



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Herefordshire Local Authority
Fostering Service**

Children`s Resource Team

Moor House

Widemarsh Common

Hereford

Herefordshire

HR4 9NA

10th,21st, 22nd,23rd, 24th, 25th28th
February 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

Herefordshire Local Authority Fostering Service

Address

Children`s Resource Team, Moor House, Widemarsh
Common, Hereford, Herefordshire, HR4 9NA

Local Authority Manager

Rebecca Plato

Tel No:

01432 262839

Address

Children`s Resource Team, Moor House, Widemarsh
Common, Hereford, Herefordshire, HR4 9NA

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

March
2004

Date of Inspection Visit		10 th , 21 st , 22 nd , 23 rd , 24 th , 25 th , 28th February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		9.00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Dawn Taylor	081289
Name of Inspector	2	Sally Woodget	
Name of Inspector	3	Jacqueline Dunster	
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.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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 Herefordshire Local Authority Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Herefordshire Council operates a Children's Resource Team, which provides a fostering and adoption service.

The Children's Resource Team is line managed by the Children's Service Manager (Resources) who is responsible for the overall management of the Fostering, Adoption, Family Support and Aftercare Service. The Fostering Team Manager is responsible for the fostering service and has an acting manager role in the absence of the Adoption Team Manager of the adoption service.

The Family Placement Social Workers in the Children's Resource Team carry both fostering and adoption caseloads.

The fostering service provides a range of foster care to children and young people who are Looked After by Herefordshire Council, which includes emergency contract care, short term foster care, kinship care, teenage placement scheme, middle years scheme, long term foster care, shared care and respite care.

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.)

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.

This inspection took place over eight days in February 2005. It found that the majority of the National Minimum Standards had been met or partially met.

Where appropriate young people living with foster carers were asked to complete questionnaires. Questionnaires were also sent to foster carers and Children's Social Workers.

Sixty-eight Children's Social Worker questionnaires, twenty-six foster parent questionnaires and twenty-nine young peoples questionnaires were completed.

The questionnaires were used to inform Requirements and Recommendations set out in this report.

The Fostering Team Manager provided the Inspectors with comprehensive and informative pre inspection information. The pre inspection questionnaires demonstrated that the Fostering Service was aware of areas where it met practice and areas where practice needed to be developed. It also clearly stated action that had been taken to meet Requirements and Recommendations from the last inspection report

The Inspectors found that where short falls had been identified in the previous inspection report the Children's Resource Team had reviewed and developed systems to ensure improvement and have ensured many of the scores within this report have moved from one to three with relatively small input and within short time scales.

Statement of Purpose.

1 of 1 Standard was met.

There was a Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide that was known to staff and described practice in line with policies, procedures and staff guidance for Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers. The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide have been developed in line with guidance in the Children's Services Handbook, Foster Carers Handbooks and Inter-Agency Guidelines.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service.

2 of 2 Standards were met.

The Manager of the fostering service possessed the necessary business and management skills to manage the work efficiently and effectively. Herefordshire Council had followed clear staff vetting policies and procedures to ensure all checks and references were undertaken and suitable for any persons managing the fostering service.

Management of fostering service.

2 of 2 Standards were met.

In questionnaires, interviews and group discussions Managers, Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers were able to describe well-established lines of communication and accountability.

Effective systems were in place that enabled the Fostering Team Manager to monitor a range of matters that were used to inform practice and improve the quality of foster care provided by the service.

Securing and promoting welfare.

2 of 9 Standards were partially met and 7 were met.

At the time of this inspection the fostering service used LAC documentations as the Foster Placement Agreement. Herefordshire Council need to ensure that the content of the documents cover all the matters set out under Regulation 34(3), Schedule 6.

Foster carers and children are supported by a network of professionals who liaise effectively. In interviews and questionnaires foster carers and children gave positive feedback and examples of good practice with regard to the support they received from Family Placement Social Workers.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.

1 of 9 Standards was partially met and 8 were met.

Foster carers are managed, trained and supported by a team of Family Placement Social Workers who are appropriately experienced and qualified. There are systems in place that promote supervision, team meeting and access to corporate and specialist training. All carers have access to support groups, the Emergency Duty Team, Herefordshire Education Liaison Support Service and a child psychologist. Herefordshire Council need to ensure that vacancies to the Children's Resource Team are recruited to within a reasonable time frame. Herefordshire Council should develop the written staff vetting procedure to ensure that there is written evidence of explanations of any gaps in employment and telephone references maintained on file.

Herefordshire Council should ensure that Regulation 40.5 (d) and (f) are met in respect of agreements with independent agencies.

Records.

2 of 2 Standards were met.

Herefordshire Council have and are developing policies, procedures and staff guidance to ensure that up to date and comprehensive case records are maintained for each child in foster care and each foster carer.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering service.

1 of 1 Standard was met.

The premises used as offices for the fostering service are adequate for the purpose.

Financial requirements.

3 of 3 Standards were met.

In interviews and pre inspection questionnaires Managers were able to describe clear policies and procedures relating to finance.

Fostering panel.

1 of 1 Standard was met.

Herefordshire Council has developed policies and procedures with regard to the Fostering Panel. These policies and procedures were in line with the practice described by Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers. The Council have reviewed the membership of the Panel in line with the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The Fostering Team Manager described procedures for vetting checks of panel members' inline with Schedule 1.

Short-term breaks.

1 of 1 Standard was partially met.

Herefordshire Council should apply the Fostering Services Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002 to this service. As part of this process Herefordshire Council may identify aspects, which the scheme may have difficulty in meeting. The Commission recognises Herefordshire Council will need to apply the Regulations and Standards in a proportionate way. Herefordshire Council should work with the Short-term Breaks Social Worker and Shared Carers to develop policies and procedures appropriate to them and the children placed.

All shared-care foster carers are given a profile of a child prior to placement. Consideration should be given to developing this document in line with Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6.

All shared-care foster carers are required to sign the standard foster care agreement.

In interview and questionnaires shared-care foster carers described positive support from the newly appointed social worker. Positive comments were also made about the collation of a specialised library.

