decisions are made about the development of the service.

There is still a need to ensure that all foster carers have written safe caring guidelines in place and to clarify what foster carers should expect if an allegation against them or their family is made.

Further training is recommended with the Fostering Panel to ensure efficient and effective good working practices and the foster carers files should contain a list of training courses attended. Records of allegations and complaints should be maintained up to date and clear guidance given to foster carers about entitlements to respite, holidays and babysitting.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good.

The foster carers promote the health and development of children with good support from the fostering service.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Health care plans were evident in the young people's files and clear information regarding health needs were contained in the foster placement agreements. All the foster carer's spoken with were clear regarding their role in ensuring that routine medical appointments are made and recorded. They are usually involved in the annual health assessments undertaken by the Looked After Children's Nurse. There have been sessions held with the Nurse in order for foster carers to get to know her role. Foster carer's can make direct contact with the Nurse if necessary.

All foster carers are encouraged to attend relevant training on the health needs of children and there have been a number of training courses in the last year including paediatric first aid for foster carers, health and safety, sexual awareness and teenage pregnancy, drugs awareness training and drugs, sex and young people.

A new development in the last year has been the involvement of a Clinical Psychologist with foster carers and staff. She has worked directly with foster carers and young people and attends the family placement team meeting every six weeks. This has been a good development and foster carers were positive about her input and their relationship with members of staff from the Community Adolescent Mental Health Services team. A one day conference

was held in September 2006 around the issue of attachment and was attended by staff and foster carers.

Further plans are being made to introduce a training course for foster carers on parenting emotionally damaged children. It is hoped that the first group will start in January 2007 and run for 6 weeks. The group will be co-facilitated by the Clinical Psychologist and a member of staff from the Family Placement Team.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is adequate.

Overall, the fostering service has effective systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe. However, there still needs to be more written information regarding safe care and the development of risk assessments. Further training should be provided for members of the Fostering Panel.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

A sample of personnel files were viewed at the last inspection and as no new staff have been employed in the past year, no files were seen on this inspection. It was a recommendation made at the last inspection that there is clear evidence in the personnel files that CRB (Criminal Record Bureau Checks) are renewed every three years. Information was seen from HR regarding CRB checks and action had been taken to ensure that checks are renewed every three years. On this basis, the recommendation has been met.

The inspector visited the home of three foster carers. All were warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children who were living

there. A comprehensive health and safety checklist is completed as part of the approval process and annually afterwards. The form covers all areas including pet ownership, medication storage and car ownership. The same member of staff carries out all the health and safety checklists and at the last inspection it was recommended that health and safety training is provided for the member of staff undertaking these visits. This recommendation has been met.

Matching is 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. At the last inspection it was a requirement that there is written evidence to indicate the elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing a placement and identifying any gaps where foster carers need additional support. It was found that in most cases sufficient details were found in the foster placement agreement. Foster carers spoken with were clear that in most cases good matching takes place but one foster carer always asks why a child is being placed with her and the answer is sometimes because she is the only carer available. It is an inevitable consequence of having such a small pool of carers available that limited matching can take place. However, there was evidence that in most cases there was appropriate written evidence of matching and that the requirement is met. However, it was evident from the file seen of a placement made with an independent fostering provider that there was no evidence of matching in a trans-racial placement. It is acknowledged that the foster placement agreement form had not been completed by a member of the family placement team but there was no evidence of matching. Further issues regarding the use of independent fostering agencies are raised in the Management section of this report.

It was evident from talking to foster carers that issues regarding safe caring are discussed and training has taken place covering this area. It was a requirement made at the last inspection that safe caring guidelines are written for each foster home. It was clear from the files seen that not all had guidelines in place including one foster placement in which there had been concerns raised and a child protection investigation. The requirement has not been met. In addition to the safe caring guidelines there should also be risk assessments undertaken regarding individual placements made. This is not an area of work currently undertaken as a matter of course.

In the last year there have been a small number of allegations made against foster carers and members of their family. Appropriate investigations have taken place and training on allegations has been provided for foster carers. Concerns about allegations are high at present and foster carers are unsure about the support they would receive if an allegation was made. Some work has been carried out with foster carers regarding this area including a training session on allegations and new child protection procedures were introduced in November 2006 which give the process for dealing with allegations against carers. However, a number of foster carers still stated that they felt anxious

and unsure about the procedures and support if allegations are made against them. Further work needs to be carried out with carers regarding this area.

