

Inspection of Midlothian Council Fostering Service

Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services

1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines the outcome of the above announced inspection as carried out by the Care Inspectorate in May 2014.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Fostering Service is based in Lawfield Primary School and provides a fostering service for children and young people aged 0-18 years, and their families, who are assessed as in need of this service.

2.2 The Care Inspectorate is the independent scrutiny and improvement body for care and children's services and they inspect every registered care service, local authority social work departments and child protection teams on a regular basis to make sure that providers are meeting standards required and are working to improve the quality of care for everyone. Every time they inspect these services they produce an inspection report.

2.3 Based on the findings of this inspection the Care Inspectorate awarded the following grades:

Quality of care and support	Grade 2 – Weak
Quality of staffing	Grade 4 – Good
Quality of Management and Leadership	Grade 3 – Adequate

2.4 The report and grades represent the Care Inspectorate assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during the unannounced inspection.

2.5 The Care Inspectorate noted that since the last inspection the service has further developed:

- The use of chronologies for foster carers, which is in line with best practice.
- Introduced an annual training calendar and completed an audit of all training undertaken by their carers. This information is used to shape future training opportunities.

2.6 The Inspection Team noted the following strengths:

- Foster Carers told us ‘we are really happy with everything so far, our worker, and our children’s worker are always available.’
- Good working links with a range of partner agencies including neighbouring authorities, BAAF and Fostering Network.
- A young person told us its ‘much better since I came here I have friends now, I want to stay here forever’
- The bi-annual review, in line with regulations, which ensure carers remain well supported and have access to training.
- The specialised administration staff employed which enables good quality assurance systems to be put in place including the triggering of statutory checks and good quality recording of panels, reviews and enquiries.

2.7 The Inspection Team reported that following areas for improvements:

- That the risk assessment tool needs to identify all risks and highlight a plan to minimise the impact of this.
- A more robust over approvals system to be put in place.
- Where there have been significant concerns or incidents the service needs to ensure that appropriate processes for decision making are followed..

2.8 The Inspection Team concluded that within the Fostering Service the staff team were knowledgeable, skilled and experienced and committed to improving outcomes for all service users of the fostering service. Whilst it was acknowledged that there were areas for improvement in ensuring that proper processes were followed, overall there was a clear recognition that foster carers were being provided with regular support, access to training and that there was a robust panel system in place for approving and reviewing carers.

3. **Current Context**

3.1 Midlothian Council’s Fostering Service is committed to providing foster placements where each child will have stability, security and a warm, safe and caring environment. The service are committed to ensuring that young people and carers views are adequately represented in developing and shaping the service. Moreover, the report reinforces and legitimises the direction of travel undertaken by Midlothian Council.

3.2 Since the inspection report Midlothian Council has already taken a number of actions to improve the service. Namely,

- A detailed action plan which outlines the team and service priorities for the next year
- Continue to review and strengthen our systems and processes including quality assurance

- Further develop the 'Framework for Permanence' to include Key Performance Indicators,
- Further develop training and development for staff.,

4. Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There are no resource issues arising from this report.

4.2 Risk

The Care Inspectorate regulate all care services in Scotland using the [National Care Standards](#), set out by the Scottish Government, as a benchmark for how each type of service should perform. These standards are the minimum that children and young people should expect when using care services.

If the standards are not being fully met, the Care Inspectorate would note this in the inspection report and require the service manager to address these. The Care Inspectorate could impose an additional condition on the service's registration if the provider persistently, substantially or seriously fails to meet the standards or breaches a regulation. They also have the power to issue an improvement notice detailing the required improvement to be made and the timescale for this.

Monitoring, review and evaluation of progress by officers in Children and Families is the control measure in place to reduce the risk of failure of the care services and to demonstrate their capacity to improve.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Performance and outcomes will continue to be measured through the monitoring, review and evaluation process.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The Service will continue to improve its work in line with its improvement plan and the Education, Communities and Economy Directorate will continue to challenge and support the Service in relation to developing and implementing a range of quality improvement strategies.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

In addition to obtaining our own feedback, as part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate sent out questionnaires to the Fostering Panel members. Completed questionnaires were returned prior to the inspection. The contents of the questionnaires were used to inform the Care Inspectorate findings and are referred to in the Inspection Report.

The Inspectors also met with staff, foster carers and two young people who were living with foster carers during the course of the inspection.

Copies of the report have been made available to Elected Members, staff and other interested parties.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

An action plan has been prepared to address the areas for improvement recommended in the report. The action plan will be screened for equalities implications.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The Service Improvement Plan allows for sustainable development and improvement.

4.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

5 Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) note the content of the inspection report;
- (ii) pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration;
- (iii) note that the Council will continue to challenge, support and monitor the service in relation to achieving excellence through further improving performance.

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Background Papers:

Care Services Inspection Report dated 16 May 2014