Family and friends as carers.

1 of 1 Standard was met.

The fostering service has clear procedures for assessing, approving and supporting foster carers who are family and friends of the child placed.

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary
of State**
(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

THIS SECTION IS NO LONGER APPLICABLE.

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

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		

Lead Inspector	Dawn Taylor	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Sally Woodget	Signature	_____
Third Inspector	Jacqueline Dunster		_____
Regulation Manager	Alan McCardle	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	40	FS16	Herefordshire Council should ensure that Regulation 40.5 (d) and (f) are met in respect of agreements with independent agencies.	31 st May 2005
2	34	FS8 FS13	Herefordshire Council should ensure the current Foster Placement Agreement contains the information required by Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6 and is made available at the point of placement, except in the case of an emergency placement when Regulation 38 (1) would apply.	31 st May 2005
3	34, 28	FS31	Herefordshire Council should work with the Short-term Breaks Social Worker and Shared Carers to develop policies and procedures appropriate to them and the children placed. All shared-care foster carers are given a profile of a child prior to placement. Consideration should be given to developing this document in line with Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6.	31 st August 2005

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	FS17 FS15	Herefordshire Council should ensure that Family Placement Social Worker staff vacancies are recruited to within a reasonable timescale.
2	FS30	Consideration should be given to confidential documents being sent out to panel members in tamper proof envelopes.
3	FS9	The written Child Protection Procedure should be developed to include guidance on when a foster carer would be referred onto the POCA list.
4	FS19	The Fostering Team Manager and Training Officer should continue to develop and review the training available and time available to Family Placement Social Workers to ensure they are receiving training.
5	FS21	Systems for electronic communications between Family Placement Social Workers and Children's Social Workers should be reviewed to ensure there is evidence of contact on foster carers and children's files.
6	FS23	The Fostering Team Manager should review the timing of training events and foster carers forums for foster carers.
7	FS31	Herefordshire Council should ensure that specialised training is also available for shared-care foster carers.
8	FS15 FS30	<p>Herefordshire Council should develop the written procedure for recruiting staff to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where checks undertaken in line with Regulation 20 Schedule 1 for agency staff are recorded on file. • where written evidence of explanations of any gaps in employment and telephone references are recorded on file. • the procedures for vetting panel members' inline with Schedule 1.

* 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	11
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)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	10/02/05
Time of Inspection	9.00AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	X

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

Herefordshire Council Fostering Service has a Statement of Purpose, which sets out aims and objectives and the service it provides. The Statement of Purpose gives an outline of the management and staff structure.

The Statement of Purpose has been developed to include reference to the Service's policies and procedures regarding behaviour management of children in foster care, the use of physical intervention and training and support to foster carers in physical intervention. It also includes reference to the Service's policies on child protection and anti-bullying.

The Statement of Purpose was last reviewed, updated and approved by elected members of the Council on the 20th January 2005. The same body will consider any subsequent amendments of the Statement of Purpose.

Herefordshire Council Fostering Service has produced a Children's Guide, which has been made available to all children using the service. In addition to the Children's Guide all children are also given a copy of the BAAF fostering document – 'What it is and what it means – A guide for children and young people'.

The Children's Guide has been produced with the input of a group of young people who are or have been in the Looked After System. A Project Manager in partnership with the Children's Advocacy Worker has undertaken this work.

The Children's Guide includes comments from children and young people and information about availability in other formats and languages.

The Fostering Team Manager informed the Inspectors of plans to include the Children's Guide as part of a child friendly information pack being compiled as a result of consultation with children via the 'Pack Attack' project.

The reference group for Looked After Children will assist in the improvement and monitoring of the Children's Guide and fostering services.

Placing and prospective placing authorities other than Herefordshire are sent a copy of the Statement of Purpose during the referral process by the Family Placement Social Worker.

Prospective placing authorities can also access this document via the Herefordshire web site.

In interviews and questionnaires foster carers were aware of the Statement of Purpose.

The Foster Carers Handbooks and Fostering Network Safer Caring Booklet are given to all foster carers.

The Children's Services Handbook and Inter-Agency Guidelines and Protocols are available to all staff in the office. All policies and procedures accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Fostering Team Manager is a qualified social worker with a Masters Degree in Social Work and has completed the Certificate in Management Studies at Aston University. She has extensive previous experience of working with children and staff teams at a management level.

In interviews and questionnaires the Fostering Team Manager demonstrated knowledge of effective leadership of staff and management approaches.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Inspectors examined the staff vetting files for the Fostering Team Manager at the last inspection.

A current Enhanced CRB check was held on file.

All appropriate checks under Schedule 1 had been undertaken for the Fostering Team Manager.

Herefordshire Council has a policy that will ensure that all staff and panel members will have CRB checks renewed every three years.

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

The Fostering Team Manager informed the Inspectors of systems for monitoring the Children's Resource Service. This included:

1. Annual caseload monitoring including monitoring all tasks, allocation and enquiries. Workload is adjusted annually accordingly.
2. Fortnightly monitoring of the team resource i.e. availability of foster carers which is then fed to childcare teams and management meetings.
3. Monitoring through the fostering register any changes in approvals/withdrawals on an annual basis. The Fostering Team Manager presents quarterly reports on the fluctuations of service as part of the quarterly Children's Services Information. This is circulated to the Managers of Children's Services. This monitors performance and stability. This data contributes to the overall quality and performance of the Service.
4. A report is produced by the Fostering Team Manager to the Fostering Panel on an annual basis providing an overview of resources and quality of resources.

The data collected met Regulation 42, Schedule 7 and enabled the Fostering Team Manager to monitor and improve the quality of foster care provided by the service. All monitoring procedures have been used to inform Quality Protects and Best Value Review. This standard of monitoring at the time of this inspection was over and above the Requirements set out for Local Authority Fostering Services. This practice is to be commended.

In interviews and questionnaires Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers described clear and effective lines of communication and support.

There are financial procedures and information available to purchasers of services and others. These procedures are reviewed on an individual basis for each child and as a fostering service.

