



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Staffordshire Social Services Fostering Service

**Walton Building
PO Box 11
Martin Street
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST16 2LH**

Lead Inspector
Janet Manders & Elizabeth Taylor

Announced Inspection
9 January 2006 9:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

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Telephone number	01785 277088
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Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Staffordshire County Council, Social Care and Health Directorate
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Staffordshire County Council provide a fostering service as part of the range of social services provision for the county. The Fostering Service provides carers from all parts of the county and they take placements from within the same remit. The head office for the department is in Stafford and this is where the manager responsible for the service is based.

Staffordshire's Fostering Service offers a range of different types of fostering; Task Centred. Long Term, Link, REACH, Remand and Family and Friends Carers. REACH is a developing service, which it intended to provide skilled foster carers able to meet the needs of some young people presently placed in external residential placements. The authority is also piloting an Intensive Fostering Scheme in partnership with the Youth Offending Service, which is funded for 3 years by the Youth Justice Board.

Staffordshire has developed various support systems including CAMHS which focuses on mental health issues for young people, SUSTAIN which works with looked after children whose foster placements are under stress and CARS which provides advocacy and support to looked after children. There is an Out of Hours support system and regular foster carer's groups which meet at established locations across the county. A recent development is a weekend telephone support line staffed by experienced foster carers who are able to contact senior staff from the family placement team on a rota basis if advice is required.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was undertaken over a period of 5 days by 3 inspectors, requiring a total of 9 inspector days to complete the inspection. 6 foster carers were visited in their homes by inspectors, when the inspectors also had the opportunity to meet with the young people in placement. In addition to these visits, carer's files were viewed as were those of the 17 young people placed with the foster carers and interviews with the supervising social workers. In addition inspectors met with a group of foster carers, a group meetings with placing social workers and other relevant staff and managers within the Fostering Service. Questionnaires were also sent to all foster carers, young people, aged 8+, placed with foster carers by the Authority and their placing social workers.

What the service does well:

Whilst there are a number of requirements, which the Fostering Service must address as a result of this inspection, this was a very positive inspection which indicated that the Fostering Service was providing a good service to young people within Staffordshire.

The Fostering Service has made significant effort to ensure that young people are matched with appropriately trained and approved foster carers. In this process they ensure that the young people's diverse needs are understood and met. A high level of support, training and comprehensive policies and procedures support foster carers to meet young people's needs.

The Fostering Service had also worked hard with the Children's Voice project to ensure that the views of young people are heard and acted upon.

The Fostering Service is well managed and staff are enthusiastic regarding their work and considerable developments have been achieved due to the commitment of managers and staff within the Fostering Service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Fostering Service has addressed the majority of the requirements from the last inspection. Inspectors found that there had been improvements regarding the matching of young people with the skills and experience of foster carers, this has been enhanced by the use of independent fostering providers.

Young people have been well supported with improvements in the recording of contact arrangements and the allocation of leaving care workers at an early stage to assist young people to move successfully into adulthood.

There have been improvements to the records kept regarding staff employed by the department and the recruitment process. Policies and procedures have been updated to ensure that they are compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, as has the Foster Care Agreement and the Statement of Purpose.

What they could do better:

There remain a number of areas, which the Fostering Services needs to address to ensure that young people are kept safe and their needs are consistently met, however, the majority of these are of a minor nature.

The Fostering Service must ensure that there is a clear record of the consent for medical treatment for young people and that this is delegated to foster carers where this is appropriate. This would be easily rectified if the Fostering Service implemented their own Foster Placement Agreement as defined in Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 rather than relying on the present Looked After Children's documentation.

The Fostering Service must ensure that they undertake Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for all staff and foster carers and should not rely on checks provided by other agencies, as this may not provide all available information.

