

Cabinet – 18 March 2009

Walsall Fostering Service Six Monthly Report

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's services

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary of report

- 1.1 The six monthly report of the Fostering Service, found at **Appendix 1**, highlights the success of the fostering service for the period April 2008 to September 2008.
- 1.2 The fostering service was inspected by Ofsted in December 2007. Considerable improvements have been made and the majority of requirements have been implemented. The outcome of the inspection was a judgement of "satisfactory" and the service is aiming to be judged as "good" in the next inspection, which is scheduled for an unspecified date beyond April 2009.
- 1.3 The service was successfully restructured in response to one of the statutory requirements of the inspection. Significant progress has been made in relation to the support and training provided to family and friend carers, and carers who offer short-term breaks for disabled children.
- 1.4 There have been increases in the numbers of foster carers approved and enquiries made as a result of effective marketing initiatives. The proportion of foster carers approved from black and minority ethnic groups has increased.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of this report and the work of Walsall Fostering Service.
- 2.2 Cabinet is recommended to receive reports on the progress of the fostering service on a six monthly basis in line with good practice.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The report found at **Appendix 1**, summarises the work of Walsall Children Services fostering service from April 2008 to September 2008.
- 3.2 The report illustrates the success in the recruitment of fosters carers through effective targeted marketing activity. A total of 116 enquiries were received during this period. Seven families were approved, including 2 families for black and dual heritage children.
- 3.3 The service is succeeding in meeting the target to increase the number of local foster placements for Walsall children, which is helping to reduce the reliance on expensive independent fostering agency (IFA) placements.
- 3.4 At the end of the reporting period there were 90 carers offering temporary placements; 45 permanent, 16 respite and 5 short-term break and 34 family and friend carers.
- 3.5 The next inspection of the Fostering Service will find improvements in the availability of local foster placements, which will ensure better placement matching, increased placement stability and improved outcomes for children.
- 3.6 The last inspection of the Fostering Service by Ofsted was undertaken in December 2007, with an overall judgement of satisfactory. The improvement plan developed from the list of requirements placed on the Fostering Service is progressing well. The service is seeking to achieve a good judgement in the next inspection scheduled for an unspecified date beyond April 2009.
- 3.7 The fostering service was re-structured in September 2008 in response to key inspection requirements to improve supervision and support to carers.
- 3.8 The fostering service is assisted in supporting carers through partnerships with the education service virtual school and health service dedicated support team for Looked after Children.
- 3.9 The Outreach team work with foster carers and children to promote placement stability.
- 3.10 Walsall fostering service has an effective partnership with Walsall Foster Carer Association (FCA).
- 3.11 Carers are offered appropriate training and are supported in obtaining the NVQ in caring for Children and Young People. The Service has made excellent progress in supporting carers in evidencing their competence to the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in relation to training, support and development standards for foster carers.
- 3.12 The Fostering Panel and the Review and Skill Level Board meet regularly and are effective. The medical and legal advisors, although not panel members, support the workings of the panel, to good effect.

4. Resource considerations

- 4.1 **Financial:** The financial implications for the council for managing effective outcomes for children and the fostering service, are considered during the annual budget setting process and are in line with the medium term financial plan.
- 4.2 **Legal:** The fostering service must be compliant with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Good practice is that the Council Executive receives an annual written report also receives a six monthly written report on the management and outcomes of the fostering service in order to monitor progress.
- 4.3 **Staffing:** The successful re-structuring of the Fostering Service was achieved using the current staffing establishment. Workers continue to use their considerable knowledge and skills in their new roles to improve service delivery.

5. Citizen impact

The report confirms the progress that the fostering service is providing stable, safe, secure foster placements to Walsall children who are looked after by the local authority. The service priority is to provide more local placements for Walsall children.

6. Community safety

There are no specific issues that impact on community safety arising from the recommendations.

7. Environmental impact

There are no specific issues that impact upon the environment from this report.

8. Performance and risk management issues

- 8.1 **Risk:** The key risks emerging from the Fostering Service Report (**Appendix 1**), that will require effective management are ensuring that more children are placed in local foster placements and that the requirements of the fostering service inspection are fully implemented. This will assist in determining a judgement of “good” in the next inspection. Measures to respond positively to these needs and risk areas are integral to the corporate parenting service plan, risk register and the fostering service action plan.

- 8.2 **Performance management:** Continued good performance is achieved through the effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of a diverse group of foster carers, who are able to meet, locally, the needs of Walsall children. These actions are monitored through Children's Services and Corporate Parenting Service performance boards.

