



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services

Progress House

Clifton Road

Blackpool

Lancashire

FY4 4US

3 March 2005

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

Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services

Address

Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool, Lancashire,
FY4 4US

Local Authority Manager

Claire Samuels

Tel No:

01253 477526

Address

Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool, Lancashire,
FY4 4US

Fax No:

Email Address

dir.soc.services@blackpool.gov
.uk

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

March
2004

| | | | |
|--|----------|--------------------|----------------|
| Date of Inspection Visit | | 28th February 2005 | ID Code |
| Time of Inspection Visit | | 09:30 am | |
| Name of Inspector | 1 | Jayne Ivory | 098916 |
| Name of Inspector | 2 | Yvonne McGuckian | |
| Name of Inspector | 3 | | |
| Name of Inspector | 4 | | |
| 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. | | None available | |
| Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable) | | Not required | |
| Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection | | Claire Samuels | |

Introduction to Report and Inspection
Inspection visits
Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings
Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings
(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

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 Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services. 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)

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.

Blackpool Borough Council is a unitary authority, which provides the full range of fostering services to Looked After Children. These include:

- Long Term Placements
- Short Term placements
- Emergency placements
- Bridging placements
- Crisis Intervention for Teenagers
- Short break placements
- Preparation for Independence
- Parent and child placements

The aim of the service is to provide safe and secure foster care for children.

The service had 98 carers at the time of the inspection, with 172 children in placement. This figure has remained fairly constant from February 2004 to February 2005.

Foster carers are located mainly in the Blackpool area, however some carers live on the outskirts of Blackpool.

The service places a high percentage of Looked After Children in foster placements.

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 Fostering Inspection confirmed that Blackpool Borough Council has a service, which has been proactive in developing services and systems to meet and in some places exceed National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspectors acknowledge that the service has invested a great deal of time and effort into working towards meeting National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspection in March 2005 noted continued significant improvement in some areas and the challenge of addressing some of the requirements and recommendations from last year's inspection. Of most concern was the difficulty the service seemed to have in evidencing and understanding compliance with the safe recruitment of staff working in the fostering service.

The inspectors were impressed by the improvement of some key aspects of the service and wish to commend some of the social work and family placement support workers for the work undertaken in the last twelve months. Of particular note was the Training and Recruitment Report prepared by Kathryn Folkes. David Innes' consultation with carers for children with disabilities, Laura Carr's lead role in rewriting the guidance to staff and foster carers. Prith Shori's role as lead person for the family and friend carer support group and Selena Martin, Kirsty Fisher and Claire McMahon's role for facilitating the support group for carers caring for teenagers.

Blackpool Borough Council is a unitary authority, which provides the full range of fostering services to look after children.

This inspection is the third under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the first inspection under the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The focus of the inspection, which took place between February and March 2005, was to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements and good practice recommendations from the last inspection in March 2004.

The Inspectors were pleased to see the policies and procedures, which had been implemented to enhance the service concerning the matching of children with foster carers continuing to impact positively on the fostering service.

Statement of Purpose

This standard was assessed as being met.

The service had a comprehensive Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide which meets National Minimum Standards. The service has enhanced the Children's Guide, which is now, attractive and child centred. The Council reviews the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide annually.

Management of The Fostering Service

There were four standards assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the four standards, three were assessed as met, one was assessed as not met.

The Inspector found that the Family Placement Team Manager was well regarded by her staff and by carers, who considered that she offered a responsive style of management. The Family Placement Team manager felt supported by her line manager who had recently been appointed as the Service Manager.

Issues concerning the recruitment and selection of staff were identified during the inspection and must be addressed to ensure compliance with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

There were nine standards assessed as part of this inspection. Of the nine standards four were met, three were nearly met and two were not met.

The Family Placement Team offered supervision of carers, who unanimously confirmed that they preferred this way of working.

The service should be commended for this, however there were concerns from staff, carers and children about the capacity of the service to offer meaningful placement choice particularly for older children and children with a disability.

The manager confirmed that a child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs are addressed in preparation and training for all carers.

Foster carers confirmed in case tracking and during group discussions that they were advised about anti-discriminatory practice and how to support a child to deal with discrimination. The service has developed a matching form that requires the family placement social worker to get all the necessary information about the child for the foster carers before the child is placed. Training for Foster Carers includes training in caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse and ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem.

