

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Vale of Glamorgan Fostering Service
Placements and Permanency Team
Docks Office
Subway Road
Barry
CF63 4RT

Type of Inspection – Focused

Dates of inspection – Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 January 2015

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Summary

About the service

The Vale of Glamorgan local authority fostering service is based in the Docks Office in Barry and provides a range of placements, including long term, short term, respite and placements with friends and family (kinship care).

The last statement of purpose document (updated 1.4.14) indicated the service had 83 approved foster care households looking after 105 children. The service had recruited 9 new sets of foster carers during the last inspection year.

The fostering service is located within the Placements and Permanency Team. The service recruits, assesses, trains, approves and supports foster carers approved by the Vale.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This was a scheduled, announced focused inspection which considered the quality of life and quality of leadership and management theme.

Inspection methodology included:

- seeking the views of foster carers by meeting with a group of 3 very experienced foster carers (level 4) who were representing the views of the wider group of foster carers
- looking at a report produced by the Vale Social Services quality assurance officer, who had gained the views of foster carers and children through interviews and questionnaires
- discussion with the operations manager and temporary team manager
- discussion with some members of the fostering team
- meeting with a manager of a child care team
- sampling of a range of documentation, including recent foster carer reviews
- discussion with the LAC education coordinator.

What does the service do well?

- The service is responsive to addressing any issues raised as a result of inspection and internal audits. The service is also keen to undertake a 'lessons learnt' approach from any safeguarding issues that have arisen within the service.
- Foster carers reported positively on the responsiveness of the service and senior managers within the department to any issues raised by them. They told us that management "do listen and respond" and "we feel respected by them".

What has improved since the last inspection?

- A policy has been developed in relation to foster carers who have other caring responsibilities in addition to their foster care role and the service and panel are

monitoring this closely.

- There had been a focus on foster carer training regarding safeguarding children and we saw that 36 carers had attended this training prior to this year's inspection.
- The service undertakes a thorough quality assurance process of its service. This now includes monitoring the educational attainment of children placed with foster carers, including the number of children excluded from school. This year it is anticipated that the findings of the authority's policy and quality assurance officer's report will be incorporated into the services annual report.
- A thematic audit of statutory visits to children in placement had been undertaken within this inspection year.
- When reviewing carers, the service has developed a system to ensure that the previous panel minutes are presented to panel to ensure that the panel can review whether its previous recommendations have been met. This will ensure that any identified actions are addressed.
- The service has worked on developing guidelines for support to foster carers subject to a safeguarding allegation.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

- We found that the service was not fully compliant with regulation 20. This was in relation to one foster carer who we case tracked, their disclosure and barring (DBS) service three yearly check was four months overdue. We were told that this was the only DBS that had not been renewed and that action had been taken to expedite this.
- The service was not fully compliant with Regulation 17 (1). This relates to carers receiving induction and refresher child protection training. Panel has a role in relation to improvements in this area by ensuring that recommendations are made where necessary. We had notified the service of this previously at last year's inspection and although improvements were noted (as above), we saw that there remained some carers who had not completed child protection training, nor induction training. As pointed out in last year's inspection report, where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both should complete all training.

Quality Of Life

Overall we (CSSIW) found that the fostering service has children's needs at the centre of its work by promoting welfare and striving to ensure that placements are able to meet the child's social, health and educational needs.

Children can be confident that foster carers and supervising social workers will encourage them to express their views about their care. Children are able to give their views through the usual processes for looked after children such as their independently chaired review meetings. We also saw that children are consulted about their care as part of the foster carer annual review process. The Vale local authority has a quality assurance officer who seeks the views of children about the fostering service. The last review had concluded that most of the young people felt that they had been listened to and their views valued. It was positive to note that an action plan for the service had been drawn up in response to feedback from children and young people gained as part of the review.

The importance of maximising children's educational attainment is recognised and supported by the fostering service. Since last year's inspection the fostering service had started to monitor and analyse children's progress and achievements in education, and had plans in place to work with foster carers in order to improve their support for children educationally. The looked after children education coordinator has strong links with the fostering service, sitting on the foster carer approval panel. We saw examples where some children had achieved excellent educational and career outcomes during their placements and foster carers told us about some children gaining excellent grades in GCSE exams. We also saw, from case tracking, an example where two younger children had progressed considerably in their reading age in the short time they were in placement. Foster carers told us again that they would like more direct contact with the looked after children education coordinator. Foster carers raised some concerns about the lack of available individual tuition for looked after children within the Vale local authority and also raised concerns about the Personal Education Plans (PEP's) for children being kept up to date and young people not being involved in them. However, the authority reported improvements in systems to update PEP's and in completion rates. We saw an example of where that there had been a careful move of children to a new school, with good support mechanisms being in place.

Children placed with foster carers are encouraged to be active, positively occupied and stimulated. We saw that children and young people were encouraged in a variety of activities or interests outside of the home and school. In one placement that we tracked, the children were involved in rugby and football training, piano lessons and marshal arts classes.

