

By Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: **Cabinet Committee for Social Care and Public Health, 14 September 2012**

Subject: **2012 FOSTERING INSPECTION BY OFSTED**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report outlines the legal framework, process and outcome of the Ofsted inspection, including the key messages, of KCC's Looked After Children and Fostering Service. The inspection took place on the 12th, 13th and 14th June 2012 under the new Ofsted Inspection Framework which was introduced in April 2012.

Recommendations: That members note the report and the resultant action plan, welcome the positive comments in the Inspection report about the fostering service, outcomes for Looked After Children and the improvement journey.

1. Introduction

- (1) The legal framework for the inspection of Fostering Services is contained in the Children Act 1989; Children Act Guidance Volume 4– Fostering Services 2011; Fostering Service The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010) – National Minimum Standards and the Care Standards Act 2000
- (2) In April 2012 Ofsted introduced a new framework for the inspection of Fostering Services. The previous inspection framework focussed on services meeting National Minimum Standards (NMS) with in the region of 80% of Services nationally being judged as Good or Outstanding and yet outcomes for Looked After Children were poor. Inspections were conducted on an 'announced' basis with services getting approximately 6 weeks notice
- (3) Hence the new Framework looked to shift the balance from 'processes' to how a whole service achieved good outcomes for Looked After Children Compliance with NMS's are an expectation and the basic requirement for achieving an adequate judgement. Inspection now focuses on the child's 'journey' and thus the inspection has broadened it's remit to Children Looked After in in-house fostering placements rather than just how the fostering service complies with and meets NMS.

- (4) Services can be judged overall as Outstanding (a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements), Good (a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements), Adequate (a service which meets minimum requirements) or Inadequate (a service which does not meet minimum requirements with individual judgements being made on:-
- Outcomes for children and young people
 - The quality of service provision
 - Safeguarding children and young people
 - Leadership and management
- (5) Equality and diversity issues are judged on the basis that they are addressed throughout the service and across the standards
- (6) Comprehensive Grade Descriptors were published by Ofsted which made clear what was expected and how services would be evaluated under each heading with an incremental build up of evidence to support the judgement i.e the requirement to achieve a higher grade is dependent on meeting and exceeding all the requirements and expectations of the grade below plus those of the higher grade This is a much more challenging regime and Ofsted indicated that they anticipated fewer services would be judged as good or outstanding and it was likely that nationally most services would drop a grade. There are no 'limiting judgements' but it is unlikely that a service would be deemed Outstanding if for example safeguarding was judged as Inadequate
- (7) The following types of Inspections may be carried out by Ofsted:-
- An inspection – which is carried out once in each 3 year cycle
 - A monitoring inspection – which may be carried out if there is an incident
 - A Survey inspection – on a themed basis
- (8) Ofsted indicated that they would focus on safeguarding and matters which made a difference to children's life chances and experience of being looked after' such as, stability of placements, placement of siblings together, evidence that children's views are sought and responded to with regards to their own care plan but also in the development of the service, and the response to children who go missing.
- (9) Inspections would focus on 'what difference' the service made to outcomes for children and how this could be robustly evidenced, for example ,it would not be enough to say that there was a comprehensive training programme for foster cares but a need to evidence how this had made a difference to carers ability to meet children's needs and achieve good outcomes.
- (10) Kent's Inspection was carried out by three inspectors over three days and included:-
- Adherence to and compliance with NMS and legal requirements
 - Focus groups with a range of professionals, children and foster carers

- Scrutiny of policies and procedures
- Scrutiny of 10 children's' cases
- Compliance with the recommendations from previous inspections
- Feedback questionnaires
- Service data and performance information on national indicators
- Scrutiny of complaints and how allegations against carers are handled
- Partnership working

(11) Services are given 10 days notice of the inspection. The draft report should be made available to the service 10 days following the completion of the inspection so that any inaccuracies can be rectified and the final report within 20 days

(12) In future Ofsted will conduct a combined inspection of all services relating to Looked After Children rather than separate inspections of Fostering, Adoption and District social Work Services as is currently the case and hence will examine how a the Local Authority meets the needs of their Looked After Children wherever they live. This new inspection regime will be introduced in April 2013 and hence this is the final year of separate inspections

2. Financial Implications

(1) There are no financial implications directly arising from this report

3 Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

(1) There is a clear mandate that Children in Care in Kent should be, where ever possible looked after within a family. There is a challenging target to recruit 140 new carers in 2012/13.

4. Ofsted Inspection of Kent County Council's Looked After Children and Fostering Service

(1) KCC Fostering service was inspected in May 2008 and judged to be Good.

(2) On the 28th May 2012 the County Fostering Manager received notification from Ofsted advising that the service would be inspected on the 12th, 13th and 14th June thus giving 9 working days notice and subsequently the inspection took place on those days. The draft report was received on the 16th July. 22 working days after the completion of the inspection. Factual corrections were made and the report was returned to Ofsted on 18th July 2012

(3) Following receipt of the inspection report an action plan has been produced which is attached as Appendix 1. The inspection report is attached as Appendix 2.