Regulation 46 requires the 'registered person' to inform the Commission of any changes in manager or management structure. Herefordshire Council has agreed that although this Regulation excludes local authority services it would be good practice for Herefordshire to notify the Commission of any changes.

A Conflict of Interest Policy and the Foster Panel Policy have been developed to meet Standard 4.5, Regulation 20 (6), (7). The administration staff described good practice in relation to potential conflicts of interest and positive working practice.

The Council has employed a Performance and Information Manager to advise and assist in the monitoring and quality assurance of practices and processes within Children's Services.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:	N/A
Death of a child placed with foster parents.	0
Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.	0
Serious illness or accident of a child.	0
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	0
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	0
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	1
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	1
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	6
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
<p>The Fostering Team Manager has a job description, which clearly defines the lines of accountability between staff and carers.</p> <p>There is a procedure for an identified staff member to act up in the absence of the Fostering Team Manager.</p> <p>The Children's Resource Team is line managed by the Children's Service Manager (Resources) who is responsible for the overall management of the Fostering, Adoption, Family Support and Aftercare Service. The Fostering Team Manager is responsible for the fostering service and has an acting manager role in the absence of the Adoption Team Manager of the adoption service. This system is reciprocated in the absence of the Fostering Team Manager.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The foster homes visited by the Inspectors' demonstrated accommodation appropriate to the needs of the young people placed. The homes were well furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness.

Young people accommodated had their own bedroom apart from where an assessment of need had determined otherwise.

Home Check Services assess potential hazards and provide necessary equipment when requested. In interviews with foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers the Inspectors were informed of annual unannounced visits and annual health and safety visits. The Inspectors sampled five foster carer files and found that the format and recording of these checks were consistent and in line with new procedures introduced since the last inspection.

All foster carers attend preparation training, which covers health and safety issues. Written guidelines on health and safety were contained in the Foster Carers' Handbooks.

The Fostering Team Manager and Family Placement Social Workers described procedures for ensuring foster carers transport was safe and appropriate to the needs of the young people placed. The Inspectors sampled five foster carer files and found that a checklist was maintained on each file.

An additional checklist is now completed prior to a carer's review and is taken to panel. This document monitors unannounced visits, CRB checks, car checks and is used as part of the formal supervision sessions between foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers.

This checklist is signed off by the Fostering Team Manager before the foster carers review. It was made clear to the Inspectors that foster carers were aware that they might be interviewed or visited as part of the Commissions inspection process.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Herefordshire Council's Training Programme provides induction and training in valuing diversity.

Herefordshire Council has a policy that was made available to all Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers entitled Equal Opportunities Policy.

Special arrangements required to meet the needs of a child are identified through core assessments, which inform LAC documentation for the child. Specific arrangements are reviewed at statutory reviews.

In interviews foster carers were able to describe appropriate care and practice to meet the individual needs of young people.

Foster carers were able to demonstrate positive relationships with schools and clubs to ensure that the individual child's welfare was developed and promoted. Case tracking files demonstrated that these arrangements were in line with the child's wishes and minutes of review meetings.

Family Placement Social Workers, foster carers and the Fostering Team Manager were able to describe how a child with a disability was assessed and supported to maximise their potential within a foster home. The Fostering Team Manager described how appropriate equipment or adaptations to carers' homes or vehicles would be provided if required, foster carers confirmed this.

During the last inspection foster carers identified training they had attended relating to disabilities but a number requested training specific to working with young people with learning difficulties. This request was fed back to the Fostering Team Manager and during this inspection the Inspectors were told that a Shared Care Social Worker had been appointed to supervise the Shared Care Scheme for Children with Disabilities. This worker and a shared care foster carer have and will be participating in providing specialist training on disability issues together with Childcare Social Workers from the Disabilities Team. Further training will also be brought in from the Barnados Project if required, with the assistance of the Children's Services Training Officer.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Children's Services Handbooks set out the roles and responsibilities with regard to placement arrangements.

The Fostering Team Manager and Family Placement Social Workers described the process followed to match a child with an external or out of county placement. The child's Social Worker makes initial enquiries of suitably registered potential service providers. The Social Worker decides on the most appropriate placement and makes recommendation to the Children's Resource Panel (CRP). The CRP makes the decision on the placement. When a decision has been made, the Contracts Officer confirms if the selected provider has a Pre-Placement Agreement. The Social Worker completes an Individual Placement Agreement (IPA), which is forwarded to the Contracts Officer and then signed by the Children's Service Manager.

The Inspectors sampled files of information held on external services accessed by Herefordshire Council. These contained letters requesting specific information – NCSC and CSCI inspection reports, confirmation of registration and copies of current Statement of Purposes. Where information was not on file there was evidence that that information had been requested.

The Fostering Duty Officer or Team Manager takes internal referrals via Children's Social Workers. A Child Checklist and Matching Form is completed with the Family Placement Social Worker in partnership and discussion with the child's Social Worker. This process has been introduced and been regularly reviewed over the last year and considers matching, risks and the child's needs. This information is used to identify any appropriate foster carers. Information relating to appropriate matches is passed back to the child's Social Worker. The files sampled by the Inspectors relating to recently made placements contained detailed referral and matching information. The system ensures all files contain detailed written information regarding the matching process.

The Children's Service Handbook gives written guidance of the checks that should be carried out prior to placement as part of the matching process. A written record of these is kept on file.

Herefordshire Council use the Looked After Children (LAC) documentation Placement Plan Part 1, Essential Information Part 1 and Care Plan as the Foster Placement Agreement at the point of placement. Inspectors sampled this documentation. Attention was focused on LAC documentation completed over the last year. The Inspectors found that in one case Schedule 6 (2) and (4) were not clearly stated and in the second case Schedule 6 (4) was not clearly stated (see Standard 13). The Inspectors acknowledge that if the format of the documents remain the same, the clarity of this information being found in the documents is based on the skill and understanding of Regulation 34(3) by the completing Social Worker. Since the last inspection work has been undertaken to ensure the quality of the LAC documents.