The Fostering Panel was relaunched with a new independent Chair in May 2005 and there have been a number of changes in membership of the Panel in the last year. The Panel minutes showed that there have been some difficulties in processes and decision-making. The Panel members have had training from an independent organisation and it is a recommendation that further sessions are arranged in order to ensure that the Panel runs efficiently and effectively.

New Panel members complete an application form and a CRB and references are required before taking up the post.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13, 31

Quality in this outcome area is good.

The fostering service works with a range of foster carers and children/young people with diverse needs and identities. Particular attention is paid to the needs of disabled children. Foster carers promote the educational needs of each child placed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service makes few placements that are trans-racial or cross-cultural. There are few foster carers and few young people who are black or from a dual heritage. Issues relating to identity, religion and culture are identified in the foster placements agreements. Training for foster carers in valuing diversity took place in January 2006 but only twelve foster carers attended. This should be a core area where attendance is compulsory.

There are some disabled children who are fostered and it was evident that each disabled child receives specific services and support to help them maximise their potential and to lead as full a life as possible. One foster carer's home visited had been extended to provide appropriate accommodation on the ground floor for a disabled child.

Wokingham provides a short-break scheme which is aimed at children with a disability and which is managed within the Disabled Children's Team. There is

only one part time worker who manages the scheme. At present there are 13 carers and 4 are approved to have children overnight. In the last year a Fee Paid Short Break Carer has been approved but no new carers have been recruited. There is a waiting list of 10 young people wanting overnight respite and in order to develop the service there needs to be more than one part time member of staff involved.

All the young people in a foster care have a Personal Education Plan and foster carers spoken to had attended meetings at school. All foster carers are provided with a copy of the 'Rough Guide to Education' which gives them detailed information on a number of education issues. Where necessary foster carers have developed close working relationships with education colleagues to ensure good outcomes for the young people placed. There were only 4 young people leaving care whose last placement was with the fostering service and all 4 achieved at least 1 GCSE at grade A* - G or a GNVQ. 1 achieved five or more GCSE's at grades A* - C. Funding is available for computers and additional tuition if needed.

Individual carers promote educational achievement but there were 11 children who had a change of school due to their placement over the last year. This is not ideal in terms of maintaining existing networks and friends. There was concern that the competency schedules developed did not mention education but the inspector was informed that that they do include a section to evidence the carers ability to meet the child's educational needs.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is good.

Contact with family is encouraged whenever possible and there is good consultation with the young people in foster care.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

All the children and young people seen during this inspection were having regular contact with members of their immediate family. Foster carers said that the arrangements for contact worked well and they are included in foster placement agreements.

Wokingham has a Children's Rights Service which offers advice, information and support and advocacy to any young person Looked After by Wokingham District Council. Three participation groups are run on a monthly basis and the groups have been involved in developing the policy about allowances to older young people and have spoken at the Corporate Parenting Group.

There has been work undertaken by the Foster Carers Reviewing Officer in obtaining meaningful feedback from the young people in foster care. The groups run by the Children's Rights Officer agreed to undertake a consultation about ideas of relevant questions to ask and will form the basis of a future questionnaire to pilot. This is a positive development.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

None

EVIDENCE:

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 32

Quality in this outcome area is adequate.

There are not sufficient staff or foster carers to develop the service. There have been no systems in place to commission or monitor placements made with independent fostering providers. The day-to-day support of foster carers is good.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has an up to date statement of purpose which is reviewed annually. In addition the Fostering Manager produces an Annual Report and a Half Yearly report for fostering services. The independent reviewing officer for foster carers also completes an annual report and together these documents provide detailed information about the service, its strengths and needs.

The Family Placement Team has two part time Managers, one of whom leads on adoption and the other leads on fostering. As has been stated in previous inspection reports, this arrangement is not ideal in terms of responsibility, communication and accountability. The shortfalls documented relate to management above Team Manager level and wider management issues such as those outlined at the beginning of this paragraph.