The work of the fostering service has contributed positively to improvements in key performance indicators including placement stability D78 long term stability, A1 placement moves and C24 school attendance.

9. Equality implications

Continued improvements in securing local foster placements, placements for children from black and minority ethnic communities, and for disabled children and their families will ensure equality of service for all Walsall children who are looked after by the local authority.

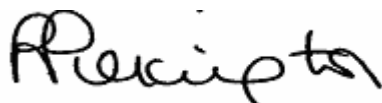
10. Consultation

This report has been informed by consultation and feedback from relevant stakeholders; foster carer's children and young people, and panel members. The report is a public document, which can be accessed by anyone wishing to do so and will be available on the council website.

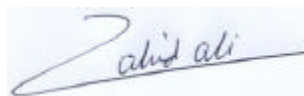
Background papers

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Walsall Council

WALSALL CHILDREN'S SERVICE
FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT
1 APRIL TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2008

Author: Louise Watts
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Family Placement Service

1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the activity of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2008 to 30th September 2008.

The Fostering Service comprises the following:

- 1.1 Operations Manager Family Placement Service the primary objectives of this role is to be responsible for the service planning and management of all local authority fostering and adoption services.
- 1.2 Recruitment and Assessment Team This team is responsible for all marketing, recruitment, training and assessment activities. They undertake the assessments of mainstream and private foster carers and are responsible for the commissioning of the assessments of family and friends as carers, and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. The team provides supervision and support to carers until their first review.
- 1.3 One full-time senior practitioner post is responsible for commissioning independent assessments (family and friends and Special Guardianship Orders). A second half time senior practitioner post is responsible for managing the assessments of internal foster carers and private foster carers. This post also leads on the introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) induction standards for carers.
- 1.4 A Family Support Officer Post (FSO) post is responsible for supporting carers in relation to the CWDC induction standards for carers and the other provides support to all marketing activity.
- 1.5 Support and Development Team This team is responsible for providing supervision and support to temporary carers, undertaking placement duty, family finding for permanent placements, and undertaking back up carer and permanence assessments.
- 1.6 The senior practitioner post is responsible for the management of the duty system, and managing all permanent family finding and placement identification for the service.
- 1.7 Permanence Support Team This team is responsible for supervision and support of permanent and family and friend carers, undertaking placement duty, family finding for permanent placements, back-up assessments, and providing post SGO support.
- 1.8 One senior practitioner post is responsible for the short-term break scheme and the other senior practitioner post takes a lead on the support to family and friends as carers and the post SGO support.

- 1.9 The Outreach Team The primary purpose of the Outreach Team is to enhance the provision of quality care to children and young people “looked after” by the Local Authority. The team works with foster carers and children and young people to promote their placement stability. The Outreach Team also leads on work programmes with children and young people that promote participation and consultation to ensure they have a voice and are heard. This is done through the activities of the Respect Group and Team A.
- 1.10 The Independent Reviewing Officer for foster carers undertakes all reviews of foster carers and is involved in aspects of service development and the delivery of some training.
- 1.11 The Placement co-ordinator is responsible for the identification, commissioning and monitoring of external residential placements and provides support to the services’ commissioning of independent fostering agency placements.
- 1.12 All parts the service with the exception of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and the Outreach Team are based at the Offices at 106 Essington Road, Willenhall. These premises benefited from a substantial refurbishment in 2007. The IRO is based with the Children Protection and Reviewing Unit at the Hollies and the Outreach Team at Jerome Road.
- 1.13 Following the inspection of the fostering service by Ofsted in December 2007, the service was restructured in order to comply with a key statutory requirement that the supervision of foster carers must now be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker. This task had previously been undertaken to a high standard by non social work qualified staff, under the direction and supervision of qualified social workers.
Refer to staffing structure – appendix 1

2. RECRUITMENT

2.1. During this reporting period, the recruitment activity has focused on two priority areas.

- Promoting targeted activity in line with priorities set out in the Children and Young People’s Plan, in relation to the recruitment of carers from black and ethnic minority communities
- Maintaining high profile of Walsall Council as a market leader in fostering services .

2.2. Enquiry Levels

	Fostering
	Enquiries = 116 Offers = 26 (22%) Approvals = 7 Conversion for period = 6%
April	15
May	20

June	31
July	14
August	15
September	21

2.3. Ethnicity of potential foster carers from enquiries

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Chinese	Unknown
April	9	0	2	7	0	3
May	18	0	1	2	0	4
June	24	1	5	1	0	4
July	10	1	3	2	0	1
August	10	0	2	0	0	1
September	16	0	7	5	0	4
143	83	2	20	17	0	17
% of total	58%	1.3%	14%	12%	0%	12%

2.4. Enquiries by source of marketing methods

This figure is based upon 116 recorded enquiries from April to September 2008. The table provides an indication, in relation to campaign activity of which enhanced marketing has prompted a greater level of enquiries.

