



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Oxfordshire County Council Fostering Service**

Yarnton House

Rutten Lane

Yarnton

Oxford

OX5 1LP

31st January – 4th February & 10th  
February 2005

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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

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

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

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

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

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

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Oxfordshire County Council

**Address**

Yarnton House, Rutten Lane, Yarnton, Oxford OX5 1LP.

**Local Authority Manager**

Sarah Clayson

Gwen Grossman, Acting Service Manager

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**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

27/02/04

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>	31st January – 4th February and completed on 10th February 2005.			<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>	09:30 am			
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Clare Davies	105285	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Chris Hastings	71952	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>	Kate Harrison	93889	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>			
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.				
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>				
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Gwen Grossman, Acting Service Manager		

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

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**Description of Fostering Service**

**Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings**

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

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**2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**

**3. Management of the fostering service**

**4. Securing and promoting welfare**

**5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**

**6. Records**

**7. Fitness of premises**

**8. Financial requirements**

**9. Fostering panels**

**10. Short-term breaks**

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Local Authority Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Social and Health Care Directorate operates a family placement service that provides services in relation to both adoption and fostering.

This amalgamated service comprises three geographically based family placement teams (over 4 sites), a county wide family placement team for children with disabilities and a county wide placement support team. A unit manager leads each of these teams and the services are further supported by a recruitment officer, fostering and adoption panel and an advisor to the panel.

The disability family placement team is part of the Directorate's disability service for children and young people, and is managed by the Disability Service Manager. That team does however apply the same standards as the wider fostering service and is party to its development work. The Placements Service Manager manages the teams that constitute the family placement service.

The following fostering services are provided:

Recruitment, preparation, assessment, training and support of foster carers.

Preparation and support groups.

Training for carers including NVQ and NVQ Assessor Awards.

Training for staff including student placements and Child Care Award.

Placement finding for all children and young people, including disabled children.

Relief placements.

Short term placements.

Long term placements.

Emergency placements.

Short breaks for disabled children and young people.

Mother and baby placements.

Fostering Plus; a fee paid service for foster carers who accept children and young people with challenging behaviour.

Assessments for Courts, including Residence Orders.

Placement Support.

In February 2005 the local authority fostering service were supporting foster carers with 306 placements. At the time of the inspection the county had 319 approved foster carers.

## **PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Inspector's Summary**

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This inspection took place over 11 days in February 2005 and was the third inspection against the National Minimum Standards since the introduction of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, children in placement, placing social workers and parents of children using the short break scheme in advance of the inspection. The Inspector received responses from 20 children/young people, 9 foster carers, 41 placing Social Workers and 9 parents.

The fostering service provides good support and training opportunities for foster carers with good systems in place to support placements with health and educational needs. Strong working relationships have developed between foster carers and the Family Placement Teams and many initiatives have involved partnership working with other agencies. Great efforts are made to ensure that the local authority consults children and young people in foster care and the Inspectors concluded that this standard was exceeded.

Shortfalls were found in the areas of recruitment, foster carer agreements, information held on the registers of children and foster carers and the constitution of the fostering panel. Eight of the assessed standards were not met, 6 had minor shortfalls and 2 had major shortfalls.

#### **Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**

**This standard had some minor shortfalls.**

The Statement of Purpose reflects the aims and objectives of the agency and is up to date, a few amendments are required to fully meet the standard.

#### **Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)**

**One of these standards was assessed and met.**

The management of the fostering service is by suitably qualified and experienced people.

#### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)**

**These standards were assessed and both were met.**

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.



### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

**Eight standards were assessed, five were met and two had minor shortfalls and one exceeded.**

High priority is given to ensure that foster carers and their placements provide a safe environment where children and young people can be protected from harm. The assessment tool used for health & safety checks needs to be improved to allow for a more thorough record. Awareness of cultural differences in relation to language, religion, dress, food and festivals could be promoted more widely.

Having consulted with foster carers, family placement staff and placing social workers the Inspectors recommend that some meetings/ training sessions are arranged for all parties to get together to develop a greater understanding of each other's role.

Innovative approaches are taken to consult with children and young people.

### **Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)**

**Seven of these standards were assessed, five were met, one had minor shortfalls, one had a major shortfall.**

A strength of the fostering service is its arrangements for support to carers, the majority of whom were unanimous in their praise of the direct and indirect support offered by link workers and the unit managers.

Some minor omissions were noted in the recruitment of fostering service staff and a panel member. It was a major shortfall that not all Foster Carer Agreements had been signed and one was missing from the appropriate case file.

