



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Shropshire County Council Fostering Service

**The Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND**

Lead Inspector
Janet Manders

Announced Inspection
20th February 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Shropshire County Council Fostering Service

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Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND

Telephone number 01743 254700

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Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Shropshire County Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Shropshire County Council Children's Placement Services aims to recruit a wide range of placements to meet the family placement needs of the great majority of children and young people looked after by the local authority. At the time of the inspection the Service provided placements for 142 young people. Placements are provided by 112 approved foster carers.

The Children's Placement Services team is located in Shrewsbury, but is responsible for providing a service to the whole of the county.

Foster carers receive the Fostering Network recommended allowances and most have access to fee payments on a Payment for Skills scheme, currently payable on four skill levels.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was undertaken over a period of 8 days by 2 inspectors, requiring a total of 12 inspector days to complete the inspection. 6 foster carers were visited in their homes by inspectors, when the inspectors also had the opportunity to meet with the young people in placement. In addition to these visits, carer's files were viewed, as were those of the young people placed with the foster carers and interviews with the supervising social workers. In addition inspectors met with a group meetings with placing social workers and other relevant staff and managers within the Fostering Service. Questionnaires were also sent to all foster carers, young people, aged 8+, placed with foster carers by the Authority and their placing social workers.

Inspectors had planned to meet with a group of foster carers at a local foster care forum, but due to inclement weather the forum was cancelled.

What the service does well:

The Fostering Service support their foster carers well, with the appointment of 3 support workers, who are able to offer practical support to foster carers. There are regular support meetings in the 3 geographical areas, a telephone helpline run by foster carers, supported by the department and the additional support of an independent Advice and Mediation Worker from the Fostering Network. Foster carers clearly felt that they were well supported by the staff within the Children's Placement Service.

Foster carers are also provided with a comprehensive training programme. Whilst this area of work was not inspected during this inspection, foster carers commented how useful the training programme is. The training programme provided exceeded the standard at the last inspection. There was no indication that this provision had diminished in the last year.

The input of the Looked After Nurse into undertaking regular health reviews and developing health plans for young people is commended by the inspectors and will hopefully result in the improvement of young people's health.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Fostering Service management structure has been reviewed and changed so that all supervising social workers are supervised by the same team manager, thus increasing the consistency in the operation of the Service. Additionally this has enabled the other team manager to undertake all foster carer reviews enabling an independent element into the reviews.

There has been a significant improvement in the regular supervision of foster carers since the last inspection, with the Service now providing 2 monthly supervision for foster carers. Foster carers reported that they found this beneficial.

Staff have undertaken training in respect of assessment of foster carers and the assessment report viewed by inspectors was of a high level, providing robust analysis of the information gained during the assessment. There has also been an improvement in the level of training available for staff.

There has been an improvement in developing appropriate Health Plans and Pathway Plans for young people, although both plans would benefit from further development and use by all parties.

What they could do better:

It is of concern that a number of the Fostering Service's practices, policies and procedures have not yet been updated to ensure that they are compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. In addition 12 of the requirements made at this inspection are carried forward from the previous two inspections.

The use of a Foster Care Agreement compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, would assist considerably in ensuring that appropriate plans were made for young people's placements and that all parties are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that the plan is implemented. Such an agreement would also ensure that appropriate information is shared with all parties.

There is a need for the Fostering Service to develop and effectively use risk assessments in relation to young people's placements, especially in respect of contact arrangements and when young people are required to share a bedroom.

The educational provision for some of the young people was found to be lacking for a number of the young people seen by the inspectors during this inspection and work must be undertaken within the Children's and Young People's Directorate to improve the service for young people so that all young people receive a satisfactory level of education, assisting them to meet their potential.

There must be an improvement in how the Fostering Service matches young people with the skills provided by foster carers and ensure that carer's approval is appropriate for the placements made. Where extensions to a foster carer's approval are made, the Fostering Panel must consider this.

