

Cabinet – 27 September 2006

Fostering Service Inspection of 27 February 2006 and Action Plan

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's services

Service Area: Children's Services

Wards: All Wards

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of Report

Walsall Council's fostering service received its third annual inspection during February 2006 by a team of three inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) over a 5 day period. The inspection came within 13 months of the services last inspection (January 2005). The inspection methodology included a pre-inspection self assessment questionnaire, interviews with staff, carers and young people, a questionnaire to young people, inspection of case records, policy and other service documentation, and observation of Walsall's Fostering Panel and Foster Care Association. Foster carers, staff, social workers, partners and children/young people in placement assisted with and responded positively to the inspection process.

Unlike the first inspection which assessed compliance across all 32 National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, the inspection, on this occasion, concentrated on a lighter touch process covering 26 of the 32 standards. The standards are rated on a 1 to 4 score with 4 being the highest. For the first time, the fostering service was awarded a 4 (standard exceeded – commendable) in relation to one of the standards inspected in relation to the numbers of qualified and experienced staff.

The service received an impressive upward rating in five areas with all but one of the remaining standards remaining at the same assessed level as in the previous January 2005 inspection, with one standard rated lower. This equates to all standards being met, exceeded, or met with minor shortfalls, except standard 26, fitness of premises, which again received a low rating. However, this deficit is being addressed through a capital project to refurbish the Essington site which cabinet approved in July 2006. The project is due to be completed by May 2007.

The Commission has developed a new report format for the inspection of Children's Services and the reports are now mapped to the five outcomes set out in "Every Child Matters: Change for Children". These are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving

- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic wellbeing

The Commission has grouped the remaining standards under the umbrella of “management”.

The overall findings reflected that the management of the fostering service has continued to make improvements to practice, service provision and delivery, whilst maintaining the protection and welfare of children and young people as the core objective of the service.

The inspectors noted marked progress in the infrastructure of the service and operational systems and practice, and that further work has been done to address statutory requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection. It was noted that the foster carers and staff have taken on board the aims and objectives of the service development plan produced by the management team. Proposals have been formulated into innovative projects developed to meet new service outcomes, such as the foster carers centre and the town centre recruitment and marketing one stop shop.

Since the inspection, the manager of the family placement service has become fully operational. This is a new post, established in October 2005.

The actions agreed by the service to address all requirements identified by the inspectors are included in the action plan which maps progress against statutory requirements, set out in **appendix two** of this report. The full inspection report can be found at

www.csci.org.uk

Recommendations

- (1) That the inspection findings be noted
- (2) That Cabinet approve the action plan at appendix two of this report

Resource and legal considerations

Independent and local authority services fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), at the time of inspection in February 2006. The purpose of inspection was to establish the fostering service’s continued compliance and development towards meeting the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. The fostering service report is published under section 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must also comply.

The financial implications to the Council of implementing the action plan are relatively low and have been met from existing budgets. This excludes the capital resources required to address the poor office accommodation which the inspectors have highlighted for the third time as having major shortfalls. A capital project has commenced to progress a substantial refurbishment of the Essington site which

accommodates the fostering service. There are some major costs involved in relation to the more extensive needs such as roof repairs and replacement of all windows. The financial viability is however increased as the building's life span as an office base will be significantly lengthened as a result of major refurbishment. The inspectors are aware of these outline proposal plans approved by cabinet in July 2006.

Citizen impact

Walsall Council is committed to the development of a comprehensive fostering service for local children/young people and their families. The service aims to recruit carers from a broad representation of the community in order to meet the diverse needs. At the time of inspection the fostering service was supporting 149 carers in borough and 50 carers out of borough. The service provides 251 in-house placements, providing a range of temporary or permanent placements. This excludes family and friend placements (41) and the 15 additional short-term placements.

The appended action plan in response to the inspection is designed to support the drive for local placements and placement choice for local children and families and will therefore have a positive impact on Walsall's looked after children.

Community safety

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

Environmental impact

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

Performance and risk management issues

The fostering service has just been notified by CSCI of the date of the next inspection – 13th November 2006. This is 9 months since the last one in February 2006. The early date is due to CSCI uniting with OFSTED in April 2007. After this date, all inspections will judge how well service meet outcomes and a new system of quality ratings will be introduced – “excellent”, “good”, “adequate” and “poor”. The inspections will then be aligned with the three yearly inspections of the local authority fostering and adoption services alongside the private fostering arrangements, with in-between proportionate inspections depending on the quality rating awarded. In Walsall, the fostering service is striving to be awarded an “excellent” rating.