### **Records (Standards 24-25)**

**One of these standards was met and the other had a major shortfall.**

The registers maintained for children/young people and foster carers require minor amendments to fully meet the regulatory requirements. References received for one carer had not been followed up with interviews.

### **Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)**

**This standard was not met with minor shortfalls.**

The office accommodation is adequate for the purpose of the fostering service though it is recommended that the new office space in Abingdon be reviewed to consider more privacy in such an open plan design. The availability of IT equipment has greatly improved in all but one office.

### **Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)**

**One of these standards was assessed and met.**

Foster carers reported that payment was regular and prompt.

### **Fostering panels (Standard 30)**

#### **This standard was not met with minor shortfalls.**

The fostering service has 3 panels jointly to consider fostering and adoption matters and generally operates to a good system. Some additions are needed in the policies and procedures developed for the panel.

One panel was waiting to recruit an elected member though this requirement was met in relation to the other two panels. The panel need to develop their quality assurance role in receiving management information of annual reviews. The minutes of panel discussions would benefit from a summary of the discussions highlighting strengths and any areas of concern.

### **Short-term breaks (Standard 31)**

#### **This standard was assessed and met.**

Parents of children with disabilities spoke highly of the short break scheme but reported that they would like more flexibility and frequency with the offer of respite. The scheme ensures robust recruitment and assessment procedures are in place and works within the fostering service policies and procedures.

### **Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)**

#### **This standard was assessed and met.**

The fostering service has embraced Kinship care and nominated staff to develop this area of care. Good networks have been made with other local authorities and national organisations. The fostering service has identified what areas need development to further enhance this type of care.

The Inspectors would like to thank the children & young people, foster carers, staff, placing social workers, birth relatives and the managers for contributing to and assisting with the inspection process.

## **Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

As detailed in the Requirements.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

**If No please list below**

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

**Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.**

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Clare Davies Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Second Inspector Kate Harrison Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Regulation Manager Christopher Hastings Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	20 Schedule 1	FS15	The fostering service must ensure that information as required by Schedule 1 is obtained and stored.	31-05-05
2	28	FS22	The fostering service must ensure Foster Carer Agreements are in place and signed by all parties.	30-04-05
3	31	FS25	The fostering service must ensure that the information held on the register for foster carers meets the regulatory requirements.	31-05-05
4	22 Schedule 2	FS25	The fostering service must ensure that the information held on the register for children/young people meets the regulatory requirements.	31-05-05
5	27(2)(b)	FS25	The fostering service must ensure that at least 2 referees are interviewed.	30-04-05
6	24(3)(c)	FS30	The fostering service must ensure that each panel has an elected member of the local authority.	30-06-05

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	<p>It is recommended that the Statement of Purpose is amended to include;</p> <p>The address of the fostering service.</p> <p>The correct telephone number of CSCI.</p> <p>The procedure and process of reviewing foster carers.</p> <p>It is also recommended that the Children's Guides have the correct telephone number for CSCI.</p>
2	FS6	<p>It is recommended that the format for the health &amp; safety assessment is reviewed to allow more space for recording and not rely on tick boxes.</p>
3	FS7	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service provide carers with information on cultural differences in relation to language, food, religion, dress, festivals etc.</p>
4	FS8	<p>It is recommended that written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between carer and child/young person.</p>
5	FS10	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service ensures that carers record the outcomes of contact arrangements.</p>
6	FS13	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service consider how it can work with the education department to present a more integrated service for children and their carers.</p>
7	FS15	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service ensures that all administrative staff who have access to confidential information about children in the Looked After system should have a Standard level CRB check carried out before commencing work.</p>
8	FS16	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service reviews administrative tasks to consider where inefficiencies can be addressed.</p> <p>It is recommended that meetings are arranged between the children's social workers, fostering service staff and foster carers to promote a greater understanding of each other's role.</p>

9	FS22	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service amend the foster carers' handbook to include the role of CSCI in relation to complaints.</p> <p>It is also recommended that supervisory visits of foster carers include regular reference to the handbook.</p>
10	FS25	<p>It is recommended that foster carers are informed through the handbook of the need to return records to the fostering service once the placement has ceased.</p> <p>It is recommended that file monitoring occurs regularly by senior management.</p>
11	FS26	<p>It is recommended that IT skills are considered alongside professional development and training needs.</p> <p>It is also recommended that the fostering service consider providing some screening within the Abingdon office.</p>
12	FS30	<p>It is recommended that the fostering service ensure that the panel chair summarises the reasons for the conclusions reached by the panel including the positive aspects as well as any areas of difficulty or potential risk.</p> <p>It is recommended that the foster panel receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews.</p>

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



**PART B****INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	11
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NA
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	31/01/05
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	91

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Statement of Purpose is a good publication, user friendly and provides a helpful A-Z section of information for foster carers. The statement includes details in respect of the fostering service as detailed in this standard and elected members have formally approved the document. The Inspectors recommend amendments to some minor details.