There is a need for the recruitment practices of the Service to be improved to ensure that all the requirements of Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services

Regulation 2002 are complied with to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with young people.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Evidence indicates that young people's needs are well met by the Fostering Service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has made considerable progress in promoting young people's health. A useful Health Plan format has been developed which is completed at the initial health assessment and this is reviewed and updated regularly by the looked after nurse. To ensure that plans are reviewed regularly she undertakes home visits to young people within their foster homes. She encourages healthy lifestyle and provides a personal quit smoking programme where this is required and information regarding healthy lifestyles, exercise and healthy diets. Foster carers and young people have a copy of the plan and are encouraged to add to it. However, evidence suggests that social workers are not using health plans to their full potential. This may be an issue of placement in the file, as it appears it is often filed in the correspondence section. It is suggested that it should be filed with the current LAC documentation, to enable it to be regularly considered as part of a young person's placement. It may be useful for the fostering service to have a copy on their records too.

There had been a considerable improvement since the last inspection in February 2005, regarding ensuring that parental consent is sought for medical treatment with completed parental consent for treatment placed on all files examined by inspectors, however, none of them had delegated consent to the foster carers. In one case the carers' names had been completed in the delegation section of Placement Plan Part 1 document but this section had not been signed. It is recommended that the service – and the local authority – consider the delegation of consent to appropriate medical and dental treatments to the foster carers, especially where placements are long term and/or there is little parental involvement. This should be reviewed at the

young person's LAC review. Whilst inspectors were informed that one of the area managers is undertaking work to address this issue, at the time of the inspection this work had not been completed.

Carers were seen to be ensuring that young people received any medical, optical and dental treatment required, and this was monitored through the LAC review process.

There is a dedicated CAMHS service for looked after young people, although staff and foster carers felt that this did not fully meet the demand for this service.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Foster carers and the Children's Placement Services endeavour to keep young people safe, however, improvements must be made to the matching of young people with appropriate foster carers, the recruitment of staff and the operation of the fostering panel to ensure that all young people are kept safe at all times.

EVIDENCE:

While there has been an adjustment to the management structure of the fostering service, there have been no changes in the managers involved, and they therefore continue to be suitable people. It is positive to note that the CRB check of one manager had been renewed at the expiry of three years, as required by the standards.

All foster homes visited were seen to be providing a safe and nurturing environment. The service has a Health & Safety checklist, which is renewed annually, and has been recently revised to include checks on the MoT and insurance of the carer's car(s), and the signatures of those involved in completion. One placing social worker comments – 'the house is a safe environment in which to live'.

At the last inspection the service had introduced a risk assessment into the referral format, which is helpful. However, this does not specifically address

the issue of sharing bedrooms, and is not placed on the carer's file for future reference. The risk assessment is also not yet being routinely completed in all cases. The previous requirement therefore remains.

It was difficult to see that any progress had been made regarding ensuring that young people are appropriately matched with the skills of the foster carers. The reasoning behind placement decisions are not clearly recorded. The service is still relying on the LAC documentation for Placement Agreements, although this does not cover all the areas required by the standards and regulations.

Both carers and staff consider that there is very little matching of carers and young people due to the immense pressure for placements. Inspectors noted that there were a number of examples of children being placed with carers poorly matched to meet their needs. One carer had 2 young people placed with her although she was only approved for 1 young person, both young people were not attending school but the carer's employment did not allow appropriate supervision of the young people. Another foster carer reported to inspectors a situation in which two very vulnerable young people had sexual relationships while in the foster home, and it was decided that future placements should only be for girls. However, a young man had been placed in an emergency. It was later discovered that he had had a sexual relationship with a member of staff in his previous care home. This information had not been given to the foster carer when the young person was placed.

There were 14 young people placed in excess of the numbers for whom the carer was approved or outside the age range for which approval had been given. This could result in the needs of young people not being met, to placements breaking down thus resulting in young people suffering further disruption to their lives.

As indicated earlier in the report, inspectors found evidence that some young people are still being placed with foster carers without foster carers receiving the necessary information to allow them to appropriately care for the young person. Foster carers had not been informed that one young person, placed on respite exhibited sexualised behaviour. The inspectors were informed that as a result of this experience a form has been developed so that foster carers can share information when a respite placement is made. Nevertheless, inspectors also found evidence of well-planned placements with introductory periods and good written information.