Compliance with the inspection requirements and recommendations is essential to ensure continued ability to provide an in-house fostering service. High performance is achieved through effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of a wide range of foster carers through the manager of the family placement service, three team managers supported by a team of social workers, support and specialist function officers.

The action plan, based on regulatory requirements, is designed to support our drive to become an excellent authority, by continuously improving the quality of our in-house fostering service. Success in this area will have a positive impact on a range of performance indicators, including those associated with placement choice and resulting placement stability (PAF indicators CF/A1 and CF/D35) and those concerned with the percentage of children – and particularly young children - in foster care (PAF indicator CF/B7).

Also by placing more children in local (in house) placements as opposed to out of borough placements within the independent sector, this will positively influence PAF indicators CF/B8 (cost of services for looked after children), and CF/C69 (distance children newly looked after are placed from home – a new indicator). Additionally, the provision of stable high quality placements will contribute to enabling children and young people to meet the required outcomes of the Children Act 2004, namely staying safe and healthy, enjoying and achieving in life, making a positive contribution to their communities and achieving social and economic wellbeing.

Equality implications

At the time of inspection of the 149 approved carers 13 were African Caribbean, 4 were Indian, 3 were Pakistani, 3 were dual heritage, and 126 were White European. The service has specific targets to ensure the diversity of carers is expanded. We have continued targeted recruitment for South Asian carers. The service offers short breaks and a matching service for disabled children. Specific arrangements, including structural alterations, aids adaptations and personal support are part of the service.

The action plan aims to ensure that more looked after children can be placed within Walsall and within family placements, which will lead to a more local service for local families.

Consultation

There continues to be ongoing consultation with foster carers directly and with the Foster Care Association. The established Foster Carer Committee, supported by the peer support development worker, is supporting the service development measures. Carers are active participants in service development and are active contributors to many project groups.

In line with the standards, consultation with young people has taken place to ensure that the design of our Children's Guide is appropriate and accessible.

Vision 2008

The objectives of our action plan following the inspection support the Walsall Vision. In particular, a high quality and continuously improving fostering service contributes to the priorities in relation to making Walsall a healthy and caring place and ensuring people are safe and secure, including vulnerable children looked after by the local authority. Local placements also make it easier for local children to access local services.

Background papers

The CSCI Inspection report February 2006

Authors

David Bovell – Service Manager, Children’s Resources

Contact No 01922 658356

bovelld@walsall.gov.uk

Louise Watts – Manager, Family Placement Services, Children’s Resources

Contact No 01922 658351

WattsL@walsall.gov.uk

Signed



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 18 September 2006

Signed



Portfolio Holder: Zahid Ali

Date: 18 September 2006

FOSTERING INSPECTION – OVERVIEW 2006

BEING HEALTHY	
Standard & No	Score
12. The Fostering Service promotes the health and development of children	3

STAYING SAFE	
Standard & No	Score
3. Any person carrying on or managing the service are suitable.	3
6. The Fostering Service provides suitable foster carers	3
8. The service matches the children to carers appropriately	2
9. The Fostering Service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.	3
15. The people who work in or for the Fostering Service are suitable to work with children and young people.	2
30. Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVEING	
Standard & No	SCORE
7. The Fostering Service values diversity.	3
13. The Fostering Service promotes educational achievement	2
31. 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.	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
Standard & No	Score
10. The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person	2
11. The Fostering Service promotes consultation	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard & No	Score
14. The Fostering Service prepares young people for adulthood.	3
29. The Fostering Service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified	3