(4) The overall judgement of the inspection was **Adequate**, with the following detailed judgements:-

- Outcome for Children and Young people – **Good**
- Quality of Service – **Adequate**
- Safeguarding children and Young People – **Adequate**
- Leadership and management – **Good**

(5) There are many very positive comments in the report which include:-

- The entire service is working tirelessly to support the progress made, with the well-being of Kent's children as its driving force.
- The fostering service is committed to valuing every child and improving their outcomes
- Foster carers are passionate about providing the best possible care and they advocate tirelessly for children
- Great emphasis is placed upon keeping young people safe
- The service benefits from strong leadership and management
- The vast majority (of children) are very happy with their foster carers. feeling valued and cared for
- The energy and drive committed to the virtual school over the last two years is paying real dividends
- The views of children and young people are overwhelmingly positive, particularly about the quality of direct care and support they receive from their foster carers.
- Excellent systems reliably inform the ongoing foster carer recruitment campaign
- Placing social workers value foster cares as professional colleagues
- Foster Carers are excellent role models; many use their own continued training and development to demonstrate the value of learning to those in their care
- Children and young people enjoy good health
- Children and young people enjoy appropriate and meaningful contact with their family members and important others
- Young people say they receive a good service to prepare them for leaving care
- Newer foster carers say they are happy with their own initial assessment processes
- Children with disabilities receive the care and support they need from well trained carers
- The percentage of those (carers) having completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's induction training is higher than the national average
- The wide variety of placements offered by the service increases the likelihood of placing children successfully and appropriately
- The Fostering Panel provides a robust quality assurance role and function in terms of assessments, reviews, allegations and complaints
- Approval checks conducted on prospective carers and members of their households are robust and thorough
- The majority of foster carers say they a have been well supported following a complaint or allegation

- Significant energy is having the desired effect upon driving down the occurrences of young people being missing from care. Protocols with the police are clear and effective. Foster carers understand their role.
- The Service is effectively managed and staffed by people who possess the skills, experience and qualifications required.
- A clear sense of purpose and direction dedicated to improving outcomes for children and young people is demonstrated by staff across all disciplines
- Multidisciplinary working is now an integral feature of planning and monitoring the support provided for children and young people
- The percentage of children and young people who are placed with foster carers is higher than the national average
- Good retention and an active recruitment campaign see the number of approved fostering households across the county increased year on year.
- Staff say they receive good, often excellent levels of support from their line managers

(6) There are 8 recommendations contained in the report which include, the need to:-

- further develop consultation to ensure that children can communicate their views on all aspect of their care and support in order to inform service development
- review and update policy and procedural guidance for foster carers with particular regard to physical restraint and to ensure that foster carers receive training on positive care and control of children
- maintain and further drive down the number of children who go missing from care to minimise the risk that they will go missing and reduce the risk of harm should they go missing
- ensure that foster carers practice safe care policies including fire risks and e-safety by ensuring that carers are trained and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities
- ensure that all foster homes are inspected annually without appointment
- update fostering panels' terms of reference and seeking its views on additional service matters to include the panel giving advice on other matters referred to it
- address the variable quality of carers supervision records and service policies and procedures and that the manager regularly reviews and updates these to ensure they comply with policy, identify concerns about specific incidents, and identify patterns and trends

(7) The report recognises that, following the inadequate rating from its Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection in 2010, that Kent is on a journey which has resulted in a structured and targeted approach which is driving and achieving improved safeguarding practices throughout the authority , good examples of which include partnership working with the police and extensive dialogue with schools.

- (8) The report highlights that the service is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and has a clear plan to deal with any short comings. It notes that there are some areas for development across Social Services which include :-
- That consultation mechanisms to capture the views of young people are underdeveloped and not universally known but are being actively improved and steps taken to advertise the new developments in the advocacy service and the revitalised Children in Care Council including the setting up of a junior Council for younger children.
 - That there are a number of unplanned endings to placements although these are declining due to better matching processes
 - There are insufficient carers from minority ethnic groups to ensure children are racially or culturally matched with carers. This is being addressed through the Recruitment Strategy currently being updated and developed
 - The use of exemptions (where the manager of the service agrees that carers can take more than 3 unrelated children) is high compared to other Local Authorities. This is often done to keep sibling groups together. The report acknowledges that exemptions are robustly monitored by the manager

5. Conclusions

- (1) This is a very positive report in the context of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework with many areas of good practice being acknowledged by the inspectors. Particularly heartening is that children feel safe, happy, valued and positive about their foster carers and that they are making such good progress.
- (2) Foster Carers, managers and staff from KCC, and partner agencies are clearly very committed to ensuring that Looked After Children's life chances are enhanced by being in care.

6. Recommendations

- (1) Members are asked to:
- a) NOTE the Inspection Report
 - b) COMMENT on the action plan arising from the recommendations.

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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – Fostering Inspection Action Plan
- Appendix 2 – Ofsted Inspection Report, July 2012