



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Liverpool City Council Fostering Service

Millenium House
60 Victoria Street
Liverpool
Merseyside
L1 6JQ

2nd, 15th – 26th November 2004 and 1st
December 2004.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Liverpool City Council Fostering Service

Address

Millenium House, 60 Victoria Street, Liverpool,
Merseyside, L1 6JQ

Local Authority Manager

Mr James Clarke

Tel No:

0151 233 6806

Address

Millenium House, 60 Victoria Street, Liverpool,
Merseyside, L1 6JQ

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

8th – 21st,
23rd and
28th
October
2003

Date of Inspection Visit		Commenced 2 nd November 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Beate Roth	072783
Name of Inspector	2	Nick Veysey	
Name of Inspector	3	Not Applicable	
Name of Inspector	4	Not Applicable	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not Applicable	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not Applicable	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Kath Kerfoot and Julie Ellis (Team Managers)	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Liverpool City Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Liverpool City Council's fostering service is a Local Authority service that provides a variety of fostering services for children and young people residing in the city of Liverpool.

The service is based in "Parklands," which are council offices located in Speke, approximately eight miles from the city centre.

The management structure of the fostering service consists of a group manager, who oversees the operation of the service. Two team managers, three resource managers, fourteen social workers, 4 support workers and a recruitment worker.

The core responsibility of the service is to provide a range of placements for children, who are "looked after" by the Local Authority. At the time of the inspection, there were 581 children and young people "looked after" by Liverpool City Council in temporary and permanent placements. The service works closely with social workers from the children and family area teams, education, health, cultural services and other appropriate agencies.

The following services are provided: -

- Approving family and friends, as carers to maintain children either within their extended family or to maintain their community links.
- Providing a range of placements such as emergency, short term, medium term placements. The primary purpose being to safeguard children and work with families to prevent, wherever possible, long term care away from home.
- Providing permanent placements in Liverpool, to enable children and young people to maintain contact with their family and established social networks.
- Providing therapeutic fostering (the Rosta Project), which provides a service for young people with complex needs and accommodates them in a family. This service aims to prevent young people having multiple placements in foster or residential care.
- Providing parent and child placements to support and assess parents in their parenting skills.

The fostering service, when unable to provide a foster placement for a child or young person in Liverpool, will obtain a fostering placement from the voluntary and private sector. At the time of the inspection, there were 55 children or young people placed with foster carers in the voluntary and private sector.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The inspection of Liverpool City Council's fostering service took place in November 2004. Since the last inspection, the service had made extensive efforts to address the issues raised in the National Care Standards Commission's inspection report. The inspectors were pleased to find that many of the requirements and recommendations made in the previous inspection report had been addressed and work had been initiated on those that were still outstanding at the time of the inspection.

8 foster carers and the young people they are looking after were visited during this inspection. In addition the inspectors met with a group of foster carers and a group of young people looked after.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection received a number of questionnaires from foster carers, foster children and young people during this inspection. This report has incorporated some of the information received; any specific issues of concern arising from these questionnaires were addressed with one of the managers of the service at the time of the inspection.

The inspection took place during a period of industrial action by children's social workers from different departments across Liverpool. A small number of workers from the fostering service were involved in the industrial action. Their views have not been ascertained as part of this inspection.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard was almost met.

Liverpool City Council's fostering service has a written statement of purpose, which is informative and detailed and contains much of the information required. However, to fully meet this standard the statement of purpose needs to address all the matters outlined in the National Minimum Standards 1.1 – 1.6.

The fostering services' children's guide is well designed; informative has been produced in different formats to meet the differing needs of children and young people using the service.

The inspectors examined the fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff and foster carers, which accurately reflected the statement of purpose.

Fitness to Provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

Both these standards were met.

The managers had the necessary experience, knowledge, skills, and competence to run a local authority fostering service. The managers were exercising effective leadership of the staff, and operation of the service and it was organised, managed and staffed in a way to deliver a good standard of childcare practice. It has a clear and thorough recruitment and selection policy and procedures to ensure that those in the management of the fostering service are suitable to run a business concerned with the safeguarding and promoting of children's welfare.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 –5)

One of the two standards were met.

There was evidence from discussions with the managers, staff and carers, and from the written records that there was a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff, and well established lines of communication and clearly defined lines of accountability. The inspectors found that there are systems in place to monitor the operation of the service. The managers use the services' information technology system to record and review events and incidents outlined in Schedule 8. The service must develop a policy and guidance for staff and carers relating to any possible conflicts of interest to cover the requirements of Regulation 20 (6) and (7) and make sure that managers, staff, and carers are informed of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest. There was evidence to show that the service was being managed in an effective manner. The managers and resource managers have clear job descriptions setting out the duties and responsibilities. There are clear arrangements in place for the management of the service in the manager's absence.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Two of these standards were met. The rest of the standards were nearly met.

The service was providing foster homes that were emotionally warm, adequately furnished, well decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness. Each child had their own bed and accommodation to meet their specific needs and need for privacy. There were policies and procedures in place to make sure that the standard was maintained. The local authority needs to make sure that children are visited in placement in line with the regulations.

The service has clear and detailed guidance for staff and foster carers on valuing diversity, covering meeting the needs of children in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. There was evidence that the service was actively taking steps to recruit carers to reflect the needs of a diverse group of looked after children. The service needs to make sure that the needs of children with a disability are fully met.

The service was making sure that children were appropriately placed with foster carers who could meet their needs. This could be improved further by making sure that carers had up to date information about the children they look after and by making sure that more details are taken at the referral stage.

There were steps to protect children from abuse and neglect through foster carer training, safe recruitment and approval systems, and the development of safe caring policies. There were many examples of good practice with foster carers actively encouraging and supporting children to maintain contact with their families.

All the children the inspectors met said that foster carers asked their views and opinions about matters affecting them and were asked their views about living with the foster carers. Children said they knew how to make a complaint if they were unhappy.

The service was promoting the health and development of children placed with foster carers. All the children were registered with a GP, had access to such dental, medical and psychological advice, treatment and services. Children were provided with guidance, support and advice on health, personal care, and health promotion appropriate to their needs. The service needs to develop a separate health record for each child and finalise its draft policy on medication.

Foster carers were encouraging and supporting children's education and working closely with their schools and educational professionals. Children were making significant progress at school.

Developments in the health and education services such as the CAMHS LAC team and the Virtual School generally appear to be having positive outcomes for children. Carers found these services a useful source of support.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

Six of these standards were met, and the rest were nearly met.

All the social work staff have appropriate qualifications to work with children, their families and foster carers, have a good understanding of foster care, and were organised and managed in a way that delivers an effective foster care service. They receive regular supervision, training and appraisal. The staffing levels were adequate to meet the needs of the service.

The service has a thorough assessment process for prospective foster carers and a clear strategy and procedures for working with foster carers. Foster carers were very satisfied with the support they received from the service. Foster Carer Agreements were in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 and outlined comprehensively the information that foster carers need to know to carry out their duties effectively. Each approved foster carer was supervised by an appropriately qualified social worker. The service, however, needs to develop a more robust system in relation to private fostering services.

The fostering service offers foster carers a comprehensive training programme covering a wide range of relevant issues including child protection, child development, communicating with children, child sexual abuse, safe care, challenging behaviour and recording skills.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Both these standards were met.

The service kept all the required records. They were up to date well maintained and organised, and securely kept. There were robust administration systems and procedures including an access to records policy.

Fitness of Premises (Standard 26)

This standard was almost met

The premises are in general appropriate for their purpose. There are some continuing issues with the use of an open plan office but most staff reported that any problems encountered can be overcome. It continues to be recommended that a visitor's book be introduced into the building for reasons of health and safety. An issue raised by some foster carers around direct telephone communication with the office is being addressed.

Financial requirements (Standard 27-29)

2 of the 3 standards are not applicable to this service. The other standard was met.

The fostering service has a clear policy on foster carer's allowances and expenses, which are reviewed on an annual basis. Each foster carer within the service is provided with a copy of the foster carer allowances and expenses. The inspector found that service provided an efficient payment system. Most carers said that they were paid promptly and had any queries dealt with straightaway.

Fostering panel (Standard 30)

This standard was met.

During the course of the inspection one fostering panel was observed. The panel was well organised, with all panel members appearing to have a clear understanding of their role, and responsibilities. The panel was chaired well and there was evidence that all panel members' views were taken into account. It was clear from the decision making and recommendations around future social work practice that the panel performed a quality assurance function.

The panel had access to individuals with expertise in health and educational matters in accordance with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was met.

The fostering service provides short-term breaks for children with learning and physical disabilities. The emphasis is very much on birth parents remaining central to the promotion of their child's welfare and development. All short-term break carers are subject to the same assessment as full time carers and are provided with the same introductory and follow-on training. Training around meeting the needs of children with physical or a learning disability is available.

There is currently a shortfall in the number of short-term break carers available. This is being addressed by the current recruitment strategy and through a working party looking at alternatives to overnight respite. An issue regarding insufficient information being provided to meet a health care need was brought to the attention of the fostering service team managers to be addressed.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

This standard was not met.

The fostering service has a large number of foster carers who are family and friends of the children that they are looking after. Prior to November 2002 all these carers were assessed, supervised and supported by the child's social worker. However, since this date the fostering service has been involved in the assessment of these carers and post approval, their supervision and support.

