



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Shropshire County Council Fostering Service

The Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND

31st January 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

Shropshire County Council Fostering Service

Address

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

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

01743 460560

Address

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

Fax No:

01743 460562

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Nominated Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

08/03/04

Date of Inspection Visit		31st January 2005	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		Mr. Chris Dennison	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
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- 6. Records**
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- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
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D.2. Action Plan

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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 Shropshire 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.

Shropshire County Council Fostering Services aims to recruit a wide range of placements to meet the family placement needs of the great majority of children and young people looked after by the local authority. At the time of the inspection the Service provided placements for 162 young people. Placements are provided by 119 approved foster carers.

The service is organised in two teams, each with a team manager, under the overall management of the appointed manager of the service, the Service Manager, Resources. All the Fostering Service teams and managers are now accommodated within the same building in Shrewsbury.

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

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 between 8th – 19th March 2004. This inspection took place between 31st January 2005 and 10th February 2005. This inspection concentrated on Core Standards as identified by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, however inspectors did follow up requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection in respect of all standards, in addition to issues raised during the inspection that did not fall within the Core Standards. Inspectors felt that the Service had made progress in complying with the Fostering Services Regulation 2002, but Inspectors were concerned that 17 requirements from the previous inspection had not been met, with the inspectors making a further 17 requirements as a result of this inspection.

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 and placing officers. 27 questionnaires from foster carers were returned. Foster carers' views were also sought through visits to six foster carer households and through attendance at a monthly support group and a meeting of the Shropshire Foster Care Association. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire, of which 57 were returned. A questionnaire was used to gather views from young people, aged 7+, and 20 of these were returned. Young people were also seen during the visits to the six identified foster homes.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was met.

The Statement of Purpose has been revised and provides a concise and useful summary of the service provided. The Service has also developed an attractive Children's Guide with the involvement of young people, however, it is not suitable for younger children or those with learning difficulties. It is necessary for the Service to produce a less complex guide to meet the needs of these young people.

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

1 standard was met and 1 standard was not inspected.

Whilst the appointment of the Manager of the Service took place prior to the implementation of the National Minimum Standards, his appointment complied with the Standards.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

1 standard was not met, due to a minor shortfall; 1 standard was not inspected.

Inspectors are aware that not all significant events are being notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection as required by Schedule 8. The Service's procedures require amending to ensure that the Fostering Service consistently reports such notifications.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

2 of the 9 standards were met; 7 of the standards were not met; 6 due to a minor shortfall and 1 because of a major shortfall.

The care provided by foster carers is of a high standard, however, there remains a lack of written assessment and agreements to support these placements. As reported in the previous inspection report the major shortcoming in promoting the welfare of young people is the Service's inability to provide appropriately matched placements for young people. Whilst

new carers have been approved as a result of the Services recruitment campaign, the campaign has yet to achieve sufficient numbers of the types of carers most needed by the service. Staff reported that it is becoming an increasing problem to identify suitable foster carers to meet the complex needs of young people requiring a foster placement.

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

1 of the 9 standards assessed was met and exceeded the standard, 2 standards were not inspected. 6 standards were not met; 5 due to a minor shortfall and 1 because of a major shortfall.

The Service continues to offer a high level of training to its foster carers, with this standard being exceeded. Inspectors were concerned that although there had been limited progress in respect of the supervision and support to foster carers, there is a considerable amount of work required before the Service can meet this Standard, with 7 requirements being made by inspectors. Inspectors felt that improvements regarding this standard can only be made if the Fostering Service is fully staffed. The Nominated Manager must keep the adequacy of staffing levels under review.

Whilst the Service fully supports the need for rigorous recruitment processes for both staff and foster carers, the detailed procedures had not been consistently applied.

Records (Standards 24 – 25)

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

Whilst there has been an improvement in the content of information provided in respect of young people placed with foster carers, the Service must ensure that information is maintained in a confidential manner on each young person's separate file.

Further work is required to ensure that the register of foster carers contains all required information and that the record of young people placed is accurate.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This standard was met.

Since the last inspection the Service has relocated to one central office. This has provided many advantages, however, the Nominated Manager should ensure that all staff are provided with appropriate equipment to enable them to undertake tasks in an efficient and effective manner.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

3 standards were not inspected.

Two standards are not relevant to Local Authority Fostering Services. Inspectors confirmed that a requirement from the previous inspection had been met in respect of clarification of mileage for foster carers.

Fostering Panels (Standard (30)

This standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.

The Fostering Panel is a joint Panel with Find Us Keep Us Fostering Agency. The Panel was not observed during this inspection as it had been observed as part of Find Us Keep Us inspection in September 2004. Information from that inspection and examination of minutes and procedures indicate that the Service has made progress in respect of this standard, with the Panel being appropriately constituted and chaired. However, the Nominated Manager must ensure that all appropriate information is presented to Panel in respect of exemptions from the normal fostering limit.

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.

The Service has still not completed policies and procedures setting out the particular arrangements for short break and respite placements.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard was met.

Kinship foster carers are well supported by the Fostering Service and have recently received the same basic payment as other foster carers, however, they still do not have access to the Payment for Skills Scheme.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report.

