

inspection report

Fostering Services

Freedom Fostering

Suite 6, Saturn Facilities, Spring Road
Ettingshall
Wolverhampton
West Midlands
WV4 6JX

6th December 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Freedom Fostering

Tel No

01902 491117

Address

Suite 6, Saturn Facilities, Spring Road, Ettingshall,
Wolverhampton, West Midlands, WV4 6JX

Fax No

Email Address

maureen@blenheim-
corporation.fsnet.co.uk

Registered Number of IFA

E080000270

Name of Registered Provider

Freedom Fostering

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Ms. Maureen Johnson

Date of first registration

18th December 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

18th December 2003

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

24/06/03

Date of Inspection Visit		6th December 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Janet Manders	133244
Name of Inspector	2	Sarah Moore	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mrs. Maureen Johnson	

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 Freedom Fostering. 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.
<p>Freedom Fostering is a small fostering Agency based in the Wolverhampton area. It was formed in 2002 by a group of social workers, foster carers and teachers coming together to develop a service for children based on the principles of high quality foster care and effective support systems.</p> <p>Freedom Fostering aim to provide a small number of skilled, well trained carers who will work with short term and emergency placements. Long term placement will also be considered as appropriate, dependent on the needs of the young people and the skills of the foster carers.</p> <p>Freedom Fostering state that training is given a high priority within the Agency. All the preparation and further training is competency based and linked with NVQ awards. Support of carers is also a high priority. In some situations staff have maintained daily contact with the carers. This level of support has not always been possible as the Agency has begun to grow, however, a planned restructuring of the Agency and the recruitment of another member of staff should assist in providing appropriate support to foster carers.</p> <p>The declared intention of the directors is for the Agency to remain small. This is to allow close support and guidance from staff in providing a high quality service and for carers to work together in developing their skills and expertise.</p>

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 the second inspection of this service, the previous inspection took place on 24th, 25th, June 1st 2nd July 2003. The Agency has grown during this time however, the inspection indicates that the organisation of the Agency and the staffing levels has not kept pace with the growth in foster carers.

This inspection took place on the 6th, 7th, 9th, 10th and 14th December 2004. In addition to the inspection work undertaken within the fostering service itself, information was sought from young people placed by the fostering service, foster carers, placing officers and family members. Sadly no questionnaires from foster carers were returned and only 1 questionnaire from a young person placed by Freedom Fostering. Nonetheless, inspectors were able to seek the views of the majority of young people and foster carers from Freedom Fostering during the inspection as inspectors visited 4 foster carer households. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire, of which 100% (4) were returned. Inspectors found that although Freedom Fostering has a comprehensive policies and procedures manual, there was little evidence during the inspection that it was being fully implemented by the Agency. Inspectors found that there had been no significant progress in meeting the requirements from the previous inspection report, with 6 of the 8 requirements still outstanding. In addition inspectors have made 43 additional requirements, which would indicate that in many areas there appeared to be a deterioration in the service provided.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.

The Agency has revised its Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide, these are detailed and useful documents but both need to be amended so that they fully comply with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, this must include the address and updated details for the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

Neither of the 2 standards assessed were met, 1 standard was not met due to a minor shortfall and 1 standard was not met due to a major shortfall.

Both the Manager and the Director have considerable experience in the fostering field and the Manager has obtained appropriate social work qualification but has not yet gained a management qualification. Inspectors made an immediate requirement in respect of the managers of the service requiring current CRB checks undertaken by Freedom Fostering.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Neither of the 2 standards assessed, both standards were not met due to major shortfalls

Whilst Freedom Fostering is only a small agency inspectors were not confident that the service was being well managed, there was a lack of clarity as to who undertook what role, with the Director undertaking foster carers supervision although she is not qualified. At the last inspection the Responsible Individual had agreed to undertake Regulation 42 monitoring to examine the quality of care provided by the Agency, however, there was no evidence of this at the time of this inspection. The Agency had not notified the Commission for Social

Care Inspection of significant events as required by Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

6 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 1 standard was not met due to minor shortfalls, 2 standards were not met due to major shortfalls.

Freedom Fostering Service were found to meet young people's needs well in the majority of these standards, with foster carers providing a high level of support to ensure that young people were provided with safe and nurturing placements, that valued their talents, encouraged self-esteem, supported their education and contact with families. However, there were significant gaps in two main areas. The Agency did not demonstrate a systematic way of matching young people's needs to the skills of the foster carers, Foster Placement Plans were not used and in a number of cases only very limited information was available prior to the young people being placed. Records indicated that one foster carer's first placement was a young person who was outside the carers approved age range. Inspectors were also concerned that the Agency's practice in respect of child protection matter did not involve the local child protection team and notifications to the Commission for Social Care Inspection were not made. Freedom Fostering also need to ensure that their foster carers are fully conversant with the Agency's policies and procedures to enable them to adequately protect young people.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

1 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 4 standards were not met due to minor shortfalls and 4 standards were not met due to major shortfalls.

Freedom Fostering were unable to demonstrate to inspectors their competence in meeting these standards. This was in part due to a lack of accurate recording systems and the lack of suitably qualified staff. An immediate requirement was made by inspectors in respect of the Agency undertaking CRB checks on all foster carers and staff. Whilst foster carers were very positive about the amount and quality of the support they received, further attention must be given to the roles and responsibilities within the Agency as the Director has been supervising foster carers, and although well experienced to support foster carers she is not appropriately qualified to supervise foster carers.