The vast majority of kinship carers continue to be supervised by the child's social worker. The division of these responsibilities is problematic. The child's social worker does not undertake supervisory visits in the same way or conduct assessments of the home in the same way. There is evidence of carers not accessing training resources or having their annual reviews conducted. Overall, it was the inspectors' view that consideration needs to be given as to how consistency is to be achieved in the post approval supervision, support and appraisals of kinship carers, whilst taking into account the pre-existing relationship between the child and the family member or friend proposed as a carer.

Three requirements relating to this standard have been made These are fully detailed in standard thirty-two and in the requirements section of this report.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

YES

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

The Commission for Social Care Inspection in their inspection of Liverpool fostering service, in November 2004, were not satisfied that all the regulatory requirements, under the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 were met.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	35,37 & 41	FS21 FS22	<p>The fostering service provider must satisfy itself, that the welfare of each child placed in foster care continues to be suitably provided for by the placement, the authority shall make arrangements for the person authorised by the authority to visit the child in the home.</p> <p>The foster provider must ensure that all children in foster care are visited at the prescribed frequency, as laid down in Regulation 35,37and 41.</p>	1/12/2003
2	17(3)(B) & Schedule 6, 34(c) & Reg. 34(3)	FS8 FS12 FS24	<p>The foster service provider shall ensure that in relation to any child placed or to be placed, a foster parent is given such information, which is kept up-to-date, as to enable the carer to provide appropriate care for the child.</p> <p>This information must also include the arrangements for giving consent to the medical or dental examination or treatment of the child.</p>	1/12/2003
3	28 (5)(a) & 38	FS6	<p>The manager of the service must give a foster carer notice, in writing of the terms of their approval, for example, whether it is in respect of a particular named child or children or number and age range of children or of placements of any particular kind or in any particular circumstances.</p>	1/12/2003

4	42(1)(B)	FS16	The manager of the service shall ensure that where an agency is used to provide a foster carer, they shall clearly specify in the contract, the quality of care to be provided and the arrangements in place to monitor compliance, with a view to improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.	28/02/2003
5	27(2)(a)(b) (d)(e)(f)	FS32	<p>If the fostering service provider considers that a person may be suitable to act as a foster parent it shall-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to the prospective foster parent and other members of his household and family, and any other information it considers relevant; (b) interview at least two persons nominated by the prospective foster parent to provide personal references for him, and prepare written reports of the interviews; (c) having regard to these matters consider whether the prospective foster parent is suitable to act as a foster parent and whether his household is suitable for any child in respect of whom approval may be given; <p>Prepare a written report on him which includes the matters set out in paragraph (4); and refer the report to the fostering panel and notify the prospective foster parent accordingly.</p>	01/01/2004

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Beate Roth</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Nick Veysey</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	<u>Paula Ross</u>	Signature	_____
Date	<u>17/12/04</u>		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1.	20 (6) & (7)	FS4	The fostering service must develop a policy and guidance for staff and carers relating to any possible conflicts of interest to cover the requirements of Regulation 20 (6) and (7) and make sure that managers, staff, and carers are informed of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest.	1/03/05
2.	35,37 & 41	FS21 FS22	<p>The fostering service provider must satisfy itself, that the welfare of each child placed in foster care continues to be suitably provided for by the placement, the authority shall make arrangements for the person authorised by the authority to visit the child in the home.</p> <p>The foster provider must ensure that all children in foster care are visited at the prescribed frequency, as laid down in Regulation 35,37and 41.</p>	1/12/04

3	28 (5)(a) & 38	FS6	The manager of the service must give a foster carer notice, in writing of the terms of their approval, for example, whether it is in respect of a particular named child or children or number and age range of children or of placements of any particular kind or in any particular circumstances.	1/12/04
4	15 (2)(c)	FS7	The fostering service must make sure that each child is provided with any aids and equipment they may need as a result of any particular health need or disability.	1/12/04
5	17(3)(B) & Schedule 6, 34(c) & 34(3)	FS8 FS12FS12 FS24	The foster service provider shall ensure that in relation to any child placed or to be placed, a foster parent is given such information, which is kept up-to-date, as to enable the carer to provide appropriate care for the child. This information must also include the arrangements for giving consent to the medical or dental examination or treatment of the child.	1/12/04
6	11	FS9 FS32	The registered person shall ensure that the welfare of children placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. The assessment of the foster carers identified at this inspection is to be completed without delay.	1/12/04
7	29	FS9 FS16	The fostering service provider shall review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with Regulation 29 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. A review shall take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary but at intervals of no more than a year.	1/12/04
8	12	FS9	The fostering service must make sure that they keep a written record of the actions taken in response to an allegation of abuse and neglect including documenting the reasons why particular actions were taken, for example what were the reasons for deciding that a child protection investigation should or should not be instigated.	1/12/04

9	15 & 17	FS12	The fostering service must make sure where children and young people require skilled health tasks that carers receive appropriate training and an assessment of their competence to perform the tasks by an appropriately qualified and competent person.	1/12/04
10	17	FS15	The fostering service must make sure that all foster carers have up to date CRB checks.	1/12/04
11	42(1)(B)	FS16	The manager of the service shall ensure that where an agency is used to provide a foster carer, they shall clearly specify in the contract, the quality of care to be provided and the arrangements in place to monitor compliance, with a view to improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.	1/03/05
12	27(2)(a)(b) (d)(e)(f)	FS32	If the fostering service provider considers that a person may be suitable to act as a foster parent in accordance with Regulation 27 it must prepare a written report on him which includes the matters set out in paragraph (4); and refer the report to the fostering panel and notify the prospective foster parent accordingly. The local authority manager must inform the Commission of the progress with meeting this requirement in relation to the carer identified in Standard 32.	1/03/05
13	Reg 38	FS32	The Professional Instruction Notice on Guidelines for the Approval of Regulation 38 Foster Carers must include further information on initial checks to be undertaken to ensure suitability of the placement.	1/12/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	<p>It is recommended that the statement of purpose is more specific about the qualifications and experience of the managers and staff.</p> <p>It would be good practice for the statement of purpose to be signed and dated by the person, who is approving the statement, on behalf of the elected members. This would readily evidence that the elected members have reviewed the statement, on an annual basis.</p>
2	FS4	<p>It is recommended that it would be good practice for the Commission for Social Care Inspection to be notified in writing, all the matters listed in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002</p>
3	FS4	<p>The inspectors would recommend that any quality assurance system implemented in the fostering service should be consistently applied to all services where fostering functions are carried out, for example kinship care.</p>
4	FS4	<p>It is recommended that a more consistent approach in relation to health and safety matters be established in relation to all foster carers.</p>
5	FS6	<p>It is recommended that when emergency placements are extended beyond twenty – four hours, detailed written evidence of the discussions and matching considerations that take place in the decision making process are made and placed on the foster carers' file.</p>
6	FS8	<p>It is recommended that there is detailed written information regarding the matching of each child or young person placed in foster care.</p>
7	FS10 FS19	<p>It is recommended that the training on the promotion of contact could be developed and expanded upon, thereby enabling foster carers to develop the variety of skills required in the promotion of contact.</p>
8	FS11	<p>It is recommended that the Parents leaflet is developed further to include contact information about the Commission for Social Care Inspection.</p>
9	FS12	<p>Liverpool City Council should finalise and introduce its updated medication policy as a matter of urgency.</p>
10	FS12	<p>It is recommended that foster carers receive training regarding the services' new medication policy and procedures once it's finalised.</p>

11	FS12	It is recommended that risk assessments be completed for young people who self-medicate with the support of their foster carers.
12	FS12	It is recommended that a written plan around the management of a re-occurring medical condition or disability should be outlined in the child's health plan.
13	FS13	The fostering service should review its procedure for obtaining consent for school trips and activities to make sure looked after children don't miss out on school trips due to a delay in consent being given by the delegated person.
14	FS13	The fostering service should make sure that children and carers are made more aware of the support available for them from the Virtual School.
15	FS14	It is recommended that the fostering service outlines in writing what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for semi-independent and independent living.
16	FS15	The fostering service should make sure that any notes taken at recruitment interviews or assessments undertaken during the selection process are retained on each employees personnel file.
17	FS17	It is recommended that some consideration be given to kinship carers approved prior to 2002 being managed within the fostering service.
18	FS18	It is recommended that the whistle blowing policy include the details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, as a source to whom issues can be directed.
19	FS25	It is recommended that renewed training be provided to foster carers on the confidentiality of records and their safe storage or disposal.
20	FS26	It is recommended that a visitor's book be introduced into the building for reasons of health and safety.
21	FS29	The fostering service should provide carers with clarification about foster carer allowances and expenses.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix eg FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	12
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	02/11/04
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	197

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- **There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.**

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The statement of purpose for the fostering service is detailed and comprehensive containing much of the information to meet this standard. It has been developed to include information about the health, education, and therapeutic services that are available to children and young people looked after by the service. It continues to be recommended that more specific information about the qualifications and experience of the managers and staff be provided. The inspectors also continue to recommend that it would be good practice for the statement of purpose to be signed and dated by the person, who is approving the statement on behalf of the elected council members. This would enable the service to evidence that the elected members have reviewed the statement on an annual basis.

The inspectors examined the fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff and foster carers, which accurately reflected the statement of purpose.

The children's guide is well designed, informative and is suitable for all children fostered through the service. The guide provides information about the statement of purpose and includes a summary of the services available for children and foster carers. It contains information on how a child can access an independent advocate and about how to complain. The guide has been produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children, for example it is available in Braille, audiotapes, and different minority languages to reflect the diversity of Liverpool's population. The guide contains information about how to contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection. However, these details need to be amended to include the correct telephone number of the Commission for Social Care Inspection in Liverpool.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There was evidence found during the inspection that the managers of the fostering service were able to demonstrate that they had the necessary experience, knowledge, skills, and competence to run the service efficiently and effectively.