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

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	<u>Janet Manders</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Sarah Moore</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	<u>Brian Lock</u>	Signature	_____
Date	<u>24th May 2005</u>		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Nominated Manager (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 Nominated Manager(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	FS1	A simpler version of the Children's Guide must be produced to meet the needs of younger/less able children. Timescale of 26.07.04 not met	01.07.05
2	43(1)	FS4	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all significant events as identified in Schedule 8 are notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.	01.05.05
3	12(1)(a)	FS6	Where a child has been abused or has abused another child, a recorded risk assessment must be carried out before any decision is made to allow sharing of bedrooms.	01.06.05
4	33	FS7 & FS17	The fostering service must recruit carers able to meet the range of needs of children looked after by Shropshire County Council, particularly in relation to ethnicity and disability. Timescale of 03/12/04 not met.	01.07.05
5	34 (3) Sch 6	FS8	The Fostering Service must ensure that before making a placement, a written agreement is drawn up (foster placement agreement), which covers all matters specified in Schedule 6. This must include specific reference to elements of matching.	01.06.05

6	12	FS9	<p>The fostering service must produce a written policy on which safe caring guidelines for each foster home can be based.</p> <p>Time scale of 01.10.04 not met.</p>	01.06.05
7	12 (1)	FS9	<p>The Nominated Manager must ensure that all allegations against foster carers are investigated thoroughly and that departmental procedures are followed.</p>	01.05.05
8	14	FS10	<p>The Nominated Manager must ensure that risk assessments are made prior to commencement of contact and retained on files of both the young person and the foster carers.</p>	01.06.05
9	15 (2)	FS12	<p>The Nominated Manager 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.</p>	01.06.05
9	17	FS14	<p>There must be clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living.</p> <p>Timescale of 01.10.04 not met</p>	01.06.05
10	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	FS14	<p>Pathway Plans must be fully completed by all involved, and should provide a clear plan how all concerned will contribute to the young person's route towards independence.</p> <p>Timescale of 28.06.04 not met.</p>	01.05.05
11	20 (1)	FS15	<p>The Nominated Manager must ensure that any criminal offence is fully considered and a written record is made of the consideration prior to the appointment of any member of staff.</p>	01.05.05
12	20 (1) Sch1	FS15	<p>The Nominated Manager must ensure that two written references are obtained for all appointments to the fostering service, and followed up by telephone, before the commencement of employment.</p>	01.05.05

13	20 (1) Sch1	FS15	The Nominated Manager must ensure that CRB checks are separately and securely stored and are destroyed once viewed by CSCI. A record of the date, type of check, etc should be placed on the individuals file.	01.06.05
14	27 (1)	FS15 FS17	The Nominated Manager must ensure that an assessment is undertaken in respect of all persons it considers suitable to become a foster parent.	01.05.05
15	27	FS17	Foster care assessments must fully comply with the relevant standards and regulations, and must be carried out in a thorough and investigative manner. Timescale of 28.6.04 not met	01.06.05
16	19	FS17	The Nominated Manager must keep under review the adequacy of staffing levels within The Fostering Service.	01.07.05
17	17	FS18	Urgent consideration must be given to alternative methods of providing out-of-hours cover for the fostering service, and should be implemented as quickly as possible. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.06.05
18	19	FS19	There must be a clear plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.06.05
19	17	FS19	A joint review scheme must identify the training and development needs of both staff and carers and joint training must take place on a regular basis Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.06.05
20	29 (2)	FS21	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all foster home reviews are brought up to date, and are systematically maintained at the minimum required frequency in the future.	01.06.05
21	17 (1)	FS21	The Nominated Manager must ensure that foster carers who operate the foster carers helpline receive adequate support and training.	01.07.05

22	17 & 19	FS22	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all foster carers are supervised by a qualified social worker.	01.05.05
23	28	FS22	The fostering service must issue to all carers with a written foster care agreement covering all matters specified in Schedule 5. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.06.05
24	19	FS22	The fostering service must ensure consistency in the way in which complaints against foster carers are investigated and recorded. Timescale not met	01.05.05
25	12 (2) (b)	FS22	The Nominated Manager must ensure that an accurate record of all allegations against foster carers is kept and that the outcome of the investigation is clearly recorded, to allow for monitoring the service.	01.05.05
26	28 (5) (b)	FS22	The Nominated Manager must ensure that where a couple have been approved as foster carers, that both parties enter into and sign the Foster Care Agreement.	01.05.05
27	28 (2)	FS22 & FS30	The Nominated Manager must ensure that all notices of approval are made under the correct legislation and that they accurately reflect the approval agreed by the Fostering Panel.	01.05.05
28	44	FS22	The fostering service must review the insurance cover available to staff and carers and ensure that sufficient cover is provided, using as a guide the fact that children's homes are required to provide cover to the value of £5 million. Carers must be informed of the cover available, and the extent of their own potential liability. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.07.05
29	40	FS24	The Nominated Manager must ensure that each young person has a separate and confidential file, which only contains information regarding that child.	01.06.05

30	31	FS25	A register of carers must be produced which contains all the information required by Regulation 31. Timescale of 26.07.04 not met	01.07.05
31	22	FS25	The records maintained under this regulation must be maintained with complete accuracy. Timescale of 26.07.04 not met.	01.05.05
32	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 (4) (2)	FS30	The Nominated Manager must ensure that where an exemption from the usual fostering limit is granted the requirements of Schedule 7 are fulfilled.	01.06.05
33	11	FS31	There must be a policy and procedure item setting out the particular arrangements for short break/respite placements. Timescale of 01.10.04 not met	01.06.05