The Fostering Team Manager has undertaken an informal audit of LAC documentation of children placed from the beginning of November 2004. Discussions have taken place with individual Children's Social Workers and in Team Meetings.

The responsibility for the completion of these documents has been reviewed and is now the responsibility of the Childcare Team Manager or their representative.

The Children's Service Handbook has been revised and gives written guidance on the completion of LAC documents as Foster Placement Agreements.

The Independent Planning and Review Service are developing a schedule of monitoring and developing systems, which will include the monitoring of LAC documents.

Herefordshire Council should continue this work to ensure that the information required by Regulation 34 (3) is made available at the point of placement, except in the case of an emergency placement when Regulation 38 (1) would apply. This is a Requirement that was made in the last inspection report and has been reviewed with a revised timescale.

Foster carers described the process of information sharing meetings and introductions of young people to a foster family.

The Children's Services Handbook gives a detailed agenda for the pre-placement meetings, which should ensure all appropriate topics are discussed and recorded.

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?	3
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Management systems are in place that collated information on the circumstances, numbers and outcome of all allegations of neglect and abuse of a child in foster care. This is updated and monitored by the Fostering Team Manager.

In interviews and questionnaires the Fostering Team Manager demonstrated that she has an overview of child protection concerns through the collation of the database and staff supervision. This information is used to identify patterns of concerns, which are then addressed through annual reviews of foster carers and regular supervision sessions with Family Placement Social Workers.

Herefordshire Council has a range of policies, procedures and staff guidance in place.

These policies, procedures and staff guidance are contained in the Foster Carers Handbooks, Inter-Agency Guidelines and Protocols and Children's Services Handbook.

In addition to Herefordshire Council's policies, procedures and staff guidance foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers have access to a range of leaflets and publications providing information and guidance.

The written Child Protection Procedure should be developed to include guidance on when a foster carer would be referred onto the POCA list.

Family Placement Social Workers are working to ensure that each foster carer develops their own Safe Caring Policy. Each Carer's Safe Caring Policy will be monitored during regular supervision and shared with the children placed and their Social Worker. Foster carers described the action they would take if they were concerned about the welfare of a child or if a child was to make an allegation.

Since the last inspection Herefordshire Council have ensured foster carers are aware of the procedures in place if an allegation was made to support the foster carer and their family. Existing measures have been reinforced through a foster carer newsletter to all carers together with a Fostering Network Information Leaflet about the independent support service available to all carers.

Pre-approval training and post-approval training ensures that foster carers have training in Child Protection, Bullying and Whistle blowing. Foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers have accessed ACPC joint training events.

The policies, procedures and staff guidance contained in the Foster Carers Handbooks makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. Regulation 13 requires providers to 'prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents' and to 'take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child placed with foster parents is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline, which is excessive or unreasonable', it is therefore a reasonable expectation that where appropriate foster carers will be provided with restraint training as part of the providers measure to implement their policy. This matter has been reviewed and training is being developed to ensure this matter is addressed. A training course entitled Managing Difficult Behaviour is available to foster carers as part of the training programme for 2005.

The Fostering Team Manager informed Inspectors that where an assessment of risk identified that a young person needed to be restrained, appropriate training would be identified for the foster carer in line with the needs of the young person.

The Foster Carers Handbooks contain an Anti Bullying Policy and guidance relating to Children Living away from Home. The Anti Bullying Policy and Guidance for Foster Carers has been developed to identify those who are likely to instigate bullying i.e. foster carers, Social Workers and siblings and describe the role of the Family Placement Social Worker in helping foster carers cope with bullying.

The Foster Carers Handbooks contain guidance entitled Absconding.

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Policies, procedures and staff guidance on contact are available to foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers in the Children's Services Handbook and Foster Carers Handbooks.

The Foster Placement Agreement used by Herefordshire Local Authority is the LAC documents as described in the appropriate section of this report. The Inspectors sampled these documents and the additional LAC documents completed after placement and found details regarding contact arrangements with friends, family members and social workers. Once a child is placed with a foster carer contact is reviewed on a regular basis and through LAC review meetings.

The process of matching since the last inspection was clearly recorded and demonstrated that the fostering service considers the need for, and benefits of, appropriate contact for a child when finding/suggesting a suitable foster carer and the views of the child are sought and taken into account in determining contact arrangements.

Foster carers maintain individual records for each child, Family Placement Social Workers support foster carers to set up individual daily reports for all children placed.

In interviews foster carers felt that some Children's Social Workers were more proactive than others in seeking the views and observations of foster carers of a child's reactions and views regarding contact arrangements.

There is written guidance to Children's Social Workers to consult and sign foster carers records during statutory visits to the child and to note the child's reactions to contact. This is being monitored and audited by the Independent Planning and Review Manager at Planning and Review Meetings.

All foster carers receive training regarding promoting contact.

Children's contact visits are supported by foster carers, the child's Social Worker or Family Placement Social Worker. In interviews foster carers described how they were supported by the fostering service in dealing with any difficult contact issues.

Foster carers were able to claim financial support to provide for transport and other costs involved in ensuring contact arrangements take place.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)
The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Herefordshire Council has a Corporate Complaints Procedure.

All foster carers and children are given a copy of a standard Herefordshire Council leaflet entitled Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure.

Specific guidance entitled 'Complaints made by Foster Carers' and 'Complaints and Compliments about Foster Carers' is available to all foster carers in the Foster Carers Handbooks.

The Children's Service Handbook contained a section on Complaints.

Foster carers are able to feedback to Herefordshire Council using a formal Complaint Procedure or as part of the annual Foster Carer Review. It is the role of the Chair of the Fostering or Adoption and Permanency Panel to investigate concerns raised during Reviews.

An Inspector observed a Panel Meeting where foster carers were encouraged to give feedback with regard to the support and training they receive.

In questionnaires the majority of children stated that they were aware of the procedures to follow to make a complaint. In interviews children confirmed that Social Workers and foster carers made them aware of complaints procedures through discussions.

