



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Devon County Council Fostering Service

County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QJ

7 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

Devon County Council Fostering Service

Address

County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QJ

Local Authority Manager

Andrea Morris

Tel No:

01392 382000

Address

County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QJ

Fax No:

Email Address

info@devon.gov.uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

02/02/04

Date of Inspection Visit		7 February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30	
Name of Inspector	1	Jim Palmer	071563
Name of Inspector	2	Romana Young	105157
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.		NA	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		NA	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Andrea Morris Fostering Service Manager	

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Devon County Council fostering service provides the following range of services:

- Respite care for children in need of regular breaks from their families
- Emergency short term placements
- Short or temporary placements
- Long term or permanent placements
- Parent and child placements
- Family care worker placement – a placement scheme for children with complex needs
- Remand placements
- Day care support

The service is offered county wide and is delivered from three locality based offices. A group manager, supported by six locality based practice managers, manage the service on a day to day basis. The fostering service is a major child care resource within the counties range of services for looking after children.

The service has links to specialist health; education; psychological and CAMHS services.

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 was the second inspection undertaken under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The inspectors met with seven sets of foster carers; four children placed with foster carers, parents of one child placed in the service; two foster carer support groups; one foster carer peer guide group; one locality team of fostering social workers; the family care worker scheme team meeting; administrative staff; two support workers; three practice managers. Interviewed four placing social workers and attended an information evening.

A pre-inspection questionnaire and self assessment form was completed by the manager. Questionnaire were received from children; foster carers and placing social workers.

The Inspectors would like to thank all those people who contributed to the inspection for their help and co-operation.

At the last inspection four statutory requirements were made and twelve good practice recommendations. At this inspection five Statutory Requirements were made and eight good practice recommendations.

Three Statutory Requirements from the previous inspection have not been fully implemented.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard is met.

These are comprehensive documents and now meet the requirements of the regulation and Standard.

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

Standard 2 and 3 were both met

The service is managed by a group manager and six practice managers, they have a wide range of experience, qualification and expertise, which is recognised and respected.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Standards 4 and 5 were fully met.

There are systems in place to monitor the service, the manager now has a mechanism for monitoring all events listed in schedule 7 and the commission has received reports on the review of the quality of services. Foster Carers and staff commented that they felt the management of the service was improving.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

Standards 6, 7, 9,10,11,12and 13 were met; 8 was not met; 14 was not assessed.

The foster service is operating at close to capacity, leading to difficulties in matching children, despite attempt to match children with carers who can meet their needs. Carers do

not always receive sufficient information prior to placement. Measures have been introduced to ensure that placement planning takes place, but many carers reported a lack of information being provided. A requirement has been made. The service recognise the need to strengthen the degree of consultation with parents and children using the service.

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

Standards 15 and 17 were not met, Standard 22 was partially met; standards 16, 18, 19, 21 and 23 were met two were partially met and one was not met.

Information held on staff files did not meet the requirements of Schedule 1. The Commission is aware of work being undertaken by the local to remedy this, at the time of the inspection this work had not been completed. The previous requirement will remain until that work has been completed.

The local authority does not currently have a system in place to ensure that all staff have CRB checks, renewed every three years. Generally staff felt the service to be a fair and competent employer. A number of carers on the family care worker scheme had transferred from other service providers, minimal assessments had been undertaken, relying heavily on historic assessments carried out by previous fostering agencies, with little evidence of any detailed re-assessment. A further requirement has. Information held on staff files did not meet the requirements of Schedule 1. The Commission is aware of work being undertaken by the local to remedy this, at the time of the inspection this work had not been completed. The previous requirement will remain until that work has been completed.

been made.
Foster Carers felt well supported by their link social worker

Records (Standards 24-25)

Standard 24 was partially met, Standard 25 was not met

The case records of children are not held by the fostering service, these are held by placing social workers. Records held had gaps in information and several entries were not dated and signed. Placement plans were found to be lacking in detail. A requirement has been made. General records held by the service were found to be well maintained, a recommendation has been made concerning sufficient information being held by carers to enable children to come to terms with their past .

Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This Standard was partially met

The office locations used by the service were found to be satisfactory, and there were no outstanding requirements from other statutory bodies. Two recommendations have been made.

Financial Requirements (Standard 27-29)

Standards 27 and 28 met; 29 was partially met.

