

Cabinet –21 October 2009

Walsall Fostering Service Annual Report

Portfolio: Councillor Walker, Children's services

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary of report

The Fostering Service annual report, found at **Appendix 1**, highlights the success of the fostering service for the period April 2008 to March 2009.

The fostering service was inspected by Ofsted in December 2007. Considerable improvements have been made and all the requirements made 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 2010.

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 those who offer short-term breaks for disabled children.

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 of the fostering service on an annual basis in line with good practice.
- 2.3 Cabinet extends thanks and appreciation to the members of the Fostering Panel for their hard work and commitment to the children of Walsall.

3. Background information

The report found at **Appendix 1**, summarises the work of Walsall Children's Services fostering service from April 2008 to March 2009. It provides information about the changes to the structure of the service. Additionally it shows success in the recruitment of foster carers through effective targeted marketing activity. A total of 116 enquiries were received during this period. 13 families were approved, (compared with 10 for the whole of 2007/2008); including 2 families for Black and dual heritage children, and 2 families offering 2 placements for children through the Short term Break scheme. This resulted in a net gain of two fostering households. On 31 March 2009, there were 13 families in assessment, including 3 families for Black, Asian and dual heritage children.

The service is striving to meet the targets to increase the number of local foster placements for Walsall children, which is helping to reduce the reliance on more expensive independent fostering agency (IFA) placements.

On 31 March 2009 there were 154 fostering households, offering 134 temporary placements; 73 permanent, 12 respite and 15 short-term break and 34 family and friend carers (with 56 children placed). The next inspection of the Fostering Service will note improvements in the availability of local foster placements, which will ensure better placement matching, increased placement stability and thus improved outcomes for children.

The inspection of the Fostering Service by Ofsted was undertaken by Ofsted in December 2007, with an overall judgement of satisfactory. All the requirements have been implemented and an action plan to implement the recommendations is in place. The service is seeking to achieve a good judgement in the next inspection scheduled for an unspecified date sometime after April 2010.

The fostering service was re-structured in September 2008 in response to one of the key requirements of the inspection in December 2007 namely supervision and support to carers by qualified social workers, which continues to be effective. The fostering service is assisted in supporting carers through partnerships with the Education Service (the virtual School) and health (the dedicated team for Looked after Children). Within Children's Services there are effective working relationships between the Looked after Children's Teams and the Vulnerable Children's Service. The Outreach team works with foster carers and children and young people to promote placement stability.

Walsall fostering service has an effective partnership with Walsall Foster Carer Association (FCA). Carers are offered appropriate training and are supported in obtaining the NVQ in caring for Children and Young People. The Service has made an excellent start in supporting carers in evidencing their competence to the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training, support and development standards for foster carers. The supervision and review processes support carers and safeguard children placed.

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 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 determine 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 performance boards.

The work of the fostering service has contributed positively to improvements in key performance indicators such as long term placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving 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 access to services for all Walsall children who are looked after by the local authority.

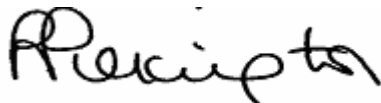
10. Consultation

This report has been informed by consultation and feedback from relevant stakeholders; foster carers 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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8 October 2009



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8 October 2009



Walsall Council

**WALSALL CHILDREN'S SERVICE
FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT
1 APRIL TO 31 MARCH 2009**

**Author: Louise Watts
Operations Manager
Family Placement Service**

1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the activity of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009

The Fostering Service comprises the following:

- Operations Manager Family Placement Service the primary objectives of this role are to be responsible for the service planning and management of all local authority fostering and adoption services.
- Recruitment and Assessment Team This team is responsible for all marketing, recruitment, training and assessing 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.

One full-time senior practitioner post is responsible for commissioning independent assessments (family and friends and Special Guardianship Orders). The other half time senior practitioner post is responsible for managing the assessments of internal foster carers and private foster carers and lead on the introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) induction standards for carers.

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.

- 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.

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.

- 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.

