

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

OFSTED INSPECTION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE IN NOVEMBER 2009
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Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning: Cllr Mike Carr

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

4th March 2010

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 Ofsted inspection of Middlesbrough's Fostering Service. The inspection took place from the 16th to the 19th November 2009. The final Inspection report was received on 26th November 2009 and is attached (Appendix 1).

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION, WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent
Urgent report

BACKGROUND

5. This is the seventh inspection of the fostering service, which was undertaken by Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted is the body responsible for ensuring that the Council (and other agencies) is compliant with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the related Fostering Service Regulations (2002.)
6. There were two inspectors, one 'lead' Inspector and a co-worker. The methodology of the inspection was relatively unchanged on this occasion, in terms of the initial data collection. The lead inspector was made aware, prior to the commencement of the inspection, that the data set submitted to Ofsted in March 2009 would look significantly different, had it been submitted immediately prior to the inspection, as had been the process for previous inspections. The inspectors were duly provided with our most recent performance information to provide an accurate context to the inspection.
7. The overall rating for Middlesbrough from this inspection is, once again, "Good", from the range of "Inadequate", "Satisfactory", "Good" or "Excellent". The rating means that 'this aspect of provision is strong' and is supported by evidence provided by the children, their foster carers and social workers, supervising social workers, the development officer, team clerks, senior practitioner and the manager of the service.
8. The service was rated as 'Good' in the following areas:
 - Helping children to be healthy
 - Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe
 - Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do
 - Helping children make a positive contribution
 - Achieving economic wellbeing
 - Organisation

This is an improvement on the outcome of the last inspection (2007), wherein we achieved 'satisfactory' in respect of 'Achieving Economic Wellbeing', meaning that the outcome is 100% 'Good'. Additionally, the service's promotion of equality and diversity is rated as 'Good'.
9. The inspector stated that the service has addressed each of the ten recommendations made at the last inspection and had also made the following improvements:
 - Arrangements for matching children with foster carers
 - Development in arranging placements and information sharing with Independent Fostering Agencies
 - Recording
 - Management, training and support of foster carers
 - Work to recruit more foster carers

In his summary, the lead Inspector states, *“The service is impressively well managed...despite a dramatic increase in the numbers of children within the authority needing foster placements and the consequent high pressures faced, the fostering service has continued to develop and improve the quality of its practice”*.

10. The Family Placement Service has undergone a re-structure since the inspection of 2007, wherein the manager of the Fostering Team became the manager of both Fostering and Adoption and a senior practitioner was appointed to each service – there being previously one across two teams. The role of the senior practitioner is, in part, to lead on developmental activity. The positive outcome of the Fostering Inspection is due, in no small part, to the contribution of the senior practitioner, who has focused on ensuring that the Children’s Workforce Development Council Standards for Foster Care, and all the necessary preparation, training and supporting documents underpinning these, become embedded in practice.
11. Though depleted in 2009 due to staff sickness, the report highlights that the fostering team social worker’s *“assessments are very rigorous, detailed and evaluative with reports ranging from good to outstanding...ensuring...carers are suitable to care for the authority’s children...foster carers are provided with good support and very thorough formal supervision...children’s social workers visit children regularly”*. Again, this is despite a dramatic increase in work pressures across safeguarding services.
12. There are 7 recommendations to ‘secure future improvement’, as follows;
 - Ensure all carers receive first aid training that is up dated appropriately
 - Ensure that foster placement agreements clearly identify the day to day arrangements regarding responsibilities and consent arrangements
 - Develop clear recruitment processes for internal candidates who move posts or are promoted
 - Ensure that panel minutes clearly record the reasons for recommendations made
 - Recruit a range of carers in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of children
 - Ensure written records comply with the requirements of data protection
 - Ensure family and friends assessments are timely
13. These recommendations form the basis of an action plan to be implemented across the service in 2010. Each team manager within Safeguarding Services, along with colleagues in Human Resources, has received a copy of the inspection report and the associated plan, to ensure that the required changes are ‘owned’ and implemented. (Appendix 2)

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

14. There are no financial or legal implications arising from this report. As the service covers the whole of Middlesbrough, this report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

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

REASON

16. The Council is responsible for providing high quality care for its children.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

17. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- *The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002*
 - *The Ofsted report of 19th November 2009*

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

*Address: Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre, Tranmere Avenue,
Middlesbrough, TS3 8PB*

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

APPENDIX 2

Recommendations and actions from Fostering Inspection November 2009

Recommendation	Action needed	By whom	By when
Ensure that all carers receive first aid training that is updated appropriately	Schedule training sessions – prioritising those most in need of up-date Training Data (foster carers) to be centralised for team access	Senior Practitioner Development Officer	2010 Training Programme
Ensure that foster placement agreements clearly identify the day to day arrangements regarding responsibilities and consent arrangements	Placing Social Workers to cover in detail in placement agreements parts 1 and 2 Improve 'Delegation of Duties' document – for carers (handbook) and Social Work staff	Team Manager to advise Social Workers Development Officer	March 2010 March 2010
Develop clear recruitment processes for internal candidates who move posts or are promoted	Advise HR colleagues of Ofsted's observations of personnel files	Team Manager	November 2009
Ensure that panel minutes clearly record the reasons for recommendations made	Discussion with Minute Takers	Adviser to Family Placement Panel	November 2009

Recommendation	Action needed	By whom	By when
Recruit a range of carers in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of children and young people who require a foster placement	Evidence link between budget and enquiries	Development Officer & Team Manager	November 2009
	Undertake joint work with HR to raise recruitment issues corporately	Development Officer & Team Manager	November 2009
	Increase budget for recruitment	Team Manager/ Accountant	February 2010
	Link with Children with Disabilities (CWD) manager and 'Aiming High' project to recruit short break carers	Development Officer & CWD manager	January 2010
Ensure that written records comply with the requirements of data protection	Ensure that CRB documents are not placed/left on carers' files – rather a record of receipt and a statement regarding safety	Team Manager, Senior Practitioner, Team Clerks	November 2009
Ensure that assessments of family and friends carers for immediate placements are undertaken in a timely manner	Allocate promptly; if no capacity to do so, commission independent assessor	Team Manager	On receipt of referral