Due to the small size of the Agency sessional workers have undertaken assessments, which has resulted in an inconsistency and lack of thoroughness in some assessments. These staff must be appropriately supervised by the Agency. Freedom Fostering has not consistently used Foster Care Agreements and when they have these have not been compliant with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It is crucial that all carers sign this Agreement at the time of their approval, with a copy being held on their file. Whilst the Agency puts a great emphasis on the importance of training, with foster carers undertaking NVQ level 3 within 12 months of being approved, the training programme for foster carers must include all areas required by the National Minimum Standards.

Records

Both of the 2 standards assessed were not met due to minor shortfalls

Freedom Fostering maintain separate files for foster carers and young people and these are securely stored. However, the Agency must ensure that all recording is accurate and complete and that all appropriate LAC documentation is available to the Agency and the foster carers. The records maintained by the Agency did not include central monitoring of complaints and allegations, and the registers of foster carers, and of children placed, did not contain all the required information.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The premises used by Freedom Fostering are suitable for the service they provide as long as the Agency ensures that confidentiality is maintained in light of other businesses operating from the building. Freedom Fostering is suitably insured.

Financial Requirements

3 of the 3 standards assessed were met

Freedom Fostering is well supported by a qualified accountant who ensures that proper financial procedures are followed. Information received by inspectors indicated that the Agency is financially viable. Foster carers reported that they were paid regularly and were able to claim additional expenses, however, inspectors would recommend that the Foster Carers' Handbook includes specific information on what expenses can be claimed.

Fostering Panels

This standard was not met due to major shortfalls.

The Fostering Panel is appropriately constituted but appropriate checks and references have not been obtained for members. At the time of the inspection there was no dedicated minute taker, which has resulted in minutes not fully or accurately recording the decisions of the Panel. Panel members also require further training in respect of the role and function of the Panel to ensure that they are clear as to what decision they can make and that all decisions will appropriately safeguard young people.

Short Term Breaks

This standard is not applicable to the services provided by Freedom Fostering.

Family and Friends as Carers

This standard is not applicable to the services provided by Freedom Fostering.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
2	7	FS20	Appropriate CRB checks are in place in relation to the manager, responsible individual and all those working for Freedom.	The Agency states that this has been completed
3	3	FS1	Further work is undertaken on the Statement of Purpose, which incorporates all the areas identified in NMS1.4, and reflects clearly the current service offered by Freedom.	The Agency states that this has been completed
5	21	FS15	A system will be put in place for recording references and checks in relation to the suitability of staff to work with children.	The Agency states that this has been completed
6	21	FS16	Appropriate contracts are put in place in relation to all members of staff.	The Agency states that this has been completed
7	28	FS22	Freedom will ensure that all foster carers sign a Foster Care Agreement at the time of their approval which complies with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002	The Agency states that this has been completed
8	42	FS25	Freedom will ensure that all complaints and	2 months

			allegations are maintained in separate records.	from draft
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Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Janet Manders	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Sarah Moore	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Brian Lock	Signature	_____
Date	31st March 2005		

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	3 (1) & 12 (4)	FS1	The Agency's Statement of Purpose must be updated to include all information required by Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards and must contain the contact details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection	01.04.05
2	3 (3) (c)	FS1	The Children's Guide must be amended to include information about the role of the Commission for Social Care Inspection and appropriate contact details, in addition to other sources of support and advocacy for young people.	01.04.05
3	7 (2)	FS2	The Registered Manager must provide the Commission for Social Care Inspection with the requested information in respect of the proposed Management Degree, so that it can be evidenced that it is compliant with Standard 2.2.	01.02.05
4	5, 7, & 20 Sch 1	FS3	CRB checks must be undertaken by the Agency in respect of the Registered Manager, the Director and the Responsible Individual.	Immediately
5	5 (3), 7 (3) Sch 1	FS3	The Registered Person must ensure that all elements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are in place in respect of the Registered Manager, Director and the Responsible Individual.	01.02.05

6	42 (1) a Schedule 7	FS4	The Registered Person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7.	01.03.05
7	42 (1) b &(3)	FS4	The Registered Person must establish and maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided, this system shall provide for consultation with foster carers, children placed with foster carers and the placing authorities.	01.03.05
8	42 (2)	FS4	The Company must supply the Commission with the report of the review conducted for the purposes of Regulation 42 (1) b and (3).	01.04.05
9	12 (2) (c) Sch 8	FS4	The Registered Person must ensure that the Commission for Social Care Inspection is notified of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry.	01.02.05
10	8 (1)	FS5	The Agency must be managed with sufficient care, competence and skill and in an effective and efficient manner to avoid confusion and conflict of roles.	01.03.05
11	34 (3) Sch 6	FS8	The Registered Manager must ensure that before making a placement, the responsible authority shall enter into a written agreement (foster placement agreement), which covers all matters specified in Schedule 6.	01.02.05
12	34 (1) (b)	FS8	The Registered Person must ensure that foster carers terms of approval are consistent with any proposed placement.	01.02.05
13	33 (b)	FS8	The Registered Person must ensure that all relevant information including a young person's Care Plan, risk assessments and recent written assessments of the young person, and their family and the carers are taken into consideration when matching young people with foster carers.	01.02.05
14	12(1) & (2)	FS9	The Registered Person must ensure that all staff and carers are aware of what action to take if concerns regarding a young person's welfare arise and that prompt action is taken.	01.02.05

