



*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*  
Mr David Morgan

*Key Announced Inspection*  
8 January 2007 10:00 am

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      9th January 2006

## Brief Description of the Service:

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

Integration into the Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate has resulted in closer working with colleagues in education services.

Staffordshire's Fostering Service offers a range of different types of fostering: Long Term/Task Centred, Family Link and Family and Friends. 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. In addition there is a central team that carries some cases but mainly oversees reviews, training and recruitment.

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. There is also a weekend telephone support line staffed by experienced foster carers who are able to contact senior staff from the family placement team.

# SUMMARY

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

This inspection was the statutory annual visit, undertaken by one inspector over approximately 7 working days. Meetings were held with the responsible County Councillor, service managers, service social workers responsible for certain, selected children, a group of service social workers, 9 children in 4 placements and a group of children at the Childrens Voice project, the Shaping Futures project, a panel meeting, SUSTAIN, a group of carers. Questionnaires were only sent to a sample of those carers who were not visited, and a small number were received back. Four households were visited and included new carers, children with disabilities and children with cultural needs.

The REACH and Intensive Fostering schemes were not inspected this time.

The inspector was fully assisted by the manager and other staff. Full information and data was provided in advance of the inspection.

At the time of inspection there were 277 households approved and these were offering approximately 490 places of which 58 were with the Family Link service. Of the total number of households, 9 (approx 3%) were reported to be not of a white ethnic background. 46 (9.3%) places were not being used. 56 households were lost in the period and 47 gained.

Issues of equality and diversity are addressed well and the service is aware of the gaps in its provision. Children and young people may have emotional and sometimes behavioural needs but also significant in this authority, as in others, is the proportion of children who have learning disabilities. Carers considered that the service provided excellent training in this area.

No complaints have been sent to the inspector since the last visit.

## **What the service does well:**

- The Council has reduced the number of children who are entering the looked after system. This will assist the service and has various implications for preventative services.
- Carers are well trained and supported. One said she 'felt valued as a professional'.
- No poor foster care practices were found. Amongst those children who were seen, one said 'I wouldn't change my life for anything', another said 'they're really good to me'.
- Children and young people have ample and varied opportunities to express themselves. One young man told the inspector he 'had loads of chances to talk'.
- Recruitment has been imaginative and ongoing.
- Managers and staff were committed and knowledgeable.

## What has improved since the last inspection?

- Development and implementation of policy and guidance for children and foster carers regarding smoking in foster care.
- 'Here I am, this is me' booklet for children with disabilities covering their medical and social needs.
- Establishment of an obesity management strategy for Staffordshire.
- Foster Placement Plan and Agreement; implemented 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006. The IT-system has also improved and further changes are planned. Both of these matters were of particular concern during the last inspection.
- Implemented *Consult8* interviews to inform the foster carer review and alert family placement social workers and area social workers about placement concerns.
- CD-Rom version of the Children's Guide, including a version in Widget.
- Appointment of a Children's Commissioner to whom looked after children have access.
- The supervision visit report has been improved aligning it with the Every Child Matters outcomes.
- The integration with education has led to joint opportunities and projects, e.g. Family Learning.
- Improvements in the supervision of foster carers makes the services expectations of carers more explicit.
- Members of the Special Educational Needs Support Services monitor the attainment of looked after children in schools and report back to the coordinators who target additional support where there is cause for concern regarding educational outcomes.
- Appointment of Looked after children Education Mentors to support engagement in education.
- The Head of Division and Heads of Service monitor the educational attainment of year 10 and year 11 pupils monthly. There is increased engagement of post-16 children in education, training or employment.
- For older fostered children, the choice of placement has been improved as 'Children's Profiling' becomes more effective.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel, which began in January 2006, is actively involved in the monitoring and scrutinising of activities relating to looked after children.
- Introduction of the new Foster Placement Plan and Agreement from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006 sets out all the information and agrees roles and responsibilities.
- Developed a more appropriate assessment template for the Family and Friends service.