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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

All parts of 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.

Following the inspection of the fostering service by Ofsted in December 2007, the service underwent a process of re-engineering 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.

- Maintaining market / brand presence within the area of Walsall.
- Promotional targeted activity

2.2. Enquiry Levels

	Fostering
	Enquiries = 274 Offers = 56 (20%) Approvals = 13 Conversion for period = 4.8%

April	15
May	20
June	31
July	14
August	15
September	22
October	31
November	26
December	15
January	22
February	41
March	22

2.3. Ethnicity of persons 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	11	0	7	5	0	4
October	16	0	6	5	0	4
November	15	1	1	3	0	6
December	8	0	1	3	0	3
January	13	0	2	5	0	13
February	29	0	8	0	0	4
March	13	0	5	3	0	0
	176	3	43	36	0	47
% of total	64.2%	1.1%	15.7%	13.1%	0%	17.2%

2.4. Enquiries by source of marketing methods

This figure is based upon 294 recorded enquiries from April to March 2009. The table provides an indication, in relation to campaign activity of which marketing mechanism 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. Full breakdowns of figures are as follows:

	Magazine	Bus Adverts	Newspapers	Events	Radio	Leaflets	Internet	Directories	Family, friends	Switch board	Unknown or not remember	Other
No	12	16	38	34	2	6	61	13	35	7	15	54
%	4.4%	5.8%	13.9%	12.4%	0.7%	2.2%	22.3%	4.7%	12.8%	2.6%	5.5%	19.7%

Of the 13 households approved, how they heard about fostering is as follows:

- 2 through family and friends
- 5 via the newspaper
- 1 was through the switchboard
- 5 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. There is an arrangement between these 4 local authorities, to jointly run the preparation courses at a minimum of 12 times per year. Each authority leads on 3 courses. This is very positive, as applicants can chose 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 7 sessions and is facilitated by Social work staff and foster carers.

<u>Number of courses run</u>	<u>Number of Walsall households trained</u>	<u>Numbers going into assessment</u>
12	31	13

3.2. Post Approval

Since January 2008, the Fostering Service has been working on the preparation and implementation of the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Training Support and Development Standards for Foster carers. One part time senior practitioner has been in post since July 09 to lead on this. Since October 2008 there have

been 8 workshops for foster carers, 2 workshops for staff, 4 drop in support sessions, 16 face to face reviews of progress, and numerous support visits from a Family Support Officer. To date 95 foster carers have attended workshops, representing 62 households which have commenced their portfolios, 4 households have so far completed the portfolio. There is a pilot scheme in place with 2 family and friend carers to inform implementation with that group, and a separate workshop to address the needs of short term break carers is planned for the Autumn 09.

The timeframe for existing carers to complete the CWDC standards is June 2011, whilst newly approved carers have 12 months from the date of approval to evidence their competence.

There was 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.

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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 and 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- March 09 we had 5 Health and Social Care (H&SC) Caring for Children and Young People completers and 1 Assessor Award Completion. We still have 2 on the programme and have just registered another 9 H & SC candidate and 2 Assessor Candidates.

We have 3 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 recruitment and assessment 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.

Type of carer	Approved	Deregistered /resigned	Net position
Mainstream	11	10	+ 1
STB	2	1	+ 1
Back up carers	2	0	+ 2
Family and friend	12	8	+ 4

White British	Asian	African – Caribbean/White British
11	1	1

4.2 The most significant figure is the total for mainstream and STB carers -a total of **13** approvals and **11** deregistrations giving a net gain of **2** households for this period .This compares favourably to the previous year when **10** households were approved and **10** deregistered giving a net gain of **zero**.

4.3 On 31.3.09 there were 14 families in assessment who wished to be approved as mainstream or STB carers.

4.2. The reasons for applicants with drawing from assessments are various and include a change in personal circumstances; family bereavement; concerns raised by the assessor; unsuitability

5. **SUPERVISION, SUPPORT AND REVIEWING**

5.1. Since the service was re-engineered 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 if 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 has improved placement matching, provided more effective support, decreased disruptions, increased placement stability and overall created more positive outcomes for children

This continues until after the first foster carer review (within 12 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 4 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 3 months with a 6 weekly support visit in between.