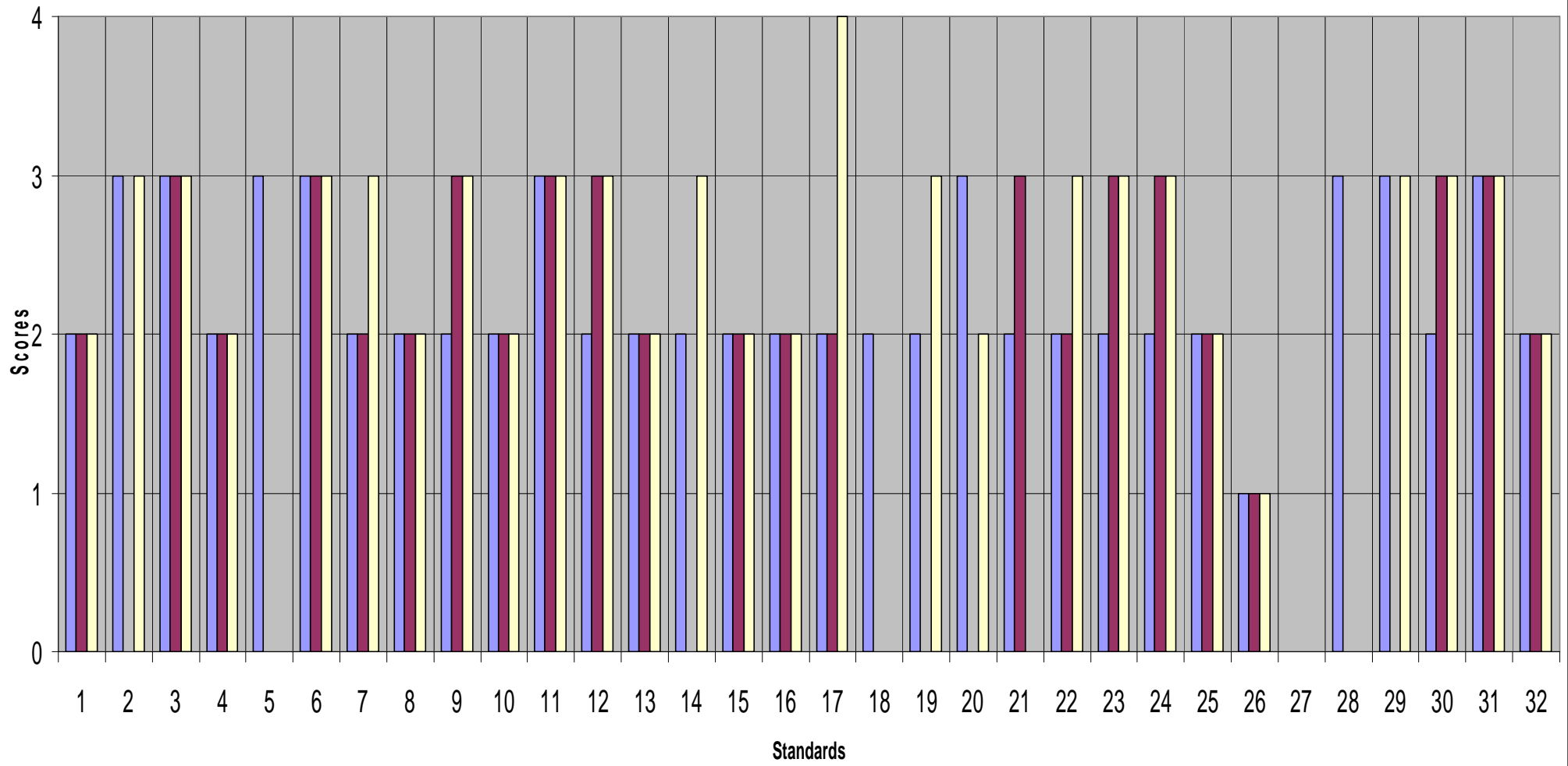
MANAGEMENT	
Standard & No	Score
1. There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the Fostering Service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives	2
2. The Fostering Service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience	3
4. The Fostering Service is monitored & controlled as specified.	2
16. Staff are organised and managed effectively.	2
17. The Fostering Service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.	4
19. There is a good quality training programme.	3
20. The staff are properly accountable and supported.	2
22. Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.	3
24. Case records for children all comprehensive.	3
25. Administrative records are maintained as required.	2
26. The premises used as offices by the Fostering Service are suitable for the purpose.	1
32. Local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friend carers.	2

Scores range from

- 1** – Standard not met (major shortfalls)
- 2** – Standard almost met (minor shortfalls)
- 3** – Standard met (no shortfalls)
- 4** – Standard exceeded (commendable)