Financial arrangements were well established and efficient, one recommendation has been made regarding payments to carers.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This Standard was fully met

The structure and composition of the panel has meets the standard. Inspectors attended panel and were impressed by the thorough but sensitive manner in which the panel worked with prospective carers and presenting social workers.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31)

This Standard was not met

Carers providing short term breaks commented they did not always receive sufficient

information in a timely manner. The requirement of the previous inspection remains.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This Standard was partially met

The fostering service does not currently undertake to assess or support family and friends as carers, except in exceptional circumstances. This work is usually undertaken by child care social workers working in locality. A recommendation has been made.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	5(3)7(2)c 20(3)d	FS3	You must ensure that all staff files fully meet the requirements of Schedule 1	31/05/04
2	34(3)	FS8	You must ensure that foster placement agreements, covering all matters specified in schedule 6 in place before making any placement, unless made under Regulation 38 .	31/05/04
3	35(1) 37(3)	FS25	The responsible authority must visit the child in the home, in accordance with regulations 35(1)a,b,c. and regulation 37(3)	31/05/04

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 _____
Second Inspector _____
Regulation Manager _____
Date _____

Signature _____
Signature _____
Signature _____

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	34(3)	FS8 FS25	You must ensure that before making any placement, the responsible authority shall enter into a written agreement , referred to as the “foster placement agreement”, with the foster carer relating to the child that covers the matters specified in Schedule 6.	01/11/05
2	38(1)	FS8	You must also ensure that if the placement is made under Regulation 38(1) the local authority, may place a child in an emergency for a period not exceeding 24 hours.	01/11/05
3	5,7,20	FS15	The registered person must ensure that all staff files hold all of the information specified in paragraphs 1 to 7 of schedule 1. of the Fostering Services Regulations.	01/11/05
4	27(1)	FS17	You must ensure that a full assessment is carried out on all prospective foster carers, in accordance with Regulation 27(1)(2).	01/11/05
5	35(1)(2)(3) 37(3)	FS31	You must ensure that the responsible authority shall visit in accordance with regulation 35	01/11/05

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	FS12	The fostering service should ensure that there is a written health record for each child placed, which is updated with the placement and moves with the child.
2	FS26	The fostering service should ensure that a health and safety review of the IT requirements and work stations for fostering service staff is undertaken to ensure that adequate and fit for purpose equipment and work stations are available.
3	FS26	The fostering service should ensure that all case records are stored securely at all times.
4	FS22	The fostering service should conduct a review of the way in which allegations against carers and complaints by carers are investigated. To ensure that these issues are brought to conclusion in a timely manner.
5	FS22	The fostering service should review the roles of the fostering support workers to ensure that none are undertaking tasks that should be undertaken by a qualified social worker.
6	FS24	The fostering service should ensure that every effort is made to gather all of the information that foster carers need to assist children in coming to terms with their past, and that where information is not made available by placing social workers, that a written record of the request is held on the file.
7	FS29	It is recommended that the payment system to carers is reviewed to ensure prompt and accurate payment.
8	FS32	It is recommended that the local authority review present arrangements for the assessment and review of kinship carers.

* 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	15.5
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	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	07/02/05
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	110

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Statement of Purpose was reviewed in April 2004. A revised edition will be published, when amendments have been agreed, in the spring of 2005. Copies will be made available to staff and carers on request and a copy posted on the Devon County Council website. The children's information pack has been re-designed. The local authority have employed a staff member with a professional media background to review and produce new promotional literature that is attractive and aimed at different target audiences. At the time of the inspection, a new Statement of Purpose, had been agreed and the revised information pack for young people was about to be issued.

Work will continue in reviewing and producing promotional documents for the service. The Statement of Purpose and young person's guide accurately reflect the service provided. The inspectors were told that different editions of the literature will be produced, to reflect different individual or cultural needs, and levels of understanding, with a targeted approach being adopted. Contact details for the Commission for Social Care Inspection have now been included.

This work is viewed as an extremely welcome and positive development.

The Family Care Worker scheme produces a separate Statement of Purpose, which is not as detailed as the service statement. This could suggest this is a stand alone scheme, and should be contained within the one statement. It may continue to produce individual literature outlining the nature of the service that it provides. A description of any specialist fostering schemes should be contained in the main Statement of Purpose.

Evidence: pre-inspection information, interview with fostering service manager, interviews with fostering service practice manager, interview with promotions and publicity officer, statement of purpose and children's guide.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service manager's qualifications and experience as detailed to the inspectors exceeds the minimum requirement.

There are six fostering service practice managers who can deputise for the fostering service manager. All hold a professional qualification in social work.

The inspectors were told that all fostering service staff who undertake recruitment and assessment of foster carers are all qualified social workers.

Discussion with the fostering service manager, practice managers, fostering service staff and foster carers and inspection of documents and pre-inspection materials all show that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation of the fostering service.

Evidence: Service Manager's pre – inspection questionnaire; discussion service manager; practice managers

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service manager has undertaken an internal audit of staff files; this is almost completed. The inspectors are also aware of a review of all staff files held by the human resources section, which the local authority is undertaking. The manager's file was not examined at this inspection but the inspectors were told that it now meets the requirements of the foster care regulations.

Staff files will be examined at the next inspection to ensure that they fully comply with the requirements of Schedule 1.

Evidence: examination of staff files, discussion with the fostering service manager.

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

At the last inspection one statutory requirement was made regarding service monitoring by the manager.

The following observations were made at that time.

“Service monitoring takes place through a variety of mechanisms, which include team meetings, formal supervision of staff and carers, unannounced visits to approved foster homes by practice managers and, in some instances, disruption meetings when placements have broken down in an unplanned way. The inspectors were told that practice managers produce quarterly reports, information from which is used in the six-monthly monitoring reports.

