

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013 – 2014

COPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13TH MAY 2014

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR
OF COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

Agenda Item No: 2

**CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES
INSPECTORATE WALES INSPECTION
OF RCT FOSTERING SERVICES 19 –
21ST FEBRUARY 2014.**

Author: Ann-Marie Browning, Service Manager Placement Services
Tel no. 01443 495104

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to update members following the Annual Regulatory Inspection by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate (CSSIW) of the Fostering Service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members note the contents of the attached RCT Fostering Services Inspection Report.

3. BACKGROUND

RCT Fostering Services are inspected on an annual basis as required by the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003. The Inspection focuses on the following key areas:

- Quality of Life
- Quality of Staffing
- Quality of Leadership and Management
- Quality of Foster Carers

4. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION

The Fostering Inspection identified the following positive areas of practice within the Fostering Service:

- Children receive good quality care with positive outcomes
- Children's educational needs are being met.
- Children's physical and emotional well-being is being promoted by RCT Foster Carers
- Improved links between the Fostering Service and Family Link Service, including improvement of matching for short breaks placements
- Staff are competent, experienced and knowledgeable
- Managers are suitably experienced and qualified
- Fostering Panel is effective and Panel Members receive appropriate training
- The Fostering Service carries out a substantial number of kinship assessments; these have increased since the last inspection.

The following areas were identified as needing improvement:

- The service is not compliant with Regulation 21 (4)(a). This relates to the Fostering Service provider not having an appraisal system in place
- The Service is not compliant with Regulation 29. This relates to review of approvals of Foster Carers, particularly Kinship Foster Carers. A small number of reviews were out of timescales
- Regulation 17. This relates to the support of Foster Carers. People cannot be confident that Foster Carers are well supported
- Review the processes in place for termination of approval of Foster Carers as part of the quality of care review

5. CURRENT SITUATION / CONCLUSION

Although the Inspection highlighted a number of areas where practice has improved there are still areas where further improvements are needed. There were no areas that needed immediate urgent improvement and no non-compliance notices were issued on the service.

A plan will now be developed specifically to deal with the areas that need improvement. It will focus on improving the support to Foster Carers, in particular the support to Kinship Foster Carers, taking into account the increase in numbers in this area of work.

During the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014, 51 Foster Carers were approved (this includes Kinship and Mainstream Carers).



Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Rhondda Cynon Taff Fostering Service

Ty Pennant
Catherine Street
Pontypridd
CF37 2TB

Type of Inspection – Baseline
Date(s) of inspection – 19 – 21 February 2014
Date of publication – 16 April 2014

You may reproduce this Report in its entirety. You may not reproduce it in part or in any abridged form and may only quote from it with the consent in writing of Welsh Ministers

Please contact CSSIW National Office for further information
Tel: 0300 062 8800
Email: cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk
www.cssiw.org.uk

Summary

About the service

Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) County Borough Council is a large local authority with a large number of looked after children. It has a large fostering service that operates from Ty Pennant near the centre of Pontypridd. The family link service provides short break services for children with disabilities and is located with the disability team in Abercynon. The authority has recently entered into a contract with an external provider for them to undertake recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers and present assessments to the RCT fostering panel. Together, these services provide the full range of fostering services for RCT.

The manager is Ann-Marie Browning.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This was a scheduled full baseline inspection looking at the four quality themes, with a focus on considering termination of carer approvals as concerns about these had been drawn to the attention of CSSIW. The inspection took place over a three day period 19 – 21 February 2014.

Information for this inspection was gathered from the following sources:

- Self assessment of service and data information
- Meeting with a group of foster carers
- Meeting with a group of staff
- Meeting with the two team leaders in the fostering service
- Discussions with the family link manager and senior practitioner
- Attendance at panel and discussion with a group of panel members
- Questionnaires returned from 4 foster carers and 13 children
- Viewing a sample of files, policies and procedures

What does the service do well?

Increased provision of respite services for children with disabilities.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Established links between the family link service and the main fostering team.
Improved matching (short breaks panel) for family link placements and increased number of respite placements provided.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

No non compliance notices were issued at this inspection as managers told us that the issues are/would be addressed. The service is not compliant with:

Regulation 21 (4)(a) This relates to the fostering service provider not having an appraisal system in place.

Regulation 29. This relates to the review of the approval of carers – this relates in particular to kinship carers.

Regulation 17. This relates to foster carers not always receiving the support they need.