## What they could do better:

Issues identified by the manager that have delayed the rate of progress since the last inspection include:

- Comprehensive re-structuring of children's services
- The County Council's Job Evaluation process
- National shortage of skilled and qualified staff in both family placement and area social work teams
- A finite number of foster carers with the skills to parent challenging children and young people
- Ongoing impact of County Council budgetary constraints
- Absence of agreement to pay retainers to carers providing respite to other carers

A number of recommendations were made about practical as well as organisational matters.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

**The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.**

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

**12**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Children are provided with healthcare that meets their needs.

## EVIDENCE:

**Health.** The Council is increasing its links with Primary Care Trusts to improve multi-agency working. 85.6% of children were reported to have received an annual health check in the past year. Health issues were clearly addressed by carers and monitored by supervising social workers.

The referral form and risk assessment process are tailored to consider the child's health needs and match needs with the specific skills of the carer; specialist services such as the looked after children's nurse, the SUSTAIN project (dedicated to the therapeutic support of fostered children, i.e. helping to prevent placement breakdown) and CAMHS are available. Two consultant paediatricians sit on the fostering panel as medical advisers. The looked after children's nurse role has brought about a significant increase in the participation of older children in health assessments. Making the nurses available both in the foster home and schools has resulted in a participation of 87.4%; this is a substantial achievement. Other initiatives include the development and implementation of policy and guidance for children and foster carers regarding smoking in foster care, and the 'Here I am, this is me' booklet for children with disabilities covering their medical and social needs.

SUSTAIN team members reported that they are involved in pre-approval training and would like a role in post-approval training, matching of children to help avoid disruptions and with infants too. They pointed-out that a disproportionate number of looked-after children have learning disabilities.

Support is available to young people and carers from the Teenage Pregnancy project and plans are in place to devise a sexual health leaflet for all looked after children.

Improvements in the supervision of foster carers around the five (Every Child Matters) outcomes make the expectations of carers more explicit. Training of foster carers will offer consistency regarding healthy eating and exercise to improve health outcomes further.

The manager reported that initial multi-agency and trans-disciplinary discussions have taken place around the Healthy Care initiative. The aim is to establish a better understanding of the interdependency issues, including information sharing, and how better outcomes for all Looked after Children can be achieved; it will also have an impact on service commissioning.

## Staying Safe

**The intended outcomes for 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, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.**

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):**

**All**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Systems are in place to ensure that children are kept as safely as possible.

**EVIDENCE:**

**Suitability of the manager.** The manager has suitable experience and training. See also, last report.

**Provision of suitable carers.** In the last financial year approximately 47 new households were approved, nearly half of which were friends and family carers, and 56 households were lost. Such figures provide a guide only because they are quickly out of date. However, they do show the significance of Friends and Families work and also the difficulties involved in achieving a net gain in carers. Independent fostering agencies are used for approximately 100 children and provide extra capacity and matching options.

Households were found to be safe and healthy places that met the needs of children. Health and safety issues are addressed routinely and are understood by carers. Issues relating to vehicles were not inspected this time.

A senior manager oversees recruitment, training and reviews. Various imaginative campaigns have been undertaken to attract new carers and a web site is maintained with a branded corporate image. Specialist recruitment occurs in respect of joint projects such as the Intensive Fostering and Shaping Futures projects.

Carer approval requires evidence of identification, CRB clearance and medical examination which is monitored on the Assessment Checklist. Risk assessments are undertaken and kept under review.

**Matching.** This inspection found that substantial efforts go into making suitable placements. Appropriate paperwork is in place and is improved when necessary.

The placement request form is designed to capture information about the particular needs of children to ensure appropriate matching around ethnicity, culture and disability. A matching form is completed 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. See however, Standard 7, below.

The new work with Shaping Futures, a joint residential project, will afford young people the opportunity to have a fostering experience prior to independence. It is hoped that this will provide a positive experience to take forward into their adult relationships.

The management of **exemptions** has been reviewed and improved since the last inspection (see previous report). Staff throughout the service understood that exemptions were only used in exceptional circumstances. Clear records are kept that show that the majority of cases are short-term. At the time of inspection the records showed three households with exemptions, each with only one child. Sibling groups over three are additional.