All children and young people are given a copy of Herefordshire's Complaints Procedure leaflet for Children and Young People entitled 'How are we doing?' This is given to all children at the point of placement and is available in a range of formats.

All children receive a copy of the Children's Guide, which informs children how they can complain and whom they can talk to if they are upset.

In interviews Family Placement Social Workers stated that children were consulted about foster placements prior to reviews, during social worker visits and in daily conversations with foster carers.

Herefordshire Council continue to review and develop ways of consulting with children and young people placed with foster carers.
 All children are invited to contribute to Voices and received a copy of the 'Voices Newsletter'.
 All looked after children in Herefordshire have access to a Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, which supports young people in expressing their views. Foster carers are made aware of this service through the Foster Carers Handbooks.

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?	3
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All foster carers receive training on health and First Aid.
 Policies, procedures and staff guidance is available to all foster carers on health related issues in the Foster Carers Handbooks.
 Since the last inspection all foster carers had been sent a copy of Healthy Care, a DfES booklet.
 LAC documentations, children's health records, LAC Review minutes, Planning Meeting minutes, initial and annual health assessment and permanency and adoption medicals detail health information relating to each individual child placed.
 Foster carers were able to describe to the Inspectors' a range of specialist services available to young people and how they would support them to access those services.
 Since the last inspection a Health Visitor for Looked After Children has been recruited to post. Foster carers were aware of her role through meeting her at a Foster Carer Forum and informed the Inspectors that she had helped them access services for the children placed with them.
 All children placed with foster carers are registered with a GP and where possible children remained registered with their own GP.
 Herefordshire Social Services fund a half-time Clinical Psychology post, linked with an equivalent half-time Health funded post. Referrals can be made for direct work with children or foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers can ask for consultations.
 In discussions and interviews foster carers were positive with regard to the support received by the Play Therapist and Clinical Psychologist.

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
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Herefordshire Council provide a range of additional support to promote educational achievement, these include a clinical child psychologist and an Educational Liaison Support Service (ELSS).
 The ELSS provides a link between schools and foster placements.
 All foster carers receive training on promoting educational opportunities and achievements.
 In interviews foster carers were able to describe positive relationships with local schools.
 Foster carers were able to describe how they supported young people to attend school and complete homework.
 In interviews the young people confirmed that they had access to computers and study materials and that foster carers attended school events and parents evenings.

The foster service ensures all financial costs are met with regard to education. Written guidance relating to education is available in the Foster Carer Handbooks. Although not all children were in full time education the ELSS continue to work closely with the child, carer and social worker in liaison with schools and the Education Department to provide alternative or specialist education. In line with Regulation 34(3) and Standard 13.4 the Foster Placement Agreement needs to state the foster carer's role in school contact in conjunction with the parent and where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment (see Standard 8). It was the responsibility of the Child's Social Worker to liaise with the foster carer, parents and school to draw up a Personal Education Plan. Access to library facilities and 'story sacks' are made available through Family Placement Social Worker. During discussions and in questionnaire a number of foster carers commented on the decreasing availability of computers for children. This was discussed with the Fostering Team Manager and Family Support Social Workers who were aware of the issues and had put in place procedures to assess need due to the decreasing numbers of computers available.

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

All foster carers receive training on moving on – exploring why placements end and preparing young people for independence. Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers were able to describe how they worked to promote each individual's independence skills in relation to their Pathway Plan. Herefordshire Aftercare Team engage with young people to prepare them for adulthood and there are also links with the local Connexions services. Both young people and foster carers identified during the last inspection that they would benefit from more information regarding the options for young people due to leave care and the role for foster carers post 18. The Fostering Team Manager has discussed with the Aftercare Team their involvement in running training for foster carers. At the time of this inspection the team were experiencing sickness and the commitment of offering training was not possible. An Aftercare worker had attended the Foster Carers Forum to give a presentation. Written guidance is provided to foster carers in the Foster Carers' Handbooks. Foster carers gave positive feedback with regard to two of the Family Placement Social Workers who maintained specialist links to teenage placements. Foster carers commented on the availability and support provided to them by the whole of the Children's Resource Team but in particular these two workers in relation to teenage placements.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Herefordshire Council has a written recruitment and selection procedure for appointing staff. The Inspectors inspected five staff personal files in line with Regulation 20, Schedule 1 and Standard 15.

The Staff Recruitment Procedure should be developed to state

- where written evidence of explanations of any gaps in employment and telephone references are kept on file.
- the procedure for recruiting agency staff in line with Regulation 20 Schedule 1 and where checks are recorded on file as evidence.

The Children's Resource Team incorporates both the Adoption and Fostering Service. Within the Children's Resource Team there are two full time Team Managers, one Fostering Team Manager and one Adoption Team Manager. The Statement of Purpose states that the fostering team is made up of 7.5 Family Placement Social Workers who carry a caseload of both fostering and adoption work depending on expertise and the requirements of the service.

In addition to these posts there is one fulltime "Home finder" Family Placement Social Worker, one full time "Shared Care" Social Worker, a half time Child Psychologist, a half time Play Therapist, one full time Panel and Team Administrator and 2.75 full time Administration staff.

The fostering team consists of a well-qualified and experienced range of social work staff. At the time of the last inspection there were two social worker team vacancies and one administration post vacancy. The two Family Placement Social Worker vacancies were long standing vacancies. At the time of this inspection there was 1.5 Family Placement Social Worker vacancies and one fulltime "Home finder" Family Placement Social Worker vacancy. In interviews staff and the Fostering Team Manager described how workload was regularly reviewed and distributed to existing team members. The team should be commended for the management of this work, however, Herefordshire Council must ensure that staff vacancies are quickly recruited to. This team has continued to work under their allocated staffing levels. They have had two experienced staff members leave in the last year and have recruited two new workers, one of whom is newly qualified and is being appropriately supported to slowly build up her caseload. This good practice has inevitably impacted on the case/work loads carried by existing team members and the continuing staff vacancies means that increased work tasks such as duty impacts on contact time that can be offered to foster carers.