The most popular direct marketing methods are internet, newspapers, family & friends (word of mouth) and events, which are all ongoing throughout the year, as well as being campaign specific. A full breakdown of figures is as follows:

	Magazin e	Bus Advert s	Newspaper s	Event s	Radi o	Leaflet s	Interne t	Directorie s	Family , friends	Switc h board	Unknown or not remembe r
N o	12	6	17	13	2	6	25	9	15	3	23
%	9%	4.5%	13%	10%	1.5%	4.5%	19%	7%	11%	2%	17.5%

Of the seven households approved, how they heard about fostering is as follows

- 2 through family and friends
- 1 previously fostered for Walsall
- 1 via the newspaper
- 1 was a carer for an IFA looking after a Walsall child
- 1 was through the switchboard
- 1 was defined as "other"

3. TRAINING

3.1. Preparation and Assessment Courses

Walsall is part of the Black Country Consortium of local authorities, along with Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Dudley. The four local authorities jointly run the preparation courses at a minimum of twelve times per year. Each authority leads on three courses. This is very positive, as applicants can choose to attend a course in any one of the authorities and this prevents delay.

The preparation and assessment course uses the format “Skills to Foster” which was devised by the Fostering Network. The package has been designed for foster carers to work more confidently in a multi – disciplinary environment demanded by modern fostering. The training runs over seven sessions and is facilitated by social work staff and foster carers.

Ten Walsall families are attending the Walsall Skills to foster course in January 2009

<u>Number of courses run</u>	<u>Number of Walsall households trained</u>	<u>Numbers going into assessment</u>
6	14	14

3.2. Post Approval

Since January 2008, the Fostering Service has been working on developments to prepare foster carers for the introduction to the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training, support and development standards for foster carers. Four workshops for carers have been run and one for staff with further workshops set up for 2009. As of 31 December 2008, seventy one carers have started their portfolios.

For carers approved prior to April 2008, they have until April 2011 to evidence competence in relation to these induction standards. For those approved since April 2008, they have twelve months from the date of commencing the workbook to evidence competence.

There is a comprehensive post approval training programme for all foster carers for 08/09. The service is exploring innovative ways for carers to access training such as e-learning.

Post approval training remains a requirement for progression through the fee payment scheme, with certain courses being identified as mandatory.

The training needs of carers are explored and agreed within the supervision process, and at the review and panel or the Review and Skill Level Board foster carers play an active role in the development of the training programme and the new requirements of the CWDC induction programme. Foster carers also act as co-facilitators of some of the post approval training courses.

3.3. NVQ 3

Between April 08 and September 08 we had four Health and Social Care (H&SC) Caring for Children and Young People completers and one person who has completed their assessor award. We still have three on the programme and have just registered another nine H&SC candidate and two assessor candidates.

We have three foster carers who support this process by acting as assessors and verifiers.

4. ASSESSMENT

- 4.1.** Assessments of mainstream foster carers are undertaken by the fostering and recruitment team. The assessment of family and friend carers is commissioned through independent workers, but managed and quality assured by the team manager and a senior practitioner in the recruitment and assessment team.

Number of Assessments	Number approved	Withdrawn
14	7	7

White British	Asian	African – Caribbean/White British
5	1	1

This compares favourably with the figures for the whole year 2007 – 2008, when a total of ten households were approved. During the year ten carers were deregistered, demonstrating like many other councils we were maintaining a consistent number of carers, but not increasing the total number available.

In this period, there have been seven households approved and six deregistered i.e. a net gain of one household. (In October, November and December 2008 a further three households were approved and two deregistered giving an overall net gain by 31 December 2008 of two households)

On the same date there were a further thirteen families undertaking assessment.

- 4.2.** The reasons for applicants withdrawing from assessments are various and include a change in personal circumstances, discontinuing once further information is received, family bereavement, concerns raised by the assessor unsuitability

5. SUPERVISION, SUPPORT AND REVIEWING

5.1. Since the service was restructured in April 2008, the supervision and support of newly approved carers is undertaken by the assessing social worker in the recruitment and assessment team. Prior to this, once approved they were linked into the support or permanence teams. The benefit of this arrangement is that the carer has established a positive working relationship with the carer. The social worker knows the carers strengths and weaknesses which will aid placement matching, more effective support, decreased disruptions, increased placement stability and overall more positive outcomes for children.