The managers both had considerable experience of working and managing a fostering service. They are suitably qualified having obtained the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW). They have undertaken a variety of training courses relevant to the role and responsibilities of a manager of a fostering service. One of the managers has recently completed the course work for a relevant management qualification and is waiting for the outcome of the assessment. The other manager is due to start a management course in 2005.

The inspectors found evidence from discussions with social workers in the service, carers, and other professionals, and from the written records that the managers were exercising effective leadership of the staff and operation of the service. The inspector found that the service was organised, managed and staffed in a way to deliver a good standard of childcare practice.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The fostering service has a clear and thorough recruitment and selection policy. The organisation has designed procedures to ensure that those involved in the management of the fostering service are suitable to run a business concerned with the safeguarding and promoting of children's welfare. This includes a policy of renewing checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) every three years.

The inspectors examined the personnel files of the two managers and the three resource managers. All the files contained the evidence of the information required in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 including recent CRB checks. There was evidence on the files showing the steps taken to verify references provided as part of the recruitment process.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence from discussions with the managers, staff and carers, and from the written records that there was a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff, and well established lines of communication and clearly defined lines of accountability.

The inspectors found that there are systems in place to monitor the operation of the service. The managers use the services' information technology system to record and review events and incidents outlined in Schedule 8. They are also able to monitor the activities of social workers and support workers, for example, checking out supervisory visits have been made to carers in line with the services' procedures. In addition there was a system of auditing written records including carers' files was in operation. The managers told the inspector that they checked three files each month and their findings were recorded on a case file audit form. The inspectors found evidence of this on the carers' files. The case file audit form provided a checklist to identify what information was included on the file and what work had been carried out. It also identified what actions were required to be taken to address any deficiencies in the file.

The service has clear financial procedures and there was a reviewing and auditing procedure in place in order to make sure they are up-to-date.

The service must develop a policy and guidance for staff and carers relating to any possible conflicts of interest to cover the requirements of Regulation 20 (6) and (7) and make sure that managers, staff, and carers are informed of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest.

Since the last inspection the local authority has been providing information regarding some notifiable incidents to the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The inspectors continue to recommend that it would be good practice for the fostering service to notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection in writing of all notifiable incidents or events, as outlined in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:	X
Death of a child placed with foster parents.	0
Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.	0
Serious illness or accident of a child.	X
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	0
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	0
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	0
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	X
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	X
Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	X
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There was evidence to show that the service was being managed in an effective manner. The managers and resource managers have clear job descriptions setting out the duties and responsibilities. The inspectors found in discussion that the managers and resource managers were clear and their responsibilities. The service has a clear structure with clear lines of delegation and accountability. Each of the management team lead on particular aspects of the service such as the assessment centre, training, family finding, and unaccompanied asylum seekers.</p> <p>There are clear arrangements in place for the management of the service in the manager's absence. The management team operate a duty system making sure that one of them is available at all times. The social workers the inspectors spoke with were aware of this system, and felt it worked well.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

During the course of the inspection, the inspectors examined eight foster carers' files and visited their homes. In every case there was sufficient space to accommodate the number of children for whom the carers are approved. The homes visited were free from hazards, clean and in general well presented. Two carers were in the process of decorating at the time of the inspection.

The majority of files inspected contained evidence that the home had been inspected within the last 12 months to ensure that it meets the needs of foster children. In general, the foster carers who met with the inspectors confirmed that these annual checks are occurring. The only exception to this was in relation to one kinship carer who was assessed, supervised and supported by the child's social worker. In this case there was no evidence of a health and safety check taking place.

The health and safety checklist used by family placement social workers for inspecting foster carers' homes, is not used by the children's social workers who supervise kinship carers. The inspectors continue to recommend that a more consistent approach in relation to health and safety matters be established in relation to all foster carers.

The preparation training for foster carers covers health and safety issues. All newly approved carers are expected to attend three core-training sessions, one of which includes Safe Caring and Child Protection. A training audit is currently being undertaken to identify any carers who have not received this training. Since the last inspection the responsibility for training for foster carers is being undertaken by a resource manager from within the fostering service. There are now improved systems for being able to determine the training needs of foster carers and there was evidence that where shortfalls are identified steps are being taken to address this. The records indicate that safe caring courses are planned and the names of foster carers to attend have been identified.

The majority of files inspected contained safe caring policies for specific children being looked after. The only exception to this was in relation to one kinship carer who was supported by the child's social worker. Again, it is recommended that a more consistent approach be established in relation to all foster carers.

One of the files inspected indicated that carers who were providing emergency placements had not been approved to do so. This raised an issue over how to ensure the safe care of children already placed with these carers. Verbal guidelines had been agreed but in one instance not followed. The managers of the fostering service reported that all carers who provide emergency placements now have to be approved by the fostering panel. This will ensure clear guidelines are established around placing children in an emergency where

children are already in placement. The placement in question exceeded 24 hours and another placement with the same carers had also exceeded this time limit. It continues to be recommended that when emergency placements are extended beyond twenty – four hours, detailed written evidence of the discussions and matching considerations that take place in the decision making process are made and placed on the foster carers’ file.

The inspector examined a sample of foster carers files where an exemption had been made, in order that the foster carers might care for a child or sibling group, over and above the number of children that they had been originally approved to look after. The inspector was able to evidence that the majority of exemptions had been made in accordance with the services exemption policy and procedures.

At the last inspection the inspectors were advised that several foster carers had been involved in a pilot scheme, “Healthy Homes”. This scheme is linked to NVQ and increases foster carers awareness and identification of health and safety issues that arise in routine family activities, as well as the immediate and external home environment. On the presentation of a successfully completed portfolio, the foster carer receives the “Healthy Homes award”. One inspector had the opportunity to talk to a carer about this scheme and was of the opinion that the course was extremely useful in raising the awareness of foster carers to health and safety issues, as well as generally promoting and maintaining the health and safety of children in their care.

There was evidence to show that where the foster carers provide transport for the child, the service ensures this is safe and appropriate to the needs of the child. There were copies of foster carer’s current car insurance certificate on the foster carers’ files examined by the inspectors.

The foster carers’ agreement form advises carers that authorised personnel from the commission may interview or visit a carer, as part of the Commission’s inspection process. All the foster carers interviewed by the inspectors were aware that they might be visited as part of the inspection process.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Liverpool City Council has an equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice policy. The foster carer preparatory training and assessment take account of the prospective foster carers abilities to support and promote a child’s religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic background. Follow on training provided to carers also looks at how foster carers are to meet these needs.

Liverpool has a limited number of foster care placements available, which can make it difficult to ensure each child’s needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin and language, culture, disability and sexuality are met. Since the last inspection a recruitment worker has been employed. The fostering service has identified that shortfalls exist in the number of black and mixed race carers available. The recruitment plan indicates that an objective is to increase the number of black and mixed race carers available. A discussion with the recruitment worker indicated that a number of strategies are in place to enable this.

The service offers a package of financial support to foster carers to meet ethnic, racial,

cultural and religious needs.

A clinical psychologist and play therapist is also available to the fostering service on a part – time basis to work with children on cultural identity issues. Training around meeting a child’s emotional needs is provided to prospective foster carers. More in-depth training is provided following approval.

The fostering service has access to a corporate translating unit and the Merseyside Centre for the Deaf, should sign language interpreters be required.

The inspectors found evidence that generally children with a disability receive specific support to enable them to maximise their potential to lead as full as life as possible including appropriate equipment and where necessary appropriate adaptation of the carer’s home. However, one carer who provided short- term breaks for children with a disability informed the inspectors that they were looking after a child who was finding it increasingly difficult to gain full access to the environment. The carer said that an occupational therapist had carried out an assessment of their home and made recommendations about the adaptations required to meet the needs of this particular child, but the work hadn’t been undertaken. The inspectors spoke with one of the resource managers about this and was told that because of the changing needs of the child it was unlikely that they would be staying overnight with this carer in the future. Nevertheless, the fostering service must make sure that each child is provided any aids and equipment they may need as a result of any particular health need or disability in accordance with Regulation 15 (2) (c).

There was evidence from discussions from carers and children that children are given encouragement and opportunities to develop and pursue talents, hobbies and interests. The local authority, for instance, provides free leisure passes for looked after children.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Matching information was available for the children in long term placements whose records were inspected. The format for providing this information differed in accordance with the type of placement provided by the service.

With regards to placements made on a temporary basis, there was not a great deal of written information to indicate how this match was made. A discussion with fostering service managers and social workers indicated that information to determine a match between a child and placement is elicited but not consistently recorded. This was identified at the last inspection and in order to address this a new referral form has been introduced. There was evidence of this form being completed. The inspectors recommended to the fostering service managers that additional categories of need should be established on the referral form in order to provide clearer information.

The inspectors found that whilst there had been a significant improvement in the looked after children documentation available on the children’s files and being given to foster carers,

there were still some difficulties in receiving this information reported by a small number of carers. Since the last inspection a number of strategies have been deployed to address this issue. The bringing together of the fostering service and children and families social work service under the same management structure will no doubt serve to ensure this matter continues to receive attention.

The inspectors' examination of a sample of foster carers' files evidenced that the written foster placement agreements were standard documents that in general provided the information detailed in Schedule 6 of The Fostering Regulations 2002. In order to ensure continuity it was discussed with the fostering service managers that they look to devising a means of ensuring that this document is available and contains the required information prior to or shortly after the placement commences.