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 Nominated Manager(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	A simpler version of the Children's Guide must be produced to meet the needs of younger/less able children.
2	FS1	The Fostering Service's policies and procedures should contain reference to the relevant legislation, regulations and national minimum standards for each item.
3	FS10	The authority should ensure that a risk assessment as required by Standard 10.6 is undertaken prior to contact taking place.
4	FS12	The provision of Health Consents Cards would be more comprehensive, appropriate and convenient than relying on the LAC paperwork.
5	FS13	Information regarding consents for school trips and after-school activities should be included in the Foster Carers' Handbook.
6	FS15	The Nominated Manager should ensure that unqualified social workers receive additional supervision by a qualified worker who is accountable for their work.

7	FS17	The Nominated Manager should ensure that a written record is kept of the medical advisors views of the suitability of applicants to be foster carers once their medical records have been viewed.
8	FS22	The Nominated Manager should ensure that all new foster carers are provided with an induction to the administrative matters within The Fostering Service.
9	FS22	The Nominated Manager should ensure that the outcomes of all complaints investigations are clearly recorded.
10	FS22	The Nominated Manager should ensure that written records of unannounced visits are kept.
11	FS22	Foster carer supervision should take place on a more frequent basis, at least every two months.
12	FS26	The Nominated Manager should ensure that there are sufficient telephones and computers to allow staff to operate the service efficiently.
13	FS32	The fostering service should consider giving family and friends carers access to Payment for Skills on the same basis as other carers, thereby providing equality of opportunity, and an incentive for these carers to train and develop their skills.

* 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
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	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	31/01/05
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	97.5

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?

3

The Statement of Purpose had been revised since the last inspection and updated during January 2005. It provides a concise and useful summary of the fostering service, and covers all the areas required by this standard and associated regulation. In addition, although not included in the standard or regulation, it is recommended that details of the role, address and telephone number of the Commission be included. This information was added to the Statement of Purpose during the course of the inspection.

The fostering service had recently produced a Young Person's Guide. This is produced in a colourful Filofax-style format, which is very appropriate, and looked-after young people had been involved in the development of the guide. It provides well written and comprehensive information regarding the looked after system, including a list of sanctions which are not permitted, and what to do if unhappy in foster care. A later section covers several methods of registering a complaint, and an explanation of what an advocate is and how to access an advocate through the Children's Advocacy and Representation service at the NSPCC. However, the guide is not suitable for younger children, or children with a learning disability, so the need to produce a less complex version remains. Inspectors were informed that a simpler version is planned.

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?

0

This standard was not inspected on this occasion. The previous inspection undertaken in March 2004 noted that this standard had been met.

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 appointment of the manager complied with the processes set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and with Schedule 1, although the appointment pre-dated the issue of those regulations.

Telephone enquiries were not made at that time to follow up references, but the personnel department assured the inspectors that this is now part of their procedures.

The inspectors were also assured that CRB checks will be renewed after three years.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up the requirement made at the previous inspection in March 2004. The requirement stated, *“The Fostering Service must ensure that carers are informed of the need to declare any possible conflicts of interest.”* Inspectors were able to confirm that a policy in respect of Conflict of Interests for Foster Carers has now been included in the Foster Carers’ Handbook.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection are aware that there have been a number of instances where the Commission has not been notified of child protection investigations prior to the instigation of the investigation, however, the Commission for Social Care Inspection appears to have been informed later of the investigation. Additionally the Commission for Social Care Inspection has not received written notification of incidents where a young person has suffered a serious accident.

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

8

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.

8

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?****0**

This standard was not inspected on this occasion. The previous inspection noted that this standard had been met.

However, inspectors were concerned to note that there was a difference in perception between workers and managers in respect of the amount of work undertaken by staff and the ability of staff to appropriately take on any additional work.

In addition there was a feeling amongst staff of disempowerment with their views and experiences not being sought by managers when considering the development of the service. An example of this was the recent training in respect of supervision of foster carers, which all staff commented on positively but felt frustrated that information considered during the training has not then been discussed further to agree positive ways of developing supervision within the fostering service. In discussion with inspectors, managers felt that they gave staff every opportunity to express their views.

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?

2

The foster carers visited by the inspectors provided a high standard of care for the young people placed. This view was confirmed by placing social workers, of which 71% of those returning questionnaire stated that the foster carers were providing a very good level of care to the young people placed.

Foster carer's files include a Health and Safety checklist that is completed prior to foster carers approval and there is evidence on file that these are updated annually as part of the foster carers review. This system has now been improved with a "Home and Health Safety Checklist" booklet being given to all foster carers.

Foster carers receive training in respect of Health and Safety, however, there is no written guidance within the Foster Carer's Handbook in respect of this matter. Whilst there is a small amount of information contained in the "Home and Health Safety Checklist" booklet, this is not sufficient to ensure that foster carers have the appropriate information to protect a young person. This is an outstanding requirement from the previous inspection.

Pre- Admission Risk Assessments are undertaken by the duty social worker when a referral is made. Whilst this does ask whether a young person poses a risk to other people, including a risk from sexualised behaviour, it does not include a risk assessment regarding whether young people should share a bedroom. Such risk assessments were also not seen on young people's files.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service currently has no foster carers of minority ethnic origin, and therefore several children are placed cross-culturally. The Fostering Service states that it is difficult to attract carers from different ethnic and racial backgrounds due to the predominantly White-European profile of Shropshire's population.