This continues until after the first foster carer review (within twelve months of approval) and then they will be supported with the permanence or support teams.

5.2. The requirement from the inspection that only qualified social workers should undertake the supervision of foster carers, impacted upon the number of foster carers that a social worker provides supervision and support to. In order to manage this additional workload, the decision was taken to amend the arrangements for supervision in relation to minimum frequency. Prior to this it was every four weeks, for temporary placements and the opportunity to go to bi-monthly in stable permanent placements. The new policy generally states that formal supervision will take place at a minimum frequency of 6 weeks. This still compares well with authorities who have been judged as "outstanding"-both Staffordshire and Warwickshire undertake supervision every three months with a six weekly support visit in between. (Full details of policy in appendix 2)

5.3. According to the fostering service regulations, at least one unannounced visit is undertaken to each fostering household each year.

5.4. The roles of the family support officer (FSO's) have developed a different focus. Prior to the restructuring, four out of the six of the workers acted as supervising link workers. They are now undertaking a variety of tasks which indirectly support carers. These include support in relation to the CWDC induction standards, health and safety assessments, family finding for permanence for children, placement duty, back up carer assessments.

5.5. The Walsall Foster Care Association (FCA), provides support to carers through a variety of activities;

- distributes a quarterly newsletter
- offers a buddy scheme to carers
- assist in recruitment activity
- participate with the service in developing and reviewing policies and procedures
- facilitate carer training
- run coffee mornings and support groups
- organise social activities
- be involved in regular communication meetings with the service

The peer support co-ordinator works to support the FCA in their support networking.

The fostering service held a consultation event with foster carers in April 2008. This supported the association in ascertaining why so few carers are active in the association and what was needed to increase participation. As a result an action plan has been drawn up by the association with the support of the service.

- 5.6.** The service is supported by the activity of the Outreach team, which works with foster carers and children and young people to promote their placement stability. Partnerships with education health and the effective working relationships within the services within children's services ensure effective support to carers.
- 5.7.** Another aspect of foster carer support is the annual foster carer review process. The reviews are independently chaired by the Independent Reviewing Officer for foster carer reviews. The process is designed to look at the strengths and development needs of carers and to assess their ongoing suitability to be foster carers. It explores any changes in the carers terms of approval i.e. category, numbers, ages and gender of children to be placed. The reviews are considered by either the fostering panel (first review or after an allegation, major change in circumstances (etc) change in terms of approval) or by the Review and Skills level board.

Over this period, fifty eight reviews have been held, out of a total of approximately eighty five which were due. The reviewing officer is timely in chairing the reviews. Delays can be attributed to some disruption to the service whilst it was being restructured and carers were transferred to new social workers. It is positive to note that the reviewing officer notes that for the period October up to the end of December 2008 there was a significant increase in activity.

- 5.8.** Support groups continue to be held – either facilitated by the service (through the peer support co-ordinator) or by the foster carers – coffee mornings. The meetings have general agenda items and may sometimes have guest speakers.
- 5.9.** The annual "Foster Carers Recognition Day" was held in April 2008. The Theme this year was morris dancing, and some fifty carers attended. This provided the service with an opportunity to clearly state the value it places on its carers. Awards were given to all carers.
- 5.10** The 4 local authorities in the Black Country take it in turn to host a "celebration of culture event", for carers and children. This year it was hosted by Sandwell. It was again well attended and a positive experience for carers and children. In 2006, when it was Walsall's turn to host the event, the service revitalised the event, as there had been a lapse the previous year. Walsall is looking forward to hosting the event again in 2010

5.11 The fostering service operates a dedicated out of hours support service for carers, which compliments the work of the Council Emergency Response Service. Carers can access this service for advice and support.

6. FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS CARERS

6.1. It is a requirement of the Fostering Service Regulations and Fostering Service Standards 2002, that family and friends as carers receive the same levels of support, supervision and training as that offered to non related foster carers.

6.2. As previously stated, the assessments of family and friends as carers are undertaken by independent assessors. Their support and supervision is provided by the permanence support team. One of the statutory requirements of the Ofsted inspection of 2007 was that the service “assessed the support and training needs of family and friends as carers and ensures their needs are met”.