As was discussed in Standard 7 the fostering service was experiencing some difficulties ensuring each child's needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin and language, culture are met, and has developed strategies to try to address the shortfall in the number of black and mixed heritage carers. In addition, at the time of the inspection the service was looking after thirteen children who were unaccompanied asylum seekers. There was evidence from discussions with the managers of the service, and the manager of the social work team responsible for unaccompanied asylum seekers that where trans-community placements were made the carers were receiving additional support and training to enable them to meet the needs of the children they are looking after. This included the use of interpreters, assistance from support workers from the relevant communities, and information about, and links with the children and young people's community. Carers were making great efforts to research and find out about the children's community, country of origin, religion and culture to enable them to work with the children to provide the best possible care and to develop an understanding of their heritage. In addition, the carers who are looking after this group of children have met together with one of the managers to look at training needs and share information. The manager told the inspector that they anticipate that these carers will continue to meet.

Although the service is making great efforts to develop appropriate placements for this group of children, it is an area where further work is required. The inspectors found that one young person in a trans-community placement had made a complaint to the service about the suitability of the placement. The manager told the inspectors that the issues were currently being investigated, and in the meantime they were attempting to identify a more culturally specific placement for this young person.

The inspectors found evidence that children, where possible, were having the opportunity for a period of introduction to foster carers. This was happening in particular for younger children, and newly born babies where foster carers were visiting hospital for short periods to become familiar with the baby's routine and specific health and care needs before their discharge.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Liverpool City Council's fostering service has a safe caring policy. In accordance with this safe caring policies are drawn up in consultation with the carers and other household members. The majority of files inspected contained safe caring policies for specific children being looked after. The only exception to this was in relation to one kinship carer who was supported by the child's social worker. As already indicated it is recommended that a more consistent approach be established in relation to all foster carers. The foster carers who met with the inspectors had been involved in the drawing up of a safe caring policy and were aware of why it is used.

Training is available for foster carers around safe caring. This covers caring for a child who has been abused, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse. Initially this is provided in the preparatory training for prospective foster carers. More in-depth training is provided to approved carers. Since the last inspection a system for determining which carer has had this training has been devised. This takes into account training provided in the last 10 months as the records prior to this have not been made available by the now disbanded training and development unit. Any carers who have not received safe care training are being identified and steps taken to ensure they undertake this training. The progress of this will be looked at further at the next inspection.

A variety of training is available to support carers in their protection of children. This includes: -

- Promoting a positive sense of self and identity.
- Providing a framework for the management of behaviour.
- Internet safety training.
- Dealing with sexuality.
- Working with children who have been sexually abused.
- Safe caring/child protection.
- Recording with care.
- Promoting health and social well - being.
- Drug misuse.
- Helping to protect children and young people from abuse.

Again, the records relating to the carers who have undertaken this training other than in the last 10 months were not available. A training audit is being undertaken so the training needs of carers can be established. The progress of this will be looked at further at the next inspection.

Liverpool City Council fostering service makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. This is clearly written in the foster care agreement.

Liverpool City Council has a written procedure and guidance for dealing with allegations of abuse made against foster carers. This is in accordance with the appropriate provisions of Regulation 12 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It also makes reference to the role of the Commission for Social Care Inspection. In addition there is written guidance about the role of the Skilled Help Support Team. This team comprises of 12 foster carers who have received training to enable them to offer support to Liverpool foster carers if an allegation is made against them.

The service keeps a record of allegations against foster carers. At the last inspection it was

recommended that information about any previous allegations or concerns about foster carers be recorded. This is now being addressed.

Since February 2004 there have been 10 allegations made against foster carers. The inspectors examined a sample of the foster carers' files regarding these allegations. There was evidence that the procedures were followed. It was not clear why the decision had been made not to hold a strategy meeting for one allegation looked at. This information needs to be clearly recorded. During the inspection a form for recording this information was devised. The fostering service must make sure that they keep a written record of the actions taken in response to an allegation of abuse and neglect including documenting the reasons why particular actions were taken, for example what were the reasons for deciding that a child protection investigation should or should not be instigated.

The inspectors were concerned that a strategy meeting held in November 2003 had recommended the re-assessment of a foster carer and the assessment of their partner following concerns about the care they provided. At the time of the inspection this assessment had not been completed. A review of the carers registration had not occurred since the approval in 1997. This is not acceptable.

The service has a clear procedure when a child is missing from the home. There was evidence on file that incidents of this are being reported by foster carers to the fostering service. At the last inspection some foster carers advised the inspectors that on the occasion they had needed to report a child missing, they had experienced difficulties contacting the Emergency Duty Team. At this inspection some carers reported difficulties contacting the out of hours service. There are plans in place for the fostering service to provide it's own out of hours service. This will be a very beneficial resource for the service and will hopefully resolve this issue.

The fostering service has an anti-bullying policy, which is outlined in the Foster Carers' Handbook. This policy is in line with the National Minimum Standards, 9. 6. This policy recognises the vulnerability of looked after children to bullying and outlines advice for foster carers about how to recognise, record, report and address instances of bullying.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)
The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The sample of children visited by the inspectors were found to be having contact with significant others, in accordance with their wishes and needs. Records indicated that children's views with regards to contact had been ascertained.

In examining the children's records, the inspectors were of the opinion that the "looked after children" documentation gave adequate information regarding contact arrangements.

From the inspectors' examination of the records and interviews with a sample of foster carers, there was evidence that a variety of support is provided to foster carers in dealing with difficult contact situations that may arise.

In the sample of foster carers visited by the inspectors, the carers were aware of the need to promote contact and the possible impact of this on children's lives. Brief recordings of the outcomes of contact were being made by some of the carers visited.

The inspectors were advised that training around the promotion and recording of contact for foster carers is provided for foster carers. It was recommended at the last inspection that this be expanded upon in order to enable foster carers to develop the variety of skills required in the promotion of contact. At this inspection the fostering service managers reported that this training has been developed and will be provided next year. This training will also address the issue of maintaining a record of the outcomes of contact.

Financial support is provided to carers in order to ensure contact takes place.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence that the fostering service was making efforts to make sure that children's opinions are sought frequently over matters affecting their daily lives. Through discussions with foster carers the inspector found that the fostering service makes sure that foster carers understand the importance of listening and responding to the views of children. In addition, foster carers had received written information about consultation and children's rights, and the issues had been covered in their preparation to care and training. The inspectors found good examples of carers listening to children's views about their lives, and supporting and advocating for their views to be taken into account in reviewing their care plans.

Most of the children the inspectors met and those who responded to the questionnaires said that foster carers asked their views and opinions about matters affecting them including day to day things such as food, and activities. They also said that the supervising social worker also asked their views about living with the foster carers. The written records showed that the supervising social worker met with children on a one-to-one basis to seek their views. In addition, the inspector found evidence that the service sought children's views about their foster carers as part of the foster carers annual review.

There was evidence that the service was taking steps to improve its communication with children and their parents. On 15th November 2004 the local authority held a young people's panel and question time, where a group of over thirty looked after young people met with the assistant executive directors for social services and education. The minutes from this meeting showed that the young people had a range of issues that they wanted to be addressed in particular about education and review meetings. Also, that it had provided an opportunity for senior managers to ask young people their views. During the inspection the inspectors were provided with evidence to show what steps the local authority had taken to deal with issues raised by the young people, including looking for apprenticeships and work placements for young people with Liverpool City Council.

Information from the Looked After Children Reviews showed that the majority of children and young people attended their review meetings and participated to varying degrees. The service was working towards improving young people's ability to participate more in the decisions about their lives by introducing Viewpoint, an interactive software package to

review children's care plans. The inspectors were told that the use of Viewpoint in other authorities had seen an increase in participation.

The annual children's Celebration of Achievement Awards have recently included at children's request an award for them to acknowledge helpful adults in their lives. The service has several methods for sharing information with children and carers including the CNET website.

The service has recently held an information day for parents whose children are looked after by them. There are plans to hold this event again in the new year. The service has produced an information leaflet about foster care for parents. The service should amend this to include the contact details of the Commission.

Children who don't speak English as a first language have access to an interpreting service to assist them make their wishes and feelings known about their care. Likewise, the service uses expertise in other communication formats such as British Sign Language, and non-verbal communication techniques such as Picture Exchange Communication system to aid communication and find out children's views.

Children told the inspector that they knew how to make a complaint if they were unhappy and had received information about the complaints procedure, and how to complain to other organisations such as Child Line, NSPCC and the Commission. This information was contained in the children's guide. The complaints manager was also in the process of designing a complaints information leaflet for young people.

Liverpool City Council has also developed advocacy services for looked after people by commissioning the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). There were a number of examples where NYAS were supporting children and young people.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that the fostering service was promoting the health and development of children placed with foster carers. Children were registered with a GP, had access to such dental, medical and psychological advice, treatment and services they require. The written records showed that children were provided with guidance, support and advice on health, personal care, and health promotion appropriate to their needs.

The fostering service ensures that carers have information about health services in the area and there was evidence that children continue to receive the specialist health services to meet their needs. The Looked After Children's Nurses coordinates and disseminates information for children and carers about health services, as well as monitoring the health needs of children and provide advice and support on health matters. This has included running training events on issues such as bed-wetting, blood-borne diseases, diabetes, asthma, sickle cell, head lice, epilepsy, and healthy eating.

There is a therapeutic fostering service, the ROSTA project, which provides services for

young people with complex needs and accommodates them in a family. The placements follow an intensive treatment programme with support from clinical psychology and mental health practitioners. The project has seven carers and a respite carer looking after twelve young people between 14 and 18 years of age.

