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REGULATION 33 & MEMBERS' VISITS (SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 2013)

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Report Summary

Purpose:

This report summarises the feedback and reports from the Regulation 33 visits to Milton Keynes Council's registered children's homes in the period September to November 2013 inclusive. Regulation 33 visits monitor compliance with regulation and quality standards as set out in legislation. This report seeks to identify themes and trends in relation to the quality of the service provided within these three children's homes.

Background:

Visits under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and as amended in the Children's Homes (Amendment) Regulations 2011 are a statutory requirement for the Local Authority. Visits take place at least once a month, by an officer independent of the management of the home, and may be unannounced.

Corporate Priorities:

Improving the quality of the Residential Services and their contribution to good outcomes for Milton Keynes Children in Care. This is in line with the council's Integrated Support and Social Care Service Group Plan 2013/14.

Performance Information:

All three residential homes are subject to regular Ofsted inspection. Inspections have been undertaken during this reporting period in all three homes by Ofsted

Equality and Diversity Impact:

The residential service is provided for disabled children from across the Milton Keynes community. It therefore needs to provide placements that can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in the Council's care.

Recommendations /Proposals:

That the report be noted.

Full Report

1.0 Legal & Policy Framework

- 1.1 Visits under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 amended in 2011 are a statutory requirement for the Local Authority. Visits are required for any children's home run by the Local Authority.
- 1.2 Visits take place at least once a month, usually by an officer independent of the conduct of the home, and may be unannounced.
- 1.3 Regulation 33(4) states that – the person carrying out the visit shall:
 - (a) Interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as appear necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home;
 - (b) Inspect the premises of the children's home, and records of any complaints and
 - (c) Prepare a written report on the conduct of the home.
- 1.4 Summary quarterly reports are presented to Children and Families senior managers, the Chair of Governors of The Walnuts School, Registered Managers of the children's homes, and Milton Keynes Council Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 1.5 There are three Council children's homes in Milton Keynes: Furze House (short break care for disabled children); Westminster House formerly known as Westminster Drive (long term care for disabled young people); The Walnuts (short break and long term care for children with autism who attend Walnuts school).
- 1.6 Regulation 33 reports are required to be sent to Ofsted on a monthly basis

2. Ofsted Inspection of these Children's Homes

- 2.1 All 3 children's homes have been subject to an Ofsted inspection during this reporting period, the reports from Ofsted on two of these homes are awaited by the Authority.
- 2.2 The inspection of Furze House took place on the 07/10/2013 and the report has recently been received. This was a Full inspection which judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be of Good. Four broad areas were considered during the inspection and were graded accordingly.

Leadership and Management	Good
Outcomes for Young people	Good
Quality of Care	Good
Safeguarding Children & Young people	Good

2.3 The inspection report was a very positive read describing a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements. It identified three statutory requirements to improve the service further.

- To the including interviews with children, their parents and professionals during Regulation 33 visits. This has already been addressed.
- Ensure that the use of electronic listening devices is controlled and limited to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children concerned. The policy is now being reviewed.
- Ensure that Ofsted are notified if any of the events listed in schedule 5 take place within the home. Homes current Criteria for notification being reviewed and expanded.

2.3 The final outcome of these Inspections for Walnuts and Westminster House will be reported more fully in the next report to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

3.0 General Observations from Regulation 33 Visits to the three children's homes

3.1 As reported previously, an independent social worker with the necessary knowledge, skills and experience relating to residential child care provision was commissioned to conduct all of the required Regulation 33 visits for October, November and December 2013.

3.2 Regulation 33 visits have occurred in the evenings, on weekends and in the early morning on both an announced and unannounced basis which has provided opportunities to see all aspects of the children's experience.

3.3 During one evening visit, the visitor was able to speak to family members of a child, who reported that they were 'delighted' by the standard of care provided in the home, and that the young woman in question had developed a range of skills, such as being able to now feed herself with a fork, a skill it had never been envisaged possible, and one that they attributed entirely to the efforts of staff at the home. They also reported how they are routinely in touch with staff from the home, who they find caring, supportive and totally child focussed.

3.4 As envisaged, this methodology has already begun to provide greater consistency and co-ordination of the visits and has allowed a more in depth focus on ensuring and evidencing that the homes policy, practice and procedures are compliant with regulations and the National Minimum Standards relating to Children's Homes.