Inspectors noted that where a young person needed to be placed cross-culturally, social workers have worked with foster carers to ensure that they have received information regarding how to meet the children's needs. Two pre-school children of African-Caribbean heritage were placed with white foster carers. The fostering social worker informed the inspectors that she had tried to find a support group for the children, but there was nothing for children so young. In addition, she had contacted the multi-cultural support team, but the children's mother had objected to the involvement of a support worker of Jamaican heritage, since the children's heritage is from St Vincent. The carer had received advice on hair and skin care, and the file contained various relevant articles provided to the carer by a previous support worker.

There is also a gap in provision for young people with disabilities, however, two foster carers have recently been approved to care for young people with disabilities. The Authority has also entered into a Service Level Agreement with Barnardo's to provide short breaks for young people with disabilities.

The department has developed a policy on promoting equality of opportunity and valuing diversity and this has been included in the recently developed Foster Carers' Handbook. Training has been provided for social workers and foster carers in ways of raising children's confidence and self worth. Inspectors were informed that further training will be provided in the training catalogue for April 2005 and that social workers are encouraged to attend this training.

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

The Fostering Service introduced a new referral form in January 2005. This requests that the views of the young person, parents and potential foster carers are sought. Whilst the Fostering Service has made considerable progress regarding gathering information from Case Managers to assist with the matching process, including Initial and Core Assessments, which are shared with the foster carers there are still occasions when foster carers do not receive crucial information. One carer did not know what a young person in their care had been charged with until they attended court with the child.

The referral form also includes a pre-admission risk assessment. However, inspectors found that there was no evidence of matching on the files of any of the young people seen by inspectors. Even with long-term placements no information was seen on file. There was reference on one file that a match was to be considered by the Fostering Panel later in the month, but there was no report on file. This is a disappointment at the previous inspection did at least see matching reports for long-term placements.

Worker consistently commented on the difficulty in finding foster carers with appropriate skills to care for the young people that they were being asked to place, this often meant a number of short term placements for a young person before a suitable placement became available.

The supervising worker for an inexperienced carer had been approached regarding a placement, which the worker considered was inappropriate for that carer, yet the carer was contacted direct later that day with the same request. This cannot be considered good matching or good practice.

Foster Placement Agreements were not found in relation to a number of placements, and where they were completed arrangements for giving consent for matters involving the child, such as school trips, overnight stays etc, were rarely covered, or if mentioned, did not contain sufficient detail. Inspectors were provided with a proforma of an agreement, however, this is a generalised agreement, which referred readers to other documents and did not fully comply with the National Minimum Standards.

Both foster carers and social workers commented that that it is rare that a young person has the opportunity to have a period of introduction or to give their informed view about a proposed placement. Most placements are made in an emergency although the inspectors did visit two young people who had had the opportunity for a brief period of introduction and it was reported that they had made a very smooth transition into their new placement.

Inspectors were informed that The Fostering Service intends to introduce a carer profile, which includes photographs of the foster carer and their family. This will be introduced in April 2005 and will be provided to all young people and their social workers prior to placement.

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?

2

The Authority has developed a useful proforma for staff to use to ensure that they appropriately monitor and manage risk in respect of young people, this includes prompts to ensure that they have seen the young person, listened to them, identified trends and patterns, evaluated and assessed information and situations.

Evidence from examination of files and from inspectors' attendance at Strategy meetings indicates that procedures are not always followed when investigating allegations against foster carers. The Fostering Service has been aware of this situation and has recently updated its procedures in relation to investigating allegations against foster carers to ensure that they are clear and transparent.

A report prepared for the Fostering Panel, by an investigating social worker after an allegation against foster carers, was objective and comprehensive.

As previously reported not all child protection investigations have been notified at the appropriate time to the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The Authority's procedures state that this is the responsibility of young person's social worker and team manager. This should be amended as the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 clearly states the responsibility lies with the Fostering Service.

The department has still not produced a written policy regarding safe caring guidelines.

The agency and all carers interviewed are clear about the unacceptability of physical punishment and this is included in procedural guidelines on the Care and Control of children and young people and in the Foster Care Agreement.

The issue of how to deal with bullying has been included in foster carers pre-approval training and is also covered in post approval training. The Foster Carers' Handbook contains information regarding countering bullying and an "Absent Children Procedure".

Foster carers spoken to by the inspectors who had experienced such situations demonstrated that they were clear as to what actions to take and the department's expectations of them.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: This information is no longer collected.

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?****2**

Foster carers spoken to by inspectors clearly understood the importance of contact and their role in it. Foster carers supervised contact where this was appropriate, and were adamant that they would ensure that they had all the information available to enable them to adequately protect the young people. Foster carers stated that generally contact details were included in placement agreements.

The Fostering Service has recently revised its procedure in respect of contact for young people, this clearly indicates that a risk assessment should be carried out prior to contact taking place, however, there was no evidence of this on the files viewed by inspectors. Inspectors were informed that training on handling difficult contact issues is to be included in the training to be launched in April 2005.

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 Fostering Service continues to strive to find ways of seeking young people's views regarding the service they receive. Whilst it is often difficult to seek a young person's view regarding a placement, prior to the placement being made, every effort is made.