15	12 (20 (d))	FS9	The Registered Person must ensure that a written record is kept of any allegation of abuse of neglect, and of the action taken in response to the allegation. This information must be collated and evaluated on a regular basis.	01.02.05
16	15 (2)	FS12	The Registered Person must ensure that all young people have a Health Plan, (as part of the Foster Placement Agreement) which identifies any health needs and how and by whom these needs will be met. This should include guidance as to who can give consent for treatment.	01.02.05
17	20 & 21	FS15	The Registered Person must produce and follow a written policy on recruitment and selection of staff, based on the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002	01.03.05
18	5, 7, 20 & 27	FS15	The Registered Person must undertake Criminal Bureau Checks on all foster carers, staff and managers of Freedom Fostering.	Immediately
19	21 Sch 1	FS15	The Registered Person must ensure that a system is put in place for recording references and checks in relation to the suitability of staff to work with children and this is kept on individual personnel files.	01.02.05
20	19	FS16	The Registered Person must provide the Commission for Social Care Inspection with an accurate list of staff employed by the Agency, the post they are appointed to and the date they commenced employment.	01.03.05
21	21 (1)	FS16	The Registered Person must ensure that job descriptions, contract, and conditions of service are provided for all staff, including sessional workers and a copy should be placed on their personnel record.	01.03.05
22	27(2)(a)	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that, a consistent and thorough approach to foster care assessment is undertaken and that such assessments consider all aspects identified in Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3.	01.02.05

23	28 (9)	FS17	The Registered Person must provide a prospective foster carer with the reasons for the Fostering Panel's decision not to approve them as foster carers for the Agency and this must be in writing.	01.03.05
24	17 (1)	FS18	The Registered Person must provide foster carers with written guidance in respect of Whistleblowing.	01.03.05
25	21 (4)	FS20	The Registered Person must ensure that professional supervision is provided for all sessional staff.	01.02.05
26	27 Schedule 3	FS21	The Registered Person must ensure that the Agency carries out an assessment of any person whom it considers may be suitable to become a foster carer, this must include respite foster carers.	01.03.05
27	28 (5)	FS22	The Registered Person must ensure that the Foster Care Agreement must cover all matters detailed in Schedule 5.	01.03.05
28	28 (5)	FS22	The Registered Person must enter into a written agreement (Foster Care Agreement) with every foster carer they decide to approve.	01.03.05
29	19	FS22	The Registered Person must ensure that foster carers are provided with regular supervision by a qualified social worker	01.03.05
30	12 (2)	FS22	The Registered Person must ensure that a written record is kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response.	01.03.05
31	29 (3)	FS22	The Registered Person must ensure that the Agency has a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.	01.04.05
32	18 (1) & (2)	FS22	The Registered Person must establish a procedure for investigating complaints and ensure that the procedure is widely available to young people, their parents, foster carers and placing authorities.	01.03.05

33	17 (1)	FS23	The Registered Person must ensure that a programme of ongoing training, as set out in the Statement of Purpose and as required by the National Minimum Standards, is established for Freedom Foster Carers.	01.04.05
34	17 (1)	FS24	The Registered Person must ensure by way of training and supervision that records completed by foster carers are accurate and complete.	01.04.05
35	22(1) Sch 2	FS25	The Registered Person must ensure that the Agency keeps a register of young people placed by the Agency, which contains all information identified in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01.03.05
36	31 (1) & (2)	FS25	The Registered Person must ensure that the Agency keeps a register of foster carers that is compliant with Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01.03.05
37	42 Sch 7	FS25	The Registered Person must ensure that all complaints and allegations are maintained in separate records and that they are monitored regularly.	01.03.05
38	20 (3) Schedule 1	FS30	The Registered Person must ensure that all Panel members have checks carried out in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. No new members of Panel should commence their role until such checks have been returned clear.	Immediately
39	25 (2)	FS30	The Registered Person must ensure that minutes of Fostering Panel are a full, clear and accurate record of discussions made by the Fostering Panel	01.03.05
40	26 (1)	FS30	The Registered Person must ensure that the Fostering Panel clearly recommend the terms on which they approve a foster carer and must ensure that they ascertain whether or not the foster carer is in agreement with the proposed approval.	01.03.05
41	27 (2) & (4)	FS30	The Registered Person must ensure that all information required by Schedule 3 and Regulation 27 is presented to the Fostering Panel for it to consider.	01.03.05

42	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7	FS30	The Registered Person must seek clarification in respect of exemptions to the usual fostering limit.	01.03.05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The Registered Person should ensure that all foster carers are familiar with the Agency's policies and procedures.
2	FS4	The Registered Person should ensure that a policy for foster carers is developed, informing them of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.
3	FS6	Health and Safety checks of foster carers homes should be undertaken as part of the initial assessment process and reviewed annually. The outcome of such checks should be clearly recorded on file.
4	FS9	Safe caring guidelines should be written, for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. A copy should be kept on file and the guidelines should be cleared with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child.
5	FS9	The Registered Person should ensure that there is a copy of the local ACPC procedures available to all staff.
6	FS10	The Registered Person should ensure that a risk assessment as required by Standard 10.6 is undertaken prior to contact taking place and that this is recorded in writing and placed on file.
7	FS11	The Registered Person should ensure that the views of young people and their families are recorded regarding all issues, which are likely to affect their daily life and their future.
8	FS13	The Registered Person should ensure each young person has a PEP.
9	FS15	The Registered Person should ensure that written references are followed up verbally, and that a record is made of this discussion.
10	FS16	Administrative procedures should be established to support staff in their work.

