

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	Cabinet
2.	<b>Date:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September, 2010
3.	<b>Title:</b>	Inspection of Fostering Services - Summary of the Report and Action Plan
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	Children and Young People's Services

### 5. Summary

This report summarises the main findings of the inspection of the Fostering Service undertaken by Ofsted, week commencing 21st June, 2010, and presents the action plan devised to address the recommendations of the Inspectors.

The overall judgement of the inspection is 'Satisfactory', with 'Good' being achieved in:-

- Helping children to be healthy.
- Achieve well and enjoy what they do.
- Make a positive contribution and;
- Achieving economic well-being.

### 6. Recommendations

**That Cabinet notes the Fostering Service Inspection report and action plan arising from it.**

## 7. **Proposals and Details**

The purpose the inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public local authorities and Government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standard Act, 2000.

The Inspectors concluded that 'Rotherham MBC operates a **satisfactory** fostering service that provides good outcomes for children in many respects. Children are well supported with their health and well consulted on the care provided for them. The authority has made a good start in involving looked after young people in the running of the authority .....and provides fostered children with strong support for their education'.

However they note that 'a lack of sufficient rigour in some areas, particularly the quality assurance monitoring of the day to day work of the service, means that some weaker areas of practice are not identified and addressed well enough. For this reason the outcome areas of 'staying safe' and 'organisation', whilst sound are not judged as strong areas of work', thus limiting the overall judgement to satisfactory.

The report highlights many aspects of the work of the service that are identified as providing good support to children in foster care.

### **Overall Judgement**

Practice that contributed to a judgement of good in stay healthy is the good training and advice received by carers in respect of children and young people's physical, sexual and emotional health and the support given to them to deal with any specialist health needs of children. The work of the looked after children's nurse and the health support worker is highlighted as giving good support to children and young people, including care leavers.

### **Staying Safe**

In the area of staying safe the inspectors note that, as in other authorities the pressure to find placements for children is high, but conclude that the service works effectively in placing children with carers who are an appropriate match and takes care to monitor and support when placements are made outside carers' approval terms. They also note the reduction in the use of exemptions. These are significant findings in light of the criticism of practice made in a previous inspection. The inspectors conclude that the authority has safe staff recruitment processes in place.

### **Achieve Well and Enjoy**

The inspectors find practice in respect of helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do to be good. They highlight the careful consideration that is given to matching children with carers who meet their needs particularly the practice that underpins the placement of children with disabilities and complex needs. The work of the Get Real team is noted as offering 'very good support' and the Families Together service as offering 'good, individualised and flexible support'.

### **Make Positive Contribution**

The work undertaken to improve the participation of children and young people has contributed to a good judgement in the area of helping children to make a positive contribution. The inspectors conclude that children are 'involved and listened to regarding the provision of their care..... foster carers take notice of their opinions and support them to express these in care planning discussions' and they 'are consulted for their reviews and those of their carers'. The work undertaken on developing the Pledge is noted.

### **Achieving Economic Well-Being**

The inspectors regard the support given to young people to prepare them for adulthood as good. They note that the Foster Carers' Handbook provides carers with good information in this respect and the Get Real and LAAC teams encouraged young people to have aspirations for their adult life. It is noted that there is 'a relatively high number of young people remaining in their foster homes beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and those attending or planning to attend higher education'

### **Organisation**

In the organisation section the inspectors found the 'promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service is working to approve carers from a range of backgrounds and cultures'. They are satisfied with the statement of purpose and the children's guide and note that elected members and senior managers are 'committed to the effective operation of the Fostering Service'. They find that carers' reviews are robust and children's records well maintained. They note the improvement in practice in respect of the assessment of family and friends carers and describe a recent assessment and match as 'an excellent piece of work'.

The Inspectors identify in the report a number of areas in which practice needs to improve. Whilst in general they consider information sharing about children's health to be good they express concern that the arrangements regarding the delegation of consent to medical treatment are not always clear and may cause a delay in a child receiving treatment.

In respect of the organisation of the service they note a number of issues that they consider undermine the services capacity to keep children safe. In particular they note that there is not robust quality assurance system in place and this means that necessary checks are not always completed and that on one occasion Panel was not quorate. They also identify that there is a weakness in monitoring outcomes and actions following an allegation against a carer. Some risk assessments and safe care plans are weak and not sufficiently individualised and they report that some carers have received conflicting information about permitted and prohibited forms of discipline. Carers' records are not always well maintained.

The Inspectors highlighted the delay in some young people being allocated a leaving care Personal advisor and the consequent delay in producing a Pathway Plan.

## **Recommendations**

The inspectors made no requirements but did make a number of recommendations that they believe will secure future improvement. These are

- Ensure that, before a placement begins, the carer is provided with clear procedures governing the consent for the child to receive medical attention. Specifically, that the level of delegation of responsibility for consent is clearly identified in every case.
- Ensure that foster carers and social workers are fully aware of, and in agreement with, the permitted and prohibited measures of discipline in relation to fostered children
- Ensure that foster carers' safe caring guidelines are cleared with the child's social worker
- Ensure that safe care policies and risk assessments are individually prepared for the young person
- Ensure that panel minutes accurately reflect the discussion of Panel, its quoracy for all cases presented to it and recommendations made
- Ensure that no business shall be conducted by Panel unless it is quorate as set in the regulations
- Ensure that each young person preparing to move to independent or semi independent living is allocated a personal advisor sufficiently promptly to provide the support needed to help them in their decision-making and their transition to independence
- Ensure there are clear day to day procedures for monitoring and controlling the quality of day-to-day activities of the fostering service
- Ensure that foster care records held by the fostering service are accurately and completed maintained (sic)

An action plan to address the recommendations is attached as appendix 1

## **8 Finance**

None

## **9 Risks and Uncertainties**

A well functioning Fostering Service is central in providing a quality service to looked after children. The risk of not embedding improved practice and not maintaining the momentum of change in the Fostering Service is first and foremost that the wellbeing of children in care will not be assured and improved outcomes will not be secured; the Authority would not maximise the benefits for looked after children and young people it hopes to achieve in setting up new dedicated LAC social work teams.

Demand for foster placements continues to be high and the service hopes to respond in the autumn with a high profile recruitment campaign. Raising practice standards at a time of service growth will require careful management and a service improvement plan that will incorporate the Ofsted action plan is being developed to meet and monitor this demand.

An essential element of the service improvement plan will be the development of the fostering module on ESCR and there may be a capacity issue in both the IT and Fostering services and there will be a high training need for some fostering social workers.

#### 10 **Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

A failure of the service to achieve 'good' in its next inspection is likely to limit progress in the annual inspection of the Authority's services for looked after children.

#### 11 **Background Papers and Consultation**

- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards
- Ofsted Inspection Report of Fostering Service 21.06.2010

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