Management Information systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in the service. However the inspection found evidence from file reading and case tracking that not all complaints and allegations had been recorded thoroughly on Incident Sheets. The inspectors recommend that the service must develop tighter systems to monitor the effective recording of complaints, incidents and allegations and should consider the development of chronologies at the beginning of each foster carers file.

There are clear procedures in place setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

The Fostering Service needs to ensure that the opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted. The issue of the lack of consultation and involvement in the development of the fostering service was also expressed by a number of children in their questionnaires.

It is recommended that the service review their current consultation with children and young people, and develop more effective ways of involving them in the development of the fostering service.

The Fostering Service does make clear to the carer their role in promoting the health needs of any child in their care. Evidence for this could be found in case tracking. All children involved in case tracking were registered with a GP and Dentist. However the Commission requires an Action Plan that outlines how the Fostering Service develops and maintains good links with health agencies, with special reference to the Child and Adolescent Mental

Health Service in the area, and helps carers to secure services for children when necessary.

The Fostering Service does give high priority to helping their foster carers to meet a child's educational needs. The Fostering Service had developed a jointly funded team with the education department to ensure that the fostering service can support carers to meet the educational needs of children.

The Fostering Service had developed a system in partnership with education to gather information that demonstrated the educational attainment of the children and young people in foster care.

It was also apparent that a number of young people who are reviewed by the children causing concern forum are still not receiving adequate education if they are excluded from mainstream education. It was encouraging to hear of the high profile this issue has with senior managers of the service. However additional resources in addition to the virtual school, and the looked after teaching team need to be made available for this very vulnerable group of children and young people if their educational achievements are to be enhanced.

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

All nine standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the nine standards four were met, four were nearly met and one was not met.

The service had good assessment practices for carers, and had developed a CRB renewal tracking system in line with National Minimum Standards.

The Team offered Out of Hours support services for carers, but had recognised that this should be enhanced when the team manager was absent. The team also operated a duty system and enjoyed positive working relationships with their colleagues in the child-care teams.

The service had developed services for the children of foster carers after a consultation with foster carers at the Fostering Forum. The first group was planned for March 2005.

Carers and staff were generally very positive about the training they received.

Issues concerning the recruitment and selection of staff need to be addressed and are cross-referenced in this report to standard 3.

As has already been discussed the service had developed a number of support groups for foster carers over the last twelve months.

Records

There were two standards assessed as part of this inspection. Both standards were assessed as nearly met.

The fostering service's administrative records contained all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service. However the inspection found evidence from case tracking and file reading that records and foster carer files were not of a consistent standard. One file seen did not clearly record all of the outcomes of a complaint and did not refer to strategy meetings that had taken place concerning children.

The fostering service should develop a system to monitor the quality of records more effectively, and to ensure remedial action is taken where necessary.

Foster carers had access to some training in direct work with children however the service continues to recognise the need to offer more training in life story work with children and young people in foster care.

Fitness of Premises

This standard was assessed as met.

The Fostering Service is located in the large open plan office of Blackpool Borough Council and is fit for purpose.

Financial Requirements

One standard was not assessed, one standard was assessed as met.

Financial processes and systems are subject to internal audits and oversight by the Chief Executive, Senior Officers and Council Members. Budgets are reviewed regularly and as such are assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards.

Fostering Panels

This standard was assessed as nearly met.

The Fostering Panel has been developed to ensure compliance with Fostering Service Regulations and all efforts are being made to ensure the Fostering Panel offers an enhanced service by the inclusion of a young person with experience of being looked after in foster care and by Blackpool Borough Council seeking to employ an Independent Fostering Panel Chairperson.

Short Term Breaks

This standard was assessed as met.

The difficulty in recruiting carers for the Family Link scheme was a continuing cause for concern during the Inspection. However the service has invested more resources in this part of the fostering service and had had some success in recruiting new carers. The fostering service recognised that there was still more to do, but was continuing to work hard at developing the service.

Family and Friends Carers

This standard was assessed as exceeding National Minimum Standards.

The Family Placement Team had amended existing policies and procedures and implemented working practices, which ensured that emergency placements of children with friends or relatives met Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards. In addition to this the service has developed a support group within existing staffing resources for friend and family carers. This development is commendable and should be maintained to provide for the continued support of friend and family carers.