- 5.3.** According to the fostering service regulations, at least one unannounced visit is undertaken to each fostering household each year, and these have been undertaken.
- 5.4.** The roles of the family support officer (FSO's) have developed a different focus. Prior to the re-engineering, 4 out of the 6 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
 - assists in recruitment activity
 - participates with the service in developing and reviewing policies and procedures
 - facilitates carer training
 - runs coffee mornings and support groups
 - organises social activities
 - is 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 was drawn up and implemented 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, 132 reviews have been held within the timescale of 12 months out of a total of 181 which were due. This is a rate of 72%. The reviewing officer is timely in chairing the reviews.

Support groups continue to be held – either facilitated by the service (via the peer support co-ordinator) or by the foster carers for the coffee mornings. The meetings have general agenda items and may sometimes have guest speakers.

- 5.8. The annual “Foster Carers Recognition Day” was held in April 2008. The Theme this year was Morris dancing.30 carers attended. All carers received an award. This provided the service with an opportunity to clearly state the value it places on its carers.
- 5.9. The 4 local authorities in the Black Country take it in turns 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, has there had been a lapse the previous year .Walsall is looking forward to hosting the event again in 2010 and is in the process of exploring a innovative approach to the activity
- 5.10. 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 re-engineered service , who would have lead responsibility for developing the support, supervision and training offered to family and friends carers.
- 6.4.** As a result of implementing this action plan, family and friend carers now receive the same levels of support, supervision and training as that offered to non related foster carers.
- 6.5.** Family and Friend Carers receive regular supervision at the same interval as non related foster carers which is currently every 4 or 6 weeks and as stipulated in the Fostering Service Regulations and Fostering Service Standards 2002.
- 6.6.** Supervision is undertaken by qualified social workers within the Permanence Support Team.
- 6.7.** Support is provided as soon as the Permanence Support Team is notified of a child being placed with a family and friend carer and they are allocated a supervising social worker who will arrange to visit the carer
- 6.8.** An Induction Training Programme was devised and delivered to all family and friend carers from January 2009. This is designed for the specific needs of family and friends carers. It is delivered 3 times a year and covers 3 main areas; The Child, The Carer and Legal Responsibilities and Requirements. It is offered as soon as our service is informed of the placement of a child within the household.

The carer’s details are automatically placed on the next available training programme with the recommendation they attend at this point.

If the carer is not available on the initial dates offered they are automatically included on the next available training programme.

- 6.9.** Feedback from the carers is very positive and has also been instrumental in them other training they would benefit from, consisting of both specific and non related foster carer training courses. The evaluation process also informs our service of any further training which may be suitable for family and friend carers to attend and is included in our ongoing future training planning.
- 6.10.** The carers receive a certificate in recognition of their attendance and completion of the 3 day Induction Training Programme and all other training attended.

6.11.The take up rate for this level of training has improved dramatically from 6 carers attending the first course to 10 and 12 for the following 2 programmes. The next Induction training session is planned to take place in October 2009.

Family and friend carers are also offered other levels of training, some of which includes non related foster carer training provision within the Family Placement Service.

6.12. From December 2008 a coffee/information sharing meeting has now been held on three occasions for family and friend Carers. A 'guest speaker' has been identified for each session to provide specific information for the carers. These occasions have been welcomed by the carers, as an additional form of advice and support, and attendance has now risen from 6 carers at the first meeting to 16 carers on the latest meeting. Whereas it was previously agreed the meetings would take place 4 times a year, the carers have requested they occur at 2 monthly intervals. This is being incorporated in the Action Plan, both currently and ongoing.

6.13. Buddy Support-an information/feedback letter was sent to all family and friend carers' asking if they may be prepared to be involved in this scheme. The scheme was also explained in more detail during their specific Induction Training. Although originally the carers were open to the idea, they have now stated they would prefer to receive support from the coffee/information sharing meetings and training programme.