Young people reported that their foster carers regularly sought their views and all young people reported that they were asked their opinion by their social worker. However, of the young people who responded to this question, over 80% stated that social workers only sought their views sometimes, 20% stated that their social worker always sought their view. The majority of young people stated that their views were sought by the service in respect of their foster carers. There was evidence of this on foster carers files as part of the foster carers annual review.

The Fostering Service are presently organising a group of young people whose views will be sought in respect of developing the fostering service.

The majority of young people (93%) were aware of how to make a complaint but only 56% were aware that they could contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The distribution of the Children's Guide should enable all you people to be aware of this right.

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
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Foster carers ensure that young people receive medical treatment as required, with young people being registered with local primary health care practitioners. However, it was of concern to inspectors that on a considerable number of files examined, the delegation of consent to routine medical treatment and immunisations had not been completed. Information regarding young people’s health was scantily completed if at all on most files examined by inspectors.

Foster carers complete records of medical treatment and accidents and copies are kept on the young person’s file and are monitored centrally.

The Authority has recently included a nurse as part of the Looked After Children’s Team, whilst inspectors did not have the opportunity to discuss this role with the nurse appointed, they felt that this can only be a positive development in supporting foster carers to meet the health needs of the young people they care for.

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
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Foster carers were seen to work closely with schools to support young people in their education and assisted the young people where appropriate with their homework. Personal Education Plans (PEP) were not consistently included on all files, but were seen on the majority of files. Where a PEP had not been completed in respect of one young person, this had been highlighted at a recent review and the chair required a plan to be completed for the next review. Some files also included information regarding young people’s achievements and their school reports.

The foster carers handbook includes information and guidance to foster carers regarding their role in a young person’s education and their responsibility to contribute to the assessment of a child’s educational needs and progress.

An effort is made by The Authority to maintain young people in their schools even when a placement has to be made some distance from the young person’s home, though this can on occasions mean long journey’s at both ends of the day for young people.

As Foster Placement Agreements have not been completed there is no clear guidance as to who can give consent for school trips etc. On one child’s file there was an undated, handwritten letter signed by the child’s social worker delegating to the foster carer the ability to sign consent forms for ‘trips’. The inspectors were concerned as to the validity of this letter. Whilst inspectors were informed that the department has now developed a policy and guidance in respect of this issue, it is not contained within the Foster Carers’ Handbook.

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?**

2

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up requirements from the previous inspection.

Examination of a young person's file who had reached 16 did not contain a Pathway Plan. The inspector was informed that discussions had taken place with the young person but no plan had yet been formulated.

Inspectors were informed that the Fostering Service had specifically requested the 16+ Team to address this issue in respect of the young people identified by inspectors.

However, as this had not been completed for those young people, this would suggest that there is a considerable amount of work to be undertaken to ensure that there are Pathway Plans in place for all young people who have reached the age of 16.

Whilst some training has been provided to foster carers regarding their role in preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living, there is still no written guidance for foster carers regarding this.

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?

2

Personnel services are provided by the Personnel section of the Social Services Department. As part of the inspection a sample of staff personnel files were inspected, including the two members of social work staff and two administrative staff appointed in the past year. There are written recruitment and selection procedures, which are clear and comprehensive. Good practice in the maintenance of personnel files included a list of posts held, with the date and establishment base at the front of each file, a comprehensive checklist for each appointment, and the division of the file into five sections for various areas of paperwork, also the format for recording the discussion of any conviction disclosed. Evidence indicates that there is a lack of consistency in respect of the recruitment of staff. Valid references had been obtained but not followed up by telephone. The file for the most recent appointment contained a checklist including the need for follow-up calls staff, but this had been marked Not Applicable. The second reference for an administrative post had not been received until two months after the start date in post. Systems were being implemented to record discussions and decisions in relation to any offence, which was disclosed, but this procedure had not been fully applied for one recent appointment. All appointments were made subject to completion of six months probationary service, but there needs to be greater clarity regarding under what circumstances this condition is not required, with specific information being given for each individual worker. A confidential report on the first 17 weeks of work appeared on one of the recently appointed social worker files, but not on the other. There was also a form confirming receipt and understanding of Policies and Procedures on the files of recent employees but not the other. It is important that the manager of the fostering service ensures that the framework for good practice in recruitment is carried through by the fostering service. Enhanced CRB checks had been obtained for all staff, including administrative staff. The top section of the CRB return, showing only the reference number with the name and address of the applicant, is held on file. This has been agreed to be good practice, but there is a problem in that the section selected does not include the information as to whether or not the check is at the enhanced level, neither does it include the date of the check. The record of CRB checks held on the file must include the date of the check and the confirmation that it was an enhanced check. CRB application forms must be carefully checked to ensure they have been fully and accurately completed, as a failure to do so could lead to an inaccurate result. The inspector

identified two recent examples of inaccurately completed forms. Original CRB checks were placed on the carers' files. The advice is to store these securely and to destroy when no longer required; usually within 6 months or when CSCI inspector has been able to view the check. Inspectors were pleased to not that CRB checks had been undertaken on a range of significant adults visiting the foster home. During the inspection the inspectors became aware of a situation where a new partner of a foster carer had been resident within the household for over a year but had not been prepared to undertake appropriate assessment or training. Due to concerns from a previous relationship a child protection investigation was instigated and the young person temporarily removed from placement. Inspectors were concerned that a situation such as this had been allowed to continue for such a long period, this may have been exacerbated by the case being supervised by a trainee social worker. Information to the foster carer from the Panel is not specific enough regarding expectations regarding the young people being placed where a person has not been appropriately assessed. Training has been organised for all staff in respect of assessment, to be held at the end of February.