Earlier in 2004 Liverpool City Council and the health authority set up the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for Looked After Children (CAMHS LAC). One of the inspectors met with the head of the service. The aim of the service is to support and improve the short and long term mental health outcomes of looked after children by providing access to mental health expertise to staff and carers. The CAMHS LAC team offers a consultation service for staff and carers. Foster carers, including kinship carers were able to contact the service directly for advice and support. In addition the service provided information on a range of subjects including child development, attachment, managing challenging behaviours and life story work. Most of the foster carers who met the inspectors were aware of the service, and those who had attended training events spoke extremely positively about the quality of the training provided.

In addition, the fostering service has access to a therapeutic team that works with children with behavioural difficulties in order to provide stability to their placements and prevent placement breakdown. The focus of the work is one to one direct work with children using ideas based on different therapeutic approaches. The team comprises an acting manager, four social workers and a support worker. There are skills available within the team from different disciplines including drama and play therapy. The team receives clinical supervision from a consultant clinical psychologist and group supervision. In addition, the drama and play therapists receive professional supervision independent of Liverpool City Council. The team also works with carers looking after children who have been sexually abused, and provide advice and support to carers on managing challenging behaviour and life story work.

There is evidence that the health needs of children are taken into consideration when identifying a placement. Information around health needs is indicated on the referral form to be completed before the search for a foster carer begins.

There was evidence on the records examined that children and young people had access to appropriate medical services. In general, foster carers reported that they received sufficient information to enable them to support young peoples health needs. But some carers reported being provided with incomplete information. At the last inspection it was recommended that a written plan around the management of a re-occurring medical condition should be outlined in the child's health plan. The inspectors found that this had not been addressed consistently. There was an example where a short-break carer was performing skilled health tasks without receiving appropriate training and their competence to undertake the tasks assessed by an appropriately professionally trained person. The LAC Nurse told the inspector that in such cases the social worker should contact them and they would identify where the appropriate training could be found. The fostering service must make sure where children and young people require skilled health tasks that carers receive appropriate training and an assessment of their competence to perform the tasks by an appropriately qualified and competent person.

The training co-ordinator informed the inspector that first aid training is available to foster carers. Again, records were only available for the number of foster carers who have completed this training in the last 10 months because records prior to this were held by the training and development unit that is no longer in existence. The inspectors were informed that first aid training is part of the essential training for all carers to complete in order to

qualify for a professional carers fee. At present the resource manager responsible for training is identifying carers who need to be provided with this training. The records indicate that first aid courses are planned and the names of foster carers to attend have been identified.

Liverpool City Council's fostering service has a clear policy and guidance regarding medical consent; a copy of this is included in the Foster Carer's Handbook. In general the sample of children's records examined by the inspectors contained adequate information regarding health issues.

There is guidance provided to foster carers on the administration of medication, which is also contained in the Foster Carers' Handbook. Since the last inspection a draft medication management procedure has been drawn up to address recommendations made at the last inspection. The inspectors understand that Liverpool City Council has taken advice from one of the Commission's Pharmacy inspectors and now is in the process of finalising the document. The revised procedure covers safe storage, administration and disposal of medication, the need for foster carers to maintain accurate records of all medication that is administered and the procedure for assessments to be completed for young people who self-medicate, with the support of their foster carers. The fostering service managers reported that priority would be given to providing training to all foster carers around the revised medication management procedure. The progress in meeting the recommendations made around the management of medication will be assessed at the next inspection.

The Foster Carer Agreement makes it clear to the carer their role in terms of helping to promote the health of the children in their care, in accordance with the National Minimum Standards, 12. 6 and 12. 8.

There was evidence that the fostering service through the work of the "looked after children" nurse was developing good links with health agencies and this was helping the carers secure services for the child, when necessary.

The inspectors were informed that advice and information was available to children through the "CNET" and materials produced by the service such as Health FAX. The inspectors were of the opinion that this was a good example of providing advice on a variety of health issues, in a creative and age appropriate manner.

There was evidence from the children's group and questionnaires that foster carers promoted healthy living and gave advice and support on health issues. The fostering service provides access to leisure activities for children who are over 6. It is understood that these benefits are available to the foster carers' own children.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Liverpool City Council has established the Virtual School to provide education services and support to looked after children, their carers and schools. One of the inspectors met with the head of the Virtual School. They outlined the aims of the Virtual School as:

- To raise the educational attainments of pupils, helping them to achieve their full potential.
- To ensure pupils have access to the same opportunities for education, training and employment as all young people.
- To provide access to youth, sports, leisure and library facilities.

The staff team include a pupil support officer working with children at risk of exclusion, negotiating transfers and identifying appropriate placements; a worker dealing with the educational, employment and training needs of young people sixteen and over; a pupil attendance and educational welfare officer; a literacy worker; a worker accessing youth projects; workers providing extra support for young people studying for GCSEs; an educational psychologist; and the support from the National Teaching and Advisory Service.

The Virtual School supports children with improving children's literacy and numeracy skills; encouraging participation in education and community resources; extra support with GCSE and other courses, including coursework and revision classes; accessing training and education courses, and sports and social courses. In addition there is support and training available for carers, teachers and social workers. It also offers support to carers of pre-school children. The foster carer told inspector that the early years worker from the Virtual School was assisting in identifying a nursery placement for a child they were caring for.

The Virtual School also organises annual Celebration of Achievement Awards.

In addition the school manages information systems collating data about educational attainments, attendance, and exclusions for all looked after children, including those with foster carers. The fostering service has access to this information.

Discussions with children, foster carers, and staff showed that the fostering service gives a high priority to helping foster carers meet children's educational needs. There was evidence from the children's review minutes that foster carers were encouraging and supporting children's education and working closely with their schools and educational professionals. The CNET website also provides information about educational issues.

In the foster homes the inspectors visited there was a clear emphasis on education and learning. The foster carers had an expectation of regular school attendance, children had the necessary school uniform and equipment, they had access to books and educational materials, and the children said they received support and encouragement in completing their homework. There were also examples of children being supported to attend school trips and after school activities. However, children and carers raised concerns about delays in obtaining consents from the delegated person for school trips and activities, and the inspectors were told that this had led to children missing out on trips where there were limited places. The service should review its procedure and look at ways to ensure that any such consent is dealt with promptly.

The minutes from the Children's Panel on 15th November 2004 clearly demonstrated that the

young people who attended saw the importance of education. They raised the following issues:

- What support is available for young people taking GCSEs?
- What support can we get when at university? There is no information available for young people moving on to further education. We have to find out everything ourselves.
- Help with buying books
- Why does the child have to come out of their lessons to attend meetings? This was embarrassing everyone knows.
- What support is available for young people with learning disabilities?
- What support is available for children excluded from school?

The inspector found it interesting that the young people should be able to get support with all these issues from the Virtual School, but they didn't appear aware of this. In the inspector's view the Virtual School does potentially provide an excellent service to looked after children, but perhaps there is a need to make sure that children and carers are more aware of the support it can offer and how to access the service.

The foster placement agreement and foster carers payment guide identifies where responsibility lies for school costs, including school trips, uniform and equipment.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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There was evidence to show that the fostering service was making efforts to help young people to develop skills necessary for adult living. The evidence from the sample of foster carers and children visited, illustrated that foster carers understand they need to provide children with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.

A discussion with a training co-ordinator indicated that training is provided to foster carers around the importance of preparing young people for leaving care. These issues would also be discussed as part of the supervisory process. The manager of the Leaving Care Team informed the inspector that training is also available to foster carers on the Leaving Care Act and Pathway Plans.

The Leaving Care team provide advice and support on a range of issues, such as health, education, training, employment, living skills, and accommodation. The therapeutic fostering service, that is the Rosta Project, provides an "aftercare" service for the young people who are and have been accommodated within this project.

The Leaving Care Team is continuing to develop links with the fostering service, for example a resource manager from the team attended the Foster Carers Development Group. The inspector was advised that the leaving care team recognise the important part foster carers play in supporting young people to develop their skills and confidence, to live more independently.

Whilst the Foster Carers' Handbook provides information about the Leaving Care Team and their role, there is no written information around what is expected of foster carers, in terms of

preparing young people for semi-independent and independent living. The inspectors continue to recommend that this matter be addressed.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service had a clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff that follows good practice in safeguarding children. The inspector examined a sample of fourteen personnel files including the managers, social workers, support workers and the recruitment officer. There was evidence that all the staff working for the service had been interviewed as part of the selection process. All the files contained photographic proof of identity; an appropriate enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure; at least two references, including one from their last employer, commenting on their suitability; evidence of previous experience in child care, full employment histories and documentary proof of their qualifications. There was evidence that references for staff employed since the last inspection had been verified by telephone or electronic mail. None of the files contained notes from recruitment interviews or assessments undertaken during the selection process. It would be good practice to make sure that this information is retained on each employees personnel file.

All the social work staff have appropriate qualification to work with children, their families and foster carers, and have a good understanding of foster care. Interviews with social workers and information from their application forms and training records show that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills outlined in NMS 15.5. The social workers involved in the assessment and approval of foster carers were qualified have experience of foster care and have been trained in assessment.

The support workers, who are unqualified staff, undertake their duties under the direct supervision of qualified social workers, who are accountable for their work.

Total number of staff of the agency:

24

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

2

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Since the last inspection there has been a restructuring within the fostering service. There are now two team leaders and three resource managers with responsibility for different aspects of the service. It is the opinion of the inspectors that these changes better promote the needs of the service. The staff interviewed appeared more content and motivated in their work. At the time of the inspection four fostering social workers were taking industrial action and were not available for comment.