6.3. The service responded by identifying a Senior Practitioner within the Permanence Support Team in the newly restructured service, who would have lead responsibility for developing the support, supervision and training offered to family and friends carers. This person is now in post and is implementing an action plan in response to this as follows:-

- Provide specific training and information events (including induction training for newly approved carers (first session held in December 08 and was attended by six carers)
- Ensure induction pack is relevant
- Identify and establish a support network
- Ensure that the foster carer hand book is pertinent to the needs of family and friend carers
- Bench mark services against other local authorities
- Arrange a celebration day for family and friend carers

This senior practitioner is also responsible for providing support to special guardians and their families once an order has been made, in relation to review of support plans, supporting contact, review financial support arrangements, etc.

6.4. The permanence support team at the end of September 2008 were supporting thirty four approved family and friends carers and fifty six children.

7. SHORT TERM BREAK SCHEME

7.1. There is a senior practitioner post located within the permanence support team, who is responsible for the short term break scheme (STB), which provides support to disabled children and young people and their families by offering short term breaks. The appointment to this post has seen an

improvement in service delivery. Currently there are five carers, providing fourteen STB Placements for children.

This was noted by Ofsted in their inspection of 2007 and again there was a statutory requirement that the service “ensures that short term break foster carers are provided in the appropriate supervision, training and support”.

7.2. The service is pursuing an action plan in response to this requirement as follows:

- To increase by 10% the number of STB placements by March 2009-
- To reduce reliance on residential provision by December 2009
- Improve retention of carers through more effective support, training, prompt remuneration, provision of equipment effective consultation and participation by October 2009
- Improve safeguarding for children through specialised training ,updated safe caring statements, good recording, unannounced visits, and regular visits by the child's social worker by March 2009
- Participate in the corporate disability strategy.

8. ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

8.1. Allegations /incidents of concern/complaints against carers- 4

During this period there were three allegations against foster carers which were investigated in line with procedures

8.2. Complaints against the Service-3

During this period there were three complaints against the service which were investigated within timescales

9. PLACEMENT DUTY

9.1. The fostering service manages all requests for placements for children who are looked after by Walsall Council. The manager of the support and development team is responsible for the single referral point duty system which identifies all placements – fostering and residential, internal and external provision. Every day there is a duty officer and a back up worker. The aim of the single referral point is to improve placement stability and continuity of placements by accurately matching placements to the individual needs of children and young people.

The single contact point provides a co-ordinated approach to placement identification for children requiring immediate, temporary placements. The senior practitioner within the support and development team manages placement duty and under the new structure, is responsible for co-ordinating the identification of permanent foster placements for all children aged 12 years and under for whom permanent fostering is the permanence option.

This is in line with the current permanence policy. Each child is allocated a dedicated family finder. During this period 3 children have been placed with carers with a view to permanence and there are currently 10 children for whom the service is family finding for permanent foster placements.

9.2. Foster Care Resource

On 30.9.08 there were 462 children looked after. Of these 190 children were placed in internal foster placements and 101 in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) placements. Since that date the numbers in IFA placements has reduced to 96 and the internal foster placements increased to 200 (31.12.08). The target is to reduce the IFA number to 80 by 31.3.09. This is to be achieved by preventing further external placements through the use of local placements and to implement exit plans for a cohort of children whose care plans are either return home or permanence away from the birth family.

Of the children placed in IFA's during this period, the reasons for having to utilise an external resource were for sibling groups of 2 + children who needed to be placed together or children aged 12 years and over with complex needs.

The internal foster carer resource on 30.9.08 was as follows:

90 carers offering temporary placements

45 permanent carers

16 respite carers

5 STB

10. FOSTERING PANEL REPORT

10.1. Introduction

This report details the work of Walsall Council Fostering Panel from April 2008 to September 2008.

It has been a busy period for the fostering panel, with a steady flow of foster care approvals and the departure of a number of carers. Foster carer first annual reviews have been presented to panel, as have reviews requesting change of approval and reviews following concerns or allegations. The panel has also considered a number of permanent matches for children with Walsall approved carers and IFA approved carers. Information regarding variations of approval and exemptions has been presented to panel.

The panel has seen a change in its membership, with the departure of the Chair and Vice Chair in March; replacements are now panel members. Panel membership is as follows:

Su Roxburgh	- Chair
Catherine Mitchley	- Vice Chair
Joel Desous	- Children's Social Work Representative

Shauna Webster	- Independent Representative
Karen Dainty	- Education Representative
Liz Day	- Independent Representative
Jayne Clarke	- Panel Member
Councillor Micklewright	- Elected Member
Linda Walker	- Foster Carer – Other Local Authority
Elaine Storey	- Panel Advisor
Sheila Perry-Jones	- Panel Administrator

There is a vacancy for a social worker from the service with social work experience, which we are seeking to fill.