The Inspectors were informed during the last inspection and this inspection that proactive

recruitment for professional staff is currently being undertaken by Herefordshire Council using the council website, careers conventions and specialist recruitment fairs. The figure in the box totalling the 'number of staff of the agency' indicates the proportion of worker time dedicated to the Fostering Service. The figures in the boxes below do not represent members of the administrative team.

Total number of staff of the agency:	6	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	2
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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
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In interviews and questionnaires staff and managers described a clear management structure and lines of accountability. There were systems and procedures in place to ensure assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed effectively and by people who have appropriate skills. In interviews and questionnaires Family Placement Social Workers and Managers were able to describe a range of systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads. The Children's Resource Team consisted of well-qualified and highly experienced social work staff who demonstrated professional knowledge and experience of fostering services as well as specific interests. This enabled the Fostering Team Manager to assign tasks to appropriate staff. There were systems in place to check CSCI registration and inspection reports of other fostering agencies and ensure that there are no concerns about the agencies' assessment, approval and review processes. These records were inspected and found to contain a chart of information requested including registration certificate, inspection report and Statement of Purpose. The chart records whether information has been requested, if that information is available and if it has been received. The Inspectors sampled three foster agency files. These demonstrated that Herefordshire Council has systems in place to monitor that procedures are followed in line with Regulation 40 (4) and 40 (5) to ensure that no arrangements are made without written agreement in respect of each placement and child. These records also identified where information, such as Individual Placement Agreements were not in place. Herefordshire Council should ensure that Regulation 40.5 (d) and (f) are met in respect of agreements with independent agencies. Professional supervision was provided to all Family Placement Social Workers. Herefordshire Council provides a range of corporate training available to foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers. In addition to this training the Children's Resource Team run a range of targeted specialist training for foster carers. A training officer has been appointed specifically for Children's Services to provide further targeted training for Child Care and Fostering Services workers and to facilitate the delivery of additional training to foster carers. Personnel in the Children's Resource Team maintain a record of training attended by foster carers. Foster carers maintain a portfolio that includes a running record and evidence of training. A team of administration staff and a corporate personnel system supports the Children's Resource Team.

In interviews with foster carers and young people the Inspectors were informed of a range of people available to give advice and effective systems requesting support. In interviews and questionnaires foster carers demonstrated that they had a clear understanding of the roles of Family Placement Social Workers.

Staff have written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.

All foster carers are provided with copies of the Foster Carers' Handbooks.

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

The experience and qualifications of staff are adequate to the size of the service and are in line with the Statement of Purpose. Where a short fall in staffing levels occur a contingency plan exists. Work is shared among the members of the team and an agency member of staff had been employed for a short period of time. Herefordshire Council should be mindful of the principles expressed in Standard 15 and must ensure that posts are recruited to within a reasonable timescale to maintain a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff working for the purposes of the fostering service.

Herefordshire Council promotes the retention of salaried staff through corporate training and supervision. At the time of this inspection Herefordshire Council had reviewed all employees terms and conditions.

Herefordshire Council has a recruitment policy and strategy that aims to recruit a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. There is a clearly set out process for foster carers, which includes training and assessment. Herefordshire Council uses the BAAF Form F, which covers matters set out in Standard 17.7. These forms were sampled through a system of case tracking. The Fostering Service Manager and Panel Chair described a process of evaluating and monitoring assessments in line with Regulation 27, Schedule 3 and Standard 17.7. The forth-coming assessment training for all panel members will assist in their evaluation and monitoring role.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Foster carers described out of hours support received from Hereford and Worcester Emergency Duty Team (EDT). In addition to this service Herefordshire Council have entered into an agreement with the National Children's Homes to provide planned out of hours support packages to foster carers and children who have been assessed to have specific needs.

A duty system is in place for foster carers during office hours this is provided by the Children's Resource Team. A newsletter has reminded all foster carers about the Children's Resource Team duty system and its relationship to the Emergency Duty Service.

Foster carers informed Inspectors of the system of formal supervision of foster carers.

Records of these sessions are maintained by Family Placement Social Workers and used to inform annual reviews and training needs of foster carers.

Sessions are recorded on a checklist, which the Fostering Team Manager monitors during supervision sessions with each Family Placement Social Worker and at the foster carers annual reviews.

A management system of annual appraisals for foster carers is incorporated into supervision and annual reviews.

There is comprehensive health and safety policies, procedures and staff guidance for carers contained in the Foster Carers' Handbooks and a Whistle blowing Policy.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Fostering Team Manager maintains a list of all staff training and development on the computer system. This is specific to training offered, training attended and individual's development. These records were inspected and showed that over the last year most Family Placement Social Workers had attended one training event.

There is a corporate training programme available to all Family Placement Social Workers this was not specific to fostering. This programme was also available to foster carers. This enabled foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers to attend joint training events covering specific issues such as child protection.

A training officer has been appointed specifically for Children's Services to provide further training for Child Care and Fostering Services Social Workers. The Inspectors were told that he had consulted with the team and will be developing appropriate training.

Family Placement Social Workers informed inspectors that all new staff participate in induction training on commencement of their employment. This induction allows staff to move between departments and observe different teams roles.

Family Placement Social Workers are informed of changes in legislation or guidance relevant to their jobs through team meetings, corporate training or specific training sessions organised by the Fostering Team Manager.

All Family Placement Social Workers receive annual appraisals and reviews, which identify training needs.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Family Placement Social Workers have copies of policies, procedures and staff guidance in the Children's Services Handbook, Inter-Agency Guidelines and Protocols and Foster Carers Handbooks. These contain clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them together with the policies and procedures of the organisation.

Inspectors saw evidence that Family Placement Social Workers receive regular support and supervision. A record is kept of the date, duration and content of the supervision.

Herefordshire Council have a Staff Review and Development Policy.

Inspectors saw evidence of regular team meetings. Minutes are taken of these meetings and made available to staff who are unable to attend.

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**

The Family Resource Team has a clear strategy for working with foster carers that is documented and includes all matters set out in 21.2.