6.14. A draft Induction Booklet and Induction Pack has now been completed and will be distributed to carers. This has been written in conjunction with the relevant information included in the foster carer hand book and is therefore pertinent to the needs of the family and friend carers.

6.15. A bench marking exercise has been undertaken to measure the services we currently offer and provide to family and friend carers, with other Local Authority's within the Black Country Consortium. From the information gathered to date it appears our service is way ahead of our neighbouring Local Authorities in the services we provide for our family and friend carers i.e. specific training, induction information, coffee/information mornings, celebration event, and provision of a dedicated supervising social worker within the Permanence Support Team.

6.16. A family and friend carer Celebration Day is planned for Saturday 11th July 2009.

6.17 On 31.3.09 there were 40 family and friend carers caring for 51 children

7. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT

7.1. The Senior Practitioner within the Permanence Support Team continues to provide support to Special Guardians and their families, both prior to (advice and support in respect of indirect contact – letter writing) and following the making of the Order, in relation to the review of the support plan, supporting contact (both direct and indirect), reviewing financial support arrangements etc. Currently, 15 families are receiving support

8. SHORT TERM BREAK SCHEME

8.1. 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. On 31 March 2009 there are 8 carers, providing 15 STB Placements for children.

8.2. Over this period, the service has received 7 enquiries from families interested in offering short term breaks.4 of these became firm offers and of these, 2 are currently being assessed

8.3. 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”.

8.4. The service drew up an action plan in response to this requirement as follows:

Action	Progress
To increase by 10% the number of STB placements by March 2009.	The increase of 1 placement represent an increase of 1 % .So th target has not been reached Future action –proactive targeted and innovative recruitment activity
To reduce the reliance on residential provision by December 2009.	This has not been achieved because the number of STB placements has not increased. Action –see above
Improve the retention of carers through more effective support, training, prompt re-numeration, provision of equipment, effective consultation and participation by October 2009.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All carers now receive monthly supervision. • Coffee mornings are held each month and carers regularly attend. • Carers are identifying relevant training and this has been

<p>Implemented</p>	<p>incorporated into the training plan 2009/10. Carers are supported to attend specific training.("Aiming high for disabled children")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carers are involved in policy/procedure development. • Consultation planned for August 2009. • Carers' recognition day planned for October 2009.
<p>Improve safeguarding for children through specialised training, updated safe care statements, good recording unannounced visits, and regular visits by the child's social worker (by March 2009).</p> <p>Implemented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carers are encouraged and supported to attend WCSB training. • All carers have safe caring statements which are updated for each new placement. • Recording is current and pertinent. • Unannounced visits take place in line with regulations.
<p>Participate in the Corporate Disability strategy.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>

9. ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

9.1 Allegations /incidents of concern/complaints against carers-6

During this period there were 6 allegations against foster carers which were investigated in line with procedures

9.1 Complaints against the Service-11

During this period there were 11 complaints against the service which were investigated within timescales

10. PLACEMENT DUTY

10.1 The fostering service manages all requests for placements for children who are looked after by Walsall Children's Services. 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.

10.2 Foster Care Resource

On 30.9.08 there were **462** children looked after .Of these,**207** children were placed in internal foster placements and **93** in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) placements. The target is to reduce this number to **87** by 31.3.10 .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 utilize 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.

On 31.3.09 there were **234** placements available as follows:

134 temporary

73 permanent

12 respite

15 STB

11.0 FOSTERING PANEL

11.1 Introduction

It has been a busy period for the fostering panel, with a steady flow of foster carer 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. It is with sadness that we report the death of Councillor Micklewright - Elected Member in November 2008. Although a member for a short period, she made a valuable contribution Panel membership on 31 March 2009 was 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
Linda Walker	- Foster Carer – Other Local Authority

Support to the panel:

Elaine Storey	- Panel Advisor
Sheila Perry-Jones	- Panel Administrator

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

There are vacancies for a social worker from the service with fostering experience, and an elected member which we are seeking to fill.