The majority of foster carers acknowledged that they had received the recently revised Statement of Purpose, not all placing social workers confirmed that they had received a copy but the Inspectors were informed that the 'Assessment' and 'Looked After' teams had access to a copy. The Statement of Purpose can be sent via email upon request and there are plans to make it available on the Oxfordshire County Council website and also at the Oxfordshire Children's Information Service Office later this year.

Written guides to the Oxfordshire fostering service for children and young people have been produced in various formats appropriate to age and understanding. These are good colourful booklets with simple explanations, contact numbers for independent advocacy services and 'people to complain to'. A pictorial booklet is available for disabled children who benefit from the short break scheme that explains a visit to the carers' home, activities that may occur, returning home to family and then planning to visit the carers again.

Not all children and young people who responded to a questionnaire said they had received such a guide though many foster carers informed Inspectors that the children and young people in their care had received one.

It is recommended that the Statement of Purpose is amended to include the procedure and process for reviewing foster carers. It is also recommended that it contains the address of the service (or indeed addresses of all area offices) and that the telephone number for the Oxfordshire CSCI is corrected. Similarly the CSCI telephone number in two of the children's guides has been misprinted and needs amending.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
Standard not assessed during this inspection.		

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The management of the service has undergone some changes since the last inspection. A Unit Manager has been acting up as a part time Service Manager and therefore two senior practitioners have acted up to cover the part time Unit Manager's post. Initially this arrangement appeared complicated to the Inspectors but in discussion with staff and observations of the service it has appeared to be suitable to the fostering service in the short term. The increase in workload and responsibilities were reported to be a pressure as well as an opportunity for professional development.</p>		
<p>This temporary management cover came to an end on 28-02-05.</p>		

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

There are good monitoring systems in place where information is collected locally in each of the three area teams and the disability family placement team. The information is then collated to provide an overall view of the fostering service countywide.

Unit managers hold supervisory responsibilities and within this role they discuss and collect information relating to supervisees caseloads. A helpful monitoring tool is in place for this exercise from which information is transferred into a Unit Manager's monthly report.

The fostering service uses such information to 'map' in-house provision and the Service Manager provides regular reports to the Children's Panel, the Council's Corporate Parenting Group. The Inspectors observed how the Placement Meeting considers an overview of the service and also provides a level of monitoring.

There are clear lines of accountability and communication between managers and staff. It was evident from the discussions with staff that they had a clear understanding of lines of responsibility.

Local authority fostering services are not statutorily required to notify the Commission of any of the circumstances listed below however the Inspectors saw that these incidents are recorded internally and the Inspectors commend this good practice.

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

X

**Death of a child placed with foster parents.**

X

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

X

**Serious illness or accident of a child.**

X

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

X

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

X

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

X

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

X

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

X

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

0

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

0

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)****The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Earlier in the report reference has been made to the acting up arrangements over the last year for the management of the fostering service. This arrangement appeared to have maintained a management structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The Local Authority appropriately delegated supervisory duties to specified staff in the position of senior practitioner to assist with the acting up

Interviews with Unit Managers established that they were clear about their duties, level of delegation and responsibilities. In the absence of the manager other staff were identified as being in charge of the fostering service.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Inspectors concluded that the fostering service gives a strong emphasis to the importance of safe caring policies. A sample of foster carers' files was inspected and health and safety checklists that were completed as part of the assessment were seen. The checklist is comprehensive but relies heavily on tick boxes. The Inspectors recommend that this format is reviewed to allow space for recording comments that will enable supervisors and panel members to consider the assessment more thoroughly than presently allows.

Discussions with foster carers confirmed that issues relating to health and safety were discussed during the approval process and carers provided examples of how they had made minor changes within their homes such as; arranging lockable cupboards, having an awareness of the storage and amount of alcohol in the home and installing smoke detectors. The foster carer handbook provides reference to health and safety advice.

All homes visited were observed to be warm and welcoming. 41 Placing social workers who responded to a questionnaire all agreed that the children and young people were safe in their placement and some reported that this was due to the following being in place;

- NVQ training for foster carers.
- Foster carers having a good understanding of safe caring issues.
- Risk assessments in place.

The foster carer handbook has good guidance on appropriate car seats for different ages and weight of children and in addition has an agreement with 'Sitting Tight' an organisation where foster carers can access advice about the purchasing and fitting of car seats.

The training officer reported that foster carers of children with disabilities will have the opportunity to attend some training on manual handling techniques later this year.