Staff are managed and monitored by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications. The inspector's interviews with a number of staff from the fostering service confirmed that there is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. Staff indicated that they are aware of whom to approach, in the absence of their manager.

The managers and fostering service social workers interviewed reported that team meetings occur on a two weekly basis. The fostering service social workers that were interviewed considered that during these meetings their views are sought regarding the operation and development of the service. The staff interviewed reported that they receive supervision on a monthly basis and that minutes of supervision are made available. Records indicated advanced planning in relation to supervision. Clinical supervision is made available to workers providing therapeutic services.

At the last inspection a group of fostering service social workers met with the inspectors and expressed some concerns regarding their new premises, use of newly introduced I.T, home working and staff turnover. The inspectors were concerned at the low morale amongst the fostering service social workers. At this inspection discussions with fostering service social workers indicated that these issues are no longer of concern to these staff. There are some continuing issues with the use of an open plan office but most staff reported that any problems encountered can be overcome.

At the last inspection some staff reported that high workloads were precluding them from undertaking all their responsibilities effectively. A recommendation was made that a workload management system be devised. At this inspection 7 fostering service social workers were interviewed. They reported that any workload management issues are discussed within supervision. No difficulties were reported with regards to workloads being too high to work effectively. Given the evidence of regular supervision, staff meetings and the accessibility of the management team reported by the social workers, the inspectors consider that this issue has been satisfactorily resolved at this inspection.

From the inspectors' examination of a sample of foster carers files and discussions with the team managers it is evident that a number of reviews have not been taking place at intervals of not more than a year. Three initial reviews presented to the fostering panel indicated that they had not been reviewed within a year of approval. The team managers are taking steps to attempt to address this.

At the last inspection a requirement was made indicating that the manager of the service shall ensure that where an agency is used to provide a foster carer, they shall clearly specify in the contract, the quality of care to be provided and the arrangements in place to monitor compliance, with a view to improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. At this inspection this requirement is outstanding. The fostering service manager

reported that work has been on-going to address this issue.

The inspectors would support the need for a more robust system to be put in place in relation to the services use of private fostering agencies and would therefore welcome any initiatives being implemented to address this.

There is an appropriate level of administrative support. A system is in place to deal with enquiries from prospective carers. A new system for referrals has been introduced.

The inspectors were able to confirm that staff receive a copy of the policies and working practices, in respect of grievance and disciplinary matters. They also receive a copy of the equal opportunities policy and health and safety procedures.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Liverpool City Council's fostering service has a recruitment strategy and a dedicated staff member whose task it is to recruit foster carers. An inspector met with the recruitment worker who has implemented some innovative ideas and has a number of future projects designed to attract prospective foster carers from different backgrounds.

In March 2003, Liverpool City Council introduced a new system for recruiting and assessing prospective foster carers. This system was initiated to combat the delay that was being experienced in the approval of carers. The manager of the fostering service who is responsible for the recruitment of foster carers reported that this new system has significantly reduced delays in the assessment of foster carers.

The system is based on the competency-based assessment produced by BAAF, which identifies the skills required by foster carers to carry out the fostering tasks. Liverpool fostering service have identified and selected key competencies from this BAAF assessment and incorporated this in their assessment of foster carers.

The assessment process is fully detailed in the last inspection report. Briefly, the assessment involves completion of an application form, which includes a detailed section on self-assessment. Attendance at an information day and three development days. At this stage prospective carers learn about the skills and knowledge needed to become foster carers, can decide on whether to progress their application and are assessed by members of the fostering service observing the development days.

Prospective foster carer then attend an assessment centre for one day. Here, the prospective applicant or applicants take part in a rigorous assessment process that builds on the training/development received in the previous days. Competencies are assessed through a series of activities and a system for scoring these competencies has been devised.

Alongside attendance at the development days and assessment day, an experienced social worker carries out home visits. The inspectors were advised that a number of home visits are undertaken until sufficient information is obtained to inform the assessment of prospective foster carers.

The assessment report of the prospective foster carer or carers is compiled from all the data gathered during the whole assessment process. This report also includes information on statutory checks and references and home safety checks. The report is then presented to the panel for their consideration as to whether the prospective foster carer or carers should be recommended to the fostering service's decision maker for approval.

Should the prospective foster carer or carers be approved the information obtained about them during the assessment process is used to establish a developmental profile for newly approved carers. A buddying system, whereby experienced foster carers provide support to newly approved carers for the first six months of approval is in operation.

The inspector observed a development day and an assessment centre day, examined records of prospective carers being presented to panel for approval and spoke to a number of staff involved in the assessment of prospective carers. The inspector is of the opinion that the assessment process is clear and covers the qualities, aptitudes and competencies detailed in the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards. The inspector considers that there are systems in place to ensure the quality of the applicants coming through the new assessment process. Regular meetings are held to discuss the process and to identify the strengths and shortfalls. The consultant, who helped to set up the new assessment system, is available for consultation and has worked with the service to further develop the system within the last 12 months.

A discussion with fostering service workers indicated staff involved recruitment consider that there are enough resources to enable a sufficient amount of time to be dedicated to the recruitment and processing of applications and to the rest of their workload.

In discussing the assessment process, the inspector was satisfied that should the process present a difficulty for a prospective carer then steps would be taken to address this.

An examination of a sample of assessment reports of foster carers recently approved and being presented to panel for approval indicated that the assessment process covers the issues outlined in the National Minimum Standards and accompanying regulations. There was evidence that gaps in employment histories are being identified during the assessment or at the fostering panel.

The inspectors were advised that as part of the service's assessment of foster carers who are divorced, arrangements are made to see their former partners. The service also arranges to see the foster carers' own children, including those who are now adults. Evidence of this was seen where it was applicable. Whilst there are currently no expectations in the National Minimum Standards or the fostering service regulations, 2002, to carry out such checks, the inspectors would endorse this assessment procedure as being good practice.

Liverpool City Council is introducing a new employment policy to encourage the retention of staff. This involves a revised pay structure. There are systems in place within the service to encourage staff retention by division of responsibilities in accordance with interests.

During the inspection there was evidence that plans were in place to address the staffing shortfall currently created by vacancies and staff taking industrial action. The couple of foster carers who reported concerns about lack of support during the inspection were referred to the team managers who indicated that this would be addressed.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

As was discussed in Standards 16 & 17 the inspection took place at a time when social workers working for Liverpool City Council were taking industrial action, including four staff from the fostering service. The social workers interviewed by the inspectors appeared more content about how the service was being run and the support they were receiving than at the last inspection. The inspectors were informed that Liverpool City Council is introducing a new employment policy to encourage the retention of staff. This involves a revised pay structure. There are systems in place within the service to encourage staff retention by division of responsibilities in accordance with interests.

The service has comprehensive and clear employment practices in relation to both staff and foster carers. The service also has a comprehensive staff handbook that includes health and safety policy for foster carers, children and staff, as well as a whistle blowing policy.

The inspector's examination of staff and foster carer's files showed that the service has good management systems in place, in respect of the supervision, appraisal and support of staff and foster carers.

Evidence from discussions with foster carers showed that many of them had experienced difficulties getting support and advice from out of hours from the Emergency Duty Team, and also had some difficulties making contact with the service through the integrated children's service. The managers of the fostering service told the inspectors that they acknowledged some of the difficulties in the current communication systems and were taking steps to address this. They had issued carers with a list mobile telephone numbers for the fostering services' managers, social workers and support workers, and they were planning to introduce their own out of hours service for carers staffed by fostering social workers, which should be operational early in 2005. In the inspector's views these were positive developments that should address the issues raised by carers.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The inspector's interviews with the resource manager and team manager responsible for training indicated that a variety of training is provided in order to enhance individual skills and keep staff up-date. The move to this responsibility resting with senior staff within the fostering service is a positive one which better meets the needs of the service

A discussion with the fostering service social workers and managers indicated that training needs are identified in appraisals, supervision and at team meetings. They reported that they have a training development plan. They considered that in general good training opportunities are provided both in-house and through accessing external training events. The staff interviewed reported that training seminars (such as, working lunches) are being provided to keep the teams up to date with changes in legislation and practice. Networking takes place with other local authorities in order to exchange ideas about practice.

At the last inspection a number of staff reported concerns over a lack of training around using computer systems, the staff interviewed at this inspection did not report these difficulties. Staff reported that since the last inspection training around the use of the available information technology has been provided and continues to be accessible to any staff who needs this.

The fostering service workers interviewed were involved in different aspects of family placement work. The staff interviewed considered that Liverpool City Council places value on their professional development.

The team manager with responsibility for staff training indicated that induction training is provided for staff new to the role and the service. The three new staff interviewed confirmed this. An induction training programme is available.

Opportunities are provided for foster carers and fostering service staff to receive joint training. The family placement workers also provide training to foster carers.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All the staff interviewed during the course of the inspection said that they felt supported. There was evidence from staff files and discussions that staff have clear written details of their duties and responsibilities, and copies of the service's policies and procedures were available.

Since the last inspection the service had devised written guidance for staff about the role of a supervisory social worker and how to conduct a visit to foster carers. This guidance was clear and detailed. The social workers felt that this had helped clarify their role and the service's expectations on them, and enabled them to be more focused in supervising foster placements. Support workers also had clear job descriptions and were aware of their roles and responsibilities.