Attendance has been good by panel members and the review of their membership is to be introduced from April 2008 to ensure best practice. The Agency Decision maker role remains unchanged with the Head of Corporate Parenting Service.

10.2. Regional developments

Walsall continues to be a member of the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium (WMRFPC), along with thirteen other West Midlands Local Authorities.

The Consortium meets bi-monthly. The Independent Reviewing Officer (foster carer reviews) attends. Discussion has centred on the development of policy, procedural and practice issues, in respect of CWDC Induction Standards for Foster Care, training development plans, marketing opportunities, initiating a bench marking group for recruitment.

Walsall and Dudley Council have a mutual arrangement for Chair of their Fostering panels.

10.3. Foster Carers Attending Panel

It is an expectation of the Fostering Service, that applicant foster carers attend panel, with the assessing social worker. All applicants attended panel, including the family and friend carers. Good practice requires the identified link worker to attend panel, to ensure they hear the assessment presentation and respond to any actions that may emerge as a result of their approval and development plan. It is also strongly encouraged that approved foster carers attend for the first foster carer review.

10.4. The Review and Skill Level Board

During this period there have been 3 Review and Skill Level Board meetings. The Board membership is as follows: Louise Watts, Operations Manager Family Placements chairs the meetings, (in the role of agency decision maker for the purpose of this Board), the Vice Chair of panel (to provide a link

between fostering panel), the Independent reviewing officer for foster carer reviews and the Operations Manager for Corporate Parenting.

Foster carer reviews where there are no changes of approval are presented to the Board (36 this period) and applications for Skill level progressions are presented (2 for this period).

10.5. The Role of Medical Adviser

There is no statutory requirement for the medical advisor to sit on fostering panel. However the completion of statutory medicals for foster carer applicants is a requirement. Dr Anand, continues to complete and oversee fostering medicals. Her scrutiny in respect of GP medicals of foster carer applicants is invaluable, and a key opportunity will be acted on this year to ensure the service meets at regular intervals to enable closer opportunities for assessors to liaise with the medical advisor for advice and clarity.

10.6. Legal Services

Again whilst not a statutory requirement for a legal advisor to sit on panel, panel have accessed legal advice, specifically in relation to recommending notification to the Secretary of State, in respect of the Protection of Children Act list.

10.7. The Fostering Service

David Bovell, Head of Corporate Parenting, for Children's Services, continues to act as the agency decision maker. In David's absence, Louise Watts, Operations Manager Family Placements Services, will act in this role.

11. OFSTED INSPECTION OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE DECEMBER 2007

11.1 Overall this was based on a combined judgement arising from 5 themed areas inspected. Although results included an "outstanding" and a "good" alongside 3 "satisfactory", the combined judgement was SATISFACTORY. This was disappointing .

"The inspection found that the fostering service has made only limited progress in meeting outstanding requirements as the service had been affected by the remodelling of Children's Services, which had resulted in the loss of posts within the service and the change in premises. Consequently, attention has been paid to the day to day running of the service, but there has been little opportunity for the development of the service".

11.2 Judgements

"**Helping children to be healthy**" was rated as **outstanding** with young peoples health needs being well met by the fostering service and its foster carers. Reference was made to the fact that the fostering service works

closely with its partners in the health service. The gathering of information upon referral about health issues was noted.

“Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe” was rated as **satisfactory**. The inspectors noted that the fostering service and its foster carers were seen to keep young people safe, by providing warm, safe environments. Reference was made to the risk assessment undertaken at the referral stage. Post placement meetings ensure the foster placement agreement is completed. Reference was made to the need to ensure that young people are not placed outside a carer’s terms of approval.

Reference was made to the updating of child protection procedures relating to investigating allegations against carers and the positive use of Safer Caring Policies. Of concern was that the processes for ensuring that all staff, foster carers and panel members are suitable, are not sufficiently robust, particular reference was made to the processes for initial CRB disclosures and renewals.

The fostering panel was regarded as operating effectively, but that quality and assurance functions need to be developed further.

“Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do”, was rated as **satisfactory**. The inspectors noted that there was a short fall in the number of carers from black and minority ethnic groups. However carers and workers promote equality and diversity and that carers providing trans racial placements receive appropriate support. It was noted that Children’s services has an excellent track record in respect of supporting young people to achieve educationally – there had been an improvement in young people’s attendance and attainment and no young people had been excluded from school. The service promotes and support working relationships between carers and education.