The Inspectors were informed that the foster carers understood they may be interviewed as part of the inspection process and this was confirmed by the Foster Carer Agreement and by those carers whom the Inspectors met.

**Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The local authority fostering service acknowledges that at the time of the inspection (and historically), there are insufficient numbers of foster carers of black and Asian origin, or from a dual heritage background, to meet the needs of children and young people needing culturally appropriate foster placements.

The fostering service has a recruitment strategy in place and the post of recruitment officer was taken up just prior to this inspection. The main aim is to recruit sufficient foster carers to ensure increased placement choice available to the children and young people referred to the service. Many carers have been approved to care for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, the majority of these carers have come to the UK from the same countries as the young people and these placements appear to be meeting their needs and generally successful.

Foster carers receive training to assist with the care of children and young people who may not be culturally appropriately placed. Guidance on hair and skin care, Promoting Good Race Relations, Life Story work and NVQ studies where promotion of diversity, equality and rights underpin the core training of this award.

The foster carer handbook gives some minimal advice on developing a child's or young person's identity. It is recommended that more information is available in relation to cultural differences of language, religion, food, dress, festivals etc. either through training events or written guidance.

The Inspectors were informed of where the fostering service had liaised with the libraries to provide literature in languages suited to young people in foster care where English is not their first language. The local authority provides opportunities for young people in care to enhance their confidence and feelings of self worth through group-work, activity camps and involvement with community resources.

The Inspectors were informed how adaptations are made and equipment provided where necessary for any children with disabilities in foster care. The short break scheme considers carefully in the assessment of carers how suitable the home environment would be for a child with special needs or physical disabilities. Assistance is given for any minor adaptations or instalment of aids.



**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

**Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

All planned placements are discussed at the placement panel where there is an opportunity to consider the needs of any children and young people requiring a foster placement and explore the suitability of any available foster carers to meet those needs as an appropriately matched placement. The needs of children and young people who need to be 'Looked After' in Oxfordshire outweighs the pool of available foster carers and therefore placement choice is reduced.

It was evident to the Inspectors during observations of the fostering service that the strengths, skills and experience of carers were well known amongst the team and this assisted in responding to any emergency referrals that were received outside of the placement panel. Some fostering service staff reported to the Inspectors that written referrals from social workers often provided inadequate information and this resulted in wasting time by having to pursue further details or potentially could lead to a poorly matched and inappropriate placement being made.

The Inspectors saw examples of insufficient referral forms and observed the fostering service staff diligently seek more details from social workers. Some staff in the fostering service informed the Inspectors that they would like to use a new or revised form. A copy of this revised form was shared with the Inspectors who consider that it could provide much of the information needed to ensure an appropriate placement is made. Although the revised form is longer the inspection concluded that it would be difficult to reduce the details requested without compromising the thoroughness of the information.

The Inspectors were informed that joint meetings/trainings are held between staff from the fostering service, assessment teams and 'Looked After' teams to raise awareness of each others role and develop their working relationships and the Inspectors support the continuation of these.

Written Foster Placement Agreements seen were not very specific in identifying elements of matching that were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and insufficient information had been recorded as to how any gaps would be addressed and supported.

Placements that are made out of the approval range of foster carers are monitored by caseload analysis. Some foster carers reported to the Inspectors that the process to change the terms of approval was lengthy before being presented to the panel. An Inspector observed the panel discuss such an example where a placement had been occurring for 8 months outside its approval range before being presented to panel.

The Inspectors were informed of some examples where placing social workers had approached foster carers directly about arranging a placement. The fostering service were appropriately concerned about this practice and reported it was unhelpful and consequently was not subject to the matching process employed by the fostering service. The Inspectors were assured that any such occurrence was appropriately managed by the fostering service.