**Protecting from abuse.** See also the section on Consultation, below. Procedures, recruitment and training are clear about the expectations of carers.

The service completes a comprehensive home study that includes a health and safety checklist and a safe caring plan for each child. Each fostering household receives Fostering Network's *Safe Care* publication, which is used in the development of the safe caring plan; this is good practice. Households receive an annual, unannounced visit from their supervising social worker.

It was reported that there are links with the *Children Who Sexually Abuse* forum, operated by NSPCC.

There has been the development of an anti-bullying strategy that has included a schools anti-bullying conference and will include young people in its evaluation. Information is sent to schools via the 'school bag' to ensure that teachers are kept up-to-date.

Foster placement plans and agreements have been improved since the last inspection and children are now more effectively consulted about their placements.

The manager considers there may be an under-reporting of children who go missing and plans to give the issue greater attention in the next year. Also, there were no statistics available for the number of times restraint had been used. Some of the young people spoken to during the inspection were candid about the risks they create for themselves at times, and were stoical about the efforts of staff and carers to protect them: one said 'they're only looking-out for us'.

**Suitable staff.** Recruitment of staff to the agency follows relevant guidance and CRB's are now undertaken of all new staff. See last report. This was not re-inspected in detail this time.

Staffing of the department has been reviewed and restructuring is underway. For the fostering service it means that there will be more support staff but fewer social workers. It is also envisaged there will be more social workers in the fieldwork teams.

**Panel.** The panel was found to operate well and be effectively advised and constituted; it benefits from an independent chairperson. Records were inspected. Panel is updated in respect of legislation and practice issues via an annual training event. Annual performance assessments occur of members and their tenure as members is kept under review. Various examples of good practice arose including Panel members' concern to protect the interests of carers own sons and daughters.

Panel was aware of the challenge posed by Family and Friends work, partly due to sheer quantity but also the differences in the position of the carers, the method of assessment and the staff who undertake them. The Panel Chairperson identifies areas of learning to carry forward, e.g. regarding disruptions amongst new carers. It was recommended that Panel procedures include a requirement to check that suitable accommodation is provided, especially in Friends and Families households.

Members of the panel considered that its capacity should be increased, particularly with respect to Family and Friends work. They also considered that

finding time for reviews was difficult. It was also recommended that the room be reviewed as it is long and narrow and is oppressive for carers who attend.

# Enjoying and Achieving

**The intended outcomes for 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.**

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**All**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The individual needs of carers and children are recognised and addressed. Education is valued and supported in imaginative ways. The service recognises that short-term breaks are a specialised provision.

## **EVIDENCE:**

**Diversity.** Children and young people were all positive about their care and none made any specific complaints. One said, 'they're the mum and dad we never had'. Supervising social workers are using the five outcomes to assess the work that carers undertake with children and this helps to address individual needs of whatever kind. A range of examples was provided of carers' excellent practice in meeting the diverse needs of children. Efforts are made to attract carers that represent the cultural and social range of the community.

The manager reported that staff recruitment is based on an 'Equal Opportunity Policy', which has an expectation that all staff adhere to its principles. Anti-discriminatory practice is integrated into assessment, training, support and the management of the fostering service. Equality and diversity issues are addressed in both pre- and post approval training, i.e. Valuing Diversity; Men in Foster Care; Working with Disability, plus courses that address attitudes towards issues such as sexuality; drugs and birth parents.



The service is building upon the links forged within the Asian community in Burton on Trent, through involvement in community activities such as the Asian carers support group and community fundraising events. Also, it is developing its partnership with the Anglo-Caribbean community in Stafford via the Community Church Foundation.

The format of Children and Young People's Plans have been written by young people in a language they could understand and appreciate. There is a CD-Rom version of the Children's Guide, including a version in Widget for those children with disabilities; this is good practice. An employment guide has been written by a young person to clearly define the roles of professional staff and how they treat young people when the Council employs them. The service is planning to create a Gay and Lesbian support service for looked after young people. Through the Disabled Children's Forum the looked after review paperwork is to be considered to make it more appropriate for disabled children. Funding of vehicle purchases and adaptations to homes allows the placement of children with disabilities and also of large sibling groups.