The fostering service manager stated that there is a clear budget monitoring process in place for which reports are produced at regular intervals.”

Since that time managers have implemented both requirement and recommendation, and the Commission has received copies of monitoring reports produced by the service manager.

The service has clearly defined roles for both managers and staff and operates within the local authority financial policies. It publishes annually allowances paid to carers and the cost of each of it’s services. This information is available to carers, staff, and commissioning agencies.

The local authority does have a conflict of interest policy.

Evidence: interviews with fostering service manager, practice managers and staff, pre-inspection documentation.*

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

1

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

1

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:	1
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	1

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>A job description for the service manager and contract of appointment is now on file. The Fostering service manager does not hold a similar position in another organisation.</p> <p>Discussion with foster carers, fostering service staff and managers showed that all were aware of lines of accountability relative to them. Through individual and group discussion, the inspectors found that carers, staff and managers were clear about their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>There are clear deputising arrangements to cover when the fostering services manager is absent – cover would be provided by either her line manager or delegated to fostering service managers.</p> <p>Evidence: Manager’s Questionnaire; discussion with staff and carers; discussion with service 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
<p>Inspectors visited seven foster homes and met with foster carers at three support group meetings, one training group and a peer guide group meeting during the course of this inspection.</p> <p>All the foster homes visited were warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and could comfortably accommodate all who were living there.</p> <p>In each of the foster homes visited, the foster child had their own bed and their privacy and need for space was adequately met.</p> <p>File tracking showed some evidence that a health and safety risk assessment of the physical environment of foster homes is undertaken. These should be updated as circumstances change, for example, one file did not appear to show an update when the family gained a pet dog.</p> <p>Foster carers confirmed to the inspector that they have received advice on safe caring.</p> <p>Evidence: direct observation, foster home visits, file tracking, discussions with foster carers, observation of support, training and peer group meetings.</p>		

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
<p>Issues concerning cultural diversity and equal opportunity are explored as part of the assessment process. In addition the service has measures in place to develop carers' awareness and knowledge of issues of diversity.</p> <p>The service is making attempts to recruit carers from as diverse a group as possible, and has recruited carers from a wide range of family types and age ranges.</p> <p>Evidence: pre-inspection questionnaire, discussions with foster carers, staff and managers.</p>		

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

There is a process for matching children with carers who are able to meet their needs. Service managers were clear that they would not offer placements that were inappropriate or constituted a risk. However, it is still the case that when matching considerations are made, choice is often limited. This leads to children and young people still being placed at some considerable distance than would be ideal.

Also, the inspectors were informed by several foster carers of situations, where a lack on pre-placement information and adequate placement planning had created difficulties for carers and young people. Carers told inspectors that many placements are not pre-planned and that subsequent planning meetings often take place weeks after the placement is made. Whilst 70% of foster carers reported that they felt they had adequate information, 30% said they felt they had been inadequately informed.

Carers also said that care managers are not always consulting care managers for children already in place when subsequent placements are being considered. The inspectors also found at least one situation where a decision had been made at a permanency planning meeting, to change the status of a placement, from a short-term emergency placement with a temporary exception to the carers' approval, to a permanent long-term placement outside the carers' approval range, before the fostering service had undertaken a reassessment of the carers' suitability for that particular age range and number of children. This was discussed with a fostering service practice manager, who stated that this was not the normal practice and explained to the inspectors measures recently agreed with the care management service which should improve the placement planning process - the fostering service will now convene and monitor all placement planning meetings for a period of three months, with the proviso that a care management practice manager with knowledge of the background of the case would attend placement planning meetings in complex cases. In other cases, the care manager would be in attendance.

A continuing issue, raised by foster carers and at fostering service team meeting, is the time taken to identify prospective placements, particularly for respite placements to support existing foster placements or where carers require a break. Inspectors were told that placements were still frequently not identified until shortly before they were needed, leading to an inability to adequately prepare children and respite carers.

Out of 57 foster carer questionnaires returned, 55% of carers said that they take children on an emergency basis and almost 80% said that they had been asked to take a child in an emergency.

You must ensure that before making any placement, the responsible authority shall enter into a written agreement, referred to as the "foster placement agreement", with the foster carer relating to the child that covers the matters specified in Schedule 6.

You must also ensure that if the placement is made under Regulation 38(1) the local authority, may place a child in an emergency for a period not exceeding 24 hours.

Evidence: discussion foster carers, foster carer survey, attendance team meeting, discussion fostering social workers, file case tracking, discussion managers.