Planned placements allow for introductions and this practice was agreed by the fostering service to be valuable. However, frequently, the sense of urgency for placements did not always allow for this. Children with disabilities receiving short term breaks through the Breaktime Scheme receive a good introduction to their foster carer(s). Carers visit the child and their birth family at their family home initially and then the next visit takes place at the carers' home. A gradual plan of introductions is agreed at a pace to suit all concerned.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Safe caring is given high priority within the fostering service, policies are drawn up specific to each foster carer and the child(ren) that they care for. The handbook gives good guidance on safe caring issues.</p>		
<p>There are training opportunities for foster carers on child protection matters. The training officer reported that in 2004, 31 foster carers attended 'Signs and Symptoms of abuse', 19 carers attended 'What to do if..' and 17 foster carers have completed the NVQ unit relating to child protection. Training commissioned in conjunction with NSPCC and Interagency organisation to provide multi-agency training in a wide variety of locations and at different times has been identified as a priority topic for 2005.</p>		
<p>The foster carer agreement makes it clear that corporal punishment is not acceptable and there is guidance on the use of restraint and control. The handbook gives some strategies on how to manage difficult behaviour and foster carers reported to the Inspectors that they were well supported by the fostering service and the Attach team in managing challenging behaviour. There were no reports received from children and young people of any inappropriate discipline or sanctions used.</p>		
<p>Management information systems are in place to collate and evaluate information from any allegation of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care and any such information is scrutinised by senior management.</p>		
<p>The handbook provides guidance on recognising signs that a child may be being bullied, definitions of bullying and advice on how to manage a child that is being bullied or indeed is being a bully. Similarly the handbook gives clear guidance on 'absconding, running away and going missing' and foster carers reported to the Inspectors that they understood what action to take and had received good support from their link workers when they had experienced reporting a missing child/young person.</p>		
<p><b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b></p>	<p>X</p>	<p>%</p>

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

2

There was evidence from records and from a variety of discussions that the local authority is committed to maintain and develop family contact where appropriate. The importance of promoting family contact is continually addressed with foster carers; during the assessment process attitudes to contact are explored, whilst considering the matching of placements, in making placement agreements and during any reviews of placement or carers.

Placing social workers were asked, 'How closely do you consider the foster carers work with the child's family?' and from the 37 replies, 19 reported 'very well', 11 'fairly well', 4 'average', 2 'a little disappointing' and 1 'poor'.

Foster carers reported the extent of their commitments to contact arrangements from telephone calls, promoting letter contact, providing transport, supervising visits and inviting family members to the foster home. Some foster carers reported that they often provided emotional support to some family members and that this was not always recognised by the local authority.

The Inspectors concluded that the recording by foster carers of outcomes of contact arrangements and impact on the children and young people was varied. One example seen in a report presented to panel stated that the carer had, 'not needed to make any records'. The young person was having contact with birth family and the local authority were in the process of care proceedings, clearly records should have been made and contributed to the assessment of the young person being at risk of significant harm.

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

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

4

The fostering service creates many opportunities to seek the views of children and young people in foster care. Independent reviewing officers chair statutory LAC reviews and foster carers encourage children and young people to attend and assist them in voicing their opinions where appropriate. 'Viewpoint', a computer programme has been available to some children and young people to use to contribute to their LAC review. At the time of the inspection this had been used as a pilot project and was subject to review.

Also at the time of the inspection, some children and young people were involved in group work with an independent youth worker looking at consultation and issues about being Looked After by Oxfordshire local authority. The Inspector observed a group meeting where the young people were preparing to present a show celebrating their achievement. The youth worker showed the Inspector examples of how the young people had been consulted throughout the project and a variety of mediums had been used such as art, craft, music and games. The Inspector concluded this group work had provided an excellent opportunity for young people to express their views and opinions.

Other groups throughout the county meet regularly and each summer there is a trip where children and young people get involved in activities linked to a theme.

Out of the 20 responses from children and young people to a questionnaire 15 said that they were 'often asked' for their opinions and ideas by foster carers and 5 said they were asked 'sometimes'. There were no responses to indicate that they were 'not asked very often' or 'never asked'. The children and young people listed the following things that they get consulted about; choice of clothes, choice of bed covers, colour of decoration, activities, outings, food shopping, hairstyle, school, homework, holiday destination, what rules there should be, how you feel about things?, can I help?.

The children and young people who completed the questionnaire were also able to give many examples of something that had changed as a result of what they had said.

Foster carers' responses to the questionnaire suggested that they had not been asked their opinion as to how the Fostering Service was being run; however during individual and group discussions foster carers reported that attendance at support groups, surgeries, coffee mornings and committee meetings enabled them to feedback any comments they may have about the service.

Criticisms reported in the questionnaires were aimed at the children and young people's social workers not being very available to foster carers and/or the children placed with them.

Interviews with social workers for children with disabilities confirmed that they have skills in communication to assess that children and young people placed in foster care and/or short term breaks are able to make their feelings known regarding their care.

Children and young people are informed how to make a complaint in the guides produced for them whilst in foster care and the responses to the questionnaire largely confirms this with 16 out of 20 stating that they have been told how to make a complaint.

The Inspectors met with a birth relative who reported a very positive relationship between herself and the foster carer. One contact cannot be taken as representative yet the Inspector felt that the birth relative had a lot to contribute about her experiences of working with the fostering service and recommends that consideration is given to include birth relatives' perspectives in the preparation training for foster carers.

