

Cabinet – 18 April 2007

Fostering Service Inspection of November 2006 and Action Plan

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's Services

Service Area: Children's Services

Wards: All Wards

Key decision: No

Forward Plan: Yes

Summary of Report

Walsall Council's fostering service received its most successful ever annual inspection during November 2006. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) methodology included a self assessment, questionnaires, interviews with staff, carers and young people and inspection of case records, policy and other service documentation.

The report notes remarkable progress and significant improvements throughout the service. Inspectors applied quality ratings – "excellent", "good", "adequate" and "poor". The Fostering service in Walsall is now deemed to be "good overall" and is well placed to be rated as an "excellent" in 2008 in accordance with the Council vision to be an excellent authority.

The first CSCI inspection in March 2004 placed 63 statutory requirements on the fostering service. Progress has been so rapid that this had reduced to 26 requirements by February 2006 and remarkably by November 2006, only 3 remain.

National minimum standards for fostering services are rated 1 to 4, with 4 signifying that the standard has been exceeded (commendable). For the first time the service received 5 standard 4 ratings and has been praised for the support and supervision it gives to foster carers, and the skills and expertise of staff. Minor shortfalls noted are the maintenance of the register of foster carers, updating of administrative records and the support to family and friend carers. These are addressed within in the action plan at **Appendix 1**. There are no other shortfalls **Appendix 2** shows the rapid continual improvement against care standards over four inspections carried out by CSCI.

The full inspection report can be found at www.csci.org.uk

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet note the remarkable, substantial progress and achievements of the Walsall fostering service.
- (2) That Cabinet approve the action plan at **Appendix 1** 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 November 2006. The purpose of the 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. 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. The role of the Cabinet in supporting this substantial project is acknowledged by CSCI.

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 inspectors now judge how well a fostering service meets outcomes in terms of a new system of quality ratings – "excellent", "good", "adequate" and "poor". Following this inspection the service is deemed to be "good". In Walsall the fostering service is now 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 November 2006

Authors

David Bovell – Strategic Manager, Corporate parenting
Contact No 01922 658356
bovelld@walsall.gov.uk

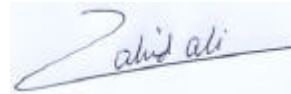
Louise Watts – Manager, Family Placement Services, Children’s Resources
Contact No 01922 658351
WattsL@walsall.gov.uk



Signed

Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 19 March 2007



Signed

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Zahid Ali

Date: 3 April 2007

FOSTERING INSPECTION – OVERVIEW NOVEMBER 2006

BEING HEALTHY	
Standard & No	Score
12. The Fostering Service promotes the health and development of children	4

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	3
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.	3
30. Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard & No	SCORE
7. The Fostering Service values diversity.	3
13. The Fostering Service promotes educational achievement	3
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	3
11. The Fostering Service promotes consultation	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard & No	Score
14. The Fostering Service prepares young people for adulthood.	Not inspected
29. The Fostering Service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified	Not inspected

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	3
4. The Fostering Service is monitored & controlled as specified.	3
16. Staff are organised and managed effectively.	3
17. The Fostering Service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.	4
20. The staff are properly accountable and supported.	3
21. The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers	4
22. Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.	4
23. Foster carers are appropriately trained	4
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.	3
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)

**Action Plan to the Statutory Requirements and Recommendations Identified in the Announced Inspection of Walsall MBC Fostering Service
November 2006 by Chris Fuller**

Statutory Requirements					
No	Regulation	Standard	Requirement	Action to be taken to address the statutory requirements	Completion date
1	22 Sch 2	25	The registered manager must ensure that the administration systems for the holding of the register of foster carers and of children in placement is improved to ensure information is current and accurate 25.6	i. Social Workers to be reminded to complete required form to update foster carer register	31.3.07
2	22	25	The registered manager and fostering service staff must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files	ii. Letter to be sent to all carers to remind them to inform the service of any change in their circumstances iii. Panel adviser to ensure foster carer register is up to date iv. File audit to be undertaken in march 07 v. Letter to carers/link-workers re: updating information on carers files vi. A register of children in placement is to be established. vii. To be actioned by the Manager Family Placement Services and all Team Managers in conjunction with the administrative support team	
3	17	32	The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service 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 The responsible person must ensure that support and or relevant training are provided to family and friend carers 32.3	i. Consultation/ celebration event to take place on 24.2.07 with family/friend carers to jointly identify their support/training needs ii. All policies/procedures and the Foster Carer handbook to be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of family/friend carers	30.4.07

Fostering Inspection Standards 2006