11	FS19	The Registered Person should put into place a system to formally appraise staff and this should inform a training plan.
12	FS19	The Registered Person should ensure that staff and foster carers have the opportunity to undertake joint training.
13	FS22	The Registered Person should ensure that written records of unannounced visits are kept.
14	FS22	The Registered Person should ensure that foster carers are familiar with the contents of the Foster Carers' Handbook.
15	FS23	The Registered Person should ensure that prospective carers have the chance to meet with experienced carers.
16	FS26	The Registered Person should ensure that doors to adjoining offices not occupied by Freedom Fostering are kept shut to maintain confidentiality.
17	FS29	The Registered Person should strenuous pursue the option of making direct payments to foster carers via the banking system rather than relying on the vagaries of the post.
18	FS29	The Registered Person should provide foster carers with clear guidance in respect of what additional expenses they can claim and the procedure for doing so.
19	FS30	The Registered Person should ensure that Panel members receive a letter of appointment, which confirms their duties and term of office.
20	FS30	The Registered Person should ensure that the Fostering Panel has a dedicated minute taker.
21	FS30	The Registered Person should ensure that all Fostering Panel members receive suitable training in respect of their role and function to ensure that they can satisfactorily undertake their duties and appropriately challenge information presented to Panel.
22	FS30	The Registered Person should ensure that the Fostering Panel has clear policies and procedures to cover situations where Panel members are not in agreement.
23	FS30	The Registered Person should consider training for Panel members in respect of applicants attending Panel.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent

8

Survey of placing authorities

YES

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey

YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

- 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

NO

- Contact with supervising social workers

NO

- Examination of files

YES

Individual interview with manager

YES

Information from provider

YES

Individual interviews with key staff

YES

Group discussion with staff

NO

Interview with panel chair

YES

Observation of foster carer training

NO

Observation of foster panel

YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents

YES

Inspection of records

YES

Interview with individual child

YES

Date of Inspection

06/12/04

Time of Inspection

10.30

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

71.5

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Freedom Fostering has a Statement of Purpose, which was revised in November 2004, and has been agreed by the Senior Management Team. The Agency indicates that it aims to provide a range of placements, including emergency, short term and long term placements. No specialist focus is identified. The Statement of Purpose covers all the areas required by this standard, with minor omissions; for example, the Agency needs to state that no complaints had been received in the previous twelve months, and to detail the qualifications and experience of the staff. In addition, the statement lists a part-time social worker under staffing, but inspectors were told that this post did not exist at the time of the inspection. The Statement of Purpose states that carers receive fortnightly supervision sessions, however, this is not the current practice.

The descriptions of the processes by which the Agency approves and trains carers are full and clear. However, they were not fully implemented in the practice observed during the inspection. The section on the Minimum Standards needs to be amended to give the new title for the Commission for Social Care Inspection, and to state that the standards and regulations came into force in April 2002, not January 2003.

The Agency has an attractively presented children's guide, which covers many issues likely to be of concern to children placed in foster care, although the section on legal age limits seems rather out of context. The Agency must ensure that the name of someone available for advice or support is completed for each child on the second page of the guide. In addition, although the guide includes a list of useful telephone numbers including 'NCSC' (this also needs to be amended to give the correct title for the Commission) the address is not included, and there is no detail for the child of the role of any of these sources of help. It is suggested that this section should be revised, and that contact details for the Agency should be included in the section on making a complaint.

The Policies and Procedures of Freedom Fostering are well thought out and reflect the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Whilst carers had a copy of these policies and procedures a number of carers were not conversant with them and the Agency should consider undertaking training sessions to ensure that all foster carers are familiar with the Agency's policies and procedures.

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?

2

Freedom Fostering is a small fostering Agency with only one member of staff in addition to the manager, director and the responsible individual, consequently the manager and director undertake much of the work within the Agency. It was therefore difficult for the manager to evidence that she exercised effective leadership and this must be addressed as the Agency grows. Inspectors were informed that it is hoped that this situation will be helped with the appointment of a deputy manager in the near future.

All the senior staff have considerable experience in the child care field and whilst the Responsible individual does not have any direct experience of fostering, he showed a good understanding of issues in his discussions with inspectors.

The manager has an appropriate social work qualification, having gained her CQSW in 1990, however she has not yet obtained a management qualification as required. Inspectors were informed that she is undertaking an MBA. This degree will not 'match the competencies required by the NVQ Level 4' as set out in NMS 2.2. After further discussion with the CSCI methodology adviser, the manager has now enrolled on an NVQ level 4 course in Management at a local college, which is compliant with this standard.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Whilst the Agency informed inspectors that CRB checks have been undertaken in respect of the manager and the Responsible Individual, there was no evidence of this on the personnel files. Further discussion with the manager highlighted that she did not understand the requirement that the Agency must undertake CRB checks rather than relying on checks undertaken by another Agency. Inspectors made an Immediate Requirement that CRB checks must be undertaken in respect of all staff, managers and foster carers before any further placements can be made.

There was no evidence on file that references had been obtained in all appointments and there was no evidence in respect of those references obtained that they had been followed up by a telephone call.

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?

1

The Manager, Responsible Individual and Director meet on a monthly basis when they discuss the operation of the Agency, however, this does not fully cover all areas required by Regulation 42 and Schedule 7 of the Fostering Regulation 2002. Inspectors were informed that the Responsible Individual was responsible for reviewing placements, however, there is no written evidence that this work is undertaken. A robust, evidenced system must be developed to ensure that information is easily available to enable the monitoring of trends and patterns within the Agency.

Regular meetings with the Agency's accountant ensure that financial systems are robust and reviewed regularly.

The Foster Carers' Handbook contains information in respect of the fees and allowances paid to foster carers. Inspectors were informed that this information is given to purchasers of the service. This information needs updating as the information relates to the year 2003-4. Inspectors were informed that the need for the declaration of any conflict of interest is included in the Agency's "Employment Record Form". However, there is no policy included in Foster Carers' Handbook.