The Family Link scheme is now integrated within the disability service. This is good practice as long as there is suitable auditing by the fostering service. See, Monitoring.

A household of new carers with black children reported that they had been unable to readily and quickly access relevant cultural information. The transracial elements of the placement had been addressed after some time although the family were not being visited by the placing social worker. It is recommended that the service identify a source of professional advice that staff and carers can access for practical information on cultural issues.

**Education.** Councillor Simpson reported that there is a drive by councillors to become 'pushy (corporate) parents' who advocate for looked after children.

The service was able to provide data about the education of children and young people. It shows that the percentage of children with personal education plans has increased to 94.8%; these were seen on file. Since the last inspection there has been a quality audit of education plans (not inspected). All the children and young people spoken to were in some form of education or work placement.

Carers are assisted to develop relevant skills to support children and young people in education and spoke positively about education to the inspector; such opportunities have increased since the amalgamation of children's services with the education service. The educational attainment (GCSE) of looked after children is encouraged through additional teaching support where necessary, and mentor support to assist in educational placements being maintained.

This was evidenced during visits to carers. Also, computers are provided to fostering households (and mentors) for young people in years 10 and 11.

The use of independent fostering agencies allows use of a wider range of placements to keep children nearer their networks - ideally within a radius of 20 miles - to maintain continuity of their education and social networks. Transport is arranged to enable children to continue at their own school, wherever possible and appropriate. The manager reported on the following, recent developments:

- Foster Placement Plan and Agreement improvements have helped improve educational outcomes
- Improvements in the supervision of foster carers around the 5 outcomes makes expectations of carers more explicit
- Members of the Special Educational Needs Support Services monitor the attainment of looked after children in schools and report back to coordinators who target additional support where there is cause for concern regarding educational outcomes.
- Appointment of Looked after Children education mentors to support engagement in education
- The Head of Division and Heads of Service monitor the educational attainment of year 10 and 11 pupils monthly.
- Consultation by education staff with foster carer groups about education issues and support.

The manager would like to see a development of the role of the designated teacher as the first point of contact for looked after children in schools.

**Short-term breaks.** The Service provides a short break scheme that links families of children with disabilities with carers who can provide short-term care on a regular basis. It is managed separately to the main fostering service.

Information provided to inspectors in respect of the Family Link scheme stated that a service is provided by 46 households to 58 young people; a slight increase on last year. 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. Pre-approval training covers all aspects of fostering and staff considered there was insufficient emphasis on their own, specialised, area of care.

Currently, the policies and procedures are being redrawn for this part of the service, as it has various distinctive features. Because of the specialised nature of the care packages a disability team manager oversees this scheme. However, at least three of the households also provide long-term care. These issues emphasise the importance of close working relationships between the

various parts of the fostering service, e.g. in planning, procedures, monitoring and training, which should be reflected in procedures. Staff judged that the greater specialism had led to better outcomes for children, e.g. through multi-agency cooperation and better matching.

# Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for 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.

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**11**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Children are provided with an excellent range of opportunities to contribute and be consulted. However, a lack of field social work support, especially for new carers, is unacceptable.

## **EVIDENCE:**

**Consultation.** The service is partnered with the Children and Young People's *Voice* Project. The Project's main aim is to consult with looked after young people in the revision of policies and procedures relating to their care or those who care for them. Young people have been involved in various matters including recruitment procedures and the employment of several assistant directors, smoking policies, information leaflets and the childrens guide; evidence of this was inspected.

The manager reported that in line with the Government's objective to recruit independent Children's Commissioners, Staffordshire was one of the first to do so. The commissioner has subsequently contributed to a number of projects and procedures affecting the service.

Children and young people are consulted at the time of their statutory reviews through a special, independent *Consult8* programme that includes sending a questionnaire to children before the meeting. This process is an extremely positive and constructive way of involving most young people and the service should have some confidence that they are actually obtaining the real views of

children. This is important for the fostering service and also for the Council in its capacity as a corporate parent. It is also clear that children are rewarded for their contributions both directly and through activities, such as trips and ceremonies. It was reported that there might be some gaps in the service, e.g. regarding children under 10 years of age, certain individuals and black and ethnic minority children; this should be reviewed.