Fostering Inspection Standards 2006

2004 2005 2006



Action Plan to the Statutory Requirements and Recommendations Identified in the Announced Inspection of Walsall MBC Fostering Service on 27th February 2006 by Chris Fuller

Statutory Requirements					
No	Regulation	Standard	Requirement	Action to be taken to address the statutory requirements	Completion date
1	3(a)(b)(c)	1	The responsible person must provide a Children's Guide which includes the following; a summary of what the Service sets out to do, information for the child on how to access independent advocacy, how to complain and the contact details for CSCI. 1.5	Children's Guide (for children over 7 years) about to be printed	2.10.06
2	3(a)(b)(c)	1	Timescale of 30/04/05 not met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. To then be posted out to all children in internal placements with accompanying letter – copy in inspection evidence folder ii. Social workers to send to children in independent fostering agency placements iv. Send batches to social workers to give to children in new placements (evidenced in foster placement agreement) v. Launch with foster placement agreement 2.10.06 vi. Supervising link worker to always take guide to pre or post placement meeting (is responsibility of child's social worker) vii. Guidance to be written by Team Manager, Recruitment and Assessment 	
			The responsible person must ensure the Guide is available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. 1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Arrange for the guide to be communicated to non-English speaking children and children who cannot read (disabled children where appropriate) ii. Provide evidence of this for evidence folder iii. Guidance to be written and 	
			Timescale of 30/04/05 not met. 1		

				communicated in different formats by Family Placements Manager	
3	4 3(i)(ii) Sch 8	4	The registered person must ensure the outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers is reported 4.1 Timescale of 25/01/05 has not been met 4	Ensure all Regulation 43 notifications are sent out and outcomes of any child protection investigations communicated to CSCI Completed by Team Manager Support and Development and Team Manager Permanence Support	Effective immediately
4	34(3) Sch 6	8	The responsible person must ensure that foster placement agreements identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer 8.4	i. Placement agreement 38 regulation 2 (emergency placements) complete ii. Placement agreement for all other placements to be completed iii. Revised referral/matching form to be completed	2.10.06.
5	14	10	The manager must ensure that: The views of the child/young person must be sought and appropriate records kept. 10.4 Detailed information is included in the Foster Placement Agreement with regards to contact arrangements for the child/young person. 10.7	iv. Procedures to be written v. Launched to all children's teams on 2.10.06 by Family Placements Manager and Team Manager Support and Development Guidance	
8	16 and 34(3) Sch6	13	The foster carer's role in school contact, e.g. parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan, is clearly laid out in the placement agreements 13.4. Timescale of 31/03/05 has not been met		
9	16 and 34(3) Sch6	13	The service must ensure that foster carers are provided with clear information, which forms part of the foster placement agreement, of who holds responsibility for giving consent to take part in such trips. 13.5 Timescale of 31/03/05 has not been met		
12	34(3)	16	The registered person must ensure there is a clear		

	Sch 6		understanding between fostering service social workers and the children's social workers of how they can work effectively together for the effective implementation of the foster carer placement agreement format 16.5 Timescale of 30/04/05 has not been met		
6	14	10	<p>The registered person must ensure that contact does not take place until the child's social worker has carried out a risk assessment and arrangements made for any supervision that is needed.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure contracted services to provide staff/carers for supervision of contact arrangements are suitable and consistent 10.6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Confirmation of risk assessment/arrangements for contact to be evidenced in referral/matching form, foster placement agreement, post-placement meeting ii. Actions of contact project to be implemented iii. Arrange meeting with Strategic Manager Looked After Children contact service providers and Family Placement Service to share issues/concerns. Decisions to be recorded. iv. Link into training for contact providers. Manager Family Placements to discuss with Workforce development Manager 	Foster placement agreement to be launched 2.10.06
7	14	10	The registered person must ensure contract arrangements provide suitable transport e.g. taxis used for transport and consistent escorts for contact arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Systems to be established for monitoring transport arrangements – foster carers to have named contact person ii. Family Placements Manager to discuss with Strategic Manager Looked After Children and Children's services Transport Manager 	31.10.06
10	20(3)(b)	15	The manager must ensure that suitable policies, procedures and guidance are produced in relation to the supervision of unqualified workers carrying out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The supervision policies for unqualified staff will be amended to reflect the particular needs of unqualified 	1.12.06