At the last inspection, inspectors were informed that The Fostering Service intended to introduce a carer profile, which included photographs of the foster carer and their family. This was due to be introduced in April 2005, however, this has still not been fully implemented and young people and their social workers are not consistently provided with this information prior to placement.

The Fostering Service have updated their procedures regarding the investigation of allegations of abuse by foster carers, however, evidence received by the Commission for Social Care Inspection since the last inspection indicates that communication between the district teams and the Children's Placement Services are not always of a high standard, with occasions when the Children's Placement Services have not been informed of the allegation. In addition the Commission for Social Care Inspection have not always been informed of all child protection issues in a timely fashion or of other issues identified in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

A safe care policy has been produced which provides basic guidelines, although this could be usefully reviewed and revised. In the present format there is no provision in the format to include safe caring rules pertinent to the particular household or to the placement needs of individual children, and there is no provision for agreement and signature of the placing social worker. These guidelines have not yet been implemented at all, so the implementation of a full safe caring policy for each household, regularly reviewed, will be a requirement.

Inspectors found evidence that a foster carer had not taken appropriate action when a young person was missing from the foster home. It is imperative for young people's safety that foster carers are aware of the appropriate procedures to follow, that the procedures are followed and case managers informed of the situation.

As part of the inspection a sample of staff personnel files were inspected, including those of the three new support workers, a new social worker and the new member of the administrative staff who have all been appointed since the last inspection. Inspectors found that the files were in good order with labelled dividers. The inspectors were also provided with a spreadsheet identifying the matters required, which was helpful and proactive.

In some instances one reference had been followed up by phone but in the appointments made during the past year, this had not been done for both references. With regards to one appointment, the person had started work on the basis of one written and one verbal reference, and the second written reference had not been received until a month after the person started work. It was of very great concern to see that an appointment to a social worker post had been made on the basis of one reference only, and there was no record that this had been followed up by telephone. There was also no evidence on file of the exploration of gaps in employment records for two appointees.

In respect of one member of staff the CRB check was undertaken in a different name from the name used for references and from the one he is known by. In light of this the Fostering Service must undertake a new CRB check submitted all known names. Whilst CRB checks are being stored separately and securely as required, these are not being destroyed once inspectors have had a chance

to view them. Additionally no record was being kept on file indicating that a CRB check had been undertaken, with the date, whether enhanced or not, the reference number of the check and that the check was clear.

Inspectors did not observe the Fostering Panel but the inspectors interviewed the new independent chair of the Panel and had access to the minutes of the previous three Panels. Inspectors were pleased to note that the Fostering Service has appointed an independent chair for the Fostering Panel, however, it is important that the new Chair, as a former senior manager in the department, is clearly seen to be independent of the local authority in the exercise of these duties.

Information gathered indicated that the Fostering Service are not abiding by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 in respect of the approval of foster carers when they place young people outside the terms of a foster carer's approval, when no other placement is available. There is no provision in the regulations for extensions to be made to a carer's approval; this can only be amended through the Panel process. However, in practice, if a considered decision is made by a manager, with the foster carer(s)'s full agreement, and a child is placed in an urgent situation, no objection would be raised by CSCI as long as the matter is taken to the next Panel for formal amendment of the carer's approval. It is not legal for these situations to be allowed to continue without going through the Panel process. It was of particular concern that a carer who had both one child more than they were approved for, and one child who was two years older than their approval, all of whom had been in placement for several months, had an annual review considered by Panel, but their approval was renewed on the same terms as before.

Once the Panel has approved the new approval for the foster carers and this has been agreed by the Agency Decision Maker a revised notice of approval must be issued to the foster carer. It is of concern that whilst the Fostering Service has developed a report format for extensions or exemptions of foster carers approval, which includes the information required regarding the impact on other young people and how the welfare of all children and young people is to be safeguarded as required by legislation, this was not routinely being completed, with only the manager's brief report for Panel being evident on file. Consequently the previous requirement remains in place. Inspectors also found evidence that even short reports had not been prepared and presented to Panel for some young people placed with foster carers outside their approval range.

