

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
15TH FEBRUARY 2007**

**ANNUAL INSPECTION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE – OCTOBER 2006**

**JAN BRUNTON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**TERRY REDMAYNE - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to share with members of the Corporate Parenting Board the findings and outcome of the most recent inspection of Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service. The inspection took place from 16th to 20th October 2006, at the same time as the inspection of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Services. The full report, which is available in the Members' library, was received on 16th January 2007. The inspection report summary is attached at Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

2. This is the fifth inspection of the fostering service undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), since the National Minimum Standards for fostering services and the related Fostering Service Regulations (2002) came into force.

3. The role of the CSCI is to;
 - *Promote improvement in Social Care.*
 - *Inspect all Social Care – for adults and children – in the public, private and voluntary sectors.*
 - *Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of Social Care and on the state of the Social Care market.*
 - *Inspect and assess ‘Value for Money’ of Council Social Services.*
 - *Hold performance statistics on Social Care.*
 - *Publish the ‘Star Ratings’ for Council Social Services.*
 - *Register and inspect services against national standards.*
 - *Host the Children’s Rights Director Role.*

4. There were two inspectors, a ‘lead’ Inspector and his co-worker. The methodology of the inspection has changed year on year. On this occasion we were required to collate data under the five key outcome areas of ‘Every Child Matters’, which was then submitted electronically. This process lead us to review the data we have previously inputted onto the SWIFT system in respect of our Foster Carers and to make amendments and improvements in readiness for future inspections. Whilst the Lead Inspector could not guarantee that future inspections would require the same type of data, the review process has been helpful in respect of our improved capacity to report on crucial Foster Care facts and figures. The inspection process continues to move away from ‘ticking boxes’ and gave more emphasis than ever to outcomes for children, as is evidenced in the report format. The report is punctuated with quotes from children, carers and social workers, which helps to paint a more ‘real’ picture of the Fostering Service.

5. The overall rating for Middlesbrough from this inspection is “good” from the range of “poor”, “adequate”, “good” or “excellent”. The rating is supported by evidence provided by the children, their Foster Carers and Social Workers, Supervising Social Workers and the Manager of the Fostering Service. We were ‘scored’ as achieving 9 standards at level 3 (standard fully met) and 11 standards at level 2 (standard almost met – minor shortfalls).

6. The Inspector has listed what the service does well, the most crucial being the way in which we keep children safe via rigorous statutory checking; the fact that Foster Carer reviews are scrutinised by the Family Placement Panel; and our attention to children’s health and well being. There is evidence of some overall improvement in the service offered to our children and “most people are very pleased with how things are going for them”. Also highlighted are areas for improvement, again, most crucially, whether our staffing level is adequate to “do the work properly”; whether our first aid and Health and Safety training for Foster Carers is provided sufficiently frequently; and whether there is adequate information on children’s files.

7. The Fostering Service has implemented the statutory requirements from its previous inspection of December 2005 as follows:
- Improvement of foster placement agreement paperwork;
 - Staff recruitment records to meet requirements of Schedule 1 of Fostering Service Regulations
 - CRB disclosures must specify whether it relates to working with children
 - The shared Care Fostering Service must be brought within the Fostering Team
 - Exemption certificates must be retained for all emergency placements
 - Regular child protection training for all Foster Carers
 - Full and detailed records of Fostering Panel decisions must be made.
 - CRBs must be taken on all Foster Carers at enhanced level.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

8. From this inspection, there are 7 statutory requirements to be met (page 42 of CSCI full report) which are:
- *Implement newly devised placement agreement form*
 - *Schedule 7 monitoring should be more detailed*
 - *Human Resources files require proof of staff identity*
 - *CRB disclosures to include the date they were received*
 - *Views of children who have been fostered must be included in the foster carer review process.*
9. The good practice recommendations (page 42 of full report) are that we should:
- *Ensure all children's files have full information*
 - *Health and Safety checks of foster carers to be undertaken annually*
 - *Placement agreements to have fuller information about matching*
 - *Provision of Safe Care training*
 - *Inclusion of specific dates for staff commencing and leaving previous jobs (Human Resources files)*
 - *Authority to complete work on fostering allowances to ensure it can recruit and retain carers*
 - *Senior Practitioner post should be made permanent*
 - *Audit staffing levels to ensure it can fulfil its duties*
 - *Foster Care reviews to monitor and record when safe care policies, health and safety checks, medicals, CRB checks and unannounced visits have taken place*
 - *Record all Foster Care training*
 - *Training re: first aid, health and safety and behaviour management, to be provided to Foster Carers*
 - *Increase the proportion of carers with NVQ in child care*
 - *Authority to continue to develop kinship Care process so that it complies with the requirement to undertake such assessments within six weeks*