The Inspectors commend the innovative approaches to consultation with children and young people in foster care.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Children and young people's questionnaires indicated that they felt that their carers promoted a healthy lifestyle and showed awareness of a nutritious diet.

The local authority has a health liaison nurse who is employed by the Primary Care Trust and she is informed when a young person is placed with foster carers and then she informs the local health visitor. The health visitor then contacts the foster family and arrangements are made to carry out the initial health assessment, which forms the basis of the health action plan. All action plans are presented at the annual reviews. At the time of the inspection there wasn't a health liaison nurse in post but a new appointment was due to start imminently.

Foster carers generally spoke highly of the support in accessing health services for the children and young people in their care and particular praise was given to the support and advice obtained from the Attach team. (The Attach Team provide a psychology service where foster carers are experiencing difficulties in their relationship with a foster child or in dealing with complex behaviour.) Some carers did not know about the existence of the health liaison nurse though the Inspectors have seen reference to this post in publications from the fostering service.

Foster carers reported that they were generally given sufficient health information about the children and young people in their care unless the local authority did not know the information. One isolated incident was reported where it took 3 months before a health assessment was undertaken of a child in foster care. Foster carers reported various methods of recording medical matters and the introduction of a Placement File for each child and young person will assist with this and provide some consistency.

The Inspector met with the former health liaison nurse who was in post until December 2004. She reported the training role of this post to Health Visitors who undertake the initial health assessments of Looked After Children, to social workers, to link workers, to foster carers and to the children and young people. The health liaison nurse spoke of a successful training programme with input from the Terrence Higgins Trust on the subject of Sexual Health and Relationships. Due to the success of this there are plans to cascade this training to more foster carers.

There have been many training opportunities for foster carers to promote development and health including 36 carers who attended first aid training in 2004, child development knowledge underpinning NVQ training, support groups have discussed drug awareness & sexual health matters and food hygiene courses have included carers and children/young people. In conjunction with the Public Health Department a leaflet has been devised about communicable diseases and this was due to be distributed in the Spring of 2005.

The handbook provides very good guidance on health matters and lists what leaflets are available from the Health Education Authority in addition to a healthcare checklist.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The local authority gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of children and young people in foster care by having a dedicated team called the Reach Up Team. This team is made up from key education support services and co-ordinators of the various Reach Up projects. The team's priority is to work in collaboration with colleagues to develop and improve the existing systems in place that identify the needs and deliver services for children in care.

Foster carers spoke very highly of this service and the various projects within it. Projects such as;

'Right to Read', the aim is to promote a love of reading and raise educational achievements. Each foster child can have 3 free books following a book appeal through the BBC, library use where fines are waived and free audio books from the library.

'Share' is a programme that uses fun and practical activities to involve carers in their children's learning. Sessions take place for 1-2 hours, one morning a week in term time and carers are provided with appropriate materials to undertake the activities with the children and young people at home. Travel and child care costs are available to assist foster carers in attending this project.

'Reading Quest' is a charity that aims to increase a child's strategies, confidence, knowledge and skills in reading and writing to enable them to work as an independent learner in mainstream class. The Inspectors were informed that Reading Quest was happening in 32 schools in Oxfordshire.

'Connect Up' is an after school project for Looked After Children that runs in two schools one day a week. Sixth form mentors support children in promoting their confidence and improving literacy skills through fun activities.

Children and young people reported in their questionnaire responses that they get help from their foster carers with school in the following ways; early bed for school nights, help with homework, attendance at school meetings, encouragement to get up and go to school, sorting out any problems and receiving praise and encouragement. Foster carers reported how they had benefited from the local authority providing a computer for the children in their care though this scheme has now finished due to lack of funding.

The Children in Care Panel meets monthly to consider the educational status of all children and young people in care. The panel identifies anyone who is not in a school placement, those who may be bordering exclusion and those who are maintaining their placement without any difficulties. This information provides an overview of the educational placements in use though the Inspector was informed of a difficulty in collating statistical information due to the different IT systems in the Social and Health Care directorate and the Learning and Culture directorate (responsible for education).

Whilst foster carers spoke highly of the support and services available with regards to the education of the children and young people in their care, they also reported their frustration when liaising directly with the education department. Foster carers informed the Inspector that they felt there were hurdles to negotiate in accessing the right person with the right information and reported that they felt they had to battle with two departments who had different IT systems, language and priorities. It is recommended that the fostering service consider how it can work with the education department to present a more integrated service for children and their carers.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

**The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

0

Standard not assessed during this inspection.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

2

Inspectors were informed that all unit managers and service managers who are involved in the recruitment and selection of staff have had training in this area. There are full, clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff that follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people.