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:

NO

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:

Section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000 has been repealed.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

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 Jayne Ivory **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager Dorothy Smith **Signature** _____
Date _____

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 | 7.2 (c) 20.3 (d) | FS15FS3 | The fostering service must not employ a person to work for the service without ensuring full and satisfactory information is available on them with regard to Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. | 30.5.05 |
| 2 | 12.2(d) | FS9 | The service must develop tighter systems to monitor the effective recording of complaints, incidents and allegations. | 30.5.05 |
| 3 | 12.1 | FS9 | The fostering services policies and procedures concerning the protection of children in public care should be updated to reflect current practice in the investigation of allegations against foster carers. | 30.5.05 |
| 4 | 15.2 (b) | FS12 | The Fostering Service must develop and maintain increased access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in the area to support the psychological and psychiatric needs of children and young people in foster care. | 30.9.05 |

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 | FS7 | The fostering service should develop a recruitment strategy which attracts foster carers for older children and children with a disability. |
| 2 | FS11 | The fostering service should ensure that the opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted. |
| 3 | FS13 | The fostering service does give a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child and young person in foster care but additional resources are required for children and young people who are excluded or suspended from mainstream education if each child or young person is to achieve their full potential. |
| 4 | FS16 | The fostering service should ensure that all staff, including sessional and agency staff have written contracts, accurate job descriptions and conditions of service. |
| 5 | FS18 | The service should offer equitable salaries across children's services according to the training, experience and competence of staff if they are to be regarded as a fair and competent employer. |
| 6 | FS18 | The fostering service should develop and implement enhanced Out of Hours support arrangements in the manager's absence. |
| 7 | FS19 | Post approval training programmes for carers reflect the policies of the Fostering Service but should be enhanced to ensure that foster carers have mandatory training, which is updated on a regular basis, in Child Protection. |
| 8 | FS22 | The Foster Care Procedures contain information about how to deal with investigations into allegations, however these should be updated to reflect the current child protection policies and procedures. |
| 9 | FS24 | The fostering service should provide foster carers with additional training in life story work for all children in foster care. |
| 10 | FS25 | The fostering service should develop a system to monitor the quality of records more effectively, and to ensure remedial action is taken where necessary. |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 11 | FS30 | The inspectors support the fostering services intentions to recruit an Independent Chairperson for the Fostering Panel. |
|----|------|---|

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g 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 | 8 |
| Survey of placing authorities | YES |
| Foster carer survey | YES |
| Foster children survey | YES |
| Checks with other organisations and Individuals | YES |
| • Directors of Social services | YES |
| • Child protection officer | YES |
| • Specialist advisor (s) | YES |
| • Local Foster Care Association | YES |
| Tracking Individual welfare arrangements | YES |
| • Interview with children | NO |
| • 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 | NO |
| Observation of foster panel | NO |
| Inspection of policy/practice documents | YES |
| Inspection of records | YES |
| Interview with individual child | NA |
| Date of Inspection | 03/03/05 |
| Time of Inspection | 9.30 |
| Duration Of Inspection (hrs) | 57 |

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?

3

The service had a comprehensive Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide which meets National Minimum Standards. The service has and enhanced the Children's Guide, which is attractive and child centred. The Council review the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide on an annual basis, in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspection team consider that access by stakeholders to the Children's Guide and Statement of Purpose could be enhanced by the use of Information Technology.

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

The Family Placement Team Manager has a social work qualification and has successfully completed an NVQ level 4 in management. The manager has 16 years experience of working with children as a childcare social worker. She has been employed as a Team Manager for 4 years.

Staff in the team confirmed in their group interviews that the Family Placement Team Manager provided effective leadership of the staff and operations. This was a view that was shared by many foster carers who advised us that the manager could be relied upon to do her best and respond to any of their questions or problems as quickly as possible.

The inspection found that the fostering service had appointed a permanent Service Manager who had taken up the role of strategic management and service development. Plans to recruit a group manager for the fostering service had been amended in light of a departmental restructuring and the development of an integrated service for children with the education department.

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?

1

The responsibility for the recruitment of staff into the service has transferred to an integrated children's services Human Resources Department.

Examination of staff files highlighted the continuing failure of the fostering service to comply with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Service Regulations 2002 concerning safe recruitment practice.

The fostering service must put in place systems to evidence compliance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

This standard is also cross-referenced to Standard 15.

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?