Inspectors found that it was difficult to ascertain which young people were placed with foster carers, as neither the register nor records on foster carers files were consistently accurate. This would be greatly assisted by an appropriate computer system that allowed managers to produce accurate management information rather than having to develop separate systems.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The health needs of young people are well met, however, the Fostering Service must ensure that appropriate consent for medical treatment is obtained so that young people's health needs can be provided for.

EVIDENCE:

It is apparent from discussion with foster carers, the young people and from examination of files that the health needs of young people are well met by the foster carers. Foster carers reported that they received good support from the LAC nurse and especially from Sustain, which provides support regarding psychological issues.

Foster carers reported that they usually received all appropriate information regarding a young person's health when the young person is placed. The recent introduction of a Matching Form, completed by the duty social worker, which includes information regarding a young person's health needs will supplement the LAC documentation received by the foster carer.

Inspectors observed that foster carers are generally aware of the issues surrounding the need to obtain consent for treatment and they ensured that they sought consent from the appropriate person prior to a young person receiving treatment. One carer said she usually takes the parent to the appointments with her; so signing consent is not an issue if the need arises. However, examination of files showed that the medical consent had not been completed in respect of all young people. Where it had been completed medical consents were rarely delegated to carers and with regards to one young person the consent for medical treatment had been delegated to the foster carers by the social worker but the young person was only accommodated and this had not been agreed or signed by the parent.

Health Plans were seen on some young people's files and there was evidence that these had been reviewed, however, this was not consistent practice across the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service has detailed policies and procedures to support the work of the foster carers and carers are provided with training in first aid, with 2 courses having been run in the past 12 months.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The Fostering Service endeavours to match young people appropriately with suitable foster carers. There are effective policies and procedures in place to keep young people safe.

EVIDENCE:

The managers of the service are appropriately trained and experienced and provide an effective management for the Fostering Service.

All homes offered a high standard of accommodation. Older children had their own rooms, which had been personalised. The department's guidelines regarding placements refers to the need for discussion with social workers of young people already in placement to identify risk and refers especially to the sharing of bedrooms, as does the department's individual risk assessment form but no risk assessments were seen on file regarding sharing of bedrooms but only very young children were sharing rooms. There is an increasing use of individual risk assessments and these were seen on some of the files examined. Referral procedures state that if there are concerns regarding the placement of a young person and the risk they pose "where necessary, a risk assessment meeting will be convened."

Foster carers have received Health and Safety training and it is planned that this will be undertaken on a rolling programme, this is supported by appropriate policies and procedures. The majority of files contained a Health and Safety assessment of the foster carers home, these are undertaken as part of the initial assessment of foster carers and renewed at a foster carers annual review. However, on one file of a foster carer who had transferred from an independent fostering agency, the last assessment had been undertaken by that agency 2½ years ago and had not been updated, when approved by the authority.

There was considerable information presented to the inspectors regarding the lengths that the Fostering Service uses to ensure that young people are appropriately matched with their foster carers. Action has been taken to increase the choice of placements with an increased use of independent providers for young people with special or complex needs. Work is being undertaken with independent fostering agencies to shape the authority's provision to enable it to provide appropriate placements for young people with disabilities, unaccompanied minors and for young people who require long-term permanency. The REACH project is tasked to ensure that after assessment young people with complex issues are placed with appropriate foster carer, these foster carers are supported to a high level with weekly visits.

Carer reported receiving good information about the children placed with them and considered placements well matched. Staff said that they would not take any action in respect of a requested placement until a referral form had been fully completed.

Examination of files and in discussion with young people's social workers it was confirmed that social workers were usually spoken to regarding the placement of another young person within the placement.

Whilst there have been occasions where young people have been placed with foster carers who had not been approved to take such a young person, the Fostering Service has clear procedures in place. This includes the completion of a matching issues form to ensure that appropriate matches take place, where there is a gap the authority takes steps to ensure that such gaps are met through alternative provision. Inspectors did not see any matching forms on files examined as all placements had been made prior to the recent introduction of these matching forms.

