

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	7 NOVEMBER 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	FOSTERING AGENCY INSPECTION		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JAN GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN & FAMILIES
SERVICE:	CHILDRENS SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	KAREN REEVE		TEL: 0118 9374163
JOB TITLE:	HEAD OF CHILDRENS SERVICES	E-MAIL:	karen.reeve@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) has a duty to inspect children's services, focussing on evaluating outcomes for children and young people. All Fostering Agencies are inspected under the current regime every 3 years.
- 1.2 An overall grading of adequate was reported and 4 sub judgments were made. Outcomes for children were judged as GOOD, quality of service, safeguarding and leadership & management were all judged as adequate. Inspectors clearly indicated that they saw marked improvements since they last inspected and were complimentary overall about the service. This judgement must also be seen in the context of another rise in the 'bar' and the context overall of Ofsted judgements.
- 1.3 Ofsted noted in particular that the service was responsive to changing needs and successful in ensuring children are placed with carers that met their needs. It noted the service is aspirational and there is an expectation that children will grow and develop in their placements. Children talked positively about their placements and the support and encouragement they received from foster carers.
- 1.4 Appended to the report is the Ofsted Inspection Report.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee receives the Ofsted Inspection Report about Reading Borough Council's Fostering Agency.

3 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) has a duty to inspect children's services under the Care Standards Act 2000, focussing on evaluating the effectiveness of the service and outcomes for children and young people. Fostering Agencies are inspected under the current regime every 3 years.
- 3.2 Readings Fostering Agency received 10 days notice of the inspector's arrival in July and the final inspection report was received in October. There were 2 inspectors

who spent four days with the fostering service and met with a range of other services, foster carers, staff and a number of young people.

- 3.3 This will be the last inspection of this type as from November 2013 a new Inspection Framework is introduced that merges the fostering inspection into a new single framework for child protection, looked after, care leavers, adoption etc

4 THE INSPECTION FEEDBACK

- 4.1 The inspectors found many positives and commented positively about the experience that child have of being fostered in Reading. Children (they said) talked enthusiastically about their lives within foster families and special mention was made of the kindness of foster carers, the quality of accommodation and the fun they had.
- 4.2 The Inspectors judged the service to be adequate overall with 4 sub judgments; Outcomes for children were judged as GOOD, quality of service, safeguarding and leadership & management were all judged as adequate. Inspectors clearly indicated that they saw marked improvements since they last inspected and were complimentary overall about the service. This judgement must also been seen in the context of another rise in the 'bar' and the context overall of Ofsted judgements
- 4.3 The successes of children and young people are recognised and celebrated. The inspectors made particular mention of the fact that the service has developed an open culture in which children's views are heard and responded to. Education is given a high priority and every effort is made to limit any disruption.
- 4.4 The report notes that the service has made significant progress since the last inspection and appreciates the service has been hampered by the rise in demand, staff shortages and inconsistent leadership at team manager level. However it notes that these have been managed well and progress is evidenced.
- 4.5 As would be expected there are some recommendations for improvement and the staff are not complacent in continuing to strive for service improvements. These are the subject of an action plan that will be monitored by the Head of Service.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The continued work to improve services for children will promote the Council's strategic aims to promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The Ofsted Inspection involves consultation and involvement in the inspection with parents, children and young people receiving services and their views and comments are incorporated in the report. A young peoples version of the inspection report is also provided and is made available to local young people.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this particular decision.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None of note for this report

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No new financial implications for this report

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Ofsted Inspection Framework for the Inspection of fostering agencies