Other areas identified as needing to be addressed to improve the service are:

Review the arrangements for making placements to ensure adequate consideration when proposing a match to individual carer's stated preferences

A kinship strategy needs to be developed to consider the specific support needs of kinship carers

A monitoring/tracking process needs to be put in place to ensure that when panel requests a return to panel in 6 months that this takes place

The fostering service should review the process regarding termination of carer approval – perhaps as part of the quality of service review. It should consider lessons learned from specific terminations that have taken place and provide staff with an opportunity to reflect, consider lessons learned, and if necessary further develop/update guidance

Quality of life

Overall children were judged to receive good quality care with positive outcomes. Thirteen children responded to a questionnaire and consistently said that they liked their foster placements and talked about positive experiences living there e.g. access to a range of activities. The children's comments indicated that they experience warmth, attachment and belonging in their foster placements. One child said:
 "I like living here because I like school. I like going to Sunday school. I like my foster family and I like being Welsh especially St David's day and watching the rugby."

Children indicated that carers listened to them and treated them in a respectful manner. One child identified the support they received with family contact and the important support they received from the carers. Another child said:
 "I love living with X they are the best foster carers ever. I know that they love me and will always be there for me. My mam and X get on well together."

Children receive responsive care from foster carers; carers support children to undertake a range of activities. All the children were clear about boundaries, understood family rules and the consequences of their behaviour.

Children's educational needs were being met because in questionnaires all children said they had education placements and were able to identify a range of supports from school professionals and foster families. Most said that they liked school.

Children's physical and emotional well being is promoted by foster carers. Comments from children and foster carers indicated that careful attention was given to children's health needs and healthy life styles including diet and exercise. Some children in questionnaires commented on being healthy and eating healthily. One child said
 "X helps me to stay healthy and teach me to know whats good for me. X sorted out with the doctors so that I don't have to take tablets anymore."

However, one foster carer told us that they had experienced difficulties in supporting contact because the contact centre often did not open on time leaving them waiting outside and shortening the time of visit for the child with their parent. Despite raising this at the child's looked after child's (LAC) review, the problem had not been resolved. This was an example of the child's wellbeing not being enhanced and potentially having an adverse impact for other children.

Most of the children said they had not received a child guide or been given information about the complaint procedure. Similar comments were made in the last inspection report. The manager told us that staff in the complaint team had updated the child guide and it was currently out for consultation. When complete, staff need to be made aware of it and consideration given to how and when it will be circulated to children.

The authority has increasing numbers of looked after children who were in need of foster placements and a very high increase in the number of children being fostered with relatives/friends as carers.

Increased numbers of children with disabilities have been able to receive periods of respite care as this service has been developed in the last year.

Quality of staffing

Overall people can feel confident that staff are competent, experienced and knowledgeable. Staff had appropriate qualifications and experience to assess and support foster carers. There had been some changes in the staff team with some staff having left and new staff transferred from other teams to take up posts in the fostering service. There was one senior practitioner vacancy in the assessment team and one staff absent on maternity leave; two agency staff were supporting the work of the service at the time of inspection.

Staff told us that they received regular supervision and support and that there were good training opportunities available to them. However, the local authority has not had an appraisal system in place for approximately three years – the service is therefore not compliant with Regulation 21(4)(a). Managers have again told us that work is in progress on this matter but it remains outstanding at the time of inspection with no date for a system to be implemented.

There have been a number of changes in the staff team since the last inspection. The service continues to operate as two teams with a team leader responsible for each of the teams. The Assessment team is no longer responsible for recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers; they now deal with viability assessments and assessment of kinship carers. The support team provides supervision and support to mainstream and kinship carers. Two staff members from the assessment team had moved across to the support team to assist in this work.

Staffing of the family link service has improved. The line manager has promoted development of the service and staff have returned from long term sick leave. The service was therefore developing and making good progress – for example a third contract carer has recently been approved and therefore the number of respite stays provided to children with disabilities in the last year has risen. Links have been strengthened with the main fostering service including joint staff meetings, information sharing, and regular attendance by manager and senior practitioner at management meetings. All comments made in questionnaires and in meetings with staff in relation to family link were positive.

Quality of leadership and management

The manager of the fostering service is suitably qualified and experienced; she also has line management responsibility for the adoption service. She and the line manager of the family link service have developed positive links to good effect e.g. the establishment of joint staff meetings. The family link service has made significant improvements in the last year.

There has been significant changes in the fostering service. Most notably the authority has employed an external provider to undertake recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers for the authority. The company recruits their own staff for this purpose but all assessments will be presented to RCT foster panel and the RCT agency decision maker will continue to make the decisions. As this new arrangement had only begun in January 2014 it was too early to assess its effectiveness. Monitoring processes have been put in place.

People can be confident that the managers in the local authority will respond positively to the feedback provided about carer's anxieties/concerns because they consider how matters raised during this inspection can be sensitively addressed.

The manager produces an annual review of the quality of service. Processes were in place for seeking the views of foster carers as part of this process but it may be that further consideration can be given to ways of obtaining their views in the light of comments made during this inspection. This is timely as the next review is nearly due.