In questionnaires, interviews and group discussions Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers were able to describe how foster carers and children would be supported in a range of situations and with the help and support of a network of professionals.

It was clear that foster carers understood the role of Family Placement Social Workers and Children's Social Workers.

Inspectors observed a fostering panel and saw evidence of annual review reports being presented to and made available to the panel. In interviews foster carers were able to describe the procedure for their annual review and the role of panel.

In questionnaires Children's Social Workers described good communication between foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers. In interviews and group discussions foster carers described how communication was maintained with Children's Social Workers either through telephone calls, home visits or via the Family Placement Social Worker.

Foster carers were able to describe clear and consistent approaches for resolving concerns. Foster carers stated that Family Placement Social Workers were supportive and proactive in resolving concerns and providing support.

Systems for electronic communications between Family Placement Social Workers and Children's Social Workers should be reviewed to ensure there is evidence of contact on foster carers and children's files.

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?****3**

Foster carers sign a Foster Care Agreement and are given a copy of the Foster Carers Handbooks, which include policies, procedures and staff guidance.

Each foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice.

The foster carers informed the Inspectors that they were given the Handbooks prior to approval, these contained policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. The Inspectors were informed that these are regularly reviewed and updated.

Formal supervisory meetings between foster carers and Family Placement Social Workers take place three times in a year. The Inspectors saw evidence of these meetings recorded in the foster carers files.

Unannounced visits take place at least annually and are clearly recorded on the foster carers file and monitored at Reviews.

Foster carers described the system of support available to them by Herefordshire Council out of hours Emergency Duty Team.

In interviews and questionnaires foster carers described insurance cover and access to Family Placement Social Work support.

Foster carers were provided with information regarding the complaints procedures and the procedures dealing with investigations into allegations.

The Fostering Team Manager described systems for recording and monitoring allegations of abuse and complaints in line with Regulation 42.1 (b) Schedule 7.

A clear policy exists which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

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**

There is an on-going programme of training for foster carers, which includes pre-approval training, induction training and post approval training.

Training available to foster carer's covers child protection, court skills, children's rights and advocacy, dangerous relationships, drug awareness, first aid, men in foster care, preparation for independence, preparation for permanence, sex education and relationships, sons and daughters of foster carers, valuing diversity and working with the department.

Foster carers are able to undertake NVQ level 3 in caring for children.

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

Foster carers attend Herefordshire Council corporate training and ACPC joint training.

The Fostering Team Manager and Family Placement Social Workers have been consulting foster carers to identify appropriate times and forums for ensuring attendance of the maximum number of foster carers to post approval training events.

A number of foster carers in questionnaires and discussions identified difficulties in attending training events and foster carers forums run during work time on weekdays. This matter should be reviewed by the Fostering Team Manager.

The Fostering Team Manager informed the Inspectors that it is the responsibility of the Family Placement Social Workers to ensure foster carers are aware of training sessions and identify specific training needs. This forms part of the formal supervision system.

A foster training data base records all training delivered to foster carers and attendance.

Foster carers informed the Inspectors that where appropriate their children have also attended training sessions. This is good practice.

Inspectors observed a foster panel and sampled annual review reports. Where the review identifies a training need the appropriate action from that recommendation should cross reference to supervision and training records. Where a training need is identified in formal supervision in is stated in the panel review report.

The Fostering Team Manager undertakes an annual review of all training provided to foster carers by the Children's Resource Team.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was a range of policies, procedures and staff guidance regarding maintaining case records.

A main children's record is maintained by Children's Social Workers these relate to each young person placed with foster carers.

The Family Placement Social Workers maintain a file that details relevant information, visits and contact specific to each foster carer. In addition to these the Family Placement Social Workers maintained files containing basic information relating to children referred and placed. These files are stored alongside the foster carers files.

In interviews Family Placement Social Workers described internal procedures for sharing information and discussing decisions.

Guidance is set out in the Children's Services Handbook with regard to children's files and foster carers files maintained by Children's Social Workers and Family Placement Social Workers. This guidance has been developed to include how these records relating to both children and foster carers are shared between social work teams.

In interviews with Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers the Inspectors were told that relevant information relating to a young person would be copied and shared with foster carers.

There is a policy in the Foster Carers' Handbooks that gives clear guidance that all records must be stored in a secure manner by foster carers.

Foster carers described to the Inspectors how they were supported and provided with the necessary information and equipment to help a young person understand and record past significant events. The Inspectors heard how foster carers encouraged young people to reflect and understand their history and to keep appropriate memorabilia.

The Fostering Team Manager informed Inspectors that data stored about foster carers and the services they access is constantly reviewed and updated to give the service a clear picture of the resources available and help analyse service needs.

Since the last inspection Herefordshire Council has reviewed its policies to comply with the Data Protection Act and training has been available to Fostering Services staff with further training planned for February and March 2005. Information about compliance when keeping records about children is available to all foster carers in the Foster Carers Handbooks and is contained in Appendix 16. The individual's right to have access to their records has been reinforced via supervision and at the Foster Carer Forum.

The Fostering Team Manager informed the Inspectors that a project managed by specialist staff has been commissioned to improve and update the CLIX system to meet the requirements of the fostering service.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

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

Policies, procedures and staff guidance on the retention and security of records were in the Foster Carers' Handbooks and Children's Services Handbook.

Herefordshire Council maintained separate records for staff, foster carers and children. The Inspectors saw evidence of permanent, secure, and private records for each young person and foster carer referred to or appointed by Herefordshire Council.

Family Placement Social Workers are continuing to working with foster carers to develop their record keeping skills.

Inspectors sampled young people's files and foster carer files. Records were on the whole legible and non-stigmatising. Records of complaints and allegations were clearly recorded on the relevant files.

A system existed for keeping records about allegations and complaints and for handling these confidentially and securely.

Herefordshire Council maintain a computerised database detailing complaints and allegations made by children in their care. This is monitored and updated on an ongoing basis by the Fostering Team Manager.