There have been significant changes in the line management of the Family Placement Team as Wokingham is currently undergoing restructuring of its Children's Services. The immediate line management structure has changed and at the time of the inspection it was not known where fostering will fit into the new structure. This is an unsettling time for all staff.

There have been occasions when senior management have not given guidance and support to the team, for example, when there have been disagreements about the future use of foster carers and possible deregistration of carers.

There have been no changes in staff in the fostering service since the last inspection. Nearly all staff undertake a mixed caseload comprising of both fostering and adoption work. All the staff are white, female and almost all work part time. It would be positive if the team were more representative in terms of gender and ethnicity. Although the number of staff has not changed since the last inspection, there has been a reduction in the number of hours worked. This has meant that the Manager has been involved in co-leading a fostering preparation group and on occasions covering Duty rather than developing the service.

The fostering service does not have a sufficient number of foster carers, especially those approved to take teenagers. There has been difficulty recruiting new foster carers and in 2004-5 only one new set of foster carers and two kinship carers had been recruited and in the year ending March 2006, four new foster carers were approved, one of whom was a kinship carer. These numbers are not sufficient to meet the number of referrals. There has been an increased use of independent fostering agencies and at the time of this

inspection there were 15 young people placed with independent fostering providers.

In the past some work had been undertaken in meeting with independent fostering providers. Then came a change in structure and there was no senior management lead in this area. At present there is no process of commissioning placements from independent providers, no written agreements and no process of monitoring placements. There are serious shortfalls which could compromise the safety of young people and must be addressed.

At the last inspection it was an unmet requirement that there are clear procedures in place which are followed when changes to foster carers approval are sought. This has been met.

All the foster carers spoken with said that they felt well supported and continue to be complimentary about individual workers. The out of hours telephone support line staffed by the family placement team during evenings and weekends is appreciated by foster carers as is the support provided by the fostering recruitment and support worker.

It was evident that relationships between the Family Placement Team and the Children's social work team have been strained on occasions. This may be due to anxieties surrounding the restructuring of the Children's Services and will need to be monitored by management.

Foster carers were unclear about respite, holiday and babysitting arrangements. It is recommended that these entitlements are clarified to foster carers.

The Annual Reviews for foster carers continue to take place on an annual basis or as a result of complaints/allegations. The reviewing officer is independent and part of a separate team. In the last year there has been the development of competency schedules for foster carers which provide a standardised and objective measurement of the skills and abilities of the carers. It is hoped that these can be developed further to include areas such as education and health. It is positive that the reviewing officer reviews all foster carers whether they are supported lodgings carers, foster carers or work for the short-break scheme. This enables an invaluable overview of the fostering service.

Case records were seen for a sample of foster carers and the requirement made at the last inspection that foster carers files contain accurate information regarding approval and any subsequent changes and a record of each placement has been met. There was some difference in the quantity and quality of information in files and it was evident that file audits are not carried out. Advice was given that they are carried out to ensure that the files are up to date and contain all the required information.

It has been a recommendation in the last two inspection reports that there are training profiles for each foster carer on file. This is still not the case. It should be possible to look at a foster carers file and see all the training that they have undertaken recorded in the same place. The inspector was informed that the recruitment and support worker keeps these records but they should be in foster carers files.

Separate records are maintained for complaints and allegations but were not found to be up to date.

The fostering service supports a number of young people in kinship placements. The carers are usually assessed and supported in the same way as any other carers and are part of the annual reviewing system.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	3
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	1
17	1
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	2
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	2
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

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.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS9	12	Safe caring guidelines are written for each foster home. (Previous timescale of 14/3/06 not met)	20/02/07
2	FS9	17(2)	Further work is carried out with foster carers regarding policies concerning allegations.	20/02/07
3	FS16	40	There are procedures in place for the commissioning and monitoring of placements made with independent fostering providers.	20/03/07
4	FS16	19	Review the management and staffing of the team to ensure that they meet the needs of the service.	20/03/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS30	There is further independent training of the Fostering Panel to continue to develop good working practices.
2	FS21	There is guidance given to foster carers about entitlements to respite, holidays and babysitting.
3	FS24	There are training profiles for each foster carer on file.
4	FS25	Records relating to complaints and allegations are kept up to date.

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