Examination of the Fostering Service's policies regarding the operation of the Panel, highlights that there is insufficient guidance regarding the procedures to be followed when all member of the Panel are not in agreement. The current sentence in the policy and procedures is not adequate. Too much onus is placed on the Chair, without any guidance as to how they are expected to conduct matters. In addition the policies and all other paperwork must be

amended so that they refer to the current legislation rather than previous legislation. An example of this in the Panel procedures is a reference to Regulation 11 foster carers, whereas relative foster carers are approved under Regulation 38. In fact, Regulation 38 placements do not need to go to panel, by the time they do, they are simply foster carer applications, as the provisions of the regulation last only 6 weeks. Where the 6 weeks is about to expire and a full Form F assessment has not been possible, the Panel must ensure that it has all the information required by Schedule 3 and thereby recommend the approval or otherwise of the carers, based on the legal minimum requirements, as there is no provision for 'interim' approval, as has been the practice of the Service in the past.

Panel has been recommending the acceptance of carer's resignations, when this has no legal validity.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13 and 31

The Fostering Service and carers value and support diversity, however, further support must be offered to those foster carers who have young people placed on a transracial basis. The Fostering Service in conjunction with appropriate staff within the Children's and Young People's Directorate must take action to address all young people's educational needs so that all young people are able to reach their potential.

EVIDENCE:

A policy has now been written regarding Short-term breaks and clearly states that parents remain the main carers for the young person. The policy also covers issues regarding the operation of this service, including the assessment, supervision and review of the service.

In discussion with foster carers, placing social workers and from children placement service social workers it is apparent that foster carers support young people well regarding education, with many carers actively advocating for the young people placed with them to ensure that they have access to a suitable educational placement. One children placement service social worker commented during a foster carer's review "They work alongside school and the young person to keep her established in school." Some foster carers expressed frustration at the lack of communication between the different personnel involved with the education of the young people, this was especially the case where the foster carers resided in a different local authority and therefore the young people need to access the local school, outside Shropshire.

Staff spoken to indicated that they believed that there had been a deterioration in the education provision for young people. This was significantly the situation for young people who had been temporarily excluded from school or were only able to access a partial timetable. The scale of these gaps are difficult to quantify because the information is not gathered, only information regarding permanent exclusions.

Young people's educational opportunities are further disadvantaged by a lack of provision regarding the assessment of special needs and the availability of tuition services, with young people often only being able to access 1-2 hours education per week, with no opportunity for other structured occupation during school hours. Young people commented to inspectors that where they were not receiving full time education, the level of education they did receive did not meet their needs, often proving to be too easy.

Young people's exclusion from school, at what ever level has a considerable impact on the young person's placement and frequently leads to a placement breakdown, with further disruption being disadvantageous to the young person.

As the Fostering Service still does not use a Foster Placement Agreement, which complies with the Fostering Service Regulations, there is no clarity as to where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and equipment.

Foster carers visited, had proved extremely good support to 3 young asylum seekers, although this was a transracial placement. Carers felt that to a great extent they had been left to find out information themselves as to how they could best support the young people. Although they accepted that the Children's Placement Services social worker had offered support, they felt that they were all learning together. In discussion with the foster carers it was apparent that the carers had not received any additional financial assistance over and above the basic fostering allowance although they had had to incur additional costs regarding the purchase of Halal meat, prayer clothes, and telephone contact with relatives and friends in Afghanistan and London.

Case managers also reported that there remained a lack of foster carers who could offer long-term foster placements for young people with disabilities.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10 and 11

The Fostering Service promotes young people's contact with family and friends, but there is a need to develop risk assessments prior to contact taking place to ensure young people's safety. Young people are actively encouraged to contribute to plans for their care and the development of the Fostering Service.

