

# INSPECTION OF HEREFORDSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

**Report By: Head of Social Care (Children)**

## Wards Affected

County-wide.

## Purpose

1. To inform Members of the outcome of an inspection of the Herefordshire Council Fostering Service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection and to identify the key features for action in response to the inspection report.

## Financial Implications

2. Immediate action will be taken within the existing budget for the Fostering Service, although longer-term investment will be required to ensure appropriate future development.

## Background

3. This first Inspection of the Herefordshire Fostering Service was undertaken by the National Care Standards Commission (now known as the Commission for Social Care Inspection) in March 2004. A draft report has been circulated separately for Members of the Committee. The final report will be circulated when it is published and will then be available to the public on request. It sets out the inspectors finding against 31 of the 32 National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services contained in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. These were published by the Secretary of State for Health under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000.
4. With 14 days of Inspector time spent speaking to a sample of service users, foster carers and staff, backed up by postal questionnaires to a wider group, this represents a full and thorough assessment of the Fostering Service as it is currently operated and sets clear parameters for future improvement.
5. Each Standard is rated on a four point scale:
  - a. 1. Standard not met (Major shortfalls)
  - b. 2. Standard almost met (minor shortfalls)
  - c. 3. Standard met (no shortfalls)
  - d. 4. Standard exceeded (commendable)

---

Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Jon Dudley, Children's Services Manager, on (01432) 260325

## Outcome of Inspection

6. The Inspectors found that the Herefordshire Fostering Service was effectively managed and staffed by well-qualified and experienced social workers. Foster carers stated that Family Placement Social Workers were proactive in resolving concerns and providing support. The Inspectors found that 15 of the 32 National Standards were met in full and that there were minor shortfalls in relation to a further 12. The inspection of short-term break services for children with a disability (standard 31) was deferred to a future inspection. Of the four standards that were not met, Standards 8,10 and 12 related primarily to the need to ensure that complete written records of children's needs and the proposals as to how these will be met, are made available to foster carers before the start of a placement. The final Standard not met (30) concerned the membership and operation of the Fostering Panel, linked to an interpretation of what constituted an "Independent Member" of the Panel. Panel membership was under review at the time of the inspection.
7. As a result of the inspection, a list of action points to meet the statutory requirements has been produced, to be completed by 30th November 2004. A second list of good practice recommendations has also been compiled. The local authority has produced an action plan in response to both of these, intended to ensure that our Fostering Service is fully compliant across all areas of the standards. The action plan is appended in full to the Inspectors report.

## Action taken

8. The Inspectors expressed their confidence that where they had identified shortfalls the Children's Resource Team's capacity for improvement would bring many scores up to standard with relatively small input and within short timescales. An implementation group led by the Fostering Manager is taking forward the action plan on statutory requirements and good practice recommendations. A new Children's Guide to fostering has been produced and will be circulated to all foster carers and foster children. The membership of Herefordshire Fostering Panel has been revised and Panel training will be undertaken soon. In liaison with area social work staff, improvements are being made to the quality and timeliness of information provided to foster carers to ensure that the life chances of looked after children are maximised.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the content of the Inspection Report and associated Action Plan in response to statutory requirements and good practice recommendations be noted.**

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.