All staff reported that they had been interviewed as part of the selection process. Inspectors were unable to evidence the practice of taking up telephone enquires to verify written references as outlined in Standard 15.3.

All human resources files indicated that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks had been undertaken and when appropriate renewed regularly; however this was not the case for one sessional family placement worker and this matter needs to be addressed. It is not current practice to undertake CRB checks on administrative staff who have access to confidential information about children and the Looked After system, this is recommended as good practice.

The Statement of Purpose indicated that all social workers working for the fostering service have a relevant professional social work qualification; however, whilst all the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 was evidenced in human resources files the documentary proof of qualifications was absent.

Inspectors were informed that in February 2005, 28% of the staff in the family placement service will have completed the Child Care Award. A number of family placement staff have many years of experience within the family placement team and with child care services in general. The manager of the service informed the Inspectors that all staff of the family placement teams would had the opportunity to attend briefings on the complaints procedure in January 2005.

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

37

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

6



**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

There is a clear management structure in place and the Inspectors noted that unit managers of the family placement service were experienced, dedicated and skilled in managing the vast plethora of different areas of work within their teams. Inspectors were impressed with the work undertaken by the professional adviser and her job description carried an explicit quality assurance role. This post was clearly having the desired effect and was beginning to drive up the standards of report writing, and ensure better accuracy and timeliness.

Social work staff are supervised regularly by unit managers. Records are maintained and monitoring tools were in use to assess the workload of each member of staff. In some teams, unit managers had delegated specific specialisms to senior practitioners related to aspects of the fostering or adoption service, roles appeared unclear to the Inspectors as some staff were deemed specialist and others generic. Some staff expressed concern about managing such a wide range of work and being able to keep abreast of new changes in legislation and practice in both the fostering and adoption arenas. The Inspectors observed staff working long hours and some staff reported that there were difficulties in carrying out both adoption and fostering work whilst others reported that they liked the variety.

The service reported having some difficulties with the lack of adequate administrative support in the recent past, inspectors were informed that this had now been rectified and that a job evaluation is intended for some of the administrative staff in the near future to ensure better retention of staff and increased job satisfaction. Administrative staff were developing some administrative systems which were beginning to impact on the efficiency of the overall work. Staff suggested to the Inspectors that it would be helpful if administrative staff could take on the responsibility of arranging annual reviews and processing CRB applications, the Inspectors recommend that the manager reviews administrative tasks and considers where inefficiencies can be addressed.

All staff reported having a job description, having seen the Statement of Purpose and having access to all policies and procedures and staff conditions of service. There was evidence that social work staff were complying with the General Social Care Council Codes of Practice. Staff informed inspectors that they either had a copy or knew how to access the relevant policies and procedures.

Some foster carers reported that they had experienced considerable delay in receiving information about fostering after having made initial contact expressing an interest. The vacant post of the recruitment officer may have contributed to this and with someone new in post the local authority reported that they anticipated this would no longer be the case.

Questionnaire responses from placing social workers suggest that working relationships with family placement staff could be improved and the Inspectors concluded that there is a lack of understanding of each other's role and that of the foster carer. It is recommended that some meetings are arranged between social workers, family placement workers and foster carers where these issues can be resolved.

<b>Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)</b>		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>The fostering service has very few vacant posts and the staff teams are stable with very few changes from the last inspection. Recruitment strategies for foster carers have been in place throughout 2004 but with the departure of the recruitment officer in the summer staff reported that they were unable to give the time and attention deserved to recruitment and now welcomed the appointment of a new recruitment officer (January 2005).</p> <p>The assessment process for prospective carers is clearly set out in written procedures and arranged appropriately in three levels. Level 3 applies to carers not known to the children and young people and adheres to BAAF competency based expectations and therefore covered all areas under this standard. The Inspectors saw some good examples of evidential observations and references for a recently completed assessment.</p> <p>Progress was noted in the recruitment of culturally appropriate carers for unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, though it was reported that access to funding for translation services can be difficult as approval has to be sought from outside the fostering service.</p>		

<b>Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)</b>		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	0
Standard not assessed during this inspection.		

<b>Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)</b>		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>Oxford Social and Health Care Directorate have a detailed and comprehensive, corporate training and qualifications programme for the year, which includes for example; practice teaching awards, post qualifying awards, child protection issues, promoting diversity, case recording, data protection, legal seminars, complaints training, supervising contact, a number of IT courses and courses on stress management. (This is not the complete list).</p> <p>Managers informed inspectors that other training and development opportunities were available for staff via team events/away days, through the continuing professional</p>		

development group, and via research in practice workshops. A training provided by BAAF on the supervision of Foster carers and their annual reviews took place during the week of the inspection.