Information provided to inspectors confirmed that there were 21 occasions where an exemption to the usual fostering limit had been agreed, 11 of these exemptions were still in place at the time of the inspection. Exemptions were in place for three of the six families visited by inspectors. Carers spoken to informed the inspector that they had received a notice detailing the agreement when they received an exemption. One of the exemptions was to allow for the

placement of the baby sibling of a child already placed, and the agreement of other placing social workers had been obtained, the two others were to allow the placement of an unrelated child. The placements seemed to be quite open-ended contrary to the Children Act 1989 which would expect for exemptions to be reviewed regularly and to be time limited. In respect of one young person an exemption was made in September 2005 for a proposed 2 week period but the young person remains in placement and there is no evidence that it has been reviewed in this time. Whilst the young people had complex needs, evidence indicated that the carers were meeting the young people's needs well.

Information provided to inspectors indicated that there had been 6 allegations against foster carers, whilst not all the investigations had been completed at the time of the inspection; evidence suggested that appropriate steps had been taken to keep young people safe in all cases.

All files examined had a safe caring plan on file using guidance provided by the Fostering Service, however, not all had been completed by foster carers. The guidance provided is particularly helpful in that they prompt carers to consider the issue of sex education for children and young people. Whilst the safe caring plans had only recently been introduced, the inspectors were informed that plans would be reviewed annually and when a new young person is placed with foster carers. Plans had been signed by the foster carer, the supervising social worker and the Children's Services Manager they had not been signed by the young person's social worker as required by Standard 9.3.

There have been improvements in the recruitment and checking process for staff since the last inspection, with photographs and follow up of references by telephone being clearly evident on file. Whilst the good practice seen at the last inspection has generally been continued, there were two areas where staff personnel files were not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. 2 staff had started without the authority having received a clear CRB check back. In respect of one member of staff, she had worked for the department for over 20 years, and the other member of staff had had a current CRB from another local authority that had only just been completed. Nonetheless, this is not acceptable and the procedure for dealing with delays in CRB checks implemented in June 2002 must be updated. In exceptional circumstances, where there is a delay in receiving an applicant's CRB, the Fostering Service must gain agreement from the Commission for Social Care Inspection before the member of staff commences work.

Not all files contained a record of the interview. The inspector was informed that this was because there was not sufficient space to store such information. The Child Care Development Manager showed the inspector evidence of her records for the 2 members of staff whose files did not contain a record of the interview and informed the inspector that these will now be kept on file until

seen by inspectors. Job descriptions were not seen on the personnel files, but staff confirmed that they had received copies of their job description.

The department has implemented a database system to ensure that foster carers CRB's and checks are undertaken in a timely fashion. Nonetheless, CRB's had not been conducted by the Fostering Service in relation to 2 different carers who had transferred from another fostering agency. On some files information regarding CRB's had been kept on the file contrary to guidance from the Criminal Records Bureau. These should be removed and a memo placed on file giving the number, date and whether the check is clear.

The fostering panel was not observed as part of this inspection.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 13 and 31

The Fostering Service values diversity and ensures that young people are supported to meet their potential.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence collected during the inspection demonstrated that the service places a high value on meeting the diverse needs of young people placed with foster carers. The service had made efforts to recruit foster carers from a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Where the Fostering Service has been unable to provide an appropriate racially matched placement efforts have been made to find suitable placements through independent fostering providers. Whilst the inspectors visited two pre-school children of dual heritage placed with white carers, gaps had been identified and advice had been given to the carers as to how the young people's needs could be met. The Health Visitor, who was also of dual heritage, provided additional support.

Carers informed inspectors that the recent training on diversity, which had been provided by an external trainer, had been excellent. This training had also been provided to all staff and to members of the Panel, where it was also felt to be extremely effective and beneficial.

Throughout the inspection it was apparent that foster carers encourage and support young people to meet their educational potential. Personal Education Plans were seen on files examined by inspectors, although they were not all

comprehensive and did not give information as to how the young person could be assisted to meet their potential and by whom.