Whilst the inspectors found information on file that indicated there had been 2 separate child protection enquiries initiated in respect of young people placed with foster carers no written notifications had been sent to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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

0

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.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

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?****1**

Inspectors were provided with a job description for the Registered Manager, this was comprehensive and covered all areas required by the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002, however, it should be updated to refer to the appropriate legislation. It was the view of the inspectors that at the time of the inspection the manager was not fulfilling her role as described in her job description and required by Regulation 42, Schedule 7, as described throughout this report.

As referred to earlier in the report levels of delegation and responsibility and accountability are not clear and are not covered in the manager's job description.

It was not clear whom the manager delegated her work to when absent from work.

Inspectors were initially informed that she delegates her work to the part time social worker, but in light of that worker not being formally in post it would appear that the Director undertakes these task, although she is not qualified to do so.

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

The homes visited were seen to be warm and well furnished, though one of the young people's bedrooms is not decorated to reflect the tastes of young people. This carer has only had one very short term placement and is intending to consider what changes could be made to make it more welcoming.

A placing social worker commented on the high level of care provided to the young people placed by the foster carers.

The Agency's procedures indicate that an analysis of a foster homes safety should be undertaken as part of foster carers initial assessment, however, not all files included a Health and Safety Checklist. One file referred to Health and Safety checks being undertaken in the Form F, but there was no evidence of the outcome of the checks on the file.

Discussion with foster carers regarding such matters does take place during pre-approval training and inspectors were informed that ongoing training is planned in respect of Health and Safety Issues for foster carers. The Foster Carers' Handbook also covers this issue giving clear guidance of the Agency's expectations of foster carers.

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

The Agency actively promotes equality and clear policies ensure that both staff and carers value diversity. The Responsible Individual has recently provided training for staff and carers in respect of diversity and promoting equality.

Each young person is appropriately placed, to ensure that their cultural and ethnic needs are met, however, this is not clearly recorded on files. The assessment undertaken in respect of one couple did not cover issues of how the foster carers would meet the racial and ethnic needs of young people. Nonetheless, the Fostering Panel requested a further piece of work to be undertaken with the carers to address this gap in their assessment.

No child placed has a disability requiring aids or adaptations.

Foster carers were seen to encourage young people's self esteem, and meet their needs in respect of a wide range of activities. Inspectors were informed that a specific budget has been established by Freedom Fostering, which provides additional funding for hobbies and activities during school holidays.

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?****1**

It was apparent from discussion with foster carers and the young people that all young people were appropriately placed, however, as reported in the previous standard there was no written evidence of matching on any of the young people's files. Inspectors discussed this issue with the manager who felt that as there were only a small number of foster carers she was well able to match the skills of foster carers with the needs of young people who were referred to the Agency. She records some of this information in the Agency's day book.

Although the Agency does have a Foster Placement Agreement document this was not completed in respect of any of the placements made and therefore it is difficult to evidence what consideration had been given to matching the skills of the foster carers to the needs of young people when making a placement. The Foster Placement Agreement if completed would include much of the information required by Regulation 34 and Schedule 6. However at the present time the Agency's Foster Placement Agreement does not include information regarding matching considerations or consents for medical treatment of school trips. The Agreement also refers to the 1991 Regulations, which have been replaced by the Fostering Regulations 2002.

Some files did not contain any more than very basic information regarding the young person; Care Plans and other LAC documentation were not found to be consistently on file. It is therefore difficult for inspectors to evidence that careful consideration is given by the Agency to match the needs of young people with the skills of foster carers.

Records indicated that one foster carer's first placement was a young person who was outside the carers approved age range.

Foster carers commented that they felt that the Agency did share all information with them, however, this was usually in a verbal form rather than any written documentation.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

The Agency has a policy in respect of safe caring and produces a booklet for each family to complete with their own safe care policy, however, no completed booklets were seen on file and carers spoken to were vague about the policy, although they stated that they had covered this subject in considerable detail in their training. There was no evidence that carer's safe care policies were discussed with and agreed by the placing social worker.

Foster carers were aware that they were not to use corporal punishment, and whilst the Agency has a policy in respect of managing challenging behaviour and what sanctions can be used, foster carers spoken to were not fully conversant with the document.

The Agency's guidance in respect of the action to be taken if concerns arise in respect of a child protection issue is vague, with the Foster Carers' Handbook only stating that "Any concern by anyone for a child's welfare should be reported to Social Services.....When an allegation is made your caseworker will notify the Manager who then takes over responsibility for looking into the allegation. The Manager will contact the local authority's Child Protection team the same day." Inspectors felt that these guidelines were ambiguous

as to which social services or child protection team should be contacted and in respect of the manager's involvement in investigating any concerns. Information gained during the inspection suggested that referrals were made to a young persons placing authority but that a referral was not made to the local Social Services Child Protection Team. The Manager informed inspectors that the Agency acted under the advice of the relevant placing authority, which did not view the matter as being a child protection matter and thus Freedom Fostering did not notify the local child protection team. However, as the foster carers were interviewed by the police in respect of the allegation, inspectors are of the view that this was clearly a child protection issue.

A foster carer informed inspectors that the Manager and the Director had interviewed the carers and young people after an allegation had been made against the carers, this is denied by the Manager.

The Agency did not have a copy of the local ACPC child protection procedures, although inspectors were informed that the Responsible Individual had a copy, a copy must be available for all members of staff.

In neither of the cases examined by inspectors where an allegation had been made against foster carers had written details of the allegation been made on the foster carers file or what discussions had taken place with the carers during supervision.

The Agency has no management system in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care.

