
Select Committee on Children's Services – 18 June 2009

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Findings of an Ofsted Inspection in Respect of Dudley's Fostering Service

Purpose of Report

1. To report to the Select Committee on Children's Services the findings of an OfSTED Inspection in respect of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Service.

Background

2. Independent and Local Authority fostering services are subject to annual inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989. The responsibility for Inspection lies with OfSTED.
3. The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards, which form the basis of judgments together with the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004.
4. The inspection of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Service was undertaken in March 2009 and was an announced inspection. The inspection focused on the National Minimum Standards relating to the five Every Child Matters outcomes, being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, economic well-being. In addition, the inspection considered payment to carers, the organisation and management of the service and premises and support to foster carers. The inspection also looked at progress made in meeting the recommendations of the previous inspection. The previous inspection was undertaken in January 2008 when the overall rating of the service was judged inadequate with a notice of action to improve.
5. The inspection report details the main strengths of the service and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection.
6. The Inspectors rated the service against the outcomes as follows:
 - Being healthy - satisfactory
 - Staying safe - satisfactory
 - Enjoying and achieving - good
 - Making a positive contribution - good
 - Achieving economic well-being - satisfactory
 - Organisation – satisfactoryThe overall judgement was satisfactory.

7. The report sets out actions which the authority should take in order to comply with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and National Minimum Standards within the given timescale. In addition the report made a number of recommendations to improve the quality and standards of care further.
8. There were 5 statutory requirements which appear as **Appendix 1** of this report. All of them have been addressed and we are now compliant with each of those requirements
9. In addition there were 10 good practice recommendations which form the basis of an improvement plan for the fostering service which will consolidate the improvement made over the last 12 months and move the service forward to achieve excellence in delivering high quality services to looked after children and in preparation for future Ofsted inspections.
10. The outcomes of the Fostering Inspection will contribute to the inspection of safeguarding and looked after children which will be an announced inspection within the next 3 years and will also contribute to the Children's Services element of the CAA.
11. The full report of the fostering inspection can be found on the Ofsted website or by specific request to Jane Prashar, Children's Resources, telephone: 5831, email: jane.prashar@dudley.gov.uk

Finance

12. In order to ensure that foster carers remain within their approved numbers and the service is able to offer placement choice to appropriately meet individual need, we will need to continue to enhance the skills of current carers and actively recruit new carers to the service. The service represents good value for money in comparison to other placement options such as internal and external residential and independently provided fostering placements. An additional investment of £400,000 into fostering service has been made within this financial year 2009/10. This will be allocated to enhance staffing levels and foster carer remuneration.

Law

13. Local Authorities have a duty to provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to require accommodation as a result of (a) there being a person who has parental responsibility; (b) being lost or abandoned; (c) the person who has been caring for him / her being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him / her with suitable accommodation or care (Children Act 1989).
14. Fostering Services are regulated and inspected under the Care Standards Act 2002 which introduced the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. These provide the current framework for the day-to-day operation and management of fostering services. Under the National Minimum Standards we are required to review fees and allowances annually.

Equality Impact

15. The provision of a fostering service contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.

Recommendation

16. It is recommended that the Select Committee receive and note the contents of the report and the actions which have been taken to achieve an improved rating for the fostering service



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Mark Wyatt
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Pauline Sharratt, Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services
Telephone: 01384 815807
Email: pauline.sharratt@dudley.gov.uk

Statutory Requirements

Standard		Action Taken
8	Ensure placements are only made, that are clearly within a foster carer's approval range and for which they have the appropriate skills (Regulations 33 and 34)	Revised matching procedures operated by the Placement Team. Exemptions/Variations to Panel. in all cases reported to Panel and signed and authorised by senior manager.
30	Ensure no panel members are allowed to begin work until all checks have been satisfactorily completed (Regulation 20 (4))	Revised Fostering Panel Policy & Procedures (April 2009) clearly state that all Panel Members must have their CRB disclosure returned prior to attendance in the role as Panel Member and all additional checks on file. Procedures refer to CRBs being renewed every three years. A fostering 'in house' electronic database has been devised (to supplement the Directorates CRB process) to manage CRB applications and renewals, which flags up reminders and is monitored regularly by Fostering Administration and the Fostering Service Manager. Completed 1.4.09.
22	Ensure the foster carer agreement includes all matters of Schedule 5 (12,13) and accurately reflects their status for example, as flipside foster carers (Regulation 28(5)(b))	The mainstream Foster Care Agreement was revised to ensure it included reference to all matters of Schedule 5 (12 &13). Completed 3.4.09. Flipside are currently reviewing their Foster Carer Agreement to include treatment aspect.

17	Ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service (Regulation 19)	There has been financial investment allocated for the new financial year to the Fostering Service and there are plans to reconfigure the service to ensure the most effective use of human and financial resources including appointment of additional staff within the service.
4	Establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 at appropriate intervals and for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency (Regulation 42 (1) Schedule 7)	A process has been devised and accompanying proforma created to ensure the effective monitoring Schedule 7 matters. In place from 17.4.09.