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**CHILDREN'S HOMES INSPECTIONS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) – Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) – Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To present a summary of the reports from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) following the unannounced Inspections of Darlington Borough Council's Children's Homes and the Short Break Centre for children with disabilities.

**Information and Analysis**

2. Unannounced inspections of all Darlington Borough Council's Children's Homes and the Short Break Centre for children with disabilities were carried out between 30 November 2005 and 05 January 2006.

One announced inspection and one unannounced inspection are carried out annually in each of the Children's Homes and the Short Break Centre, in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes, the Children's Homes Regulations 2002, the Children Act 1989 (as amended) and the Children Act 2004.

3. The inspections were based on the government's vision for children's services and the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life:
  - (a) Being Healthy
  - (b) Staying Safe
  - (c) Enjoying and Achieving
  - (d) Making a Positive Contribution
  - (e) Achieving Economic Wellbeing

CSCI have re-ordered the National Minimum Standards for Children's Services under the five outcomes for reporting purposes.

**Inspection Summaries**

4. Overview of inspectors' findings included the following:
  - (a) "the most important thing that (the Home) does well is the way the staff and young people get on;"

- (b) “the staff are committed to helping young people make the change from childhood to adulthood by making sure that they are equipped to deal with living independently;”
- (c) “staff within the home provide care similar to a parent would give and have young people’s safety in mind when dealing with them;”
- (d) “the building has a pleasant homely ‘feel’ to it. The way the staff and young people got on together was warm and friendly. The manager is good at her job and has a team who like looking after children and trying to help them;”
- (e) “the home provides a good standard of care to a group of people who appreciate the help they get. The home is bright and cheerful and interactions are warm and friendly. Carers and key workers work closely with parents. One parent stated that this meant that the home was a safe place for the care of her child;”
- (f) “communication and relationships between staff and young people are based on honest and direct talking and working together to see things through.”

### **Comments from Young People**

5. The inspection reports included the following comments by young people:

- (a) “I think this home is alright, the staff are alright with you;”
- (b) “we can bring things up whenever we want to sort things out, that’s a good way of doing things;”
- (c) “the food is nice and you can have snacks between meals;”
- (d) “sanctions are fair and if I am good I get a special treat such as a game (computer) for the week-end;”
- (e) Inspectors also reported:  
”young people said that they felt the staff were good in making sure people were not bullied, that they were dealt with fairly and their needs met.”

### **Being Healthy**

6. The inspectors looked at outcomes for Standards 10, 12 and 13 and reported:

- (a) The quality of meals is good. Staff and young people are involved in planning, buying and preparing meals.
- (b) Staff within the homes promote good health and provide a healthy environment.
- (c) Health records are good, needs are assessed and identified for young people. However, some plans could be clearer and more explicit.

- (d) Medications are administered in a safe way, but some records can be improved.

### **Staying Safe**

- 7. The inspectors looked at Standards 9, 16, 18, 19, 22 and 26 and reported:
  - (a) Records are kept secure and information is handled in a confidential manner.
  - (b) Children are protected and supported in dealing with bullying issues.
  - (c) Notifications about serious matters are as they should be in accordance with National Minimum Standards and Regulations.
  - (d) Complaints are dealt with appropriately.
  - (e) There are robust procedures for staff recruitment.

### **Enjoying and Achieving**

- 8. The inspectors looked at Standards 7, 14 and 15 and reported:
  - (a) “one young person’s file gave clear evidence about how personal support from the home had helped deal with being bullied;”
  - (b) “it was significant during discussions with young people that their education receives a great deal of attention in the home. One young person remarked ‘I get too much help with school, staff are always encouraging and help is there when I want it.’ Another said ‘I get help with things like maths.’ Records on young people’s files show the commitment to supporting young people’s education;”
  - (c) “young people were supported to develop friendships outside the home and spoke of things like cinema and bowling;”
  - (d) most young people’s personal education plans were reported as being of good quality, but that some “were brief, of limited quality and content;”
  - (e) one young person did not have an educational placement; help had been sought from the education support worker for Looked After Children but inspectors observed that “progress seems slow;”
  - (f) “one young person is currently seeking entry into work and records show that staff encourage the young person and provide opportunities to explore her direction in life.”

### **Making a Positive Contribution**

- 9. The inspectors looked at Standards 2, 3, 4, 8, 21 and reported:

- (a) In some homes young people have their needs assessed, care plans are developed and there are appropriate plans and agreements.

Areas for improvement included ensuring that this is the case for all young people.

- (b) “Contact arrangements are clear and staff try very hard to ensure that appropriate contact takes place.”
- (c) “The culture is very much centred on communicating honestly and directly with young people, seeking views and listening to what they are saying.”

### **Achieving Economic Wellbeing**

10. Inspectors looked at Standards 6 and 11, and reported:

“Young people’s allowances are good; young people are encouraged to develop their own abilities to care for themselves and prepare for life beyond the home, whilst receiving appropriate guidance from staff.”

### **Quality of Accommodation**

11. Inspectors looked at Standards 23, 24 and 25, and reported:

- (a) Homes were variously described as “pleasant, warm, friendly, well decorated with good facilities.”  
Staff accommodation in one home was described as “cramped.”
- (b) Bathrooms were judged “good” and respect for children’s privacy was observed.

### **Management**

12. Inspectors looked at Standards 28, 29, 31, 32, 33 and 35 and reported:

- (a) Staff are committed, competent and experienced. Staff receive regular supervision and guidance.
- (b) Staff receive a wide range of training and guidance.
- (c) Managers regularly monitor the homes and send monitoring reports to CSCI.
- (d) Young people’s file records are very good. The information is well recorded and thorough.
- (e) External monitoring of all the homes had not happened as frequently as required.

(NB: since the time of the inspections, external monitoring now takes place as required.)

## **Action Plans**

13. In accordance with CSCI requirements, Children's Homes Managers have submitted timely Action Plans outlining how the Statutory Requirements and Good Practice Recommendations will be addressed.
14. Areas to be addressed include Personal Education Plans, Placement Plans, External Monitoring regularity, Medicine Records, Health Care Plans and formal meetings between staff and young people.

## **Legal Implications**

15. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

16. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

17. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

## **Decision Deadline**

18. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

## **Recommendations**

19. It is recommended that Members:-
  - (a) Note the findings and recommendations of the CSCI Inspection Reports as summarised above; and
  - (b) Note that the full reports are available from the Children's Accommodation Manager on request.

## **Reasons**

20. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To comply with statutory requirements to make these reports public; and
- (b) To inform Members of the findings of these reports.

**Margaret Asquith**  
**Director of Children's Services**

## **Background Papers**

CSCI Inspection Reports

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