3

There was evidence that the Manager of the Family Placement Team had clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the Fostering Service and ensuring quality performance. The Manager had introduced a number of monitoring mechanisms, including the development of a pro forma visit form which was completed by the Family Placement Social Worker and counter signed by the Manager in supervision. The Manager and Social Workers advised that they continued to find this tool helpful. The case files of carers also demonstrated that the forms were used to track support provided and any changes in placements and Foster Parents circumstances.

The Team Manager also made use of monthly management information.

The Service and Team Manager when interviewed confirmed that there were clear roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability within the service as a whole.

The service has a budget of £1,812,100.00 with a projected spend to the end of the current financial year of £1,703,113.04 The budget for the service is reviewed by the Senior Management of Children's Services.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

1

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

2

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

There was evidence that the Fostering Service was managed effectively and efficiently within available resources. The Service Manager and Family Placement Team Manager were clear about their duties and responsibilities within the service. A group discussion with social workers from the Family Placement Team confirmed that the service was being managed effectively.

The Team Manager delegates to the Senior Family Placement Social Worker. The development of a senior post was implemented in light of last year's inspection report. The Senior offers specific guidance to carers and colleagues in the Family Placement Team in the Manager's absence.

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? |
|---------------------------|---------------|
|---------------------------|---------------|

The Fostering Service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment in the majority of cases.

Case Tracking interviews with staff and carers and case records confirmed that foster homes were inspected annually against a standard Health and Safety Checklist. All the homes visited as part of case tracking were warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The standard Health and Safety Checklist is also used as a tool by the supervising social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer to ensure that the home and immediate environment were free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm. The checklist also itemises the need for safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age and understanding.

There was also evidence from case files sampled that the service had taken action in the past when standards within a foster parents home had become unacceptable.

Each child placed had their own bed and wherever possible the accommodation arrangements reflected the child's assessed needs for privacy and space.

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

Blackpool Borough Council's difficulties in ensuring placement choice reflect the wider national issues in fostering.

Developments in the service over the last year have ensured that the issue of placement choice is not as challenging as it was.

The service had recognised the need to recruit carers for older children, and children with a disability. However despite extensive advertising the response for recruiting for these children and young people had not been great. The need to recruit more carers for teenagers and children with a disability will continue to form one of the main challenges for the service over the next twelve months.

There was evidence that social workers within the Family Placement Team and carers did work co-operatively to enhance the child's confidence and feeling of self-worth.

Carers and staff continue to be able to access the same post qualifying/ post approval training which covers some of the following areas:

- Confident communication
- Ethnicity awareness
- Domestic violence and it's impact on children and families
- Direct work
- Human development.

The manager, foster carers and staff confirmed that a child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs are addressed in preparation and training for all carers.

Foster carers confirmed in case tracking and during group discussions that they were advised about anti-discriminatory practice and how to support a child to deal with discrimination.

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?

3

There was evidence that the Family Placement Team had made considerable efforts to ensure effective matching within the services existing resources.

The service has developed a matching form that requires the family placement social worker to get all the necessary information about the child for the foster carers before the child is placed. The family placement social worker then checks that the child care social worker has provided all the necessary information for the carers by making a telephone call later that day or the next day. The family placement duty worker then takes responsibility for ensuring that the carers have been provided with all the necessary Looked After Child documentation, and any other relevant information to safeguard the welfare of the child. Outstanding information is then "chased-up" with the relevant childcare social worker or team manager. This simple system was developed last year and has been implemented throughout the service. There was substantial evidence that although there can still be difficulties getting information for carers about children who are placed in an emergency or by the out of hours team, that the family placement teams matching policy and procedure was having a positive impact on carers and children placed in foster care. The service and staff should be commended for implementing this policy and procedure so effectively.

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?**

1

Training for Foster Carers includes training in caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse and ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem.

Safe caring guidelines are provided, based on a written policy contained within the Foster Care Procedures. These guidelines need to be produced for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household.

The Foster Care Agreement and procedures makes clear that corporal punishment is not allowed. The Foster Care Agreement and Foster Care Procedures have now been amended to define corporal punishment and to include slapping, shaking and other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment as unacceptable.

Management Information systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in the service. However the inspection found evidence from file reading and case tracking that not all complaints and allegations had been recorded thoroughly on Incident Sheets. The inspectors recommend that the service must develop tighter systems to monitor the effective recording of complaints, incidents and allegations and should consider the development of chronologies at the beginning of each foster carers file.