EVIDENCE:

Young people reported that they were generally able to maintain contact with their family and friends where this was appropriate; where this was not possible they understood the reasons for this. Files recorded arrangements for contact to take place, the Placement Plan Part 2 was generally used for this, however, there was no risk assessment evident on young people's files as required by Standard 10.6. The referral form used by the duty officer does include information regarding contact and a new risk assessment form has been developed which adds to this information, however, the new form has not yet been implemented and referral forms were not seen on foster carers files. However, inspectors were informed that a copy of the referral was given to foster carers when a young person is placed with them.

Placing social workers commented that due to the lack of foster carers young people were often placed a considerable distance away from their families and this frequently caused difficulties in respect of ensuring contact took place. When it did take place it resulted in long journeys for young people and their families.

Foster carers were seen to support and promote contact in the majority of cases. One carer had been praised by the Children's Placement Services social worker in the carer's annual review 'carers have a particularly good

relationship with the young person's parents, promoting contact in a meaningful way alongside information sharing as appropriate.'

The Fostering Service has organised two groups to support young people who are looked after and for young people who foster. These groups are also used to gain young people's views regarding the service they provide. Young people reported that they were consulted by their foster carers regarding their opinions and ideas, with 63% of the 27 young people who responded to the questionnaire stating that their foster carers often consulted them. However, only 44% of young people reported their social worker often consulted with them; 11% reported that their social worker never consulted them. Inspectors were informed that it was hoped that this situation would improve since a recent training day for social workers in communicating with young people. 83% of young people stated that their views were sought by the service in respect of their foster carers. There was evidence of this on foster carers files as part of the foster carers annual review.

75% of the young people stated that they were aware how to make a complaint about how they were being looked after and 65% stated that they knew how to contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection if they needed to.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

14 and 29

The Fostering Service has improved the way it supports young people to prepare young people for adulthood, but further work is still required. Foster carers receive payments in a timely and efficient manner.

EVIDENCE:

Improvements have been made by the Leaving Care team in providing Pathway Plans to assist young people to move into adulthood. A Pathway Plan was seen on one young person's file who had reached 16 years old. The plan had been reviewed and revised, however, it had only been signed by the Leaving Care Team worker. There was no evidence of the young person's involvement in the preparation and review of the Plan, except that one sentence had been deleted because she did not agree with it.

Carers were generally satisfied with the payments system and reported prompt accurate payments. However, in relation to progression through the payments for skills levels, there seemed to be a number of delays in the system of approving portfolios of evidence. There were a number of expressed concerns regarding the system itself, including the fact that as a payment for skills scheme, there are stipulations that carers at the higher levels must be prepared to foster teenagers, which implies that fostering younger children is easier.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25 and 32

There have been positive changes to the management of the Fostering Service, however, further work must be undertaken to ensure that the Service fully abides by the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

EVIDENCE:

The last inspection made a recommendation that a simpler children's guide should be produced to meet the needs of younger or less able young people. This has still not been completed.

The management structure of the Fostering Service has been changed since the last inspection, with one of the team managers taking over the responsibility of managing the fostering team with the support of two newly appointed senior practitioners. The other team manager has taken responsibility for the residential services, but is also responsible for undertaking all foster carers review and the supervision of the newly appointed support workers. These changes are seen as a positive move by the team, and one that inspectors would endorse. Nonetheless, these arrangements must be carefully monitored to ensure that no one person becomes overloaded.

Staff reported that these developments have helped to improve staff morale within the team and that the team have been empowered to assist in the development of the service. It is hoped that the role of the senior practitioners will further develop and support the professional development of the team and the service. These changes have also assisted with the provision of the out of hours support for the Fostering Service.

Whilst the staffing complement of the team has increased, with the appointment of 1 new social worker and 3 support workers, there are areas of work that are not being completed by the Fostering Service, which require development and will therefore require additional staffing. Two major areas are that of private fostering and the supervision, support and review of relative foster carers. Inspectors also found numerous areas where the Service had not implemented the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 in their policies, guidance and practice; these have been highlighted throughout the report. Whilst inspectors accept that there have been some developments within the team they believe that due to the pressures upon the team there is little time for the development of the Service as they only have the capacity to maintain the service. It is therefore imperative that the staffing levels within the team are kept under review. Administrative support was considered by staff to be sufficient and of good quality.

