

Inspection of Midlothian Fostering Service

Report by Joan Tranent, Head of Children's Services

1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines the outcome of the above announced (short notice) Inspection on Midlothian Fostering Service as carried out by the Care Inspectorate in February 2019.

2 Background

2.1 Midlothian Council Fostering Services is co-located with other children's services based at 7 Eskdaill Court and provides a fostering service for children and young people aged 0-18 years. Whilst the fostering and adoption service are inspected as separate services, the inspections happen at the same time and it is one team who manage all the work.

2.2 The Care Inspectorate is the Independent scrutiny and improvement body for care services in Scotland. They inspect all registered care services and local authority social work departments on a regular basis to ensure 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 on the three areas it inspected:

Quality of Care and Support	Grade 4 - Good
Quality of Staffing	Grade 3 – Adequate
Quality of Management & Leadership	Grade 3 – Adequate

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 announced inspection.

3.0 Findings from Inspection

3.1 Care & Support - Strengths

The findings from the Inspection in the area of Care & Support noted the following strengths:

- An increasing number of children and young people who were assessed as being in need of permanent alternative care were experiencing this without delay.

- We observed close, loving and trusting relationships between children, young people and their carers. This was clearly supported by the stable, legally secure and enduring nature of their placements.
- Whilst aware that there have been disruptions to placements which can have a negative impact on young people's experiences and outcomes, however the systems in place allow an overview and degree of scrutiny which then informs learning and service and practice development.
- They found good examples of carers being consistently and positively involved with birth family of young people through supporting contact, establishing relationships and having appropriate sensitive and helpful conversations. Carers also spoke positively about their recruitment and preparation experiences, expressing that it offered valuable insight into their role as carers.
- Young people's views were regularly sought and the development of Mind of my Own app was a further attempt to make this process more accessible and meaningful.

Care & Support – Development

- Whilst some carers training was up to date this was not the case for all. Some areas of mandatory training, including child protection were seen to be inconsistently attended and out of date. Also there was no adult support and protection training recorded as being undertaken. Given the new duties on children's services in relation to continuing care this is an area which is new to many carers.
- Some risk assessments and safer caring policies were not found to incorporate all information available and were not always being updated at regular intervals or timeously.

In conclusion for Care and Support:

The Inspection team found a number of important strengths in this agency which taken together clearly outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of the impact on people who used the service. They noted good plans in place to drive improvement and acknowledged that the agency as emerging from a period of transition. The Care Inspectorate made one requirement and one recommendation in relation to this part of the service which are evidenced in the attached action plan.

3.2 Quality of Staffing - Strengths

- The Inspection team found that staff were enthusiastic and motivated to establish positive working relationships with carers and to consolidate the team following significant staff changes.
- Staff reported they were motivated and committed to providing a quality service. They received regular supervision and annual appraisal from the new manager of the service. Training needs were also being discussed and noted within appraisal records.

- There was a breadth of skills and experience within the team in relation to child care, assessment and social work however some staff had limited experience of fostering work and the service acknowledged that staff confidence needs to grow in this area.
- Support was offered to staff in the form of regular team meetings, team development sessions and consultations sessions in relation to case work.
- The Inspection team found very positive working relationships between the foster team and the social work teams. There was evidence of examples of good joint working practices supporting positive outcomes for children and young people, carers and birth families.

Quality of Staffing – Development

- Safer recruitment processes in consultation with HR. Whilst initial PVG checks have been undertaken, there was no cyclical PVG checks in place. The safer recruitment policy requires to be reviewed and take account of changes to the law including GDPR.
- Alongside the work of staff prioritising their relationships with carers, they also need to actively develop relationships with children and young people alongside this to more effectively support caring household.
- Management to ensure they have a clear overview of staff training records, currently they are stored in different systems. Therefore a training needs analysis is required to ensure that staff are provided with relevant training.

In conclusion the quality of staffing was found to have strengths which just outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of the impact on people who used the services. It was acknowledged that there were good plans in place to drive improvement. There was one requirement and two recommendations made which are evidenced on our action plan.

3.3 Quality of Management - Strengths

The Care Inspectorate team acknowledged that the service has experienced a number of significant challenges and changes since the last inspection, including staff absence (front line and management), staffing changes, and operating in an environment of uncertainty and changes in leadership style and practice. The impact of these issues on the team, service delivery and capacity for improvement over this period was fully discussed with the management team during the course of the inspection and at feedback.

- In recent months further changes have offered the opportunity to identify these area required to drive forward improvements and start to address the negative impact of these events. There is evidence of a

clear drive to re-establish positive, trusting relationships between the service and their carers and also to consolidate the team itself.

- The fostering panel processes were being carried out well in a way which supported quality monitoring of practice and reporting. Panel members spoke of the improvement in the quality of information being provided to the panel.

Quality of Management - Development

- Management systems should be used more effectively and new systems developed to provide an overview of the agency. There should be a more consistent and effective use of file auditing and accuracy in recording for incident and accident reporting and of child protection records. This would inform better notification reporting to the Care Inspectorate.
- The service needs to undertake some policy review and update work. The draft continuing care policy requires further development and structures for implementation required to be progressed to ensure the service develops in line with the continuing care agenda.