11	20 (3) (b)	15	social work duties and maintain appropriate records of this practice. 15.5, 15.6 & 15.8 Timescale of 31/05/05 has not been met The registered manager must ensure clarity is provided in procedures regarding the status of qualified and unqualified staff with clear guidelines for definition of social work tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. The role of unqualified social worker will be clearly defined in relation to social work tasks pertaining to the support and supervision of foster carers iii. Appoint to senior practitioner post iv. Look at supervision document/policy v. Family Placements Manager and Strategic Manager, Children's Resources 	
13	21 (4) a	20	The supervision policy and agenda does not address the role and needs of the unqualified staff 20.3		
14	22 Sch 3	25	The registered manager must ensure the records kept of the checks and references show they have been obtained and their outcomes. 25.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The actions of the fostering panel project in relation to the tracking of checks and references will be implemented ii. I.T. systems to track checks to be implemented iii. Reminders from that reviews are due will be sent to the family assessment officer in the support and development team, linkworkers and managers iv. Linkworkers to have information in relation to clearances on front of working notes to give to managers to be signed off each month v. Decisions taken to undertake additional unannounced visits must be recorded on all carers' files. Memo to be sent to all linkworkers re: above action vi. By independent reviewing officer for foster carer reviews 	30.06.06 Actioned
15	22 Sch 2	25	The registered manager the administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement needs to be improved to ensure information is current and accurate 25.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Social Workers to be reminded to complete required form to update foster carer register ii. Letter to be sent to all carers to remind them to inform the service of any change 	31.10.06
16	22	25	The registered manager and fostering service staff		

			<p>must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files</p>	<p>in their circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. Panel advisor to ensure foster carer register is up to date iv. File audit systems to be implemented v. Letter to carers/linkworkers re: updating information on carers files vi. File audit system to be presented to performance board in Nov 06 vii. By Manager Family Placement Services and all Team Managers 	
17	23	26	<p>The responsible person must ensure that hazards are assessed and remedial action taken in respect of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asbestos ceiling panels throughout the building which have been assessed as safe as long as they are not moved or damaged • Window frames broken and rotten • Flat roofs damage surface covering • Cleansing/repair of sewage drainage systems (to prevent odour). <p>26.1 Timescale of 31/06/05 has not been met</p>	<p>Implementation of the Essington Project Including temporary re-location of the fostering service to appropriate accommodation at Tameway Tower Full specification completed and contractor appointed to meet all requirements.</p>	<p>Re-location by 30.09.06</p> <p>Refurbishment 1.6.07</p>
18	23	26	<p>The responsible person must ensure that the following items receive attention:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repair flat roof (permanence team room) 2. Assess and repair cracked wall plaster in hallways and stairwell 3. Replace the floor surfaces in the toilets and 		

19	23	26	<p>kitchen with sealed washable floor covering</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Replace the sinks with worn enamel or metal surfaces 5. Replace top corridor carpet 6. Make safe uneven slabs on walkways and in courtyard <p>26.1 Timescale of 31/06/05 has not been met.</p> <p>The registered person must consult the Health and Safety Executive regarding the status of the premises for the health and safety of those working and visiting the premises</p>		
20	23	26	<p>The registered person must provide an action plan to the Commission for Social care Inspection with timescales for the relocation of the fostering services. 26.1 Timescale of 31/05/05 has not been met</p>		
21	23	26	<p>The registered person must ensure the contracted services for cleaning of the premises are monitored to ensure the premises are maintained clean and hygienic</p>		
22	19(a)(b)	31	<p>The registered person must ensure contracted services for children with disabilities meet the service needs for children and foster carers</p> <p>The registered person must ensure there is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff: employ a suitable skilled replacement for the short-term break scheme. 17.2</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The post of Senior Practitioner for the short-term break has been filled ii. Contract with NCH is being reviewed within children's services 	<p>Has been filled</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
23	17	32	<p>The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Consultation event to take place summer 06 with family/friend carers to jointly 	<p>Booked for 24.2.07</p>

24	17	32	<p>address and recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers 32.1 Timescale of 30/04/05 has not been met</p> <p>The responsible person must ensure that support and or relevant training are provided to family and friend carers 32.3</p>	<p>identify their support/training needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. All policies/procedures and the Foster Carer handbook to be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of family/friend carers iii. Manager and senior practitioner permanence support team 	31.03.07
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