The Foster Carers' Handbook covers in detail the reasons why a young person may abscond from a placement and how foster carers should deal with such a situation. Clear guidance is also given regarding how foster carers should deal with incidents of bullying.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Both staff and foster carers spoken to by inspectors were aware of the importance of contact for young people and were clearly committed to ensuring that contact took place as required in a young person's Care Plan where this was available or as a result of guidance from the placing social worker. The Agency will supervise contact between young people and their families, where this is required by a young person's placement plan. If after all issues have been assessed it is decided that it is not advisable for contact to take place in the foster carer's home it is possible to use a room at the offices, which has comfortable seating and toys for young children to play with. Foster carer's are financially reimbursed by the Agency for any additional expenses incurred through contact.</p> <p>Risk assessments regarding contact were not evident on the files and again this would have been covered if a Placement Agreement had been completed. However, there was a written agreement for the arrangements for contact on one young person's file. The manager also gave examples of where she had challenged decisions regarding contact arrangements to ensure that all parties were kept safe and the young person's needs were properly met.</p>		

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**

Whilst all staff and foster carers fully supported the involvement of young people in the decision making process, this was not always fully recorded. Where placements are planned the Manager endeavours to meet with the young person and seeks their views in respect of the placement. Young people's views are also verbally sought at foster carers reviews although there is no strategic way of gathering the views of the young people. The manager believes that due to the Agency being so small she has regular contact with all the young people and feels that they are happy to express any concerns to her. The Children's Guide gives basic information regarding making a complaint but would benefit from greater detail about how a complaint will be investigated and to give reassurances that there will not be any repercussions if a young person makes a complaint. Young people reported that they were supported to contribute to their own placement reviews and that they felt listened to by their foster carers.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

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

The Foster Carers' Handbook gives clear guidance to foster carers as to their responsibility to ensure that a young person's health needs are met. Evidence during the inspection confirmed that young people's health needs are well met by foster carers. Carers register children with their own GP, arrange optician and dental appointments, and provide health information to the child's reviews. However, there are no health plans on file, nor was their clarity on file or in discussion with foster carers as to who can give consent for treatment. If the Foster Placement Agreement had been completed, this issue could be clarified and relevant information collated to guide the foster carers. Carers felt that they had been given sufficient verbal information to provide appropriate health care for the young people. Carers are asked to gain appropriate first aid training and are supported by Freedom in attending local courses.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

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

The Agency gives a high emphasis to ensuring that young people's educational needs are met, with clear guidance being given to foster carers in the Foster Carers' Handbook. Foster carers are actively involved in supporting young people with their education, spending time with the young people to encourage reading skills and to support homework. Foster carers are involved in the development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) where this is appropriate, although there was no evidence of PEP's on file.

There was evidence that foster carers have been supported to make representation to the local education department to ensure a suitable placement was identified for a young person.

If a young person is not in school, it is possible for the young person to spend time at the office, where there is information and courses that they can pursue at least in the short term. This is also supported by a policy to provide a tutor for the young person, with appropriate charges made to the placing authority; this information should be included in the Statement of Purpose and in information given to placing authorities regarding fees.

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**

None of the young people currently in placement have reached an age where planning for their move into independence has been appropriate, however, carers do encourage all young people to develop self help skills.

The Foster Carers' Handbook has detailed information regarding the role of the foster carers in respect of young people moving into adulthood. It states "foster carers understand that they need to provide all children in their care with (age and development appropriate) opportunities for learning independence skills." It also gives useful information regarding the areas where young people may require assistance, the legislative framework and Pathway Plans.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The Agency has been unable to evidence competence in relation to this standard. No recruitment and selection procedures have been provided to the inspectors, and none of the personnel files contained any evidence of interview, although three did contain an application form. There was one written reference on file for each of these three sessional staff, but no second reference and no evidence of follow up by telephone. There were no references at all on file for the other staff of the Agency. It is recognised that this is a very small family based company, and the lack of references and interview for the manager, director and responsible individual are understandable in this context. However, the lack of legally required information on the other 6 individuals who provide or who have provided sessional services to the Agency is of grave concern. Evidence of relevant qualifications should be on file for all social work staff working for Freedom Fostering but only one copy certificate was present.

Inspectors found no evidence of the Agency carrying out CRB checks on either staff or carers. Instead the Agency has relied on the applicants' copy of checks carried out by other agencies in every case. The inadequacy of this has been explained and an immediate requirement has been made freezing placements until this process has been carried out. The Agency does not have a robust system for recording checks and references even though this was a requirement of the last inspection.

Due to the small size of the Agency, sessional social workers are engaged to complete assessments of foster carers. All such social workers are appropriately qualified.

Total number of staff of the Agency:

6

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

The management structure essentially focuses on the role of the manager of the Agency, who supervises all the staff, and on the monthly meetings of the senior management team. The role of the director is very varied and includes administrative work, support to foster carers, and supervision of carers.

Inspectors experienced difficulty in ascertaining whether there were any other social workers employed by the Agency at the time of the inspection. Pre-inspection documentation indicated that one worker was identified as the deputy manager and had responsibility for the supervision of all the foster carers. However, during the inspection inspectors were informed that the worker had not been appointed to the post of deputy manager and the post would be advertised. Inspectors were also informed by the worker that she was only working as a volunteer and had responsibility for only 2 foster carers. Inspectors were also informed by the worker that she was only working as a volunteer and had responsibility for only 2 foster carers. This worker is also related to the manager. Inspectors discussed with the Agency the need for ensuring independence and objectivity are maintained. Such confusion and inconsistency is not conducive to open and transparent working and this further illustrates the need for proper procedures in respect of the appointment of staff. At the date of the inspection the Agency was without dedicated administrative staff, and this appeared to have been the case for most of its history. However, an appointment had been made to this post, and that person was working in a linked organisation while awaiting CRB check.