Young people requiring short term breaks had not received a good service, due to the post not being appointed to on a permanent basis. The STB scheme had deteriorated with a reduction in the number of carers and placements offered. Also it was noted that the contracted service for children with disabilities was not fulfilling its requirements. However it was noted that despite service short falls, the foster carers and parents continued to provide good quality of care to children with disabilities.

“Helping children make a positive contribution” was rated as **good**. The service was seen to promote contact, particularly with the support of Outreach Team. Positive reference was made to the work of the Outreach Team, enabling young people to take part in a range of activities and presentations to explore and express their views “The way of working promotes self esteem, confidence, self worth, and a sense of achievement as aspirations for the future”

“Achieving economical being” was not judged.

“Organisation” was judged as being **satisfactory**.

The inspectors stated that the service is organised and managed in a way that young people's needs are central to the work undertaken by the service, but there were some gaps. There is a strong management structure who provide positive guidance and support for staff, but due to the remodelling of Children's services and the relocation of the fostering service that not sufficient progress had been made in developing the service.

Also staff who did not hold a Social Work qualification were supervising carers which was felt could be detrimental to the support of foster carers and young people. There was seen to be evidence of positive recruitment activity and the assessments of carers were generally good. Foster carers were generally positive about the support they received from the service – supervision, regular reviews, support groups, training etc. The use of the foster placement agreement was noted. The inspectors recorded that although family and friends carers received the same level of supervision as other foster carers, sometimes the assessments are not sufficiently robust and that they are not provided with the same levels of training.

11.1. Statutory Requirements implemented

- 11.1.1. Ensure foster carers are not requested to accept placements that are clearly outside their approval range
- 11.1.2. Follow clear procedures for the recruitment and selection of managers, staff and panel members to ensure that staff do not commence employment prior to satisfactory checks being in place
- 11.1.3. Ensure that CRB checks are renewed on a three yearly basis in respect of all managers, staff and foster carers
- 11.1.4. Complete all required checks in respect of foster panel members prior to them commencing attendance at panel.
- 11.1.5. Develop a strategy to ensure that all foster carers are supervised by an experienced and qualified social worker
- 11.1.6. Ensure that all assessments, including those for family and friends foster carers are robust, analytical and covers all areas included in Schedule 3. Regulation 27
- 11.1.7. Make an accurate record of all work undertaken with foster carers and young people
- 11.1.8. Ensure that all foster carers have an up to date foster care agreement

- 11.1.9. Enter into a written foster placement agreement before any placement is made, including short breaks and respite placements

11.2. Statutory Requirements not fully implemented and Action Plan

- 11.2.1. Asses the support and training needs of family and friends as carers and ensure their needs are met

