

AUDIT COMMITTEE

12 JANUARY 2016

UPDATE ON FOSTERING DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SERVICE CHECKS

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Summary

This report provides an update on progress against the recommendations in the audit report of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks in the Fostering service.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 All foster carers must have a valid DBS check to ensure that children and young people placed with them are appropriately safeguarded. In addition adult members of their household and regular visitors to their house must also be fully checked.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the Fostering service DBS check process as required from the Audit Committee in January 2015.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Audit Committee in January 2015 heard reports from the Assistant Director Children's Social Care and the Head of Internal Audit and Fraud regarding the Disclosure and Barring Service processes (DBS) relating to foster carers and their family members and regular household visitors.
- 2.2 The original report found there were some delays in verifying completed DBS checks for carers and their support networks.
- 2.3 As a result the conclusion was that compliance with DBS requirements needed strengthening.
- 2.4 Operational services have reviewed and improved practice in relation to DBS checks since then.

- 2.5 Whilst the DBS process is still manual, the Fostering service uses an electronic spreadsheet which is the master sheet for tracking checks. It shows the date and issue of the most recent check and the DBS register held by Fostering shows the progress of the DBS request.
- 2.6 DBS forms are sent by admin staff to carers three months before their check expires. Once returned they are sent to HR for processing before being sent to the DBS service.
- 2.7 Reminders have been given to carers about the importance of the DBS process through supervision, the carer's newsletter and letter. A letter and template requesting details of the carer, household and support network (incl. DBS information) is sent out every 6 months as well with all DBS application forms.
- 2.8 An email in-box for carers to send their completed forms to and from where any queries about checks can be resolved has been created. Annual reviews of foster carers include a review of DBS checks for the household and regular visits. Supervising Social Workers (SSWs) also discuss DBS checks and any changes in the carers support network during their visits.
- 2.9 Our aim is that Frameworki (FWi), the services case management system, becomes the vehicle to run reports regarding the percentage of DBS checks that are valid. A new FWi tracker report should be going live in the New Year. This will enable admin to also track the progress of checks as the FWi episode now includes the date the application was sent to the applicant as well as HR. Consideration is being given to adding another date to confirm the date the DBS was dispatched to the applicant. This will enable SSWs to verify the completed DBS more timely.
- 2.10 There is an alert in FWi that goes to the admin workers workflow 3 months before the DBS check is due which acts as a reminder to them to contact carers. The episode has also been upgraded to add the application form reference number, the date the form was sent to the applicant and the date the form was sent to HR. This will then eradicate the need for the electronic spreadsheet to be updated.
- 2.11 Our in house policy store, TriX, has information about the DBS process for carers which all staff in Children's Social Care (CSC) can access.
- 2.12 Following the recent admin review in CSC we now have greater capacity for undertaking spot checks on carers DBS checks. The admin manager will be undertaking spot checks quarterly to ensure all processes are operating efficiently and that all carers have an active check or have one being completed. The admin manager will be able to run regular reports once the report function is live. This will initially be weekly, with a view to moving to monthly monitoring process.
- 2.13 The Council as a whole will be moving to an electronic DBS checking system in April 2016. It is proposed that the Fostering Service will move to this system earlier using an umbrella company until Medway Council goes live with e-DBS. This will reduce waiting times with over 50% of standard

disclosures results received within 24 hours and on average all disclosure results received in less than 5 days.

2.14 Current statistics based on FWi are as follows:

Lead carers – 187 carers are showing on FWi, 133 have in date DBS checks (71%), 21 are in progress (11%) and of these 16 have been completed and are awaiting verification. 32 do not appear to have current DBS or are in the process of being checked (18%), 15 of these are connected carers and 3 are short break carers.

Secondary Carers – 77 secondary carers are on FWi. 59 have in date DBS checks (76%), 9 are in progress (12%) and of these 4 have been completed and are awaiting verification. 9 do not appear to have a current DBS or are in the process of being checked (12%), 4 of these are connected carers.

Support network - 175 support network/household members are showing on FWi. 127 have in date DBS checks (73%), 22 are in progress (13%) and of these 10 have been completed and are awaiting verification. 24 do not appear to have a current DBS or are in the process of being checked (14%), 5 of these are connected carers.

3. Options

3.1 Not applicable to this update report.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1 Internal audit services have indicated that there has been improvement in the quality of data since the original report, although they have further indicated that they need to undertake a completeness check on the data. We will work with audit colleagues over the coming months to continue to monitor and check our information Admin has been working closely with internal audit and is meeting regularly. Matching data from FWi and the spreadsheet has taken place. As the data quality has improved this has brought up areas that need work and a clear plan of how any issues can be fixed. The next meeting will be arranged for the end of January 2016.

4.2 In order to be reassured that every child is safe, we are working closely with the police and are carrying out PNC (police national computer) checks for carers who have currently no DBS in place whilst all outstanding applications are being processed. Where required risk assessments are being put into place.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Children are placed at risk because a carer or an adult within their support network does not have a valid DBS check.	If a foster carer or an adult in their support network has an out of date DBS check the council will not be aware of any offences committed which place children and young people at risk.	All carers and adults within their household and support network must have an up to date DBS check. The Fostering service must have systems in place to ensure checks are undertaken and completed on time and before the expiry of the previous check.	Amber

6. Consultation

6.1 None required for this update report.

7. Financial implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. Legal implications

8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there is a risk that a successful claim brought against the Council may result in a substantial financial award as compensation for a person who has suffered detriment as a result of a placement with a foster-carer without an appropriate DBS check in place.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress made in verifying DBS checks for foster carers, family members and regular visitors.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None