The information is scrutinised monthly by the Family Placement Team Manager. The Fostering Service has provided foster carers with information about bullying in the form of a letter. Foster carers reported in case tracking and group discussions that they were aware of the issues of bullying. Additional training has been provided for foster carers on these matters.

The service had developed a procedure for responding, recording and monitoring any incidents of bullying for a Looked After Child.

The policies and procedures concerning the protection of children in public care should be updated to reflect current practice. In addition to this the fostering service must ensure that records of incidents, allegations and complaints are recorded and updated accurately on foster carers files.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

0

%

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?**

3

There are clear procedures in place setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

All children are subject to the Looked After Child review system, which ensures that contact issues are considered and reviewed on a regular basis.

The Fostering Service does consider the need for and benefits of appropriate contact for the child when identifying a placement. However the limits of placement choice/type can sometimes mean that children are placed further away from family and friends than the service would ideally like. If this is the case attention is paid to supporting contact where the child is placed out of the area.

There was evidence in some case files to support that the views of the child or young person are sought regarding their contact and given some weight in Statutory Reviews when determining contact arrangements.

There was evidence in the assessment of foster carers that the significance of maintaining appropriate contact is addressed. The service ensures that the issue of contact is risk assessed by the child's social worker as part of the emergency placement form, and that any arrangements for supervision have been planned as part of the placement.

It was very clear from interviews with staff within the Team that they considered that it was a priority to help and support carers in dealing with difficult contact issues. The Foster Care Procedures and Foster Placement Agreements, when complete, clearly outline the expectations of the foster carer with regard to contact.

Financial support is provided to carers for transport or other costs.

Foster carers are informed that they have to keep a record of the outcomes of contact and their perceived impact on the child. Foster carers advised in case tracking that this information is fed back to the child's social worker through informal discussion, e mail and involvement in the reviewing process.

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?****2**

The Fostering Service ensures that all foster carers understand the importance of listening to the views of children in their care. Foster Carers have been offered specific training in confident communication and advocacy.

The Fostering Service needs to ensure that the opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted. The issue of the lack of consultation and involvement in the development of the fostering service was also expressed by a number of children in their questionnaires.

This good practice recommendation is outstanding from last years report and action plan.

The service were disappointed to note that children and young people had still not considered that they had been consulted despite some efforts to do so throughout 2004-2005. It is recommended that the service review their current consultation with children and young people, and develop more effective ways of involving them in the development of the fostering service.

The service should develop formal and informal consultation with children either directly or with the assistance of a local Child Advocacy/Children's Rights organisation. This form of consultation is in addition to the consultation that takes place as part of the reviewing process.

The service should also develop suitable means for any child with communication difficulties to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment.

The Children's Guide ensures that children in foster care know how to raise any concerns or complain and that their complaints receive prompt feedback on any issues raised.

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

Foster Carers were provided with written health records when Looked After Child documentation had been completed by the child's social worker. The foster carers advised that their experience of receiving the necessary information was mixed. Some social workers were very good at forwarding the information whilst some were less so. The Inspectors found that this view could be supported by examining case records and through discussions with some Fostering Services staff.

Blackpool Borough Council has a general access to files policy, which meets the Standard and Regulations.

The service provided basic training on health and hygiene issues and first aid.

The Fostering Service does make clear to the carer their role in promoting the health needs of any child in their care. Evidence for this could be found in case tracking. All children involved in case tracking were registered with a GP and Dentist. All statutory and health promotion appointments were monitored by the Looked After Child Reviewing Officers and by the Children's Commissioning Officer. Some Foster Carers were very clearly acting as advocates for the children that were placed with them.

The Commission requires an Action Plan that outlines how the Fostering Service develops and maintains good links with health agencies, with special reference to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in the area, and helps carers to secure services for children when necessary.

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?

2

The Fostering Service does give high priority to helping their foster carers to meet a child's educational needs. The Fostering Service had developed a jointly funded team with the education department to ensure that the fostering service can support carers to meet the educational needs of children.

The Fostering Service specifically requires foster carers to contribute to the assessment of a child's educational needs through the planning and review process. Foster Care Procedures require the foster carer to keep a diary for each child placed.

Case tracking provided evidence of the how foster carers were facilitated to contribute to the delivery of any personal education plan. Interviews with children in foster care gave examples of the efforts most foster carers went to, to support each child's educational achievement. A large number of children told us in their questionnaires that they were very proud of their educational attainment and received a lot of help to do their school work from their carers.