The children spoken to said their social workers visited regularly. One said 'reviews are really good, they never miss'.

Future plans include the translation of official inspection documents into language more easily understood by young people and the development of a Sons and Daughters Council with nominated young people representing a cross section of fostering households.

Information provided by the service showed that there had been no complaints received during the past year. This is unlikely to represent the true picture and should be reviewed to ensure that any concerns are being adequately gathered, addressed and audited. During the inspection certain matters were drawn to the attention of the manager for action that will show-up in next years statistics, also there have been allegations made about carers that do not show-up as complaints. It is recommended that the service consider automatically addressing any allegation as a complaint as this would trigger additional procedures.

The Childrens Voice project was able to identify important benefits for children arising from the consultation processes. These include evidence that children and young people are not clear about their care plans; investigations against foster carers where allegations have been made by young people, and, the development of skills and confidence amongst those young people who have been involved.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for 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)

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**29**

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Improvements in payments and their management are underway but have yet to be fully implemented.

**EVIDENCE:**

**Preparation for adulthood.** There is a specialist leaving care worker whose role it is to work with young people with disabilities. Young people can remain in their foster home and into adult life through the revision of payments; this is good practice. The manager reported that a training flat will be made available for young people to move into for a month to experience what it is like to care for themselves.

This Standard was insufficiently cross-referenced to reach significant conclusions on this occasion (see last report).

**Payments to carers.** Councillor Simpson reported that fostering is receiving greater attention by the Council and councillors now have greater knowledge of the service. A scrutiny committee oversees payments and made recommendations for increases in line with new national guidelines. The manager anticipated these will be in place by April '07, but not necessarily at Fostering Network recommended levels. The outcome will be reviewed next time.

Two of the four families visited raised questions about payments (see also, last report). They reported that although they were paid regularly there were

other matters that concerned them including not being paid the same allowances as other carers and not receiving the initial allowance when a child arrives. This was discussed with the manager who agreed to address the problems. The inspector understands that one person will oversee payments in future and this should improve the system.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for 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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**All except 5, 19, 26-28**

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. There is evidence of effective management in all areas despite the countywide issues that are affecting morale and ongoing developments within the service.



## **EVIDENCE:**

**Statement of Purpose.** A current Statement of Purpose, and children's guide, is in place. The service continues to develop quickly and the Statement will require updating soon, e.g. regarding private fostering and restructuring. The Statement of Purpose can be accessed through the foster carer handbook, children's guide, Staffordshire's website and the 'web reference' on all correspondence. The children's guide and associated information is attractively presented and adaptable to different needs; this is good practice.

**Management.** The nominated manager has relevant qualifications in social work and management. There are clear lines of accountability, communication and delegation from practitioners and managers through to Councillors, which were evident during the inspection.

**Monitoring.** An assessment checklist helps to ensure quality standards. There is a dedicated review database to support workers and this was found to be effective. Summary reports are made of various parts of the service and this is good practice. An annual report is produced for the panel. File audits occur every three months. Other auditing occurs by the reviewing officer, e.g. of carer training and auditing of assessments. Team managers audit the frequency of supervision meetings every quarter. Quality audits of education plans occur (not inspected) and the service intends to use the Audit Commission toolkit to monitor progress in educational outcomes. It is also intended to undertake quarterly audits of notifiable incidents (Schedule 8); this will help to ensure that details have been forwarded to relevant agencies. It is clear that a substantial amount of auditing occurs and this is good practice. However, it is fragmented, i.e. it is undertaken by various people in a service that has a number of separately managed sections. It is recommended that the service manager oversee a coherent monitoring process as outlined in the regulations pertaining to independent agencies (Regulation 42) so that quality and consistency can be assured.

Currently, the service is unable to provide all the data required by the inspector. This should be addressed in order to assist in inspections but also with internal auditing and monitoring.