Children have warm, nurturing and secure attachments to their carers. Through case file reading we could see that children had developed close and meaningful relationships with their foster carers. We saw, from a reading a foster carer review where two children in placement had made significant achievements and the positive impact living with their

foster carers was having upon their lives. In one case, improvements in a child's health condition had been attributed by a doctor to the change for the child to living in a calm and stable home where routines and boundaries were consistent and the child was receiving full support in all aspects of their life.

Children's health needs were generally being supported and promoted. We saw evidence that children were registered with their local GP, Dentist and Optician. However, feedback received again from foster carers, and management at this inspection was that the accessibility of Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was very limited, and this impacted on the level of support that children and foster carers could receive in relation to children's mental health and emotional needs. The operations manager had plans to address this deficit by commissioning a 'bespoke' therapeutic service within the authority. This was stated to be high on the agenda and was to be incorporated into the authority's commissioning strategy which was to be produced by March 2015.

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Quality Of Staffing

This inspection did not focus on this theme during this inspection. This theme will be considered at a future inspection. However, we can comment that we found that the operations manager, acting manager and the staff that we met during the inspection to be enthusiastic about their work and committed to achieving positive outcomes for children in placements.

Quality Of Leadership and Management

Overall we found that the service was well run, with due care and attention to national minimum standards and regulations.

People using the service are actively involved in defining and measuring the quality of the service and there are processes in place to assess and improve the service and outcomes for children. The service's own quality of care review had analysed educational outcomes for children and as a result there were plans in place to work with foster carers with the aim of driving up educational outcomes. We had identified last year that the quality of care review report could incorporate the findings of the service user consultation undertaken by the quality assurance officer and the resulting action plan and this was planned for the next report.

People can be confident that the provider will respond positively to feedback and critical incidents. We saw that there had been two significant safeguarding issues that had arisen within the fostering service during the last inspection year which had been followed up appropriately by the authority. The fostering service was receptive to reflect and review internally and take action regarding any lessons to be learnt.

We followed up on issues identified at last year's inspection. One of these related to statutory visits as we had found that in some cases, there was no record of the visit – other than “narrative to follow”. Since the last inspection the authority had undertaken an audit to ascertain whether statutory visits were taking place within timescale, and to ensure compliance with a new recording policy that stipulated that these visits should be recorded within 30 days of the visit taking place. This audit was seen during the inspection, and an action plan had been developed to improve the process of statutory visits and recording.

At the last inspection, we commented that the service needed to develop a policy and procedure regarding approval of foster carers who have other professional home-based caring responsibilities – e.g. child-minding and this had been actioned.

Since the last inspection, the team had been managed by an temporary manager. The recruitment of a permanent manager had been delayed because the service was waiting for the planned establishment of a separate adoption team which would be based in Rhondda Cynon Taff as part of the regional adoption team. Because of this and also because some staff had had lengthy absences, It had been an unsettled year for the team.

The statement of purpose document needs to be amended to reflect the new telephone number of CSSIW and also regarding CSSIW's responsibilities in relation to the registration of local authority fostering services in Wales.

Quality Of The Carers

Overall, we found that children and young people benefit from being cared for by foster carers who are motivated and promote the physical, emotional and social development of the children placed with them. As can be seen in the quality of life section of this report, we saw examples of where children were progressing and thriving in their foster placements.

Children and young people can, on the whole, feel confident in the care they receive because foster carers are offered a good programme of training, and receive support and supervision. Pre-approval training is generally provided to fostering applicants and there was agreement with another local authority for the delivery of joint induction training. We saw that there was a varied programme in place for post approval training. Topics included 'advanced child development', 'impact of abuse', 'understanding behaviour' and 'supporting young people with mental health problems'. At last year's inspection we highlighted the need for foster carers to undergo induction and refresher child protection training and also where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, the need for both to complete all training. We were told that there had been a focus during the year on training regarding safeguarding children and we saw that 36 carers had attended this training prior to this year's inspection. The operations manager told us that there was a clear expectation that carers completed 3 training sessions a year, and that supporting social workers were now facilitating more individual training sessions with foster carers, including opportunities for e-learning courses. However, in sampling a small number of files, we did again identify some gaps in training. One male foster carer had been approved without undertaking the initial preparation training, had not undertaken any subsequent training and on the occasion of their first review of approval, had been re-approved without the panel making any recommendation in relation to this.

There is a monthly support group and foster carers also have the opportunity to attend a monthly forum with managers that the operational manager usually attends with the head of service; with a councillor attending twice yearly. We saw that foster carers received regular supervision from their supervising social worker. Foster carers told us that on the whole they received good support which included a 24 hour telephone advice service for foster carers run by the fostering team

Foster carers were to be involved in forthcoming interviews for the new team manager and practice manager and they told us that they felt respected and listened to by the service.

The annual report stated that completion of annual reviews within timescale remains a priority for the team. We did learn at the inspection that some annual reviews were out of date, although the operations manager stated that an action plan was in place and all reviews would be up to date by the end of March 2015.

How we inspect and report on services

We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focused inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focused inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focused inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.