Total number of staff of the agency:	19	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	2
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Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)
Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
<p>This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection. The previous inspection undertaken in March 2004 required the Fostering Service to review its procedure for making placements with an independent fostering agency. A new procedure has been developed and implemented in respect of this requirement. Inspectors also recommended that managers undertake training in respect of the supervision of staff. Inspectors were informed that both managers have now undertaken this training.</p>		

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?	2
<p>The fostering service is staffed by 2 team managers, 11 social workers (a number of these are part time), a trainee social worker, a staff development officer, and 3 administration support officers. At the time of the inspection the team had one vacant social work post, and two members of staff had had protracted sick leave in the previous few months. The team support 120 foster carers; caseloads were therefore higher than the expected norm in this service, and staff were experiencing some pressures as a result. A review of staffing has been undertaken and it is anticipated that additional staff will be employed. Without additional staff inspectors are of the view that there are insufficient staff to adequately support foster carers. Administrative support was considered by staff to be sufficient and of good quality; this is a considerable improvement since the last inspections.</p>		

As previously reported The Fostering Service does not have sufficient foster carers to provide a choice of placement for young people and in number of instances young people have been placed inappropriately.

In an attempt to address this shortage of foster carers The Fostering Service has a contract with a professional recruitment agency for the recruitment of foster carers, which is now in it's second year of operation. The first year had provided a general recruitment campaign for carers for a wide range of children, while the second year has focused on recruiting carers for teenagers and children with complex needs, although some staff reported that a number of applications received by the team did not meet these criteria.

Foster carers are assessed on the basis of the BAAF Form F with the attached competencies. However, the competency assessment rarely included any additional or independent information other than that already contained in the body of the Form F, and it is therefore of limited value. A training course in the assessment of foster carers presented by BAAF had been provided for all staff of the fostering service in February. It is expected that this will increase staff skills in undertaking more investigative assessments.

Assessments undertaken in respect of foster carers did not contain sufficient information regarding foster carers health, and the medical advisor not making written comments after viewing medicals returned from the applicant's GP exacerbated this.

It was very positive for the inspectors to hear from a carer who is gay, that he had been treated with equality, and without prejudice throughout the assessment of his application, and subsequent fostering career.

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

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up requirements from the previous inspection undertaken in March 2004.

A Whistleblowing policy has now been circulated to all staff and foster carers with a copy of the policy being included in the Foster Carers' Handbook.

The Fostering Service has undertaken work in reviewing the out of hours support to foster carers but at the time of the inspection this matter had not been fully resolved. Foster carers reported the support received from the Emergency Duty Team was inadequate.

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?

2

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection, which took place in March 2004.

Discussion with staff identified that there is still a considerable amount of work required to ensure that appropriate training is available to all staff involved in the Fostering Service.

Inspectors were informed that there were insufficient places on PQ training for Fostering Service staff to attend. Inspectors were informed that Case Managers and Initial Assessment team workers are given priority over Resources staff.

Staff reported that they had not been involved in any joint training with foster carers.

Inspectors were informed that the planned recruitment of a second Staff Development Office who will take responsibility for the Residential services, releasing time for the development within The Fostering Service. This will allow further work to be undertaken in developing a clear plan for the training and development of staff.
New members of staff reported that they had received an adequate programme of induction.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up the requirement from the previous inspection in March 2004. Discussion with staff confirmed that regular supervision now takes place and both parties receive a copy of notes of the supervision session and decisions made.

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

The inspection undertaken in March 2004 found that:

“The main strategy for working with carers is contained in the Payment for Skills scheme, supported by fostering policy and procedures. All matters listed in 21.2 are covered by the fostering service. Arrangements for training and development are focused on the work of the training officer, and a contract has been signed with the Shropshire Foster Care Association to formalise the council’s support to the Association, and the expectations of the support the Association will provide to foster carers.” Inspectors noted during this inspection that this remained the situation.

Inspectors were informed that one new carer dealing with a challenging placement had been able to contact his supervising social worker over the weekend, through the workers goodwill in providing him with a private number, but when the same carer had contacted the Out of Hours service they had not been helpful.

One carer’s last review was December 2003, and this had taken four months before being presented to panel. Fostering service managers were aware that about half of the foster home reviews were overdue and a programme had been drawn up to address this. The chair of the review meetings had been changed to the fostering team manager who was not involved in the line management of the fostering social worker and carer, to achieve a degree of independence, and this change is commended.

The majority of placing social workers reported that supervising social workers kept them informed of significant events regarding the young people placed with foster carers.

The development of a foster carer telephone helpline, run by foster carers may provide a useful avenue of support for foster carers. However, it is imperative that foster carers providing this service are provided with adequate training and support.