As Foster Placement Agreements are not completed, (only LAC placement plans) plans do not cover areas regarding the role of the foster carer in the young person's education. Although the foster carer handbook does give guidance to foster carers about issues regarding educational support for looked after children and the expectations that they will support young people with their studies and liaise closely with the school.

One carer couple selected for case tracking for this inspection was providing short-term breaks for a young person. Evidence from the file and in discussion with the foster carers and supervising social worker it is apparent that the carers are providing high quality care for the young person. They worked well with the young person's main carers, were flexible in the care they provided and demonstrated a good understanding of the young person's needs and how they met them. The carers had also undertaken a very positive piece of work in assisting a young person whom they had provided short-term breaks to move onto an alternative long-term placement.

The Fostering Service also provide a short break scheme, which links families of children with disabilities with individuals and families who can provide their children with short-term care on a regular basis. Information provided to inspectors in respect of the Family Link scheme stated that there are currently 43 families approved as Family Link carers, providing a service to 56 young people. Family Link carers undertake pre-approval training and have access to training alongside other carers in addition to training specifically designed to enable foster carers to understand and meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11

The Fostering Service promotes young people's contact with family and friends and young people are actively encouraged to contribute to plans for their care and the development of the Fostering Service.

EVIDENCE:

Carers were seen to be working well with parents of children, where appropriate, in promoting contact. Inspectors were informed of a number of examples of excellent practice by foster carers. One carer had had contact in her own home and had worked with parents on parenting skills and cooking skills. At the conclusion of another carer's successful placement, the young person's mother had been invited to the foster home to help her pack for her return home.

Clear details of contact arrangements were seen on file, and foster carers stated that they were clear about contact arrangements for young people placed with them. The Fostering Service has developed tools to record contact arrangements at the time of referral and any associated risks and it is understood that these are shared with foster carers. A request was made to social workers to complete a risk assessment prior to the inspection taking place in respect of contact. However, as this tool had only just been introduced there was no consistent evidence of risk assessments regarding contact on young people's files.

Young person commented that they are consulted by their foster carers regarding their care and that they feel listened to. One young person stated "I can talk to my foster carer about anything, even things I've never talked about to anyone else."

The Fostering Service has worked closely with The Children and Young People's Voice Project and has developed an interactive computer questionnaire to seek young people's views. The service uses this system for gaining information from young people for their foster carers reviews, however, the information gained as part of this process was not being consistently recorded on file.

The Children's Voice Project also runs groups for young people on a regular basis and supports them to express their views. There are also independent visitors and advocates available for young people who do not see their families or who have communication difficulties.

All young people spoken to confirmed that they saw their social worker on a regular basis and that their views were sought as part of their own statutory review; consultation forms were seen on young people's files.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14 and 29

Young people are supported to move into adulthood. Foster carers receive payments in a timely fashion, however, the Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers receive adequate payment to meet the needs of young people.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carers spoken to during the inspection confirmed that they worked with young people to develop their independence skills at all levels. Those foster carers who had young people placed who had reached the age of 15 confirmed that Pathway Plans had been discussed and initially Pathway Plans were seen on files examined by inspectors. The inspectors were informed that since the last inspection the authority had made a policy decision that a leaving care worker is allocated to a young person once they have reached the age of 15. Information received during the inspection confirmed that this was working well and was proving to be beneficial to the young people concerned.

All carers interviewed said that payments were made promptly and that the joint finance department provided a detailed breakdown of payments to them. If there were any problems, they reported a helpful response if they contacted the finance department. However, carers commented that they occasionally experienced some difficulty regarding additional payments.