A separate database is maintained by the Fostering Team Manager, and updated with regard to Notifiable Events, which includes Schedule 2 records detailing all accidents occurring to children whilst placed with foster carers. This information is gathered by the Fostering Team Manager through information passed onto her by Children's Social Workers and Family Placement Social Workers.

The Fostering Service's administration records include computerised data on CRB checks for all members of foster carer households over 16 years, leisure passes for foster families to allow them free access to the County's Leisure Centres, monitoring of Duty Calls and Duty Roster and Staff sickness.

There is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, through supervision sessions and action is taken when required.

Figures below run from January 2004 to December 2004.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	125
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	98
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	109
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	16
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	20
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	69.72
Maximum £	269.03

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 Children's Resource Team has dedicated office accommodation on the first and second floor of Moor House. There are identifiable, well-equipped office premises to which staff and others have access during normal office hours. The Children's Resource Team has a degree of access to rooms to provide training and meetings, unfortunately due to the age of the building not all these rooms allow for wheel chair access. Alternative venues are used for training events and support groups.

Facilities exist for the secure retention of records and IT systems. Herefordshire Council has procedures for the security of the building.

All staff have access to their own personal computer linked to a central secure server managed by Herefordshire Council.

The premises and its contents are adequately insured.

At the time of this inspection Herefordshire Council were undertaking a review of office accommodation, which may change the location of the Children's Resource Team.

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?

3

The agency is financially viable and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations. Procedures exist to deal with situations of financial crisis and regulations and guidelines imposed upon businesses are conformed with.

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

The Children's Resource Team has the benefit of the full resources of Herefordshire Council's Finance and Audit Sections, which operate within prescribed financial boundaries and which are subject to evaluation by the Commission through a separate inspection process.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Foster Carers' Handbooks and Children's Services Handbooks contain a range of policies, procedures and staff guidance relating to fostering allowances. In interviews and discussions foster carers were able to describe how they would access information relating to allowances and expenses either through support groups, their Family Placement Social Workers, training and information sharing days or written information. In questionnaires and interviews foster carers stated that the process for payment of expenses had improved. They also confirmed that they had received more information and guidance with regard to tax related issues since the last inspection. Family Placement Social Workers and foster carers described how a young person would be supported financially to access specific activities, hobbies or holidays through discussions and in agreements during reviews.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There were policies and procedures relating to the role of the Foster Panel in the Foster Carers' Handbooks and Children's Services Handbook.

Herefordshire Fostering Panel meets once a month.

In interviews with Family Placement Social Workers, foster carers and Managers the Inspectors explored the role of Panel. The Panel's task is to approve fostering applications from individuals and couples who wish to offer short-term, respite or teenage placements. It also approves friends and relatives (kinship carers) applying to foster a child who is already known to them. The panel is also responsible for overseeing the review of all approved foster carers, for considering complaints, applications for deregistration of carers and for granting exemptions to the usual fostering limit that has been placed on each approved foster carer.

A written procedure describes how the Panel provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process and in line with Standard 30.5.

Since the last inspection the membership of the Fostering Panel has been reviewed in order to provide more contributions from people independent of Herefordshire Fostering Service in line with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The Chair described clear procedures for a Vice Chair to act up in his absence.

Herefordshire Council had undertaken satisfactory CRB checks for all foster panel members.

The Fostering Team Manager described procedures for vetting checks of panel members' inline with Schedule 1. This procedure should be put in writing to clearly describe the process and where evidence of checks are filed.

Inspectors observed the functioning of the fostering panel and saw evidence of foster carers reviews being considered by panel. The Resource Manager informed Inspectors that panel considers all first foster carer reviews and thereafter every two years.

Reports were prepared and presented to Panel. The Inspectors heard that these reports were sent out to all Panel Members in a timely fashion prior to Panel Meetings.

Consideration should be given to confidential documents being sent out to panel embers in tamper proof envelopes.

The Inspectors saw evidence on foster carer's files of written records of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations.

The Inspectors were informed that children's views were gained at LAC reviews by Children's Social Workers. Since the last inspection systems have been reviewed to ensure feedback from foster children are presented to Panel when considering the reviews of foster carers.

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?

2

Herefordshire Council provides short-term breaks to a small number of children with a disability. Since the last inspection a Social Worker has been recruited full time to the post of Short-term Breaks Social Worker. The post is based in the Children with Disabilities Team and should be line managed by the Children with Disabilities Team Manager. At the time of this inspection this post was vacant and other arrangements were in place. Herefordshire Council should ensure that in line with Regulation 6 there is one manager of the fostering service and bring their short-break services under the fostering services manager, or nominate a more senior manager who has a level of strategic responsibility. Herefordshire Council should apply the Fostering Services Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002 to this service. As part of this process Herefordshire Council may identify aspects, which the scheme may have difficulty in meeting. The Commission recognises a need to apply the Regulations and Standards in a proportionate way and will seek to do so wherever appropriate. Herefordshire Council should work with the Short-term Breaks Social Worker and Shared Carers to develop policies and procedures appropriate to them and the children placed.

All shared-care foster carers are given a profile of a child prior to placement. Consideration should be given to developing this document in line with Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6.

All shared-care foster carers are required to sign the standard foster care agreement. In interview and questionnaires shared-care foster carers described positive support from the newly appointed social worker. Positive comments were also made about the collation of a specialised library.

The Inspectors noted the positive involvement of the Social Worker and a shared-care foster carer in running training for other foster carers. Herefordshire Council should ensure that specialised training is also available for shared-care foster carers.

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?	3
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The Local Authority provided a fostering service and support network for kinship carers. During the previous inspection the Inspectors considered the assessment, approval and supervision of family and friends as foster carers to be sensitive to their needs and their existing relationship.

The Local Authority provides financial support to enable young people to remain cared for by their natural family this includes adaptations to the home and specialised equipment.

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 **10th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th and 28th February 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 from the local Hereford office.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/> 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	<input type="checkbox"/> YES

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 15th 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	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 Mr Henry Lewis of Herefordshire Local Authority Fostering Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I Mr Henry Lewis of Herefordshire Local Authority Fostering Service am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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