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
<p>All foster carers receive training in child protection as part of the pre-approval training, they also have written guidance on safe care practice and appropriate forms of discipline in a practice guidance handbook. In the foster carer survey, almost 88% of carers confirmed that the fostering service has made clear what punishments are acceptable.</p> <p>A child protection officer is being invited to speak at a forthcoming foster carer peer guide group meeting.</p> <p>There is a written procedure for foster carers to use if the foster child is missing from their care (seen in policy and procedures manual given to the Commission)</p> <p>The service manager does monitor all allegations and follows up all outcomes of strategy meetings with practice managers and link workers. The fostering service also informs the Commission of any allegations made against carers or staff and action taken.</p> <p>Inspectors were told that training in bullying awareness is now being provided for carers and the service has introduced an action plan to boost attendance at post-approval training training.</p> <p>Evidence: discussion with practice managers, service manager, examination of policies and procedures, observation of foster panel, pre-inspection questionnaire, foster carer survey.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

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>The service has written policies on promoting and maintaining contact and there is guidance for foster carers in the practice handbook. Pre-approval training and information evenings emphasize and promote the need for contact.</p> <p>There was evidence that the fostering service and the individual carers make every effort to maintain links with families where this is in accordance with the care plan. Young people spoken to felt that they were included in the decision making and planning of the contact arrangements.</p> <p>Some foster carers and fostering link workers reported that, on occasions, care managers have not adequately consulted with them before a contact plan is made. As a result, some carers feel that unreasonable expectations, which did not take into account their family and other fostering commitments, had been placed upon them in terms of supporting and/or supervising contact. Carers were very much aware of the key role they have in promoting and supporting children's contact with their families and significant others and take an active role in this. Where carers have multiple placements, careful planning is needed to ensure that carers are not overburdened. Out of the 94 placing officer questionnaires returned, almost 79% of placing officers agreed that foster carers work very or fairly well with the child's family. Almost 17% said that carers' work with the child's family was average and the remainder said they were a little disappointed with the way the carer works with the child's family.</p>		

Evidence: policies and procedures, discussions with foster carers, young people and parents, inspection of case records, discussions with practice managers, fostering link workers and care managers.

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

The formal process for consulting with young people is through the looked after child review process. Young people are invited to attend and express their opinion, both foster carers and children's right workers may advocate on their behalf. Children are given advice about contacting children's rights workers in both magazine and website information.

In the young person's questionnaire survey, 83% of young people said that foster carers often or sometimes ask for their opinions and ideas. 17% said that foster carers don't ask very often or never ask for their opinion or ideas. Examples young people gave about what their carer had consulted them about included all aspects of their day-to-day care, activities, meals, clothing, bedrooms and holidays.

Young people spoken to confirmed that they were consulted about the arrangements made on their behalf. Those spoken to were aware that they could make complaints about the fostering service and 63% of young people who returned a survey questionnaire said that they had been told how to make a complaint about how they are being looked after if they need to. However, an overwhelming majority (88%) said that they had not been told how to get in touch with inspectors at CSCI if they needed to about how they are being looked after. The inspectors are aware that the new young person's guide, which is due for distribution soon, does include contact details for the Commission, so no recommendation is being made at this time.

The parents interviewed were generally happy with the level of consultation and said that they had been able to take up any issues that had arisen and were satisfied that these were now addressed.

Evidence: pre-inspection questionnaire, discussions with young people, foster carers and parents, discussions with fostering social workers and care managers, young person's questionnaire survey responses.

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 inspectors were informed that young people placed within the fostering service are registered with a G.P. and receive regular medical assessments. The fostering service manager said that the service is not aware of child or young person placed who is not registered with a G.P. This was confirmed by discussions with foster carers and file tracking. Some carers also report that accessing dental services for looked after children can be difficult as there is a deficit of NHS dentists in some areas.

The fostering manager is conducting a survey of foster carers to try to establish the extent of this problem and, once the results have been collated, will be producing an action plan. A new development, since the last inspection, is the pilot project, contracted to the Peper Harow Foundation, for a period of one year, to provide a specialist placement and therapeutic support service to individual children and foster carers in permanent foster placements which have been assessed as at risk of placement breakdown. The specialist worker also provides advice and consultation to fostering link social workers and foster carers.

Foster carers continued to tell inspectors that, frequently, essential medical information is not made available to them at the time of placements being made, although, generally, this is passed the carer at a later date. Children placed do not have a written health record which moves with them when they change placement. Respite foster carers, generally, rely on receiving this information directly from the main carers. A written health record would be a better system of transferring important health information between one set of carers and another.

Evidence: pre-inspection questionnaire, discussions with the fostering service manager and staff, discussions with foster carers, file tracking.

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

Inspectors were told of a number of initiatives that have been started since the last inspection, these included; the establishing of a pilot group in North Devon involving one of the practice managers, to liaise directly with schools and community colleges, in an attempt to address issues such as absences of personal education plans, or failure to meet identified targets or objectives. The funding of a new LAC Education Co-ordinator to attend foster care team meetings and liaise with fostering teams, and manager in relation to policy and practice issues and work with specific children, and an educational psychologist who works closely with the Family Care Worker Scheme.

An inspector attended a Family Care Worker Scheme team meeting when educational issues were discussed with the educational psychologist and a number of issues were agreed to be taken up, on behalf of a number of children. The issue of some young people not formally excluded from school, but told they could not attend continued since the last inspection.