The Fostering Service operates a payment for skills scheme for its foster carers, with clear guidance as to how carers achieve each level. All parties felt that this had assisted in “professionalizing the service”. However, foster carers on Level 1 of the scheme do not receive the recommended rate as advised by the Fostering Network, which is calculated to ensure that the needs of Looked After Children are met.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

1, 2, 4, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32

The Fostering Service is well managed and foster carers are well supported, however, the Service must ensure that supervision takes place as agreed and that there are accurate records kept to allow easy identification of where and when a young person is placed.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service has updated its Statement of Purpose so that it accurately reflects the work undertaken by the Service. It is a detailed and useful document, which has recently been approved by elected members. Inspectors were assured that the document would be reviewed annually. A comprehensive range of policies, which had been updated prior to the last inspection, supports the Statement of Purpose. It is anticipated that these policies will again be updated in the coming months to ensure that they comply with the Integrated Children's Services and will be available electronically for all staff.

The Fostering Service has developed, in conjunction with young people an attractive CD-Rom version of the Children's Guide, this is also available as a paper version. Whilst this is a good source of information for young people it does not contain the relevant information as to how a young person can contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The Fostering Service has developed various systems and databases, separate from the authority's system to allow it to monitor the activities of the service. Whilst this is crucial to the continuing improvement of the service it is disappointing that the authority has not invested in providing appropriate IT support to the service to allow it to easily access management information.

Whilst the Fostering Services informs the Commission for Social Care Inspection of child protection issues that arise, records indicate that not all significant events are notified to the Commission and it would be good practice for this to take place.

Foster Carers are now made aware of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest through the Foster Care Agreement, which has recently been updated.

As previously referred to in the report, all managers are appropriately trained and qualified to manage and do so in an efficient and supportive manner. Staff spoke highly of their managers and the support they received from both their managers and colleagues. Morale within the teams appeared high and staff spoke enthusiastically about their work. Staff informed inspectors that they received excellent, regular supervision and annual appraisals.

Staff commented positively about the development of electronic records, however, a shortcoming of this is that not all staff have easy access to a computer and although training has been undertaken by staff not all staff have access to the electronic records as yet and are concerned that this time delay will result in them requiring further updated training.

The Fostering Service has undergone a re-organisation in the past year, with the permanency and adoption workers moving to independent teams. Whilst in the long run this is likely to improve the service this has caused some disruption within the service, especially support to foster carers. One foster carer commented that she had had 3 separate supervising social workers within the past year. At the time of the inspection the re-organisation was almost complete and disruption was minimal, with the majority of the vacancies within the teams being filled.

Whilst the Fostering Service has a wide range of foster carers, all accepted that it is difficult to have sufficient carers to meet the demand for placements, especially as there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals for placements over the past few months. Whilst there is only limited choice of placements for young people with carers approved by the Fostering Service this has been increased by the use of the independent sector.

The recruitment of foster carers is the responsibility of one team, whilst support is provided by other teams. There are clear guidelines regarding the assessment of carers and most of the assessments seen were of a good quality. However, in respect of one carer the reliance on an assessment undertaken by an independent agency, without exploring crucial issues further, resulted in a lowering of this high standard.

In discussion with staff it was apparent that not all staff had received training in assessment and this must be addressed as part of individuals development and training. Nonetheless, staff considered that ample training was available this included the PQ award. External courses are also available where such training is not available internally.

Annual reviews had been carried out on all carers visited and young people confirmed they had been asked for their views, although they had not always chosen to respond. Carer's own children are also asked to give their views. A separate team within the department undertakes reviews to ensure an independent view is maintained. With regards to one foster carer, the inspector noted that although concerns had recently been raised in respect of her practice this had not been discussed within the review. It was therefore unclear as to how the issue had been addressed or what action needed to be taken.

Carers who were part of the pilot Intensive Fostering Scheme, were visited by an inspector. They reported that they had just seen the first young person placed 'graduate' from the scheme and return home very successfully. They were very positive about the structure of the scheme and the amount of support available to them and to the young person and her family. Respite is also built into the scheme for every 4th weekend, and for four weeks a year. Carers said 'This is the best form of fostering, in that you can access all these forms of support within the team. Previously we knew what the children

needed but had to wait nine months for the service.’ They added that they ‘feel valued and listened to, and part of the team and the evolution of the scheme.’