There was evidence in the written records and from discussions with managers and social workers that social workers and support workers were having regular supervision with their line manager, and a record was kept of the content and outcome of the meeting. In addition the service has a staff appraisal system and evidence of this was found on staff files. Staff meetings take place regularly and are recorded.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The fostering service has a clear strategy and procedures for working with foster carers outlined in the Foster Carer Handbook. This document contained all the areas identified in NMS 21.2 including the arrangements for training and development, supervision, support services, information and advice, and out of hours support. As was discussed in Standard 20, the service has introduced additional guidance on the role of the supervisory social worker and visits to the foster carer. The inspector found from discussions with social worker staff and foster carers that they were clearer about their role as supervising social worker.

There was evidence that annual review reports were kept on foster carers' files. But the records showed that there were a number of foster carers where reviews hadn't taken place within the appropriate timescale. The managers told the inspectors that they were developing a strategy to address this as a priority. The fostering service must make sure that a review of the approval of each foster carer takes place at least every twelve months. (See Standard 9).

Evidence from discussions and inspection questionnaires showed that foster carers were generally satisfied with the support they received from the service. The sample of foster carers' files showed that supervisory visits to carers had taken place in line with the services guidelines and there was regular telephone contact. Where carers currently didn't have allocated supervisory social workers they had recently been visited and in some cases were being assisted by support workers.

Since the last inspection the service has introduced four support workers to work alongside social workers to assist with more practical tasks. Many of the foster carers were extremely positive about the help they received from the support workers and praised the introduction of the service.

Carers were more critical of the support they received from the child's social worker. They reported that many children didn't have allocated social workers, or the named social worker changed frequently. It was clear that the industrial action was having an impact on the frequency of social work visits to the child. Carers also reported that meetings about children's care plans had been postponed and were concerned about possible delays in the planning for the child. The inspectors found an example where the industrial action meant that the assessment and planning for a child's return home had been significantly delayed. The inspector brought this to the attention of the appropriate manager and now understands that the outstanding work is being completed.

The sample of children's files examined by the inspectors showed that children had not been visited in the foster home with the frequency required under Regulation 35. The records actually showed that for some children this had also been the case before the start of industrial action.

There are now two foster carer support groups in operation, LFCA and TFAL. Both are run by foster carers and are accessible to all existing and new foster carers. In discussion, with representatives from both services it is clear that at present the organisations are not working together which would better benefit foster carers and the service in general. Some issues raised by one of the representatives were brought to the attention of the two team managers who reported that they would address them.

The service also provides vehicles for some carers. The vehicles are leased to the service and are provided to foster carers who meet certain criteria.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The sample of files inspected all contained foster care agreements that covered the information detailed in Regulation 5 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The “ looked after children ” document regarding the placement plan provides the basis for the placement agreement. An examination of a sample of foster carers’ files evidenced that in general this document provided the information detailed in Schedule 6 of The Fostering Regulations 2002. In order to ensure continuity it was discussed with the fostering service managers that they look to devising a means of ensuring that this document is available and contains the required information prior to or shortly after the commencement of the placement.

The fostering service social workers provide supervision to all foster carers apart from kinship carers approved prior to 2002. The records examined showed that since the last inspection visits by fostering service social workers fell within the statutory timescale. Since the last inspection further training has been provided to all staff of the service regarding the role of the supervising social worker. The visits to kinship carers approved prior to 2002 are undertaken by the child’s social worker. Although there was evidence of the child’s social worker providing support to kinship carers it did not cover the same issues as a fostering social workers visit and as a consequence there is a disparity in the support provided. It is recommended quality assurance systems such as supervisory visits are applied consistently to all carers who provide a fostering service.

The records of visits made by children’s social workers did not meet the prescribed statutory frequency on a consistent basis.

The arrangements for supervision and support for the foster carers who provide therapeutic foster care placements is discussed, in Standard 21, of this report.

There was evidence that the fostering service is working closely with foster carers and actively promoting the development of their skills. This was evidenced by the fact that a number of foster carers are involved in support groups, for example, the skilled helpers group, where support is provided to foster carers when an allegation is made about them. Foster carers have also been involved in developmental work, such as “Healthy Homes” scheme, which was set up in conjunction with the Health Authority.

The development of foster carers skills is also apparent in the use of experienced foster carers to provide the information day and their involvement in the development days and assessment days in the assessment of prospective foster carers.

A buddying system is in operation for newly approved foster carers, whereby an experienced foster carer is paired up with a new foster carer for the first six months after approval, to provide support. There are also other support groups such as the teenage carers group and

the safe haven group, which supports carers with the most vulnerable young people.

There was evidence of foster carers arranging access to services such as local computer courses to promote their own development and provide an informal support network.

Foster carers are provided with a handbook following their approval. This provides guidance and information about a range of issues related to “looked after children” and the role and responsibilities of foster carers.

There was evidence from carers and from children that they were aware of how to make a complaint and information about the complaints procedure was widely available. The inspector met Liverpool City Council’s complaints manager. They were able to provide information to demonstrate how complaints are recorded and monitored, and the outcome evaluated to inform future practice. Since April 2003 there have been twenty complaints about the fostering and adoption services; of these fourteen haven’t been upheld; two have been upheld; two have been upheld in part; and the remaining number are still being investigated. Thirty five per cent of all complaints have been resolved within the agreed timescale. The complaint’s manager said that the fostering service was generally dealt with complaints efficiently.

Liverpool City Council has a written procedure and guidance for dealing with allegations of abuse made against foster carers. This is in accordance with the appropriate provisions of Regulation 12 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The service keeps a record of allegations against foster carers. At the last inspection it was recommended that information about any previous allegations or concerns about foster carers be recorded. This is now being addressed. (See Standard 9).

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>As already indicated in this report, since the last inspection the responsibility for providing and co-ordinating training has moved from the training and development unit to managers within the fostering service. A system for determining which carer has had which training has been devised. This takes into account training provided in the last 10 months as the records prior to this have not been made available by the training and development unit who are no longer in existence. The fostering service is in the process of updating training records by writing to carers and asking them to complete a training record. This will enable the fostering service to determine where training resources need to be targeted. The progress of this will be looked at, at the next inspection.</p>		
<p>Pre-approval training for foster carers includes the opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing foster carers. The approval process identifies the training needs of new carers. Following approval all new carers attend 3 core training sessions. At present these are safe caring, record keeping and first aid. In addition, foster carers, who have been provided a computer by Liverpool City Council, must complete a computer course on the safe usage of a computer in order to access the internet. Foster carers who have not completed these courses are also being encouraged to attend this training. The core training is linked to a professional foster care fee. Further core training</p>		

sessions have been identified for those carers who have completed the current core training sessions. These include attachment and child development.

There is a variety of training available for foster carers. A training development plan is in the process of being drawn up with all carers. An examination of a sample of foster carers' files indicated that training needs are identified in the supervision provided to foster carers however, this was not evidenced in the kinship carers' files examined by the inspectors. A discussion with the team manager and resource manager responsible for the provision of training indicated that further work will need to take place around identifying the training needs of those kinship carers who are not supervised by the fostering service.

Training and network days are provided to raise awareness of forthcoming training. In addition, a way forward day is held to look at the operation of the service with carers and other professionals. The issue of training needs is addressed here also.

Around 40 foster carers have achieved an NVQ in caring for children and young people. This course was provided through the training and development unit, which is no longer in existence. The fostering service is supporting carers who wish to undertake an NVQ course through a local college. The manager interviewed reported that a number of the training sessions currently provided by the fostering service would provide credits toward an NVQ qualification.

There are opportunities provided for foster carers and fostering service social workers to undertake training together.

The foster carers who work for the therapeutic fostering team, that is, the Rosta project receive specific training from the individuals who work for this project. They are also able to access the training provided to foster carers who do not work for this project.

The foster carers who are involved in providing support to other carers, for example, through the skilled helpers group reported that they received training around this before undertaking this role. During the inspection, the inspectors were able to evidence that consideration is being given to the support required by the children of foster carers.

The inspector observed a development training day provided for prospective foster carers by foster carers. A member of staff from the fostering service was available to give support if needed. The training was well presented. The prospective carers commented very positively on the course content.

A number of carers who met with the inspectors praised the training they have received to date. Some carers raised the issue of training not always being delivered at a suitable time, location and child care commitments being taken into consideration. On discussion with the fostering service managers and other carers it was evident that these needs are taken into account and will continue to be so. The fostering service manager also reported that specific training needs are also catered for.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Since the last inspection more information is held on computer. There is a clear structure for recording this information and all computer files accessed followed a similar format. Staff interviewed reported that they have had sufficient training to access and enter information held.

There is a comprehensive policy and procedure for the formatting and recording of case files. A sample of paper files were examined by the inspectors, which clearly evidenced that files were clearly organised and structured in the manner prescribed by the recording policy. The inspectors were able to evidence that files had been audited.

The inspectors found that whilst there had been a significant improvement in the looked after children documentation available on the children's files and being given to foster carers, there were still some difficulties in receiving this information reported by a small number of carers. Since the last inspection a number of strategies have been deployed to address this issue. The bringing together of the fostering service and children and families social work service under the same management structure will no doubt serve to ensure this matter continues to receive attention.

The inspectors' examination of a sample of foster carers' files evidenced that the written foster placement agreements were standard documents that in general provided the information detailed in Schedule 6 of the Fostering Regulations 2002. In order to ensure continuity it was discussed with the fostering service managers that they look to devising a means of ensuring that this document is available and contains the required information prior to or within a week of the placement.

As already identified there is a disparity between the record keeping on files where the fostering service supervise a foster carer and where the child's social worker supervises in the case of kinship carers.

From the inspectors' visits to a sample of carers, the inspectors were able to evidence that carers understand the importance of keeping personal possessions, memento's and photographs of a child's life and ensuring that these move on with the child.