The Fostering Service had developed a system in partnership with education to gather information that demonstrated the educational attainment of the children and young people in foster care.

The Fostering Service had developed services in response to the National Care Standards Commission's inspection, which promoted the educational achievement of all children. The appointment of a designated teacher for looked after children, the increasingly close working relationships between the Child in Public Care Co-ordinator and the fostering service were all positive developments. The jointly funded posts had been developed last year. There was some evidence during the inspection that the teacher for looked after children and the continued success of the SHARE project had brought some benefits to children looked after in foster care. It was also apparent that a number of young people who are reviewed by the children causing concern forum are still not receiving adequate education if they are excluded from mainstream education. It was encouraging to hear of the high profile this issue has with senior managers of the service. However additional resources in addition to the virtual school, and the looked after teaching team need to be made available for this very vulnerable group of children and young people if their educational achievements are to be enhanced.

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?

3

The Fostering Service has close working relationships with the After Care Team.

Children placed in foster care are supported by their After Care Worker who helps them to complete a Pathway Plan and Blackpool Independent Training Pack.

Case Tracking provided positive examples of where a young person had been consulted about moving on to independent or semi-independent living.

The Fostering Service does provide training and support to enable foster carers to help a young person to move into semi-independent or independent living.

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?

1

There are written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff.

The Fostering Service has employed two part time unqualified Foster Carer Support Officers. Both staff members are supervised by the Senior Practitioner in the team.

All staff have access to post qualifying training and have experience of family placement work and are trained in assessments.

The commission requires the Fostering Service to develop an Action Plan that ensures that Blackpool Borough Council's recruitment and selection procedures comply with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and National Minimum Standards for all newly appointed staff. In addition to this the internal appointment of staff, or promotion should also be undertaken in accordance with Blackpool Borough Council's own recruitment and selection procedures.

This standard is cross-referenced to Standard 3.

Total number of staff of the agency:

9

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

1

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

The service has a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. At the time of the inspection it was clear that staff within the service were managed and monitored by people who have the appropriate skills and qualifications.

The inspection team recommend that the service should review the senior manager with the responsibility for being the fostering services nominated responsible individual. The existing responsible individual has been promoted into a different role, and although still interested in the development of the service does not have direct line management responsibility for the team manager. It may be more appropriate for the service to nominate the current service manager for the fostering service.

Staff confirmed that the service and their manager had systems in place to ensure an equitable and manageable workload. The Family Placement Team had a weekly allocations meeting, staff were also supported and their work monitored by monthly individual supervision sessions.

The service had a limited, but increased use of agency placements.

The quality of the care provided to the child in these placements is monitored by the Looked After Child Reviewing Officers. The Children's Commissioning Officer also monitors agency placements more specifically with regard to contracts.

Staff and carers undertake ongoing training and appropriate professional and skills development. The Fostering Service has adequate administrative back up, and office equipment.

The service should ensure that all staff, including sessional and agency staff have written contracts, accurate job descriptions and conditions of service.

It was clear that the social workers within the Family Placement Team had an understanding about how the Fostering Service social workers and the children's social workers work effectively together.

Staff confirmed that they have access to all policies and procedures including policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters.

