

**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 on 17th November 2017.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Fostering Service is co-located with other children's services based at 7 Eskdail Court 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 and local authority social work departments 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 3 – adequate
Quality of Staffing	Not assessed
Quality of Management and Leadership	Grade 4 – Good

2.4 The report and grades represent the Care Inspectorate's 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 service is now co-located with other children's services. During the past year there has been significant changes within the agency in relation to a high turn-over of staff, however a new manager has also been appointed and this has had a positive effect on the service.

2.6 The Inspection Team noted the following strengths:

- There was evidence of a robust approach to care planning for children. Information provided to carers was usually very good and carers felt that effective matching was always attempted and their views listened to.
- Carers reported that they attended and took an active part in multi-agency meetings, reviews and hearings and where appropriate children and young people also attended.

- Training for foster carers was seen as a strength within the service. There was evidence of regular visits and contact. There was also evidence of additional support being offered to individual children and young people when requested and most carers reported positively on the support they received from the child's social worker.
- The Care Inspectorate found service development plans were coherent with the feedback received and the organisational goals. The decision to be co-located with other teams and appoint only one manager for the team was viewed positively.
- The new team manager is viewed by all staff and others as a key strength for the service and the quality of the fostering panels remains a strength within the service.

2.7 The Inspection Team reported the following areas for improvements:

- Relationships between the service and carers is an area for improvement. As a result of the service review, which seen a large number of staff leave this area of work, this has led to inconsistencies in approaches to working with carers. Some carers reported that they felt undervalued or under supported at times.
- The standard of assessments and reports was found to be variable. This was linked to the lack of expertise within the team and the turnover of staff.
- There was concern around workload management and the pressure on staff. The Care Inspectorate were concerned that staff were at times overwhelmed by their workload and this should be looked at as a matter of urgency.

Summary

3.0 The Inspection Team concluded that the move to co-locate with other children's services and the new manager have had a positive impact on the service. The Care Inspectorate did however raise concerns around the high turnover of staff within the team and the lack of expertise. The service review, coupled with a high level of maternity covers within this particular part of the service has had an impact upon the fostering service. The staff team are now all in post and alongside a robust training programme to enhance their skills and knowledge, we are beginning to build a new team who shall focus on supporting our foster carers so that they feel valued and supported going forward.

The Inspection noted no requirements.

The Inspection noted one recommendation:

To ensure that children and young people are being looked after by carers who feel well supported. The service should review the provision of support groups and properly implement supervision of carers in line with their own policy.

An action plan has been devised to address the above recommendation.

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 quarterly reporting, 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 the inspection process the Care Inspectorate received 13 responses from questionnaires sent to foster carers. The Inspectors met with nine carers and made contact with two foster carers by telephone. The Inspectors also met staff members, management, panel members and other professionals including allocated social workers.

Review of documentation included some children's files, carers' files, policies and procedures, team meeting minutes and other quality assurance information.

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.

Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

- (i) note the content of the inspection report;
- (ii) pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration;
- (iii) Acknowledge the continued progress and the ongoing work by management and staff.

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Background Papers:

Care Services Inspection Report dated 17 November 2017