In summary the strengths just outweighed the areas for improvement in terms of impact on people who used the service. There was one requirement in this area which is evidenced in our attached action plan.

4. Summary

Overall this is a disappointing Inspection report where grades have dropped except for the care and support offered to foster carers. In discussion with the Care Inspectorate the challenges and changes were fully discussed to give some context around the unusual set of circumstances that we faced over the past 12 months.

This said we have had a new manager in post since September 2018 and already the team and carers are evidencing the positive changes being made. The manager is a reliable and experienced worker who shall offer much needed continuity and stability to the team whilst also ensuring that they drive forward the performance of the service.

5. Report Implications

5.1 Resource

There are no resource issues arising from this report.

5.2 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's Services is the control measure in place to reduce the risk of failure of the care services and to demonstrate their capacity to improve.

5.3 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

5.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The action plan outlines the work that is required to happen within set timescales. The progress of this shall be monitored during monthly meetings with the Head of Service.

5.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The Service will continue to improve its work in line with its improvement plan. 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.

5.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

As part of their inspection process the Care Inspectorate met with five foster carers and seven children and young people. They also observed a foster carer support group meeting attendees.

5.7 Ensuring Equalities

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

5.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

The Service Improvement Plan allows for sustainable development and improvement.

5.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues.

6 Recommendations

Cabinet are requested to:

- Note the content of the Inspection Report.
- Pass this report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration.

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Background Papers:

Midlothian Fostering Action Plan 2019/2020	(Appendix 1)
Care Inspectorate Report dated 8 February 2019	(Appendix 2)

Midlothian Fostering Action Plan 2019/2020

APPENDIX 1

ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD	OUTCOME	MEASUREMENT	RED AMBER GREEN	UPDATE
Develop a robust Learning and Development Framework for foster carers mandatory training (<i>Care and Support: Requirement 1</i>)	27 May 19	Team Leader /Learning & Development/ Public Protection Unit	All foster carers are trained, competent and skilled to meet the needs of the children and young people they are caring for	All foster carers will undergo Child protection level 1 / refresher training 100% of all foster carer will undergo Adult Support and Protection training		
Develop a training needs analysis to identify areas of professional development for the team. Ensure Individual Training Records for each member of staff are held together with team training records to ensure consistent and varied staff development (<i>Staffing: Requirement 1</i>)	27 May 19	Team Leader	Early identification of gaps in training for staff. Clear overview of all staff training to management	All staff undergo child protection training All staff undergo adult support and protection training		
Implement annual reviews of foster carers in line with national care standards (<i>Management and Leadership: Recommendation 1</i>)	March 20	Service Manager/Team Leader/ Supervising social workers	Reassurance that all foster carers are reviewed annually thereby identifying any issues at early stage	All foster carers will be reviewed annually either informally at home or at panel. Mosaic records will evidence these are taking place		
Develop and deliver on a learning and development programme for panel members and chairs (<i>Management and Leadership: Recommendation 1</i>)	27 May 19	Service Manager/ Team Leader/ Ind. Chairs	Panel members and chairs are trained, competent and skilled in their role.	Panel learning and development programme in place Panel members invited to joint FPT training 4 X per annum development day		

				100% appraisal/annual reviews in place		
Ensure documents relating to risk management (risk assessments/safer caring policies) are produced and updated timeously and interface effectively (<i>Care and Support: Recommendation 1</i>)	March 20	All TL's and managers	Timeously reporting which informs robust care planning and support	All foster carer files will undergo a file audit on an annual basis – Mosaic reporting. 4 x per annum supervision to ensure risk management is reflected in the care planning process		
Develop and monitor robust recruitment record keeping practices (<i>Staffing: Recommendation 1</i>)	March 20	HR/Managers	Confirmation that all staff are appropriately and safely recruited	100% of new recruits have a file that contains necessary paperwork in line with safer recruitment		
Strengthen the relationships with Supervising Social Workers and the children placed in foster care households (<i>Staffing: Recommendation 2</i>)	March 20	Team Leader/ Supervising Social Workers	Ensure that the FPT staff know the children placed with their carers so they can contribute to making decisions about their current or future care and support	100% of case file audits and supervision notes evidence this is taking place 100% of foster carers case file and supervision highlight the link between the child's needs and foster support and learning		
Strengthen quality assurance systems for ensuring procedures are followed in line with local and national policy (<i>Management and Leadership: Requirement 1</i>)	27 May 19	Service Manager/Team Leader	Develop new system to provide an overview of the agency to include outwith approval procedure, auditing, & recording of incident & accident reporting.	100% of outwith authority placements are reviewed by a manager 100% of cares are reviewed within appropriate timescales All relevant files are monitored and reviewed – Mosaic report		

Strengthen the existing system for undertaking appropriate policy updates to ensure continuous improvement <i>(Management and Leadership: Recommendation 2)</i>	27 May 19	Service Manager/Team Leader	Completed Policy for Continuing Care.	Evidence that Council policies are being regularly reviewed		
Develop and implement a local continuing care policy, working in partnership with children's services <i>(Management and Leadership: Recommendation 2)</i>	27 May 19	Service Manager/Team Leader	Completed Policy for Continuing Care.	Policy in place and communicated to all staff and carers Registered as an adult placement service		