10. The above points form the basis of our service action plan and, in fact, much of the required work is already underway. The Commission no longer requires fostering agencies to submit an action plan following inspection, if they have achieved the levels of 'good' or 'excellent'. It will, however, require evidence of implementation in the 2007 inspection process.
11. The inspector highlighted the following comments made about the fostering service:
- *'one foster carer said...' We have fostered for Middlesbrough for 25 years. We receive a lot of support from Middlesbrough as we have had some difficult children. We would, and have, recommended Middlesbrough to others who have wanted to foster, purely because of the support we receive. Regardless of the problem they will help resolve it'.*
 - *"once children are in placement, social workers, foster carers and fostering staff are good at working together and talking to each other to make sure that children keep being well cared for"*
 - *'one young person said...."I used to hate social services as a child but after the last four years I have come to realise that if it hadn't been for social services and my foster family I wouldn't be who I am and where I am today"*
- and the Inspector commented that:
- *"Most importantly, children said that they are well looked after and happy in their foster home"*

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

12. There are financial implications arising from this report in terms of:
- a). A need to complete the review of foster carer payments and allowances. This work has been underway for approximately two years and two reports have already been presented to Senior Management/ the Directorate in respect of the need to invest in the service in order to retain and recruit foster carers. An auditor/accountant is currently collating data to further evidence this need. Information about the projected cost of this and the time scale for completion of this work is not available at the time of writing.
 - b). A review of staffing. The fostering service would benefit from increasing its staff by one additional qualified social worker.
13. There are legal implications if we fail to implement the statutory requirements outlined earlier in this report. There are no specific ward implications but the report will be of interest to all members as the service provided covers all of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATION

14. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Fostering Service Annual Inspection Report.

REASONS

15. The Council is responsible for providing high quality care for its children and is required to comply with the recommendations made by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report;

- *The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and*
- *The Commission for Social Care Inspection Report October 2006.*
- *The CSCI report of December 2005*

AUTHOR: Jane Wilson, Team Manager, Fostering
TEL NO: 01642 201960

*Address: Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre, Cargo Fleet Lane,
Middlesbrough, TS3 8PB*

Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Inspection Report

Fostering Service

Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service

**MTLC
Tranmere Avenue
Middlesbrough
TS3 8PB**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Key Announced Inspection
16th October 2006 10.00

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff for the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. The inspectors also want to thank children's social workers and other professional people who filled in forms or who told inspectors what they think of the fostering service. Staff in the fostering team, carers and children spoken to were very helpful and people spent time filling in surveys and sending them to the inspectors before the inspection. Information and facts in this report come from surveys sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers and from written information the manager gave inspectors as well as from the things seen and the people spoken to when they visited. Inspectors visited four foster carers with children living with them. Questionnaires were returned from 14 fostered children, 14 foster carers and from 30 social workers in relation to 53 of the children fostered through the service. All together seven inspector days were spent with the fostering team and a further two days were spent reading questionnaires and sorting out the information in them.

A team of two inspectors carried out the inspection, which was done alongside an inspection of Middlesbrough Borough Council's adoption service and an inspection of its arrangements for private fostering. Readers may wish to refer to the reports from these inspections, which are available from the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Information was gathered by:

- Talking individually with children and foster carers;
- Individual and group discussions with fostering staff;
- Individual and group discussion with children social workers and their managers;
- Visiting foster carers' homes;
- Group discussion with foster carers and with fostered children;
- Reading children's, carers' and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Interviewing the Family Placement Development Officer;
- Interviewing the manager;
- Studying the surveys and other information sent back to us;
- Reading records of the meetings of the fostering panel and attending a panel meeting.

People who told inspectors what they think about Middlesbrough Borough Council Fostering Service generally said good things. The great majority of people said that support to foster carers and fostered children is very good. Foster children said things like, "Where I live is my home and will always be my home," "I am part of the family" and "Because (foster family names) treat me like they have known me since I was born. (Foster carers own children) share their mum and dad – How Nice!"

Although some foster carers said there are some things that need to be better most said very good things about the service. One said, "Over the eleven and a half years we have fostered we have had excellent support from our link workers and have had good support from all the social workers we have been involved with." Most carers said the authority is very good at supporting children with their health, education and lifestyle.

Children's social workers also said good things about the fostering service although some suggested how it could be made better. One social worker said, "The foster carer provides a very high standard of care for the young person. The supervising social worker supports the placement and actively liaises with the social worker" and another said "This particular placement is excellent and provides stability, permanence, guidance, warmth, protection, emotional warmth and security and the children are making excellent progress."

21% of foster carers said that the service has got better over the last 12 months and 72% said the service had not changed. Only 5% (1 response) said the service has got worse. Social workers agreed with this, 36% said it had got better, 61% said the service had stayed the same and only 3% (1 response) thought it had got worse.

When asked how the service could be improved few foster carers thought anything needed to get better. Two carers said the level of foster carer allowances is a problem. One said, "The service could not do anything better apart from paying the national rate as Middlesbrough pays one of the lowest." Other carers made comments like, "Over the years I have appreciated the help, support and backing of the fostering service, it has altered and changed, over the years, for the better." A few social workers said there should be more joint training between social workers and foster carers, some said that more foster carers are needed to allow better matching opportunities in emergency placements. A small minority said that foster carers need more encouragement to undertake more transport to school and contact, though findings in the rest of the inspection did not indicate that this is a problem. One social worker said, "Nothing – all needs are being met."