Established members of staff reported having received training in assessment of foster carers provided by BAAF and a newer member of staff was to undertake this in the next few months. The assessment of foster carers examined by inspectors was detailed and thorough, addressing all issues required in depth and included good analysis of the information and the carer's skills.

As indicated elsewhere in the report there remains a lack of foster carers to enable young people to be carefully matched with suitable foster carers, this

shortage is most evident for young people with specialist needs as indicated in earlier sections of the report and for teenagers. There is little evidence that the recruitment campaign is significantly addressing this issue as the foster carer register shows that the majority of foster carers are not placed on a skill level and the number of foster carers on levels 2, 3 and 4 have decreased in the last year, thus reducing the number of foster carers available to care for teenagers with challenging behaviour.

Inspectors were informed that there have been improvements to the training available for staff, with 6 training courses being mandatory, these include child protection, supervising foster carers and the assessment of prospective foster carers. Independent trainers provide two of these courses, the other 4 training courses are provided in house. Inspectors were also informed that there has been joint training between foster carers, Children's Placement Services social workers and district social workers.

A clear system has been implemented to identify the dates for all foster carer reviews, these are undertaken by the team manager who does not have responsibility for the supervision of the Children's Placement Services social worker and therefore introduces an element of independence to the process. Records viewed by the inspectors indicated that not all reviews had been conducted on time in the past year, however, the new system will hopefully alleviate this problem. Inspectors would recommend that the reviewing manager keeps the other team manager informed of what reviews are due to be undertaken and the outcome of those that have been completed.

The Foster Care Helpline, is now operating well, and inspectors were informed that carers had been trained prior to the operation of the line. Consideration now needs to be given to the on-going support and supervision of these foster carers.

The Foster Care Agreement is still not compliant with the Regulations as it does not contain any information regarding the action foster carers should take regarding unauthorised absences, or require compliance with the foster placement agreement. It does not require foster carers to keep the fostering service provider informed about the child's progress and childminding and day care are not included in matters to be notified. The section in respect of legal matters states that carers will have a fact file, which includes information regarding insurance details. Inspectors expect the Foster Care Agreement to include a clear statement regarding how the Authority will meet the legal liabilities incurred by a foster carer arising from undertaking fostering and refer to the file for detailed information. The information contained in the Foster Care Agreement regarding the resignation of foster carers is legally inaccurate. The Fostering Service has now clarified and improved the insurance cover for foster carers.

Examination of one foster carer file showed that the Foster Care Agreement had not been signed until 5 months after the foster carers had been approved as carers and 4 young people had already been placed with them during this time. In addition the notice of foster carer's approval was not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 as it referred to the previous legislation. However, this matter was rectified during the time of the inspection.

At the last inspection inspectors made a requirement regarding the way complaints were investigated and recorded. During the examination of a foster carer's file it was apparent that this requirement was still not being consistently met. There was no outcome recorded on file regarding the complaint made by a neighbour in respect of the foster carer and other complaints made by the young person's mother and other professionals were not recorded on the front sheet. It was also not clear as to how the complaints had been investigated, and whether the complaints had been upheld.

Over 90% of the 39 foster carers who responded to a pre-inspection questionnaire stated that they received adequate support from the Fostering Service, with 56% stating that they were very satisfied. It is apparent from discussion with foster carers, supervising social workers and examination of the files, that improvements have been made to the level of supervision provided to foster carers, with the supervision agreement stating that all foster carers will receive supervision every 2 months. Information gathered during the inspection confirmed that this level of supervision is being undertaken. Supervision was welcomed by most foster carers and seen as an essential support for the fostering task. Unannounced visits are now recorded on foster carer reviews, however, this information had not been completed on all reviews, nor were unannounced visits recorded on all files examined. The Fostering Service has developed a spreadsheet, which records the dates of planned supervision sessions and unannounced visits for the next 12 months. This will hopefully enable the Service to meet this standard.