3.5 Opportunities for improvement have been identified and some have already been addressed, whilst others are continuing to be considered by the Registered Managers.

3.6 In all reports provided over the reporting period the visitor was able either to observe or explore with children in placement and or their family

members, their experience in undertaking activities, having meals and their interactions with staff. All reports make comments in relation to how the young people appear to be settled, relaxed and happy and that the relationship between staff and children as well as children and children was genuinely warm, nurturing and respectful.

- 3.7 Staffing levels over the times subject to this report appear to have been appropriate to the number and needs of the children within the homes. It is noted that relief staff, unfamiliar to the children are used only in the rarest of circumstances, which affords high levels of continuity and consistency of care to the children.
- 3.8 Standards of cleanliness and hygiene appear to be consistently high across the board, and menus provide nutritious and varied meal choices for the young people. There is evidence of cultural needs and special dietary needs being met in all the homes.
- 3.9 There was evidence within the reports of good levels of staff engagement with young people and a range of opportunities for choice of activities within the home and local community. One home had explored in a range of ways other cultures from around the world.

4 Members' Visits during the Period

- 4.1 To complement the Regulation 33 Visits, the homes receive a visit from a member of the Council's Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 4.2 **Walnuts** - No member visit
- 4.3 **Westminster House 7th November**
 - 4.3.1 The format and reporting of this visit mirrored those undertaken by officers.
 - 4.3.2 The visitor commented on the fact that there were no outstanding issues during her visit and that the children have settled well into their new home.
 - 4.3.3 The visitor reported that recording was kept to a high standard.
 - 4.3.4 Young people were observed returning to the home after their school day and the visitor commented that the children were in high spirits and after a drink and light snack settled into the home, just as any other child would do.
 - 4.3.5 The visitor was assured that children access a range of age appropriate community based activities in their leisure time.

- 4.3.6 The Visitor was assured that non-verbal children can raise issues in respect of their care to a wide range of persons outside of the home as well as within it.
- 4.3.7 The visitor was satisfied that any dietary needs of children are met.
- 4.3.8 The Visitor reported that her overall impression of the quality of the service provided at Westminster House was very good.

4.4 Furze House - No Member visit

5.0 Going Forward

- 5.1 Ofsted has noted that there has been an improvement in the Regulation 33 reporting and as such it has been agreed to extend the independent social worker commission in respect of Regulation 33 visits until the end of the financial year 2013/14.
- 5.2 The Council Members' visits during this reporting period had been agreed to be changed from the same reporting format as officer visits to a programme of "surgery" style events designed to enable service users, parents and professionals to meet and discuss the operation of home directly with councillors. The surgeries are planned to take place at each home twice in a calendar year the dates of which are mapped. The next event is at Furze House in January and it is hoped that the next reporting period will see these surgeries held and inform the continued development of the 3 homes.
- 5.3 Ofsted announced that in November 2013 they would stop doing individual inspections of local authority adoption agencies and fostering services and instead inspect services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; these inspections include local authority adoption agencies and fostering services. These inspections focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children; and the experiences and progress of children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care; and children who return home. The new inspection methodology started in November 2013.
- 5.4 Ofsted, in mid-December 2013 then launched a consultation on a new inspection framework for children's homes. The consultation is open until 21 February 2014.
- 5.5 This new framework, it is suggested, will come into effect from April 2014 as part of Ofsted's reform of its registration, inspection and enforcement practice in relation to children's homes to make it more robust, challenging and effective. Ofsted's intention is to raise the bar and define what 'good' looks like as we believe that only 'good' is good enough for children and young people. As such, Ofsted propose that the 'adequate' judgement is

replaced by 'requires improvement' and that a judgement of 'inadequate' in 'how well children and young people are helped and protected' will automatically result in an 'inadequate' judgement overall.

- 5.6 A response to the consultation will be submitted by the Local Authority.
- 5.7 It of note that one young person resident at Westminster House has been supported to engage in this process from a young person's perspective.
- 5.8 Members are invited to view the consultation document at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/inspection-of-childrens-homes-consultation-document-2013> and send any comments or observations to the Assistant Director Children's Social care.