As identified at the last inspection, the foster carer handbook and young people's guide was in need of updating. Both are in draft form and currently out for consultation/in final stages of development.

An example was seen of a carer not being returned to panel after six months as requested by panel. It was fourteen months before this happened showing that the annual review was also late. An effective monitoring/tracking process needs to be put in place to address these issues.

The fostering service has an established effective panel with an experienced independent panel chair person. Training for panel members is provided annually. Panel member attendance at panel is monitored. It was evident from their knowledge, discussion and questioning that they had prepared well.

In discussion panel acknowledged that there had been some challenges in relation to the difficult and complex issues arising, for example in relation to requests to terminate the approval of carers. Panel do not have a regular business meeting at which they can reflect and explore the issues arising for them as panel members – it would be useful to have occasional business meetings diarised each year to include opportunity for such discussions and to consider any needs for amending procedures/protocols.

Quality of Foster Carers

RCT is a large local authority with around 200 approved foster carers and an identified need for more. The authority has a high number of relative carers.

Overall, we received positive comments from children in questionnaires; these indicate that foster carers ensure positive outcomes for children.

The assessment of kinship carers has consistently been prioritised due to court requirements and these often being required in tight timescales. Despite the pressures of kinship work, the assessment team completed 23 assessments of mainstream carers last year. The team now undertakes mostly relative and viability assessments.

People cannot be confident that foster carers are well supported. Staff told us that there were work pressures in supporting carers. Regular supervision is provided to mainstream carers every 6-8 weeks and this was confirmed by carers. Carers told us this visit was focused on completing the form and some told us they did not feel there was adequate opportunity to talk and express their views for fear of reprisals. Staff told us that there was not enough time to fit in extra visits although additional visits had been made on occasion.

The support of kinship carers has moved across to the support team. The team are introducing a supervision contract with kinship carers in order to be clear about levels of support they can expect from the team. Feedback from them was mixed in terms of level and consistency of support received.

It is acknowledged that there are some difficulties in providing support to relative carers who live a long way away. Some efforts had been made to develop the support needs of kinship carers but this needs to be effectively communicated e.g. none of the carers spoken to knew there was a dedicated kinship carer support group. As at the last inspection, there is no assessment process to make an informed judgement about the level of support kinship carers need.

Support groups were well established in each of the districts for mainstream carers – a few kinship carers attended some of these.

The Solihull training had been provided to a group of mainstream carers around the time of the last inspection but no groups have been set up following that event. Staff and carers indicated that this would be welcome. In recognition of the differing needs of carers, a separate Solihull training event has been arranged for kinship carers. The manager told us that there are plans to alternate this training for mainstream and kinship carers.

Staff told us that good support was provided via the educational psychologist, the Miskin project and the small group of support carers.

Carers told us that they were approached to accept child placements for children who were not suitable or whose needs they could not meet but were then made to feel under pressure to accept placements. Carers told us of examples where this had resulted in placements that carers were not confident of their ability to meet the child's needs and where placements had not worked well for the child and family.

Carers were further concerned at the plans of the authority for all carers to be approved for 0-18 year olds and this links to carers experiences of feeling pressurised to accept placements and their fear of reprisals.

Information provided to carers about the child at the point of placement was described as variable.

The arrangements for matching children to foster carers are essential to successful placements. Clear arrangements need to be put in place to ensure appropriate levels of respect for carers/their families needs/wishes and appropriate support if placements are to be requested outside their approval/boundaries.

The culmination of comments from staff and foster carers indicates that support does not consistently meet carer's needs. Careful consideration will need to be given to the best way of dealing with this.

A clear annual review of approval process was in place. Files viewed showed that the process included a report from the support social worker, a foster carer report, and a report from the child's social worker; carer profiles and matching criteria are put on the front of reviews. The process did not include a review meeting – this would be good practice but it is acknowledged that in such a large service it would not be feasible to put this in place for all reviews.

The service is not compliant with regulation 29. A small number of mainstream reviews were a little overdue and was not considered to be of concern, but a higher number of kinship reviews were out of date – this was confirmed by staff and carers.

Out of hours support is provided by the emergency duty team (EDT) – social work support is only provided in office hours.

Staff told us that terminations of approval were never undertaken lightly and a lot of work was carried out before this step is taken. Carers are invited to attend panel. The review process is used to undertake this work and was described as a transparent process.

There were a number of recommendations for termination in progress and some were being appealed via the independent review mechanism (IRM). This work has presented high levels of challenge for staff and the panel and is a long process. Records showed that in different cases carers had been seen by different managers and one had involved an independent social worker. Whilst some of the issues were explored at inspection, it is suggested that the fostering service undertake its own review to include providing staff an opportunity to reflect, consider lessons learned and if necessary further develop/update guidance around this difficult area of work.

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.

Focussed 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. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focussed 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.