Examination of young people's files showed that they were not always up to date, minutes of crucial meetings were not always on file. At the last inspection a requirement was made that each young person has a separate and confidential file, which only contains information regarding that young person. However, with regards to 4 unrelated young people the same documents regarding their background and issues regarding the need for a foster care placement were seen on all 4 files. In respect of one of these young people the statutory review referred to another young person.

As stated throughout the report, the Fostering Service still does not use the Foster Placement Agreement as required by the Fostering Services Regulations, consequently crucial information is not gathered.

Improvements to the Foster Carers' register now make this a useful document, which is compliant with the Regulations. Nonetheless, inspectors found that the register of young people is not compliant with the regulations. It does not include the date of the placement, the legal status under which the young person is placed, the address prior to placement and the address they are discharged to or the date they left the placement. Inspectors found considerable difficulty in confirming the dates of a number of placements, with different dates being recorded on the foster carers file, the young person's file and a different date being recorded on the computer. In some cases it would be extremely difficult for a young person to gain accurate information regarding their time with their foster carer.

Examination of records of support for foster carers who are family and friends foster carers confirmed that the Fostering Service does not provide adequate support to these foster carers. Family and friends foster carers do not receive supervision nor are they reviewed on an annual basis as required by the Regulations. Whilst such carers can access training with other foster carers, this is rarely taken up. Experience of support offered in other agencies indicates that such carers would benefit from dedicated training and support. Family and friends carers may also benefit from copies of the Handbook for Family and Friends Carers produced by the Fostering Network, since very few have attended preparation training. Most family and friends foster carers are not able to access the payment for skills scheme, even though many of these placements are complex and require considerable skill from carers to meet the young people's needs and to keep them safe.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	2
8	1
9	2
15	2
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	2
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	2
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	X
2	X
4	3
5	3
16	3
17	2
18	X
19	3
20	X
21	2
22	2
23	X
24	2
25	2
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	1

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? YES

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS6	12(1)(a)	The Nominated Manager must ensure that where a child has been abused or has abused another child, a recorded risk assessment is carried out before any decision is made to allow sharing of bedrooms. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.	20/04/06
2.	FS8	34 (3) Sch 6	The Fostering Service must ensure that before making a placement, a written agreement is drawn up (foster placement agreement), which covers all matters specified in Schedule 6. This must include specific reference to elements of matching. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.	20/05/06
3.	FS30	CA1989Sched 7(4)(2)	The Nominated Manager must ensure that where an exemption from the usual fostering limit is granted the requirements of Schedule 7 are fulfilled. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	20/04/06
4.	FS8	17(3)	The Fostering Service must	20/04/06

			ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed.	
5.	FS8	33(b)	The Fostering Service must ensure that carers are formally and legally approved for the placements of the number, gender and ages of the children actually placed with them.	20/05/06
6.	FS9	12	The Fostering Service must ensure that the safe caring policy is updated to meet the expectations of Standard 9 and that safe caring guidelines are drawn up for each foster home, agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child. These guidelines must be reviewed regularly. Timescale of 01/10/04 not met	20/05/06
7.	FS15	20 (1) Sch1	The Nominated Manager must ensure that two written references are obtained for all appointments to the fostering service, and followed up by telephone, before the commencement of employment. Timescale of 01.05.05 not met.	20/04/06
8.	FS15	20 (3) Sch 1	The Registered Person must ensure that a new CRB check is undertaken were there are inaccuracies in the initial check.	20/04/06
9.	FS15	20 (1) Sch1	The Nominated Manager must ensure that CRB checks are destroyed once viewed by CSCI. A record of the date, type of check, etc should be placed on the individuals file. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.	20/05/06