There is a 24 hour Helpline run by foster carers, but this is relatively little used, but appreciated by carers. Foster carers also reported that staff were easily accessible and returned telephone calls promptly. Some staff also provide foster carers with their mobile telephone numbers for the use in an emergency.

Experienced carers act as mentors for newer carers and foster carers have the additional support of the Fostering Network Advice and Mediation project.

The Fostering Service has updated its Foster Care Agreement so that it meets with the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Foster Care Agreements were seen on all foster carers files, however, not all these had been signed by the foster carers. In one case the carer had been approved in May 2005 and the Agreement had not been signed until January 2006. In addition the Notice of Approval refers to the Foster Placement (Children’s) Regulations 1991. As the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 repealed these regulations, the notice of approval must be re-issued so that the carers’ approval is legitimate.

There was evidence of supervision visits on files, but due to the re-organisation of the service and some staff vacancies these had not always been carried out at the agreed frequency, although there had recently been an improvement in this situation. Supervision was based on a contract drawn up between the carers and workers, with the expectation that supervision should take place every 3-4 months, dependant on the foster carer’s experience and was recorded on a dedicated format. There was also evidence of unannounced visits on the files.

REACH foster carers receive weekly visits to provide additional support as it is recognised that the young people placed under this scheme have very complex needs. Foster carers commented that this support was extremely helpful and often necessary to ensure that placements were successful.

The Foster Carer’s Handbook has been updated and foster carers commented that it was useful, but rather cumbersome. The service agrees with these comments and plans to re-write the handbook and produce it on a CD-Rom to make it more accessible to carers.

There is a comprehensive programme of pre- and post-approval training. Pre-approval training is provided through the ‘Skills to Foster’ programme, which is co-presented by a carer and a family placement worker, and includes other input from experienced carers. Post-approval training is set out in an annual catalogue, and includes some very valuable courses. Training is provided at a

choice of venues and most courses are available at either evening or daytime sessions.

Training is evaluated through feedback at the end of each session, and on an annual basis. The team responsible for training have a database which records the training each carer has undertaken, and this information is provided for foster home reviews. Training is linked to the Payment for Skills scheme, with an expectation that carers undertake specific training in order to achieve the different levels. Carers felt there was ample training and said they had found it useful. A group had been run for the sons and daughters of carers but it was difficult for all carers to get their young people to the central location, and there were plans for more local groups.

Young people's files are maintained by case managers and not directly by the Fostering Service. Generally these files were well maintained with LAC documentation in place. As previously reported, due to the use of LAC documentation to develop plans for young people, plans are not compliant with the expectations of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 for a Foster Placement Agreement.

Foster carer files contain a chronology of young people placed with the foster carers but these were rarely accurate and inspectors found it difficult to identify with any confidence which young people were placed with the foster carers. In addition inspectors were informed that it is difficult to be confident that the authority's register of young people placed is accurate at any particular time. Considerable verifying had to be undertaken to enable the Fostering Service to provide inspectors with an up to date and accurate list of young people in placement.

A dedicated team of workers supports Friends and Family foster carers. The work of this project has been hampered by difficulty in recruiting staff, however, at the time of the inspection it was anticipated that all vacancies would be filled by February 2006. Consequently, the level of support to Friends and Family carers is not yet at the level anticipated by the Service.