Some foster carers continued to report that they felt educational planning for young people felt a low priority, others felt they had received excellent support.

Foster carers do attend school events and actively support children, as is appropriate within the care planning for individual children.

Evidence: attending foster care supports groups; discussion with carers; young people, foster care support workers; managers; attending team meetings; Pre – inspection questionnaire.

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?

0

This standard was not fully assessed at this inspection and therefore has not been scored.

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

With regard to the requirement made at the previous inspection, in relation to Schedule 1 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the fostering service manager told the inspectors the measures that are being undertaken to ensure compliance - she has almost completed an audit of staff files and has been liaising with colleagues from the human resources department at County Hall, to ensure that the centrally held files also comply. Six staff files held in the HR section at County Hall, were randomly selected for inspection. Files did not hold all of the information required in schedule 1 of the Foster Care Regulations. Information not held on staff files, included; CRB checks, recent photograph, two written references, full employment history, application forms for current post held. Evidence of qualifications. There was no evidence that written references were supported by telephone contact. The inspectors are aware that a county-wide audit of staff files is being undertaken by the local authority to ensure compliance with the relevant service regulations and national minimum standards. The work undertaken to ensure compliance in the future will be examined at the next inspection. Until that time the previous requirement will remain.

All qualified social workers within the service, have now been registered with the GSCC, and therefore those staff do have enhanced CRB checks and proof of identity and qualifications. The local authority has recently undertaken a review of residential service provision and as a result a number of additional foster care support worker posts have been created. Those staff appointed to the fostering service as a result of the review, were subject to a selection process, but a decision was taken not to renew references.

All social work qualified staff, held a recognised qualification, the inspectors were told that all other specialist professional advisors to the service hold appropriate qualifications.

Evidence: Staff Files; Discussion manager; Pre-inspection questionnaire

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

X

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?****3**

There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability, staff and carers told the inspectors that they understood the structure, and lines of accountability. The county service has an office base in Exeter, Totnes and Barnstaple, each locality office has at least one practice manager, each of whom report to the Group Manager for foster care who is based in Totnes.

Two practice managers have responsibility for the family care worker scheme. One had only recently started in that post, one was established in that role, neither had a background in family placement work, prior to taking on that role, however one has been in post for five years. In interview with the established practice manager, she confirmed that is gaining experience of the foster care standards and regulations with each piece of work undertaken. The inspector was told; “we are learning as we go”; this was reflected in practice within parts of that team which had developed following the closure of residential units. Both of these practice managers do have substantial experience in managing residential services.

The monitoring of staff workloads in carried out in supervision. The disparities in caseload across the county continue despite being reviewed since the last inspection.

All social workers working in the fostering service were clear about the relationship between the child’s social worker and themselves.

Administrative systems and back up to the service was efficiently organised.

Training profiles are maintained for both staff and foster carers.

Evidence: Discussion with foster carers; foster care social workers; support worker; managers; training schedules; supervision schedules; records held.

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**

A significant expansion of the Family Care Worker Scheme has taken place since the last inspection. Further plans are in place to increase the number of fostering support workers throughout the service. However only a little over 25% of carers, said that they felt there were sufficient staff working in the service.

The fostering service has started to target specific groups and locations, with a view to seeking to recruit a range of carers to meet the needs of children, across the county. The service has identified that it has insufficient carers to meet the full range of needs in all areas of the county leading to some children needing to be looked after outside of their local area. It has also identified a shortfall in placements for teenagers.

The assessment of prospective carers, were generally found to be detailed and thorough, covering the qualities, competencies, aptitude and attitude of prospective carers. In general the quality of foster care assessment was high.

However some carers recruited to the Family Care Worker Scheme had not been subject to the same quality of assessment as was the case in other areas of the service.

A random selection of Family Care Worker files were looked at, one form "F" showed that assessments undertaken by previous fostering agencies had been purchased by the local authority and in the case of that form "F" the details of the assessing social worker and supervisor on the form, were not employed by the local authority. The form "F", identified them as working for the family care worker scheme, based in Totnes. This was not the case. The local authority had only made minor alterations to that form "F", mostly relating to dates and ages, despite it being completed some years previously.

A full assessment of the carers had not been undertaken by the local authority assessing social worker, relying largely on historic assessment material. One of the Family Care Worker Scheme practice managers told an inspector, that three other sets of carers had been recruited to the scheme in a similar manner, and that they "were learning as they go".

You must ensure that a full assessment is carried out on all prospective foster carers, in accordance with Regulation 27(1)(2).

Evidence: discussion with family care worker scheme practice managers; service manager; Foster Carer Files; talking with foster carers.

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

The fostering service has clear policies and procedures for addressing staff concerns, most staff were generally satisfied with the fairness and competence of the service as an employer. There are adequate processes in place for resolving grievances and complaints from staff and carers.

The service does have a whistle blowing policy, it is unclear how well this is understood.