Due to the small size of the Agency, sessional workers undertake assessments of prospective foster carers. Whilst these workers spoke occasionally with the manager, they did not receive formal supervision and there was no system in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively.

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?****1**

As previously reported the staffing of the Agency is unclear, and statements made verbally to the inspectors, details in the statement of purpose and details given in the pre-inspection questionnaire were all inconsistent with each other. However, it is clear that the Agency is insufficiently staffed at present, since only the manager has the qualifications required for the supervision of foster carers, and she is not able to provide this for all the carers now registered with the Agency. The Agency plans to appoint a deputy manager to fill this need. Sessional workers undertake assessments of prospective foster carers, this has led to some discrepancies, but a recent discussion has taken place, which hopefully will address some of these issues. Assessments seen by inspectors were of variable quality, did not contain all information required by Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3 and showed little robust analysis of issues and concerns raised during the assessment.

The Agency aims to grow only slowly and primarily by word of mouth. The stated emphasis is on the quality of placements, and, as an independent Agency, the issue of sufficiency of carers is not relevant. There is a clearly set down process for working with carers.

The inspectors noted that on the Foster carers application form, at 19.7 it is stated 'That the Director of Children's Services of Freedom Fostering is under no obligation to disclose the reasons for non-acceptance of an application.' This is contrary to Regulation 28. The form

also refers to adoption not fostering and should therefore be amended.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Agency does not appear to have any contracts of employment or statements of terms and conditions for sessional workers or for the manager. It is therefore not possible to evidence whether or not sound employment practices are in place. A requirement has been made in respect of this under Standard 16.

There are full health and safety guidelines in the carers' handbook but nothing has been seen by the inspectors relating to staff. Inspectors were provided with a Whistleblowing policies for staff but no policy is included in the Foster Carers' Handbook. Public liability insurance is provided by the Agency.

The inspectors were informed that the Manager and the Director provide out of hours support to foster carers and all carers reported that this provided adequate support and were complimentary regarding the levels of support received.

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

Staff training needs are not formally appraised at present, and this should be put in place as the Agency is growing. However, staff are free to identify relevant courses and funding is available to facilitate attendance.

Currently there is no joint training between Freedom staff and carers, however, it is hoped that this will be addressed once the new worker is in post.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The supervision of the director and of the manager is essentially carried out within the monthly senior management team meeting, since only three people attend this. Individual sessions with the responsible individual could be requested if the need arose.</p> <p>No supervision is provided to the sessional staff undertaking assessments of prospective foster carers, although the manager is freely available for consultation. However, as previously noted there are some inconsistencies in approach between the individuals involved in this work, which the supervision of sessional workers would address.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The Agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers, this is outlined in the Agency's Statement of Purpose although this does not cover the encouragement for self help groups or respite care.</p> <p>Inspectors discussed with the manager the Agency's procedures in respect of respite care. Inspectors were informed that discussion takes place with foster carers to identify back-up carers as part of the assessment, however, these carers would not be fully assessed with the Agency only undertaking basic checks and CRB's. The manager stated that she did not envisage foster carers making a request for respite, as the expectation is that young people are treated as part of the family.</p> <p>The buddying system that the Agency describes in it's literature should be put into place for all carers, and the Agency should offer carers a range of opportunities to meet together for mutual support.</p> <p>Information received from placing social workers indicated that the Agency communicates well and keeps them well informed of any significant events.</p> <p>None of the foster carers seen as part of the inspection had been fostering for more than a year and therefore reviews had not been undertaken in respect of them, however, documentation is clear that reviews would be undertaken and presented to the Fostering Panel on an annual basis.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10) The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
<p>Carers have been supervised by the Director, who, although an experienced foster carer, is not a qualified social worker. This needs to cease, although the Director remains suitably placed to offer carers support.</p> <p>Inspectors were given a copy of the Foster Care Agreement that is used by Freedom Fostering. The Foster Care Agreement must be updated so that it states the type of placement the carer is approved to provide, the procedure in connection with the placement of children, and the procedure available to the carer for making representations. It must also clearly state that the foster carer must undertake not to use corporal punishment, to comply with the terms of any foster placement agreement, to promote the child's welfare, and to comply with procedures for the protection of children and the management of behaviour as set out in regulations 12 & 13.</p>		

There was no evidence that Foster Care Agreements had been completed on any of the files examined by inspectors.

Details of allegations of abuse and their outcomes are not clearly recorded on foster carers files, nor is a separate record kept to enable the manager to monitor such incidents. There must be a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

Foster carers receive a copy of the Foster Carer's Handbook once approved as carers by the Agency, this is a useful and detailed document. However, a number of foster carers were not familiar with all procedures and Freedom Fostering should work with carers to ensure that all carers know its contents.

There was no evidence on foster carer's files that unannounced visits had been undertaken, however, foster carers did confirm that such visits did take place.

Information contained in the Foster Carers' Handbook in respect of complaints is very limited and should cover all areas required by Regulation 18 (2). This should be available to all parties. Pre-inspection information available to inspectors indicated that none of the placing social workers were aware of the Agency's complaints process.