One young person visited had been placed with relatives in May 2005, however, a review undertaken in November 2005 recorded that CRB's had still not been completed in respect of his carers. The inspector was informed that this was the responsibility of the area social worker, but that this matter would be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Fostering Service must ensure that there is a clear understanding, with detailed policies and procedures in place for the assessment and approval of Friends and Family foster carers and who is responsible for which part of the assessment and approval of these carers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	2
8	4
9	3
15	2
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	2

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
2	3
4	3
5	X
16	3
17	2
18	X
19	3
20	X
21	3
22	2
23	4
24	2
25	2
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	2

YES

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS12	34 (3) Sch 6	The Fostering Service must ensure that as part of the Foster Placement Agreement arrangements for the consent to treatment and delegation of consent are clearly recorded.	01/03/06
2	FS6	12 (1)	The Fostering Service must ensure that risk assessments are carried out in line with Standard 6.5 are recorded in writing and placed on file.	01/04/06
3	FS15	20	The Fostering Service must undertake their own CRB check in respect of all staff and the results of this must be received before the person commences employment.	01/03/06
4	FS15	27	The Fostering Service must ensure that they undertaken their own CRB check on all foster carers including those transferring from another agency.	01/03/06
5	FS29	19	The Fostering Service must review the payment of Level 1 foster carers to ensure that they meet the needs of young people placed.	01/05/06
6	FS1	3 (3)(c)	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Children's Guide	01/04/06

			contains all relevant information as required by the Fostering Services Standards 2002.	
7	FS17	27	The Fostering Service must ensure a thorough and rigorous assessment process is undertaken for all prospective foster carers.	01/03/06
8	FS22	34 (1)	The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers enter into an agreement with the authority (Foster Care Agreement) and that this is in place before a young person is placed.	01/03/06
9	FS22	28 (5)	The Fostering Service must ensure that all notices of approval refer to current legislation, any that do not are re-issued.	01/03/06
10	FS22	17(1)	All foster carers must receive supervision at the agreed frequency. Timescale of 1/6/05 not met	01/04/06
11	FS24	34 (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that Foster Placement Agreements are completed and meet the requirements of Schedule 6.	01/05/06
12	FS25	22(1) Schedule 2	The Fostering Service must keep a record of all young people placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22 and Schedule 2.	01/04/06
13	FS32	17	All the Standards need to be reflected in the service provided for family and friends carers. Timescale of 25.8.04 not met	01/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS6	The Fostering Service should ensure that Health and Safety checks of foster carers homes are undertaken as part of the initial assessment process and reviewed annually. The outcome of such checks should be clearly recorded on file.
2	FS8	The foster placement agreement should contain specific reference to elements of matching that were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement, and identify areas where additional support is needed to compensate for any gaps in the match.
3	FS30	The Fostering Service should ensure that where an exemption is in place this is reviewed regularly and that there are clear plans in place to ensure that the exemption is limited.
4	FS9	The Fostering Service should ensure that safe caring plans are signed by the young person's social worker to confirm that it has been cleared with them.
5	FS15	The Fostering Service should ensure that the policy regarding action to be taken if a CRB is delayed is updated so that it is compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
6	FS15	The Fostering Service should ensure that it implements a policy for the storage and destruction of CRB checks, which is compliant with the guidance given by the Criminal Records Bureau.
7	FS13	The Fostering Service should ensure that young people's Personal Education Plans are detailed and identify how the foster carer can contribute to the delivery of any personal education plan.
8	FS10	The Fostering Service should ensure that a written risk assessment regarding contact is undertaken prior to contact taking place.
9	FS4	The Fostering Service should notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection of significant incidents as identified in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
10	FS16	The Authority should ensure that staff within the Fostering Service have access to the Trim system as a matter of urgency so that they can effectively meet the needs of young people and foster carers.

11	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff undertaking assessments of foster carers have received appropriate training in this area.
12	FS21	The Fostering Service should ensure that annual reviews of foster carers consider any area of poor practice and identify action and training required to address the issue.
13	FS25	The Fostering Service should ensure that there is an accurate record of young people placed with each foster carer.
14	FS32	The Fostering Service should ensure that there are clear guidelines understood by all parties, for the assessment and approval of Friends and Family Foster Carers.

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