It is good that people said that generally the service works well and though there were some problems mentioned that are written in this report, most people are very pleased with how things are going for them.

One foster carer said, "We have fostered for Middlesbrough for twenty-five years. We receive a lot of support from Middlesbrough as we have had some difficult children. We would, and have, recommended Middlesbrough to others who have wanted to foster, purely because of the support we receive. Regardless of the problem they will help to resolve it."

Most importantly, children said that they are well looked after and happy in their foster homes. They said things like, "I am very happy where I am living." One young person said, "I used to hate social services as a child but over the last four years I have come to realise that if it wasn't for social services and my foster family I wouldn't be who I am and where I am today." Another young person said, "My foster carers are just so wonderful. I love them loads. They're always there for me when I need them; they deserve a medal. They are doing such a wonderful job looking after me; I don't know where I'd be without them."

What the service does well:

Middlesbrough Borough Council Fostering Service is good at a lot of the things it does.

- The fostering service is good at working with people who want to foster to make sure that they are the right sort of people. It checks new foster carers out very carefully and they get good training before they can foster.
- New foster carers cannot foster until a group of experts called a panel make a recommendation that they are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly. This panel is careful, gets a lot of information and thinks very hard about people before it recommends that they can foster. This panel also looks at all foster carers' reviews to make sure they are still doing a good job and getting the help they need to look after children well. This is good for children as it helps keep them safe and have a good life.
- The service is also good at supporting foster carers to look after children. Foster carers get visited regularly and get good advice about how to help the children they are caring for.
- The fostering service is good at making sure that children get to live in the place that is right for them. This is hard for it to do as it needs more foster carers but it works very hard to make sure that children go to carers who are right for them.
- Once children are in placements, social workers, foster carers and fostering staff are good at working together and talking to each other to make sure that children keep being well cared for.

- The service also works hard to make sure that all children get good help, in the way that is right for them, depending on what needs they might have because of their background, race, religion or disability. Children said good things about foster care, like "I love my new mam and dad. They always care and they ask me how I am and how's school gone. Also they make me laugh," "Where I live is my home and will always be my home" and "I am part of the family."
- The service is good at helping children stay healthy and well. Children get good advice about their health and get help to get doctors and dentists when they need them. It also makes sure that children get their health checked often.
- The fostering service is good at helping children get a good education. It is good at helping children stay in school and helping plan the support they need at school. The service also has a lot of people who work to help children do well and get good grades at school. Children said things like, "Any problems I have at school are sorted right away," "My carer thinks I should get a good education; so do I, I want a good job" and "Everything I want to do at school subject wise, people support." There are also a lot of activities and events that fostered children are able to take part in in their spare time.
- The fostering service is good at finding out what children think about things and using this to make their care better or to help the service do things better. Children said they are listened to by their foster carers and, most of the time, by their social worker.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection has:

- Made sure that, where there are more children placed with a foster carer than are usually allowed or where children are different from the sorts of children that carers are approved for, a record is kept on foster carers' files showing the special permission for this to happen.
- A lot of foster carers have been given child protection training and other carers are going to get this training soon. This is good, as it will help foster parents keep children safer. A lot of foster carers have also done training about bullying which also helps them keep children safe.
- Better records are kept in foster carers' files of the recommendations of the fostering panel and the decision made about whether foster carers are the right sort of people to foster and the type of children they will be most suited to look after.

- Made sure that checks on staff members to make sure they are the right sort of people to work with children are redone every three years and made sure that telephone checks are made on staff as well as getting written references about them.

What they could do better:

Although the fostering service does a lot of things well there are some things it needs to do better.

- When children are placed with foster carers an agreement is made about how the children have to be looked after and who should do what to help the children. The service needs to make sure these agreement forms have all the information in them that the rules say they should have to make sure that foster carers know how to look after the children in the way that they need.
- The fostering service still needs to write down better the checks it does on, and the information it gets about new staff members, to make sure that they are the right sort of people to work with children.
- The authority needs to have a look at the numbers of staff members in the fostering team to make sure that there is enough staff to do the work properly and have time to find new foster carers.
- The authority still needs to do some work to make sure children's records have all the information about children that they should have. This is to help people look after children and plan for their future properly and also, if children want to look at their records, to help them learn about their past and the things that have happened to them.
- Foster carers should be given training in 'safe caring'. This is how to look after children in a way that is safe for the child and the foster carer. They should also be helped to write down a policy for how they will care for each child safely and check this out with the child's social worker.
- Foster carers should also get first aid, health and safety and behaviour management training and should be able to update this training every few years. This is important, as all this training will help carers look after children and keep them safer.
- The fostering service needs to get better at how it does foster carers' reviews. It needs to make sure that fostered children are asked what they think of their carers and take these views into account when it decides whether carers should keep on fostering children. The service

should also use reviews as a way of making sure that all the checks that it needs to do on foster carers get done when they should be.

- The authority needs more carers and some people said foster carers get paid a lot less than carers working for other fostering services and that this is making it difficult to get new foster carers. The authority should finish the work it is doing to sort out its system for paying foster carers so that it can make sure this is not stopping it getting new carers.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection. The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.