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?
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Standard met?	2
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<p>Pre-approval training is provided on an individual basis by the assessing social worker, as it is not practical to undertake group training due the small number of assessments undertaken by the Agency. In these circumstances, it is particularly important to ensure that prospective carers have the chance to meet with experienced carers.</p>	
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<p>Post approval training has focused mainly on the NVQ award and is specifically competency based. Freedom Fostering state that their underpinning ethos is that training and learning are integral to a person's ability to undertake their role and to enable them to be responsive to the needs of the organisation and the needs of the child placed with them. Inspectors received a specimen programme for post approval training, however this did not cover all areas identified in the Agency's Statement of Purpose.</p>	
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<p>There is a booklet of 'Key Training Messages' but this adds little to the information in the foster carers handbook.</p>	
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Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Freedom Fostering ensures that there is a record relating to each child or young person, which is held separately from the records of carers.

The Foster Carers' Handbook contains clear information regarding the Agency's expectations of foster carers in respect of recording information. Foster carers complete daily records for the young people, which are then kept on the young people's files. Whilst these were not available on all files at the beginning of the inspection, they were available after the first day. Records were of variable quality and did not always appear to be clear as to when they were written, in that on one file there were different reports covering the same dates, which contained different information.

The Agency makes it clear to foster carers that all information regarding young people must be stored in a confidential manner.

Inspectors found evidence of foster carers working sensitively with young people to assist them to understand their past.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13) The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	2
<p>Inspectors received a list of foster carers approved by Freedom Fostering, but this did not comply with the regulations, neither did the list of young people placed by the Agency. As previously indicated in this report the Agency do not maintain separate, dedicated records in respect of allegations and complaints.</p> <p>Records are kept securely in locked filing cabinets in the Agency's offices, as are all Personnel files.</p> <p>At the last inspection in June 2003 the inspector was informed that <i>"A system for monitoring the records is being developed. The inspector was informed that the Responsible Individual will play a key role in this area."</i> There was no evidence of this work during this inspection.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the Agency:			5
Number of placements made by the Agency in the last 12 months:			9
Number of placements made by the Agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			4
Number of foster carers who left the Agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	325	Maximum £	370

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
<p>The Agency's offices are in a shared converted building, which are accessible to staff 24 hours a day 7 days a week, The offices comprises of two small offices, an administration office and a room which can be used for contact, formal meetings and education for young people.</p> <p>Premises are suitable for the purpose. During the inspection the door between the office used by Blenheim Training and the Agency had been left open to allow inspectors to easily undertake the inspection. Inspectors informed the Agency that this door must be kept shut (and preferably locked) to maintain confidentiality. Once this was raised with the Agency, the manager ensured this was done. The door to the corridor, which gives access to the suite of offices on the opposite side of the corridor, should be kept shut.</p> <p>Computers are not linked to each other; all are pass word protected. Records are stored in locked cabinets. The building as a whole offers a good level of security.</p> <p>Contents of the premises are insured. The landlord and administrators of the building maintain fire precautions.</p>		

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 inspector spoke with the Company Secretary who acts as financial manager for the company, he is also a Registered Accountant. The Company Secretary confirmed that the company is financially viable and a copy of the management accounts for September 2004 confirmed this.

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

Appropriate financial procedures appear to be in place, with the Company Secretary visiting the office on a weekly basis to deal with all financial matters.

The company's accounts are not formally audited as due to the company's size it is not required to having them audited, however, the Company Secretary produces monthly accounts, which are discussed at meetings of the Board.

The Agency publishes the fees for the services provided.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

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

Foster carers are paid twice monthly, this is by cheque, but foster carers commented that this system was not totally reliable due to the unreliability of the postal system. The Company Secretary informed inspectors that the company are endeavouring to arrange for payment to be made directly into carers' bank accounts.

Carers reported no difficulty in obtaining reimbursement for additional expenses incurred whilst looking after a young person, however, the Foster Carers' Handbook is not clear as to what expenses can be claimed. Information regarding such matters is located in numerous places in the Handbook and carers would benefit from guidance being produced to bring all financial information and how to claim expenses, together in one document.

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?

1

Panel is appropriately constituted as long as it is recognized that the director is a member in that capacity and not as an independent foster carer member. The panel is appropriately chaired by an independent person; a vice chair must be appointed from among the members.

The panel has two social worker members but neither has up to date experience in fostering, and a member should be recruited who has knowledge and experience in this area.

However, the proper procedures have not been followed in appointing panel members. The Agency has not undertaken checks to ensure that Panel members are suitable persons to serve on the Panel, in that CRB's and references have not been obtained.

The panel does not yet have a minute taker, and this role was performed by the manager, this has resulted in minor administrative mistakes. Inspectors were informed that this matter should be remedied when the administrator takes up their role.

Observation of the Panel indicates that members require further training in the role and function of the Panel. The Panel made a number of recommendations regarding the approval of carers where it was not clear the carers would be in agreement. Examples of this included the Panel approving a couple jointly when the assessment had only been undertaken in respect of the female applicant, they also increased the approval age range for one foster carer without any further discussion with the foster carer.

Panel failed to state the number of children the carers were recommended to be registered for in one case, and the type of placement was not specified in another case, neither was the number or gender of the children.

References for another application were not included in panel members' papers, although the manager read out the employer reference and one personal reference but not the other. Since it is a legal requirement to have two personal referees this recommendation for approval may not be considered lawful.

Policies and procedures for Panel do not include details of the procedure to be taken when panel members are not in agreement.

There is a need for clarity about exemptions to the usual fostering limit as the Agency has received advice about this, which the inspectors consider inaccurate.

There are procedures for the attendance of applicants at Panel, but members have had no training on this, and it is recommended that this be provided.

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?
Freedom Fostering does not offer regular short-term breaks for children.	9

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?	9
Freedom Fostering do not provide placements for young people with their family and friends.		

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 6th December 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

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 16th March 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of FREEDOM FOSTERING 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 _____ of FREEDOM FOSTERING 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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