Actions

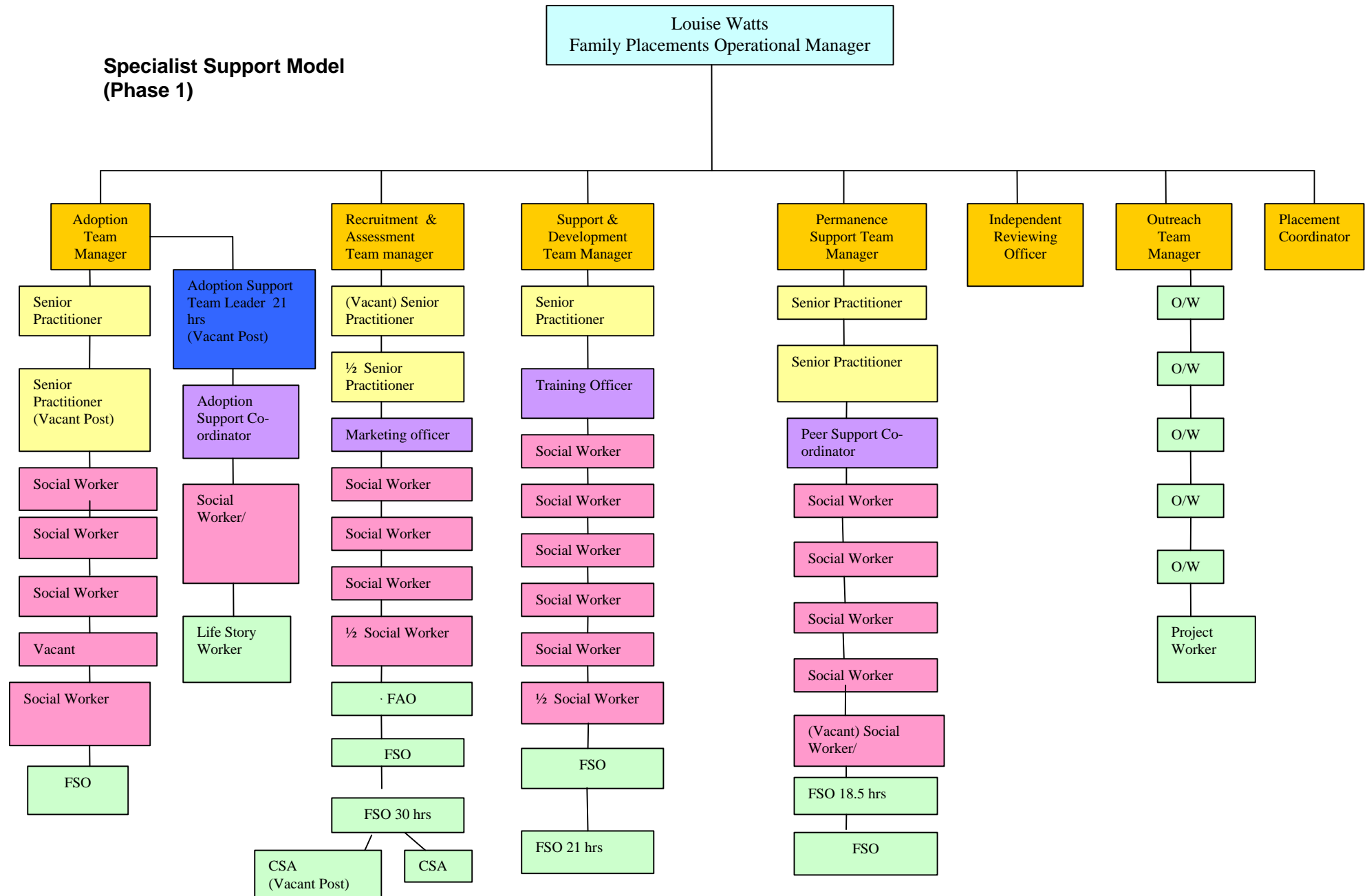
- Provide specific training and information events (including induction training for newly approved carers(first session held in December 008 and was attended by 6 carers).Subsequent courses set for March, June and September 2009
- Ensure induction pack is relevant-by March 2009
- Identify and establish a support network –by April 2009
- Ensure that the foster carer hand book is pertinent to the needs of family and friend carers by March 2009
- Bench mark services against other local authorities by March 2009
- Arrange a celebration day for family and friend carers July 2009

- 11.2.2. Ensure that short-term break foster carers are provided with appropriate supervision, training and support.

Actions

- To increase by 10%the number of STB placements by March 2009-
- To reduce reliance on residential provision by December 2009
- Improve retention of carers through more effective support, training, prompt remuneration, provision of equipment effective consultation and participation by October 2009
- Improve safeguarding for children through specialised training, updated safe caring statements, good recording, unannounced visits, and regular visits by the child's social worker by March 2009
- Participate in the Corporate Disability strategy-ongoing

Specialist Support Model (Phase 1)



Appendix 2

Policy in relation to the supervision and review of foster carers

Mainstream and short term break carers

- Frequency of Supervision:
- (1) Monthly formal supervision
 - (2) In between Personal Development plan reviews (CWDC standards) also monthly
 - (3) Senior practitioner reviews CWDC progress at 6 months.

Review

- First review is booked 11 months from approval date.
- The supervising social worker from the support or permanence team becomes involved prior to and as part of this review for a streamlined hand over.

Exceptions

If a review is held within the 11 month period, a decision will be made on an individual basis as to the timing and format of the next review in relation to the induction standards, and handover timing etc.

Family and friends carers

- Supervision of Regulation 38(2) family and friend carers before the full assessment considered at panel will be undertaken by the Permanence Support Team.
- Defer CWDC induction standards at present.
- Monthly supervision.

Review as above

- First review booked 11 months from date of panel when full assessment is considered

After first review –all carers

Supervision

- Standard will be 6 weekly formal supervision.
- Can be more frequent or less frequent (maximum bi-monthly) following recommendations of foster carer review, panel, disruption meeting, post placement meeting, variation, exemption, manager/carers supervision – all recorded on Management Decision Record.
- If supervision is bi-monthly there must be a support telephone call in between as a minimum.

Subsequent reviews

- Booked at the first and subsequent reviews for 11 months hence ,unless a shorter time period is recommended by panel, the reviewing officer etc