**Staff organisation and sufficiency.** It has been recognised that there are insufficient qualified staff in both field social work and fostering teams and this is being addressed at present. There was insufficient evidence in this inspection to support or contradict this position.

A separate team undertakes reviews to ensure an independent view is maintained; this is good practice. Other staff are organised logically and effectively.

There is an emergency duty system that consists of 2 households plus two others (at any one time) from a pool that works on a rota basis. The manager and other staff indicated that this part of the service that requires a review. Its day-to-day management is rotated amongst managers who have a team of social workers but there is some doubt that it has sufficient capacity.

**Fair employer.** The service meets the Standard but is affected by events outside its control. There was evidence of low morale amongst staff at all levels at present because of a job evaluation programme and restructuring. These are occurring only 18 months after the last reorganisation. Part of the strategy is to move from automatic progression of social workers to senior posts to progression if there is a vacancy in the teams establishment; this could have substantial effects on individuals and teams. Established carers too thought the number of changes and 'reorganisations' was unhelpful.

**Staff accountability.** Staff reported that they get regular supervision from their team managers. A new procedure has been implemented since the last inspection whereby team managers audit the frequency of meetings every quarter (this forms part of the service monitoring discussed above).

Policies and procedures have been amended since the last inspection. Friends and Families social workers (especially field workers, who undertake assessments) will have new procedures where applicable in due course.

**Support of carers.** Carers were almost unanimous in their praise of the service social workers; one said 'they have been brilliant'. One exception was brought to the attention of the manager. They also reported on the mentoring that is available to new carers. Ten support groups operate across 9 localities every month; since 2005 they have included male support groups. This is excellent practice that exceeds the Standard.

Out of hours support is available to foster carers via a free-phone service to duty foster carer, with management backup, in addition to the countywide emergency duty service. All foster carers are made members of Fostering Network, which includes legal cover. Assessing social workers continue, post-approval, providing supervision and support.

Male support groups exist across the county. A carers handbook is provided to all carers and it is intended to make it available electronically in the next year.

Carers did not report a lack of support. However, there is other evidence that needs investigation. One is the lack of field social work support in some cases (mentioned elsewhere in this report). This can have substantial effects about which carers, especially new ones, may have no knowledge. Another is the evidence from Panel about the disruptive effect on children when new carers are overstretched. This could usefully become part of auditing so that lessons

can be integrated into practice (see also in this report, the lessons available from the SUSTAIN team about prevention of disruptions).

Support for carers who are out of county was not inspected in detail this time. The manager outlined the arrangements for their support.

**Carer supervision.** Carers reported that their reviews are undertaken routinely and staff supported this; files supported this. A central team is responsible for reviews and reported minimal slippage. Substantial amounts of information are available to carers on paper, electronically or in person.

**Carer training.** Post-approval training is supported financially and is offered at a variety of times. Carers were positive about the training that was available. Although there are often training issues that arise once a child is placed, these are addressed promptly from the most suitable source. Carers also reported on the portfolios of evidence they compile (except Family Link carers). It was reported that in the past year approximately 50% of households attended a training event. In more than half the cases, both carers attended.

Foster carers post-approval training is monitored centrally as evidenced by the Payment for Skills system whereby carers can show they are working at higher skill-levels and obtain higher payments. This programme is evidence of the service exceeding the Standard in this area. Staff evidenced the scheme during the inspection and showed that it was an established and effective process. Carers keep portfolios of evidence and if there is insufficient they run the risk of being 'demoted' to a lower level of payment. Post-approval training is obtained from a catalogue that cross-references with NVQ underpinning knowledge and carers access those courses that are considered relevant when they have their annual review. It does not apply to Family and Friends carers (see below). Post-approval training is not compulsory and this should be reviewed. It is also recommended that if a household has two people who are approved then they should *both* be expected to evidence their ongoing competence. Although supervising social workers reported that they cover this issue in supervision, it is not sufficiently collated at present and those carers who were spoken to do not accept responsibility for passing on the learning in the way described by staff.