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----------|
| 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 |
| <p>The previous Service Manager had put in a successful growth bid for more staff to enhance the service capacity to recruit and train carers and to offer additional support to foster carers. Two experienced unqualified staff had been appointed into the team and the post of Senior Practitioner had been created since the last inspection in March 2004.</p> <p>Staffing policies did encourage retention of staff, including training, supervision, flexible working schemes, study leave and clear workloads. The Fostering Service also provided support, training and services to carers.</p> <p>The Fostering Service does have a recruitment policy and strategy for carers, which has been more specifically focused by the service manager to meet National Minimum Standards.</p> <p>The Fostering Service uses the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guidelines contained in the standard Form F to define the assessment process.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|----------------------|----------|
| 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? | 2 |
| <p>Staff confirmed in their group interview that they had become increasingly concerned about the lack of equality with regards to pay that existed between the child care social work teams and themselves.</p> <p>The service should offer equitable salaries across children's services according to the training, experience and competence of staff if they are to be regarded as a fair and competent employer.</p> <p>An out of hour's service to support foster carers was operational, but relied solely upon the Team Manager to offer support and advice. The need to enhance Out of Hours support arrangements in the manager's absence should be addressed as part of the services action plan.</p> <p>There are very clear management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff.</p> <p>The Fostering Service has corporate membership of the fostering network.</p> <p>The service has developed a post to offer independent support when a carer has had allegations made against them would benefit from further consideration by the service.</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----------|
| 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 |
| <p>The Fostering Service has a clear plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work through induction, post-qualifying and in-service training. Staff have individual induction programmes and can access post-qualifying and in-service training. Employees are kept informed of changes in any legislation through Team Development Days and monthly Team Meetings.</p> <p>Blackpool Borough Council has developed and is in the process of implementing a staff appraisal scheme as part of supervision.</p> <p>Training needs of individual workers are addressed in monthly supervision.</p> <p>Post approval training programmes for carers reflect the policies of the Fostering Service but should be enhanced to ensure that foster carers have mandatory training, which is updated on a regular basis, in Child Protection.</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|----------|
| Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) | | |
| All staff are properly accountable and supported. | | |
| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 3 |
| <p>Staff confirmed in group discussions that they are well supported and properly accountable to the Family Placement Team Manager. The Manager confirmed that she had monthly supervision with the Service Manager.</p> <p>The Manager offered regular supervision and a record of the content of the supervision is made.</p> <p>The Manager and the team as a whole should be commended for their joint commitment to attending and contributing to weekly allocation meetings and a monthly general business meeting. In addition to this the Team have two development days each year.</p> <p>The Family Placement administrator is now included in the monthly general business meetings and Team Development days.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|----------------------|----------|
| 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? | 3 |
| <p>The Fostering Service has a clear strategy for working with carers that is documented in the Foster Care Agreement, Foster Care Procedures, Statement of Purpose and Staff and Foster Carer Guidance Handbook.</p> <p>The Fostering Service has developed a clearer policy on respite care for foster carers. The service should be commended for ensuring that staff and carers were very clear about the role of the supervising social worker.</p> <p>Social workers in the child care teams and family placement team confirmed that there is a good system of communication between them, which is facilitated in part by the daily Duty Officer in the Family Placement Team.</p> | | |

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

As has been previously stated this Fostering Service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Foster Care Agreements have been amended to meet National Minimum Standards, and include all the information listed in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, however the agreement should refer more specifically to the range of mandatory training that the foster carer must attend to maintain their approved status.

Foster carer records demonstrated that social workers visited regularly and had a clear supervisory purpose to their visit. This practice has been supported by the development of the pro-forma visit tool. Staff, foster carers and the manager confirmed that occasional unannounced visits took place. There is a system of practical support for carers, and the service had recognised the need to improve support services to carers with the development of a range of specialist support groups which are referred to in the summary of this report.

All Foster Carers were pleased with the way they were provided with essential child care equipment, for example, child car seats, cots and new mattresses.

All Foster Carers were positive about the service they received from the Boarding Out Section.

Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and representations is widely available. Complaints are recorded and monitored by the Manager and the outcome evaluated to inform future provision of services.

The Team had also developed contact cards for children to provide them with other opportunities to get help or advice from the team and other independent organisations, including Childline and Blackpool Advocacy.

The Foster Care Procedures contain information about how to deal with investigations into allegations, however these should be updated to reflect the current child protection policies and procedures.

Blackpool Borough Council has corporate membership of the Fostering Network, which can provide support to foster carers associations, access to legal advice and insurance cover.

The Manager was exploring the possibility of purchasing individual membership of the Fostering Network for each foster carer in order to enhance the level of support available.

The Manager keeps records about allegations of abuse. Blackpool Area Child Protection Committee's Child Protection Policies and Procedures and the Foster Care Procedures outline the circumstances in which carers should be removed from the foster carer register.

However as has previously been stated the Foster Care Procedures should be updated to reflect current policy and practice guidance concerning the investigation of allegations of abuse made by a child in foster care.

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

Pre-approval and induction training for each carer involves opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers.

All training fits within the wider framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

Foster carers training addressed the need for safe caring. Applicants are asked to develop their own safe caring plan for the family. The Team had attended specialist training in September 2003 concerning good practice in safe caring.

The Fostering Service have developed services after consultation with foster carers, which give specific consideration to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers. Two social workers will offer the first session to children of foster carers in March 2005 and the aim of the service is to offer three to four sessions for foster carers children every year.

The service had completed an annual audit of the effectiveness of training received by both staff and carers.

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? | 2 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|
|---------------------------|---------------|---|

The Fostering Service has access to Blackpool Borough Council's general written policy on case recording.