Evidence: policies and procedures; pre-inspection information; discussion staff

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The service does undertake regular supervision of staff and all staff have an annual appraisal. Training opportunities exist within the range of training available to all social services staff. However there is limited opportunity for staff, to undertake more specialist training specifically aimed at foster care services.</p> <p>There are regular service development days held, attended by all staff within the service, these provide professional development, and address strategic issues for the service.</p> <p>Managers indicated that budgetary constraints had an effect on specific training for social workers in fostering.</p> <p>The service is introducing a programme of joint training for foster carers and staff in the near future.</p> <p>Currently there is not a formal induction programme for newly appointed staff</p> <p>Evidence: Discussion managers; observation of training programme; discussion staff.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Fostering service practice managers provide the one-to-one supervision of fostering service staff. The fostering service manager provides individual supervision and support to the practice managers. All staff providing supervision have been given appropriate training. There was evidence that supervision was taking place regularly.</p> <p>There is an annual performance review for all staff, at which targets are discussed and set. Regular team meetings are held in each office location and minutes are taken. An inspector observed a team meeting held in the Exeter office and a family care worker scheme team meeting.</p> <p>Evidence: examination of supervision records, team meeting minutes, observation of team meetings, pre-inspection information, discussions with staff and managers.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The Foster Carer pre – inspection questionnaire showed that of the 57 returned, 63% said the support they were provided with, was either very good or quite good; 17% reported they were not well supported. The majority carers, said that they felt well supported by their Fostering link worker and the fostering service, but reported that they felt less well supported by the child’s social worker.

Foster Carers attached to the Family Care Worker scheme generally reported feeling very well supported by their support worker.

Support to carers is provided through supervisory visits by the allocated link fostering social worker; fostering support workers, peer guides, in a small number of cases carers received support from a specialist worker provided by the Peper Harow foundation as part of a pilot scheme. The fostering service have introduced a new model of supervision of carers and new records of supervisory visits. Some confusion was reported by carers regarding the new process and paperwork. Further confusion existed between the differing roles of each of the people providing support to carers, some clarification between the roles is recommended. Additional support may also be provided by the County emergency duty team. Some experienced carers spoke of the difficulty in obtaining help out of normal office hours.

The role of the supervising social worker is clear and is understood by foster carers.

The role between the child’s social worker and the foster carer was also understood. The inspectors were told that communication between some foster carers and children’s social workers could be improved, these difficulties including returning telephone calls, difficulty in gaining information about the child and in some cases no social worker allocated to the child. This issue is addressed in requirement 3, discussed in Standard 8.

Evidence: Discussion foster carers; peer guide group meeting; team meetings. Foster Carers Questionnaire. Discussion Practice Managers.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

All foster carers have a written foster carer agreement, which outlines the expectations the service will have of foster carers. This agreement also outlines the expectations foster carers should have of the service.

The inspectors were told that all foster carers are allocated a named, qualified social worker, to provide professional support. In addition unqualified support worker posts have been created and a third post is being covered by a secondment arrangement. Further support worker post have been created, by the review of the residential provision provided by the local authority. The majority of those support workers will work with carers as part of the Family Care Worker scheme. The role of two fostering supports workers; one based in Exeter the other based in Barnstaple appears to differ, in that one has an allocated caseload and is viewed by foster carers; placing social workers and some colleagues as the allocated link worker, whilst the other does not carry a caseload, and fostering link social workers request additional support for cares from that worker as required. There would appear to be no strategic reason for the differences in those two roles. At the last inspection, the

inspectors were told, that this role was to provide an additional level of support to foster carers. The Exeter based post would appear to be undertaking the role usually expected by the allocated link fostering social worker.

Arrangements for the supervision of foster carers, varies within each of the locations. There is some confusion within the fostering service and amongst foster carers, regarding the roles of the support workers.

Within the Family Care Worker scheme, there are two qualified practice managers and three qualified social workers.

Supervising social workers meet foster carers on an irregular basis, but will visit if requested, a substantial degree of contact is by telephone. Records are maintained of any visit, the frequency of visits will be determined by individual circumstances relating to individual children placed. As mentioned in the previous standard a more formal approach to the supervision of carers is being introduced.

Practice managers have started to monitor the undertaking of unannounced visits to foster carers by social work staff, pre-inspection information indicated that not all carers received an unannounced visit during the last year.

Foster carers are given written practice guidance and advice on how to complain should they feel it necessary. This advice includes information on how allegations of improper conduct by a foster carer will be managed. At the time of the inspection, a number of foster carers had been either subject of allegations, or had complaints that were being investigated at that time. Several carers expressed a high level of concern about the length of time that investigations took to be brought to conclusion, poor communication and feeling generally unsupported by the department throughout the process. This had led to a high level of concern by a significant number of carers and meetings had been arranged between the service manager and carers in an attempt to address these matters during the course of the inspection.

It is recommended that the service conducts a review of the way in which allegations against carers and complaints by carers are investigated. To ensure that these issues are brought to conclusion in a timely manner.

It is also recommended that the roles of the fostering support workers are reviewed to ensure that none are undertaking tasks that should be undertaken by a qualified social worker.

Evidence: discussion foster carers; support worker; fostering social workers; pre-inspection information, peer guides.