10.	FS15	20 (1) Sch1	The Nominated Manager must ensure that gaps in employment are explored and recorded on file.	20/04/06
11.	FS30	28 (4)	The Nominated Manager must ensure that the policy regarding action to be taken when Panel are unable to reach a joint decision is revised to ensure that it is clear as to the action to be taken rather than putting the onus on the chair.	20/06/06
12.	FS30	38	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all legislation and paper work refers to the correct legislation.	20/05/06
13.	FS30	27	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all approvals are made as required by Regulation 27 and Schedule 3 and ensure that foster carers are not approved on an interim basis.	20/04/06
14.	FS13	16 (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that any education it provides for any young person is efficient and suitable to the young person's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs he may have.	20/06/06
15.	FS13	34 (3) Sched 6	The Nominated Manager must ensure that the Foster Placement Agreement clarifies where the financial responsibility lies for all school cost.	20/05/06
16.	FS7	33	The fostering service must recruit carers able to meet the range of needs of children looked after by Shropshire County Council, particularly in relation to ethnicity and disability. Timescale of 03/12/04 not met.	20/06/06
17.	FS10	14	The Nominated Manager must	20/05/06

			ensure that risk assessments are made prior to commencement of contact and retained on files of both the young person and the foster carers. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	
18.	FS14	17	There must be clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	20/05/06
19.	FS17	19	The Nominated Manager must keep under review the adequacy of staffing levels within The Fostering Service.	20/06/06
20.	FS17	33	The Fostering Service must ensure that it has sufficient foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs.	20/06/06
21.	FS21	29 (2)	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all foster home reviews are brought up to date, and are systematically maintained at the minimum required frequency in the future. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.	20/05/06
22.	FS22	28	The Fostering Service must issue to all carers a written foster care agreement covering all matters specified in Schedule 5. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	20/04/06
23.	FS22	28 (5)	The Nominated Manager must ensure that when a foster carer is approved they enter into a Foster Care Agreement with the Fostering Service.	20/04/06

24.	FS22	19	The Nominated Manager must ensure consistency in the way in which complaints against foster carers are investigated and recorded. Timescale of 01.05.05 not met	20/04/06
25.	FS24	40	The Nominated Manager must ensure that each young person has a separate and confidential file, which only contains information regarding that child. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met.	20/04/06
26.	FS25	22	The Nominated Manager must ensure that a register is kept of all young people placed with foster carers which is compliant with Regulation 22 and Schedule 2	20/04/06
27.	FS32	17	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all friends and family foster carers receive regular supervision and are reviewed on an annual basis.	20/05/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS12	The Nominated Manager should ensure that a young person's Health Plan is consistently used, and that it is filed in a clear and accessible section of the child's and the fostering file.
2.	FS12	The Nominated Manager should consider the use of Health Consents Cards, which would be more comprehensive, appropriate and convenient than relying on the LAC paperwork.
3.	FS12	The Nominated Manager should ensure that consent for medical treatment is delegated to foster carers where this is appropriate.

4.	FS8	The Nominated Manager should ensure that young people and placing social worker receive a copy of carer's profile as part of the introduction process.
5.	FS4FS4 FS9	The Nominated Manager should ensure that all significant events as identified in Schedule 8 are notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
6.	FS9	The Fostering Service should ensure that all foster carers are aware of the written guidance to follow if a child is absent from a foster home without permission.
7.	FS13	The Nominated Manager should compile information regarding young people placed with carers who are not receiving full-time education.
8.	FS13	The Nominated Manager should ensure that all young people who are not in full-time education are offered structured occupation.
9.	FS14	The Nominated Manager should ensure that young people are encouraged to actively partake in the preparation and review of their Pathway Plan.
10.	FS1	A simpler version of the Children's Guide should be produced to meet the needs of younger/less able children.
11.	FS21	The Nominated Manager should ensure that the manager supervising Children's Placement Services social workers is kept up to date as to which foster carers are to be reviewed and the outcome of the review.
12.	FS22	The Nominated Manager should ensure that the outcomes of all complaints investigations are clearly recorded.
13.	FS22	The Nominated Manager should ensure that written records of unannounced visits are kept.
14.	FS32	The fostering service should consider giving family and friends carers access to Payment for Skills on the same basis as other carers, thereby providing equality of opportunity, and an incentive for these carers to train and develop their skills.

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