

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 DECEMBER 2012

## OFSTED INSPECTION OF MEDWAY'S FOSTERING SERVICE

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### Summary

This report provides an overview of the outcome of the inspection by Ofsted into Medway Council's fostering service and the actions being implemented to address areas identified for improvement.

### 1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The terms of reference for this committee are detailed within Chapter 4, paragraph 22.2(b) of the agenda and includes 'fostering and adoption and family placements.

### 2. Background

2.1 Ofsted have a duty to inspect fostering services once in every three-year cycle. The scheduling of inspections takes account of legal requirements; previous inspection findings; complaints and concerns about the service; performance information held by the Department of Education, the timing of other inspections in local authorities and notifications and monitoring reports provided to Ofsted by registered fostering services under regulation 35 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

2.2 Ofsted is introducing a new Inspection Framework for Looked After Children and young people Leaving Care in April 2013. This will include Fostering and adoption. The more universal programme will be unannounced and have a 4-year cycle.

2.3 Medway's Fostering Service was inspected on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2012 with Ofsted publishing their findings on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012. At the time of the inspection 161 approved fostering households were looking after 269 children.

### Inspection Judgements:

Overall Effectiveness	Adequate
Outcomes for Children and Young People	Good
Quality of Service	Adequate
Safeguarding Children and Young People	Good
Leadership and Management	Adequate

### 3. Ofsted findings

- 3.1 The overall effectiveness of the service was judged to be **adequate**. The full report can be viewed using the following link:-  
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/CARE/SC049562>
- 3.2 Children and young people feel safe, happy and settled. This is reflected in the Local Authority's data regarding placement stability, which is higher than the national average.
- 3.3 Children and Young People are valued by their carers, with their diversity being celebrated as well as their views and opinions influencing service delivery.
- 3.4 The leadership and management team is cited as being fully aware of the services' strengths and weaknesses, and is systematically implementing improvements.

### 4. Summary of Areas for Development

- 4.1 The following bullet points summarise the areas identified for development: -
1. Role of corporate parent. **Action: The Looked After Children's Officer group be reformed to support the work of Corporate Parenting Group.**
  2. Communication between teams. **Action: Fostering to allocate a fostering (link) social worker to each child's social care Team care team to help with internal communication. The placement officer role to be advertised as a permanent post.**
  3. Co-ordinated support and delivery of care to promote the journey of the child. **Action: Permanence Panel now established to ensure effective long-term plans are put in place as early as possible.**
  4. Fostering Panel procedures and decision-making. **Action: New procedures being drawn up to clarify roles and responsibilities.**
  5. Documentary shortfalls to be addressed i.e. HR processes. **Action: HR reviewing staff transfer policy.**
  6. Management hours to be increased. **Action: Full Time Team managers post advertised and interim appointed for 6 months as no applicants for permanent post**
  7. Foster Carers' Personal Development Reviews to be implemented. **Action: Fostering Social Workers drafting a Personal Development Plan format for carers.**
  8. Improving the quality of the content of staff appraisal and supervision records **Action: Goal Setting and supervision training session to be set with line managers.**

9. Promotion of safer care policies with carers. **Action: Training planned for all carers to update safeguarding skills and policy review to be concluded by end of December.**
10. Recruitment strategies to ensure sufficient foster carers are available to meet demand. **Action: Service Manager drawing up recruitment strategy by January 2013.**
11. Improvement of children in after school activities, which promote learning. **Action detailed in Fostering Action Plan**

## 5. Implementation of actions

- 5.1 The current Service Manager has drawn up an action plan to address the areas of development identified within the Inspection. The Children's Social Care Senior Management Team approved this at the end of September. See annex 2.