In general, the foster carers appreciated the need to keep information about children held securely.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)			
The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	3
<p>Separate records are held for staff, carers, children and complaints. The records of allegations are held on the foster carers' files. A system that brings together any previous allegations relating to a foster carer has been recently devised. The progress of this will be examined at the next inspection.</p> <p>The Local authority's register of foster children contained all the information, as outlined in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Regulations 2002.</p> <p>The inspectors were able to evidence that since the last inspection file audits are taking place. They were also able to confirm that confidential records are stored securely within the office and a lockable cabinet has been provided for files, when taken home by workers. A lockable storage facility is also made available to foster carers.</p> <p>Records are held in a form, which could be readily passed on. The computerisation of the service's records will have implications for service users wishing to access their records and this needs to be reflected in a revised access to records policy and procedure.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			15
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £		X	Maximum £
			X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

At the last inspection a group of fostering service social workers met with the inspectors and expressed some concerns regarding their new premises. These concerns were around the noise levels in the office making it difficult to concentrate, there being limited places to hold confidential discussions, insufficient training to use newly introduced I.T, lack of risk assessments for home and office working. The inspectors were concerned at the low morale amongst the fostering service social workers.

At this inspection most of the recommendations made at the last inspection regarding the premises have been addressed. Discussions with fostering service social workers indicated that these issues are no longer of concern to these staff. There are some continuing issues with the use of an open plan office but most staff reported that any problems encountered can be overcome. The team managers are continuing to look for alternative premises which has contact facilities close by and additional meeting rooms. At the time of the inspection 4 fostering social workers were taking industrial action and were not available for comment.

Visitor's identity cards have been introduced since the last inspection. It continues to be recommended that a visitor's book be introduced into the building for reasons of health and safety.

The premises have efficient administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. Some carers raised the issue of not being able to phone the office directly as the majority of calls go through the Integrated Children's Service which is not located within the fostering service. Staff reported that the carers they supervise have their mobile telephone numbers and can contact them via e-mail also. Staff can access e-mails at any time through use of a hand held computer. The team managers reported that they are looking at having extra phone lines installed in the office for those carers who are reporting delays in fostering service staff returning calls made via the Integrated Children's Service.

There are facilities and systems in place for the safe keeping of written and computer held records. There are now additional security measures in place regarding accessing the building where the fostering service is based.

The team managers reported that the premises and its contents are adequately insured.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not applicable to local authority fostering services.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not applicable to local authority fostering services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service has a clear policy on foster carer's allowances and expenses, which are reviewed on an annual basis. Each foster carer within the service is provided with a copy of the foster carer allowances and expenses. The inspector found that service provided an efficient payment system. Most carers said that they were paid promptly and had any queries dealt with straightaway.

During the course of the inspection, some foster carers raised issues about payments and in particular where they had disagreements with the service over discretionary payments. The administrative manager looked into all of these issues during the inspection and provided written evidence that the service had made appropriate decisions in line with the payment procedures. Nevertheless, the inspectors came away with the impression that some carers were unclear about the allowances and expenses, and recommend that the service take steps to ensure that all carers have up to date information about payments in particular about discretionary payments, and holiday and equipment payments.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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During the course of the inspection two inspectors observed one fostering panel. The foster panel chairperson was new to this position and this was the first fostering panel they had chaired. The observations by inspectors led them to conclude that the panel was well organised and conducted itself in an appropriate and professional manner. The panel was well chaired and there was evidence of all panel members' views being taken into account. It was clear from the decision making and recommendations around future social work practice that the panel performed a quality assurance function.

The panel met the regulations in terms of the number and role of the individuals present. A discussion took place with a team manager around the remit for one panel members' attendance as this did not appear to be appropriate.

The inspection of previous panel minutes indicated that there is clear decision making which is fully recorded.

The administrator for the panel reported that the paperwork for all applications being considered is forwarded to panel members in advance of the panel. A panel member confirmed this.

The inspector was advised that training is provided to panel members around their role and any changes, for example, to the fostering service or to legislation that may impact on information presented. The team manager informed the inspectors that the only outstanding checks to ensure suitability of panel members is a CRB check for 2 workers currently employed by Liverpool City Council who have had a police check which needs to be renewed.

A medical advisor was present at the panel to provide medical expertise as required. There was also an independent member available to provide advice around educational matters.

Panel members have been made aware of the procedure around the storage and management of confidential information.

A discussion took place with the panel chair around the current Regulation 38 procedure which does not cover all checks that could be undertaken to ensure the suitability of carers that a child is placed with in an emergency. A function of the panel will be to ensure this procedure is adhered to.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service provides short-term breaks for children. This service is predominantly for children with learning and physical disabilities. At present there are 19 short - term break carers providing 25 short-term placements. Some carers are available for day care also.

A discussion with team manager who has responsibility for these carers indicated that this service is provided to reflect the differing needs of children receiving this service. The emphasis is very much on birth parents remaining central to the promotion of their child's welfare and development. To promote this, these children are subject to children in need reviews twice per year rather than "looked after children" reviews which tend to be focused on children whose birth parents are not still the main carers. Guidance for carers is drawn up with parents/those with parental responsibility.

Recruitment tends to be amongst individuals who already have a link with the child to be cared for, such as a relative, classroom assistant or nurses. Recruitment campaigns are targeted with this in mind. As already indicated there is now a recruitment worker employed within the fostering service. The recruitment of more short-term break carers is included in the current recruitment strategy.

At present there is a shortfall with regards to providing short - term care for children with a physical disability. Issues such as accessibility within a foster carers home and issues that arise as a result of a risk assessment can result in difficulties around recruitment. Working parties to address such issues and to look at a less residential based respite provision are taking place.

All short - term break carers are subject to the same assessment as full time carers and are provided with the same introductory training. The policies and procedures implemented in practice to meet the needs of children having short - term breaks are similar to those for carers providing care on a full time basis. All short - term break carers are offered the same training as full time carers. The take up of this training does not tend to be as high due to the limited availability of these carers.

Two files and computer held records were examined and contained evidence of visits by family placement social workers taking place within the prescribed intervals. As already indicated in standard 12, there was insufficient information provided around some skilled health tasks for a young person identified with the managers of the fostering service.

Training around meeting the needs of children with physical or a learning disability is available. In addition, written information on particular disabilities is provided for carers to assist them in their care of children.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.**

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The fostering service has around 150 hundred foster carers who are family or friends of the children they are looking after.

Since November 2002, the fostering service has been involved in carrying out an assessment of these carers through attendance at the assessment centre and development days. The fostering service also supports kinship carers approved since this date. The vast majority of kinship carers though continue to be supervised by the child's social worker. Therefore, the assessment of the carers' home environment and relationships with the child and significant others rests with the child's social worker, as does the responsibility for providing these carers with the necessary supervision and support.

The division of these responsibilities is problematic as different assessment processes are used by family placement social workers and the child's social worker to assess the home environment. Moreover, the child's social worker would not necessarily have had the training to undertake this task, nor might they automatically be aware of the resources and support services that can be provided to family and friends, as carers.

At this inspection two kinship carers' files were examined. One file did not contain a safe caring policy or evidence of a health and safety assessment. Both carers had not been reviewed since their approval 5 years ago. Both carers interviewed had not attended any training provided by the fostering service and were unaware until very recently when a fostering service social worker visited, of support services available. The inspectors were concerned that a strategy meeting held in November 2003 had recommended the re-assessment of one of the foster carer whose records were inspected and the assessment of her partner to ascertain if they are appropriate to continue to be foster carers. At the time of the inspection this assessment had not been completed. This is not acceptable.

At the last inspection it was reported that a child, who was subject to a care order, under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, was placed with a relative who had not been approved by the fostering panel. A full and comprehensive assessment of the relative had been completed, however, the relative did not wish to be approved as a foster carer and had not received a foster carer's allowance in respect of the child. A requirement was made at the last inspection that this situation be addressed without delay in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. At this inspection attempts had been made to address this matter however the situation has not been resolved and the requirement is outstanding.

A discussion with the team manager and resource manager responsible for the provision of

training indicated that further work will need to take place around identifying the training needs of those kinship carers who are not supervised by the fostering service.

There was evidence from an examination of files, as well as through discussion with children's social workers and managers of the family placement team that there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family or friends as carers, in the assessment and approval. The importance of children being cared for by individuals who have a significant link to them was clearly acknowledged in the small sample of cases examined.

At the last inspection a requirement was made that the Professional Instruction Notice on Guidelines for the Approval of Regulation 38 Foster Carers needs to be developed further with regards to Regulation 38(2) (b) which requires that the prospective carer has made a written agreement with the local authority to carry out the duties specified in paragraph (3) of the Regulation. The Professional Instruction Notice on Guidelines for the Approval of Regulation 38 Foster Carers now addresses this. However, further information on initial checks to ensure suitability, such as POCA/POVA checks and checks of Liverpool County Council's records needs to be recorded.

The inspectors continue to be of the opinion that consideration needs to be given as to how consistency is to be achieved in the assessment, approval and support of kinship carers, whilst taking into account the pre-existing relationship between the child and the family member or friend proposed as a carer. Overall, the inspectors' were of the view that it would be good practice, if all kinship carers were fully incorporated into the fostering service.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2, 15-26 November and 1 December 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26 January 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I James Clarke of Liverpool City Council (Liverpool City Council Fostering Service) confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name James Clarke _____
Signature _____
Designation Group Manager _____
Date 25 January 2005 _____

Or

D.3.2 I James Clarke of Liverpool City Council (Liverpool City Council Fostering Service) am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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