Looked After Child consultation and reviews ensure that foster carers know why the child is in foster care. The need for completed and up to date Looked After Child documentation is paramount for the foster carer and the welfare of the child. As has been referred to in earlier sections of this report the Family Placement Team had developed a robust system for ensuring that essential information is provided promptly by the child care social worker. Foster carers had access to some training in direct work with children however the service continues to recognise the need to offer more training in life story work. Foster carers are also encouraged to take photographs of the child and to keep other appropriate memorabilia. The Fostering Service ensures that carers store information in a secure manner and understand what information they are expected to keep and to pass on.

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?**

2

The Fostering Service has administrative systems and records, which contain all significant information. Separate records are kept by the Manager and were supplied to the Inspectors for the following;

- All staff
- Carers
- Children
- Complaints
- Allegations

The inspection found evidence from case tracking and file reading that records and foster carer files were not of a consistent standard. One file seen did not clearly record all of the outcomes of a complaint and did not refer to strategy meetings that had taken place concerning children.

The fostering service should develop a system to monitor the quality of records more effectively, and to ensure remedial action is taken where necessary.

The Manager samples case files as part of her supervision.

Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear policy on access.

There is a permanent, private and secure record for each child and foster carer referred to or appointed by the organisation, which can be seen by the child or their parents or foster carers.

There is a clear policy and procedural guidance for staff on keeping and retention of files.

Foster carers, fostered children and their parents have access to their files through the Access to Files policy and procedure.

| | | | |
|---|-----|------------------|-----|
| Number of current foster placements supported by the agency: | | | 172 |
| Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months: | | | 86 |
| Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months: | | | 120 |
| Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months: | | | 12 |
| Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months: | | | 10 |
| Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £ | 164 | Maximum £ | 255 |

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?

3

The premises used as offices by the Fostering Service are appropriate for the purpose
There are efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. The office has:

- Facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room within the large open plan layout of Progress House
- Appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems
- An appropriate security system

The premises provided an equipped base from which staff work.

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?

0

This standard was not assessed as part of this inspection.

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?

3

Blackpool Borough Council makes available sufficient funds to support the existing fostering service.

Financial processes and systems are subject to internal audits and oversight by the Chief Executive, Senior Officers and Council Members.

Budgets are reviewed regularly and as such are assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards.

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

Foster carers advised that in the majority of cases they received prompt payment. Foster carers confirmed that they received clear guidelines about the allowances and expenses payable from the service.

The Manager and foster carers confirmed that allowances were reviewed annually.

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?

2

The Fostering Panel have written policies and procedures, which have been reviewed and amended to meet National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspectors did not have the opportunity to observe panel during the inspection, but were advised that the Fostering Panel takes place once per month and is well supported by Panel Members.

The vacancy for the fostering service social worker has now been filled. The inspectors were pleased to note that the new service manager intended to strengthen consultation with all children and young people who were looked after and was considering the recruitment of a young person who had previously been fostered to sit on the fostering panel.

Further to this the inspectors support the service managers consideration of appointing an independent chairperson for the fostering panel, and consider that this is good practice.

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? |
|---------------------------|---------------|
|---------------------------|---------------|

| | |
|---|--|
| The Fostering Service provides short term breaks for all children in need. The service has a written policy concerning the Family Link Scheme which is a service provided to children with a disability and their family. | |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| The Family Link scheme has been reviewed and the service has developed specific and targeted recruitment of carers, although the service experiences difficulties in recruiting sufficient carers the scheme can now be assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards. | |
|---|--|

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?

4

The Fostering Service is sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers.

Support and training needs for family and friends carers are assessed and met in the same way as other carers.

The service should be commended for developing a specific support group from existing resources, for friend and family carers. This was just getting established at the time of the inspection.

There is a policy and procedure within the service, which ensures that family and friend's carers are given priority for assessments in the general workload of the Team. These assessments have a clear time scale and are allocated in the main to a designated social worker.

The service has developed policy and practice to ensure that all placements, including those, which are emergency or unplanned, meet the regulations and that checks and essential information about the safety and well being of the child are now completed as required.

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 3 March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

NO

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 18 April 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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

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, William Grace of Blackpool Borough Council – Childrens Services 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 _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, William Grace of Blackpool Borough Council – Childrens Services 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

33 Greycoat Street

London

SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000

Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

www.csci.org.uk

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