In addition, thirteen households (4.6%) had one or both carers with NVQ 3, and five households were undertaking it. Households can undertake NVQ-assessments only after completing 6 post-approval courses and a years fostering. It was reported that there is a shortage of NVQ-assessors and this should be reviewed. 44 households had other, relevant qualifications.

The excellent work in delivering post-approval training in partnership with foster carers, area social workers and other agencies, was recognised through

the Skills for Care Council and Staffordshire Fostering Service received a National Award.

A substantial amount of work also goes into providing support groups throughout the county.

One household that was visited and undertook a mixture of Family Link and other fostering was found not to be undertaking the competency assessment. This appeared to be due to them having a contract with the service. This should be reviewed as the principle of maintaining competence is relevant whatever the payment arrangements.

Pre-approval training was not inspected in detail this time. It was reported that 4 courses have been completed in the last year using the Skills to Foster material.

**Childrens case records.** Childrens files are increasingly kept electronically. Foster placement agreements have been reviewed since the last inspection. Children were aware of their records and that they could have access to them.

Carers participate and contribute to the completion of life work with children and work closely with field social workers.

**Admin records.** Appropriate records are kept. The service now has an improved system for identifying which carers children are living with and this will improve further when the new IT system (PISCES) is fully operational. Implementation of this integrated information system is occurring at present and will connect social care and education services. Currently, information has to be obtained in protracted ways. It is not possible to identify the ethnicity of all carers from the database; information provided did not identify all the carers (e.g. some Family and Friends carers) and the approvals of carers could not be printed-off. It was reported that these problems should be resolved by the new IT system.

Security of records in households is facilitated by secure boxes and guidance on storage of confidential information.

**Family and Friends.** This is a distinct team that operates in tandem with area teams and became fully staffed in 2006. It is also responsible for Special Guardianship reports and becomes involved in particularly complex court cases.

It is clear that, at the moment, this is a developing service and that the procedures applied to the rest of the service do not apply consistently here; this is caused in part by staff shortages but also by the particular characteristics of this type of foster care. Questionnaires from carers indicated there are significant delays in approvals and the manager reported that this

was partly due to problems accumulating sufficient information. In the staff restructuring there will be additional resources given to this team.

In the last financial year approximately 47 new households were approved; nearly half of which were Family and Friends carers. Another significant area of work for this team is the increasing number of Special Guardianship orders.

The Panel has a representative from the Family and Friends team, which is good practice.

Training is under review by the team and courses can be accessed. The Payment for Skills programme is not provided to Family and Friends carers; this should be reviewed, especially as this is a large group of people who do not usually receive pre-approval training, either.

# 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	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	4
9	3
15	X
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	X
29	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

### 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
2	FS29	17(1)	The service must fully implement the planned improvements in payments to carers.	09/04/07
3	FS32	17	All the Standards need to be reflected in the service provided for Family and Friends carers. <b>Timescales since 25.8.04 not met</b>	09/04/07

### 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	FS4	It is recommended that the service manager oversee an integrated monitoring process, as outlined in the regulations pertaining to independent agencies (Regulation 42)
2	FS4	The manager should ensure that the service is able to provide all the annual data required by CSCI.

3	FS7	It is recommended that the service identify a source of professional advice that staff and carers can access for practical information on cultural issues.
4	FS9	The manager should consider ways of obtaining accurate data about children who go missing, and, obtain statistics about the number of times restraint had been used.
5	FS11	The identified gaps in consultation with certain groups should be reviewed.
6	FS11	A review should occur to ensure that any concerns are being adequately gathered, addressed and audited.
7	FS11	It is recommended that the service consider automatically addressing any allegation as a complaint
8	FS22	The manager should consider: a) applying the system of post-approval training and competence assessment to all carers; b) making post-approval training and/or evidence of ongoing competence compulsory, and, c) applying it to partners of main carers.
9	FS22	The shortage of NVQ-assessors should be reviewed.
10	FS30	It was recommended that a) Panel procedures include a requirement to check that suitable accommodation is provided, especially in Friends and Families households, b) the suitability of the room be reviewed, and c) the capacity of Panel be re-assessed.
11	FS31	The manager should review whether or not Family Link fostering is adequately addressed in pre-approval training.
12	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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