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

All prospective foster carers are given pre-approval training, prior to being approved as foster carers. After approval carers felt that continued training was dependent upon the enthusiasm of the carers. There was evidence that the service was encouraging those who were keen enough to progress through levels two and three with a view to taking more complicated cases. The foster care progression scheme is competency based and requires foster carers to develop specialist skills.

The service has introduced an action plan in order to address poor attendance levels at post approval training courses. Specific training has been given to carers to raise awareness of cultural diversity within the service.

Foster carers linked to specific services such as the Family Care Worker scheme, receive additional training relating specifically to that role; this training may be provided, by members of the youth offending team or workers within the family care worker scheme.

Foster carers told inspectors that generally they the training offered was relevant and helpful.

Evidence: training records; pre-inspection questionnaire; discussion foster carers; discussion staff and managers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The case records relating to children are not held by the fostering service, but are held in local social services offices. The quality of the information held on file showed some improvement since the previous inspection. However there still continued to be gaps in information held which included the following, hand written records were frequently not legible, there were substantial gaps in information held in relation to schedule 6. The gaps in information held included; legal status of child; religion of child; incomplete contact arrangements; in some instances no placement plan, in others placement plans with no clear identification of health, educational or social needs and how the foster carer was to assist in meeting these; Foster placement agreements not signed by carers, link worker or practice manager; SS(9) not signed by team manager; medical consent forms not signed and dated. Frequent entries not signed and dated. (NMS 24.4)

The local authority does have a policy concerning client access to records , these files are included within that policy.

There is little evidence that the fostering service has sufficient information on the background and history of each child to assist foster carers in supporting children to come to terms with their past. (NMS 24.6)

Children's files looked at indicated that in some cases statutory visits and reviews of the arrangements for looked after children at not being held within statutory timescales.

It is recommended that every effort is made to gather all of the information that foster carers need to assist children in coming to terms with their past, and that where information is not made available by placing social workers, that a written record of the request is held on the file.

Evidence: Children's case files; discussion foster carers; discussion fostering social workers; discussion with placing care managers.

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?**

1

Separate records are held on each area specified in NMS 25.2. The service manager now holds records of complaints and allegations. There is evidence that these records are monitored and follow up action taken. A summary of complaints and outcomes for the period Jan. '04 to Jan. '05 was provided for the inspection. At the last inspection a recommendation was made regarding the record of complaints and allegations, this is now met.

Staff records, are held by the human resources section in County Hall. Inspectors are aware currently being undertaken to ensure compliance of these records. The staff records examined in County Hall did not hold all of the information required under schedule 1, this will remain a requirement until that work is completed.

All confidential records are held in securely, there is a policy on access to that information. The fostering service holds a register of carers, which is updated on a weekly basis, a register of children placed is also held by the service provider. These records hold the information required.

The local authority has a written policy on the keeping and retention of records.

Each of the service locality offices, North, South and Exeter hold placement information in separate formats. The Family Care Worker scheme also keeps a separate record of placements. This makes gaining a single overview of placement activity difficult and it is recommended that one single system be introduced to cover the whole service.

Foster carer files examined varied in quality. Some held all of the information required under the regulations and schedules 5 and 6 however others did not. Among the information not held were the following: foster placement agreements; medical consent forms; risk assessments; identified educational needs; care plans; core assessment; copies of LAC reviews.

It is required that before making a placement the responsible authority shall enter into a written agreement with the foster carers (foster placement agreement) which covers all of the areas specified in Schedule 6.

Evidence: records examined; discussion manager; Pre – Inspection placement information.

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

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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During this inspection, the offices selected for particular inspection were the fostering services Exeter office and the family care worker scheme office in Totnes. At the last inspection, the fostering services Barnstaple and Totnes offices were inspected.

Another of the local authority's services also occupies the Exeter office premises and shares some facilities, with the fostering service, in particular, the reception, meeting room, kitchen, toilet and car parking facilities. This office was being redecorated during the course of the inspection. The family care worker scheme office has its own car park at the rear of its premises and is self-contained from other users of the building.

Discussions with staff showed that access to computers for report writing and accessing the internal email system was limited and, at times, caused delays and had a negative impact on their ability to do their job efficiently. It is recommended that a health and safety review of the IT requirements and work stations for fostering service staff is undertaken to ensure that adequate and fit for purpose equipment and work stations are available.

All office locations used by the fostering service have adequate premises security systems in place. Case files and other records generally had adequate security measures in place. However, the management of the security of some case records, in the Exeter office, needed improving, in particular, the files stored in the lockable cabinets in the corridor area outside the practice managers' room. This corridor is accessed by staff not members of the fostering service, and at the time of the inspection, maintenance and contracted workers also. These cabinets were not kept locked during the day, and the roller doors were sometimes left open, so were not totally secure. This was discussed with one of the practice managers. It is recommended that these cabinets are removed to a more secure location or are securely managed.

Evidence: tour of the premises in two office locations, discussions with fostering service managers and staff, pre-inspection questionnaire.