## 6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Rating
Failure to recruit sufficient panel members.	Panel will not be able to undertake its duties.	Recruitment of panel members for the central list through BAAF; Fostering Network; social work teams; elected members to be approached; Medway website: Just4You and local press.  JD/PS to be written	D3
Inaccurate recording of panel meetings plus failure to record exemption decisions.	Minutes do not effectively capture key data.	Amend structure of panel minutes to ensure content meets required standards.  Panel recommendations to be clearly detailed by the Panel Chair and recorded accurately.  Clear details and reasons for exemption decisions to be recorded.  Record of all exemptions to be maintained	D3
Non-compliance with legal ruling.	Key decisions must include all matters taken into account.	Consider 'Hofstetter v LB Barnet & IRM guidance	E4
Skills base of carers will be limited which will impact on quality of care provided.	All Foster Carers have training and development needs addressed.	Personal Development Plan to be included in Form F for all prospective carer and to be reviewed at carers annual reviews  Personal Development Plan Form to be devised to cover support and learning domains	C2
Ineffective supervision of staff will impact on service delivery.	Regular and quality supervision is required for all social workers.	Compliance with Medway Supervision policy and procedures. Supervision records to be audited in line with audit cycle.  Attendance at Espresso Shot Workshops ie Conducting Effective PDR's/ One to Ones/Coaching for Performance/Challenging Underperformance  Senior Practitioners to attend developmental	D3

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Rating
		<p>sessions with PSW</p> <p>HR surgeries to be provided at the Elaine Centre to support staff with HR advice.</p> <p>PDP' s to link to corporate divisional and team plans plan</p>	
Failure to comply with safe care policies will not promote safeguarding of LAC population.	Key safeguarding checks and activity must be complied with.	<p>PIR's to be completed for every child highlighting any risks.</p> <p>Audit of records of unannounced visits to carers.</p> <p>Safe Care Policies to be reviewed.</p> <p>Feedback from children and young people to be monitored, within review process. Quarterly paper to CSCMT detailing themes.</p> <p>Themes from complaints from young people to be monitored at CSCMT.</p> <p>Promotion of LSCB policies and procedures in supervision/training and MFCA meetings.</p> <p>Internet Safety Training to be provided for all carers and fostering staff.</p>	C2
Insufficient recruitment of foster carers will cause further pressure on placement budget for Medway.	The cost of independent Foster placements is significantly higher than in-house carers.	<p>Recruitment Strategy to be devised and implemented,</p> <p>Audit and analysis of cases where applicant withdrawals to inform recruitment strategy.</p>	B2
Non-engagement of foster carers will result in limited care planning for children which will impact on outcomes for LAC population.	Ensure all Foster Carers play an active part in plans for their Foster children.	<p>Monitor foster carers contributions to child care plans within supervision/carer reviews and LAC reviews. Audit of feedback forms received from carers</p> <p>Audit of Placement Information Record and Delegation of Responsibility</p>	C2
Lack of learning opportunities beyond the school day may impact on intellectual development and future opportunities for LAC population.	Ensure all Looked after Children have a wide range of learning activities beyond the school day.	Audit of current provision by the Virtual Head to identify any shortfalls.	D3
Management oversight and accountability of day to day running of service will not be	Continuous improvement of the service is critical to improve outcomes for	Recruit new Fostering Manager	C2

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Rating</b>
sufficiently implemented.	children.		
Non-compliance with recruitment processes could affect safer recruitment of staff.	Ensure all recruitment is compliant to standards required.	Ensure staff personnel files contain work reports and evidence of the transfer of social workers between teams.  Transfer policy to be reviewed	D3

## **7. Implications for Looked After Children**

- 7.1 Should Medway fail to recruit sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted demands children will continue to be placed in out of area placements.
- 7.2 Contact with family members, changes in school, medical professionals and social networks are all cited by young people as areas for concern when they are placed outside of their familial geographical areas.
- 7.3 Failure to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures in place will impact on the well being of LAC.
- 7.4 An ill-trained and poorly informed cohort of foster carers will not enable outcomes for children to be met in their placements.

## **8. Financial and legal implications**

- 8.1 Insufficient recruitment of foster carers will cause additional pressure on the local authorities budget.
- 8.2 There is case law that a failure by the council to carry out the recommendations of an Ofsted Inspection can open the council to legal proceedings from Looked After Children or foster carers.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 The committee is recommended to note the outcome of the inspection and the ongoing implementation of the action plan.

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### **Background papers**

None