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

The Fostering Service has a policy and procedure for the supervision of foster carers, which requires foster carers to receive supervision every 3 months in the year after approval and subsequently every 4 months. Examination of files indicated that this level of supervision has been complied with, however, inspectors remain of the opinion that for supervision to be effective this level of supervision is not adequate. Whilst the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 do not state a frequency for supervision, inspectors believe that the present level of supervision does not offer adequate support to foster carers, with the additional danger that crucial information will not be discussed and passed on. The staff of the fostering service had attended a training programme in providing supervision to foster carers during January 2005. Staff informed inspectors that this had been a useful training course and as a consequence of the issues raised during this training they felt further discussion should take place regarding the content and frequency of supervision for foster carers in Shropshire. Fostering social workers also commented that there was nowhere on the record of supervision to note that the carer's records had been read.

Inspectors noted that the trainee social worker had been undertaking supervision of foster carers, this is not permitted by the Fostering Services Regulation 2002, as all supervising social workers must be qualified.

The service was in the process of supplying foster carer handbooks to each carer at the time of the inspection. Foster Carer now have a handbook, this is a useful source of reference. Carers are supplied with a lockable filing box and the paperwork required to record matters relating to the placement of children. However, one carer commented that they had been fostering for four months before receiving this material, and had not realised prior to that what the recording requirements were. The provision of an 'induction course' to administrative matters, and familiarisation with the purpose and function of the various meetings, has been discussed with the training officer by the inspectors.

The front of each carers file contains a summary sheet of complaints, compliments, concerns and allegation. This includes information as to where full details are located in the file. This is a piece of innovative good practice for which the Fostering Service is to be commended.

The Foster Care Agreement had been revised and now refers to the appropriate legislation. It covers most of the areas required by Schedule 5, with helpful detail in respect of the procedures for the review of foster carers approval, and in respect of confidentiality issues. However, there was no reference to the carer complying with the local authority's policy in respect of unauthorised absences, nothing about the arrangements for meeting any legal liabilities of the foster parent arising because of a placement, and it does not specifically require the carer to comply with the Foster Placement Agreement. Whilst the Agreement

does state that foster carers should receive copies of LAC documentation, this does not happen in all cases, although inspectors have noted an improvement in this. Both foster carers must sign the Foster Care Agreement where a couple have been approved. Complaints and allegations are recorded in summary format within files held by the manager, which gives details of where the full papers are stored.

Eleven allegations or concerns had been raised in the previous year, which appeared to have been referred to child protection procedures in each case, although in four cases this was not explicit. This figure does not match the number given to inspectors as part of the pre-inspection information nor with the number of cases notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The summary of outcomes did not make it clear in every case whether or not the allegations were considered to have been substantiated, although it is hoped this would be clear from the full paperwork. In some cases the source of the allegations was recorded only as the social worker or team passing on the concern, and the child's name was not recorded.

In one case where a step-child alleged indecent assault by the male carer, the female carer resigned and the male carer was asked to do so. This is not considered appropriate on the facts as they stand on the summary sheet, which on this occasion did not contain information as to where the full paperwork was located.

There were five complaints recorded in the past year, but one of these was a complaint about the quality of care received by a child, which was referred through child protection procedures, and should therefore have been recorded on the allegations file. None of the summary sheets made it clear whether or not the complaint had been upheld or not. Two complaints had been made on 11 January 2005, and were in the process of being investigated by the appropriate foster team manager.

Observation of foster carers files highlighted that the Notice of Approval of Foster Carers as required by Regulations 28 and 30 still refer to the Foster Placement (Children's Regulations) 1991 and it could therefore be considered that the approval of foster carers was not legal. In respect of one case the records of the Panel Chair state that foster carers were approved for respite but this is not included in the notice of approval.

There was no record of unannounced visits on any of the files examined by inspectors although inspectors did see a proforma, which has been designed to record such visits. Whilst discussions have taken place with the Council's insurers regarding the insurance cover available to foster carers, discussions have not been finalised. Once discussions have been concluded, the fostering service must ensure that all foster carers are notified in writing of the arrangements.

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?	
<p>The Fostering Service has adopted The Skills to Foster as the preparation training programme and plans are set out to run this three times in each year. Training for trainers has been provided, partly by the Training Officer, and also for three staff members, at a course run by the Fostering Network. Experienced foster carers co-lead The Skills to Foster training. Feedback from the three day foundation training programme in April 04 was collated and placed on carers files. Each course is evaluated in this way. Five respondents had asked for more preparation regarding their own children, and this has been planned for inclusion in future courses. In addition, a group for the birth children of foster carers had recently been established and had made a promising start. The inspector had the opportunity to meet with this group.</p>		4

A full programme of post-approval training has been provided during the year, and held at a number of different locations in the county. Many courses had been well attended but a number of courses had to be cancelled due to a poor response. It had been suggested to the inspectors that this may be partly due to the reliance on a single trainer for the provision of most of the courses, and that carers would prefer a range of different trainers on different subjects. There are a number of other possible factors as well, which the service needs to explore with foster carers.

A programme of support meetings (to be known as Carer Forums in future) has been established at three venues across the county, with a speaker at each event. This provides foster carers with a choice of three dates for each speaker, if they are able to travel to the other venues. There is an intention to make attendance at a certain number of these meetings an expectation for all foster carers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Whilst inspectors were pleased to note that the Resources team have developed a system for maintaining important information in respect of the young people looked after, they must ensure that each young person has a separate file, including siblings. One file had a number of loose papers tucked in the back, which included minutes of a review Case Conference for a totally unconnected child.