Attendance has been good by panel members and the review of their membership was introduced from April 2008 to ensure best practice.

11.2 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. It is also strongly encouraged that approved foster carers attend for the first foster carer review, or on occasions when the review is as a result in a change of circumstances or an allegation or complaint.

11.3 The Review and Skill Level Board

During this period there have been 5 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 (66 this period) and applications for Skill level progressions are presented (11 for this period).

11.4 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.

11.5 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.

11.6 The Fostering Service

David Bovell, Head of Corporate Parenting, for Children’s Specialist 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.

12.0 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Walsall continues to be a member of the West Midlands Regional Family Placement Consortium (WMRFPC), along with 13 other West Midlands Local Authorities and voluntary agencies

The Consortium meets bi-monthly. The Operations manager for the Family Placement Service attends. Discussions have centred on development of policy, procedural and practice issues, in respect of Special Guardianship Orders, Short Term Break schemes, “staying put” pilots, family and friends as carers, private fostering, panel processes and the new BAAF form “F”.

13.0 OFSTED INSPECTION OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE DECEMBER 2007

13.1 All the statutory requirements of the Ofsted Inspection of December 2007 have been implemented.

13.2 This is the action plan drawn up to implement the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection of December 2007.

Recommendation	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage placing social workers to provide all relevant health information in a timely fashion (NMS12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervising social workers to ensure that the children’s social workers provide carers with relevant information at pre/post placement meetings.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervising social workers to obtain any relevant information contained on PARIS and give to the carers. Monitored through file audits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop robust system for ensuring that outstanding health and safety requirements are followed up and actioned (NMS6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervising social workers to complete health and safety assessments. Health and Safety to be a standard item on agenda of foster carer supervision and method whereby the assessment is "signed off". Monitored through file audits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that safe care plans are in place for all placements, are updated in light of change of circumstances and agreed by placing social worker (NMS6) (Implemented). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New guidance written and issued to all supervising social workers. Standard item at foster carer review, requirement for fostering panel RSLB. Foster placement agreement rewritten to reflect requirement to review safe caring statement for new placements. Monitored through file audits.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that minutes of the fostering panel accurately reflect any concerns raised by panel members and the reason a decision has been reached (NMS30) (Implemented). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each panel member is asked for their recommendation and reasons and this is now recorded in the minutes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a simpler version of the Children's Guide to meet the needs of younger and less able young people (NMS1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish project group to consult with younger and less able young people to develop an appropriate children's guide.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update the foster care agreement so that it accurately reflects the arrangements for inspection (NMS22). (Implemented). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated foster carer agreement issued. Monitored through file audits.

14.0 FUTURE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 14.1 Implement all the recommendations of the last fostering inspection.
- 14.2 Implement the ongoing actions in relation to the provision of short term breaks for disabled children.
- 14.3 Ensure the assessments of the emotional needs of children and young people in foster care are completed using the SDQ processes.
- 14.4 Launch and implement the amended “Missing from Home and Care” policy within the service and foster carers.
- 14.5 Encourage foster carers to develop leisure pursuits for the children they care for.
- 14.6 Ensure the cultural, religious and linguistic needs of children are met through the recruitment of more carers from black and minority ethnic communities.
- 14.7 Implement PARIS within the Family Placement Service.
- 14.8 Reduce the reliance on external fostering service providers by increasing internal local capacity through effective recruitment and “stretching” capacity of existing foster carers.
- 14.9 Continue to promote placement stability.
- 14.10 Implement a strategy to raise awareness and understanding amongst carers about attachment issues, through regular training and practice workshops.
- 14.11 Undertake a review of the re-aligned fostering service in the light of service requirements.
- 14.12 Develop processes to monitor disruptions in placements and use the information gathered to inform practice and policy.
- 14.13 Continue to support carers to acquire accreditation in relation to the CWDC induction standards.
- 14.14 Increase the numbers of children cared for by family and friends carers.