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 fostering service has an allocated annual budget, which is agreed within the social services directorate budget. The service manager is able to present bids for additional funding, and additional money had been found within the current financial year to fund additional posts within the service. The budget is monitored regularly and financial reports are made available to the service manager, to enable appropriate management action to be taken.

There are contingency plans to enable the continuance of the service in financial crisis.

Evidence: pre-inspection information, discussion with the fostering service manager.

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 fostering service operates within the local authority finance regulations. There are clear guidelines for foster carers, staff and managers. This is subject to scrutiny by the local authority auditors, and is regularly monitored by management accountants.

Payments to foster carers and costs of service are published and subject to regular contract monitoring.

Evidence: financial policies and procedures, budget monitoring reports, discussion with the fostering service manager.

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?

2

At the last inspection a recommendation was made that the service provider reviews the payment system to carers to ensure prompt and accurate payment. At this inspection some foster carers told inspectors that there were difficulties with the payment system to carers. Inspectors were told on one case where a carer had provided fortnightly respite but had not received any payment for over eight months, another carer told inspectors of protracted difficulties regarding the cost of meeting specialist medical appointments and contact visits which had to be negotiated on a visit by visit basis, rather than agreed and reviewed as part of the placement planning process.

The payments are published and should be agreed prior to placement, this does not happen on every occasion. Inspectors were told that these errors occurred most regularly, with short term or respite placements. Responsibility for making the payments lies with the placing social worker, not with the fostering service. Difficulties in communication, between district and foster carers may have contributed to this difficulty.

The previous recommendation remains.

Evidence: discussion foster carers; fostering social workers; managers.

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

The inspectors attended one panel and interviewed the chair.

On the day that panel met the chair was delayed as a result of a road traffic accident causing severe congestion. The deputy chair, chaired the panel until the chair was in attendance. Despite the short notice and the attendance of two inspectors the panel was well managed and business like. The Chair and panel members were sensitive to the nervousness of interviewees.

The notes provided for the panel members were generally informative and presented in an acceptable format. However on the day of the inspection, three agenda items had to be deferred. In one instance advice from the medical advisor had not been included in the assessing social workers summary. In another case, a first annual review, the panel felt the quality of the assessment insufficient for panel to make a decision, this case was deferred for a second time. In the third instance panel felt they had insufficient information to reach a conclusion.

The members of the panels included occupational therapists, educational psychologists and other independent professionals and non-professionals from a range of backgrounds, however, there was no medical advice included. Though medical advice can be sought. The chair used these cases of examples by which the panel is able to provide some feedback to the service on the quality of individual assessments being presented to panel.

No other changes have been made to the panel process since the last inspection.

Chairs of panel do provide information to the service provider regarding the range of carers and their ability to meet the needs of children , there is not a formal process for panel to provide a regular report on the quality of assessments and to provide a quality assurance function. This does happen informally however.

This standard is now fully met.

Evidence: Direct observation of panel; interviews with chair and deputy chair of panel; panel policies and procedures; discussion manager.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Most short term breaks for children with a disability are subject of separate contract arrangements with another service provider. However the local authority fostering service does provide respite care for both families and other carers. Discussion took place in a team meeting, trying to identify carers with vacancies, for short term breaks, these arrangements are frequently not made until the very last moment, not allowing for adequate preparation of either the child or carer.

In these cases carers should receive adequate time to prepare and the same level of pre-placement information be provided for them as for any other placement. The inspectors were told by carers that frequently no placement planning takes place for respite placements. The inspector was told of one occasion on which a child was placed for a month, no placement planning took place, no social work visit to the child took place.

In another case, a respite placement had been sought for family care worker scheme carers, within the independent sector. This placement had been arranged by staff from the family care worker scheme and had been paid for by that scheme. The young person's social worker; had not been involved in placement planning for that series of placements nor any visit to the respite carers. The inspector was told that this type of arrangement has happened on other occasions, using the same independent foster care agency.

Inspectors were told that in a number of cases children do not have qualified social workers allocated. They may have a community care worker allocated as care manager, who may in some cases be unfamiliar with the placement planning and statutory visiting arrangements.

A requirement has been made.

Evidence: Discussion care managers; discussion foster carers; discussion team manager; attendance team meeting; discussion with link fostering social workers.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The assessment of kinship carers is not usually undertaken by the fostering service and is usually undertaken by child care social workers working in district. This may lead to assessment being undertaken by staff who lack experience in assessment work. All such assessments are presented to the foster care approval panel.

The manager told inspectors that support to kinship and specific carers is not usually undertaken by the fostering service, in South Devon, some have an allocated link worker within the fostering service. Kinship carers do not attend pre-approval training, they may be offered post approval training if requested by the locality social services team. There are implications for resources if the service is to undertake this work.

The previous recommendation remains.

Evidence: discussion managers.

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 07/02/05 to the 03/03/05 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 27th September 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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 Andrea Morris of Devon County Council Foster Care 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 Andrea Morris of Devon County Council Foster Care 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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