Young people's files completed by Case Managers were not always seen to be up to date, LAC documentation was not completed to a meaningful standard and crucial information in respect of a young person who had been hit by his father during a contact visit was not recorded on file.

Files were securely stored within the office and foster carers have been provided with lockable boxes to store information regarding young people, those foster carers spoken to by inspectors were aware of the need to store information securely and ensured that all information was stored in the lockable boxes.

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
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This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up requirements from the previous inspection, which took place in March 2004.

Inspectors noted that the foster carers register is not accurate as one of the young people seen by inspectors was not included on the register and one young person had left the placement in September.

The Foster Carers register does not include all information required by Regulation 31.

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 £	108.49	Maximum £	491.37

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

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up the requirement from the previous inspection.

The Fostering Service moved into new accommodation in June 2004 allowing all 3 teams to be accommodated in the same building. This does mean that workers often have to undertake long journeys to visit foster carers but staff were generally positive about the move and planned their visits in an effective manner, where this was possible.

At the time of the inspection there was still a lack of computers and telephones. Inspectors were informed that this was because some of the offices that they now have use of were only vacated by other projects just before Christmas. There are plans for this situation to be remedied in the near future.

Inspectors would recommend that the management team look at how the re-location of the team can be further developed to ensure that all staff members are consulted and involved in the development of the service.

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?
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	9
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This standard is not assessed in relation to local authority fostering services.

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?
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	9
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This standard is not assessed in relation to local authority fostering services.

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?

0

This standard was not fully inspected on this occasion, however inspectors have followed up the requirement made at the previous inspection in March 2004. The requirement stated, *“Details of the circumstances in which additional mileage allowances may be claimed, should be set out in writing and included in the foster carers handbook.”* Inspectors confirmed that details regarding mileage allowances is now contained in the Foster Carers’ Handbook

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Panel is now fully constituted as a Joint Panel with Find Us Keep Us Fostering Agency and was observed on 9th September 2004 as part of the inspection of Find Us Keep Us. Consequently, the Panel was not observed during this inspection, however, inspectors had access to recent Panel minutes and the revised Panel procedures and undertook an interview with the Panel Chair.

The inspection of the Panel on 9th September 2004 found that

“The panel has appropriate independent members, including a medical adviser, an education specialist, and two foster carers from another agency. They are also fortunate to have been able to appoint a young person with experience of the care system, who demonstrated the ability to make a very appropriate contribution to the discussions. However, there are currently 12 members of the Panel, which exceeds the permitted limit of eleven members for joint panels. Discussions are currently taking place about vice-chairing arrangements, and both matters may be resolved by the current vice-chair standing down from Panel, and a new vice-chair being appointed from among existing panel members. If not, another member of the Panel will need to stand down.”

“The panel is now clear regarding their role in making recommendations which go to the respective agency decision makers for ratification.... The consideration of the minutes of the previous panel included a brief feedback from the Shropshire agency decision maker”

“Annual Reviews of carers which are not required to be considered by the fostering panel are presented to a Sub-panel consisting of several Panel members, and the minutes of these meetings are presented to the Panel for their information. The sub-panel does not have any legal status, but is considered to be an example of good practice by both agencies.”

The Service Manager Resources acts as Shropshire Social Services decision maker.

Inspectors were able to confirm that arrangement have been made to ensure that the Panel does not exceed the permitted limit of 11 members.

Inspectors also noted during the inspection of Shropshire Social Services Fostering Service on 31st January 2005 that there were two areas requiring further attention. This included the need for more detailed reports to request an exemption to the normal fostering limits. The present format does not give details of other children placed, reasons why an exemption is justified, or any extra support to be provided to the carer. Regarding one form examined by the inspectors the form does not give the expected length of placement, or the carers current approval. Carers do not get a copy of the agreement to grant an exemption.

As previously reported inspectors were concerned to note that the Notices of Approval are issued under the revoked 1991 Fostering Regulations, and have boxes only for number of children and ages. There is no capacity to specify the type of placement, or more than 1 type of placement. It is handwritten, not signed by the Head of Children’s Services whose

name is at the bottom; it would be more appropriate for these to be signed by the Agency decision maker.

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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The provision of short term breaks for children with disabilities is now contracted to Barnardos, and no longer the responsibility of the local authority's fostering service. However, some foster carers are approved to provide short breaks for children and young people, in order to support them and their families. The service has still not completed policies and procedures setting out the particular arrangements for short break and respite placements.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Inspectors noted at the previous inspection undertaken in March 2004 that *“There is a positive and enabling approach to family and friends carers within the fostering service, and assessments are carried out by fostering service staff using the Form F2. Carers are offered foundation training, but this offer is rarely taken up. The training needs of family and friend carers are considered at their annual foster home reviews, as for all carers, but no specialist training has yet been provided. Family and friends carers have a designated fostering social worker”*

Information gained during this inspection would support this view.

The Fostering Service has updated its policy regarding payment of family and friends carers, who are now given the minimum recommended allowances for the children in their care, on a par with newly approved or level 0 carers. There are still no plans to allow such foster carers access to the Payment for Skills scheme.

Family and friends carers may benefit from copies of the Handbook for Family and Friends Carers produced by the Fostering Network, since very few have attended preparation training.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 Nominated Manager'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 31st January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 28th April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

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

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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