Staff reported that training issues are discussed during supervision and appraisal sessions with their managers and objectives are set and plans are made for the coming year. All new staff are given a thorough induction training orchestrated by unit managers, and via the directorate induction events and also through the induction group.

Inspectors were informed that staff are kept abreast of any changes in legislation, guidance and case-law relevant to their job through the use of legal seminars, presentations, team meetings and by the departmental subscriptions to BAAF.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

0

Standard not assessed during this inspection.

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

Meetings with foster carers both individually and as a group indicated that they considered they were well supported and this was further evidenced in foster carers' responses to the questionnaire. From the 9 responses, 6 foster carers stated that they were 'very satisfied' with the support from the fostering service and the remaining 3 were 'quite well' satisfied.

Foster carers praised the role of the link worker and they reported that the fostering service made available a duty worker or the unit manager in the link worker's absence. Experience of contacting the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) out of office hours was variable with some foster carers reporting a good response and others felt it was poor. Foster carers informed the Inspectors that they received good support from the Attach Team and appreciated that they could contact them directly.

Surgeries for foster carers have been successfully set up and 6 dates have been planned throughout 2005 in a variety of venues throughout the county. Support groups were reported to be valuable and the role of the carer co-ordinator, though it was evident that these support systems were less available in the city area of the county. The Oxfordshire Foster Care Association produces a magazine twice a year and arranges social events and training.

A team of outreach workers are available to support young people in foster care aged between 9-16 years. The interaction helps to develop community links and stimulate new interests, skills and activities. Many foster carers reported positive experiences of this input with the children and young people they have cared for.

The questionnaire asked foster carers what they thought were the 'best' things about the fostering service and gave responses such as;

- 'there is always someone there at family placement service'
- 'friendly and helpful staff, dedicated..'
- 'good attendance at meetings'
- 'good knowledge source within the team'
- 'information is available if you ask'
- 'good link workers'

The questionnaire asked foster carers what they thought were the 'worst' things about the fostering service and gave responses such as;

- 'too much paperwork and volume of post'
- 'lengthy delay before starting home study'
- 'delay in gaining approval to increase number of placements'
- 'foster carer not being treated as a professional'
- 'heavy workload and shortage of staff'

Annual reviews are held with the first review of each foster carer being presented to panel. Social workers of children and young people placed in the foster home are asked to contribute to the annual review and views are sought from the birth children of foster carers.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**1**

Most foster carers have a named link worker, a qualified social worker from the fostering service. For the few carers who do not have a named link worker, they reported that they were liaising directly with the unit manager or a member of the team on duty until a post had been recruited to.

Foster Carers' Agreements have been written in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 though some examined by the Inspectors had not been signed by all parties and the terms of approval and date of panel were not specified. One file that had been monitored by the Service Manager 27-1-05 highlighted that there was no foster carer agreement on file, no evidence of any unannounced visit in the previous 12 months and the last annual review had taken place 15-7-03. The Service Manager had detailed the actions required to address these shortfalls.

A comprehensive handbook is issued to all foster carers, it is indexed well and full of useful guidance and procedures. Foster carers acknowledged using their handbooks as and when an issue arose but the Inspectors did not receive any reports where link workers or foster carers referred to the handbook during any supervision visits. It is recommended that this is considered as part of the agenda for supervision visits.

The Inspectors saw records to evidence that regular supervisory visits take place with foster carers and that some unannounced visits had been made but not to all placements in the last 12 months. One foster carer informed the Inspectors that she thought the unannounced visit was an excellent idea and had no objection to the fostering service checking her practice.

Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints can be found in the handbook and the Statement of Purpose. Reference to the role of CSCI responding to complaints is made in the Statement of Purpose but not in the handbook. It is recommended that this is amended.

Similarly information about the procedures to deal with investigations into allegations is produced in the handbook and Statement of Purpose with a named contact person from the National Fostering Network organisation who can provide independent support.

Information seen regarding allegations that had been investigated was appropriately recorded and the procedures had been correctly followed.

The Inspectors concluded that the fostering service generally provides good supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills well. The major shortfall in meeting this standard relates more to administrative and procedural errors.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

**The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The training programme for foster carers has been linked well to the National Minimum Standards and associated regulations. Some joint training between foster carers and fostering service staff have been held and the Inspectors recommend that these continue and consider including placing social workers where appropriate.

The training officer provided very good evidence of the training that foster carers have attended and the Inspectors were impressed with the creative approach in considering the timing, venue and practical supports e.g. transport and childcare.

At the time of the inspection the training officer was in the process of developing individual training profiles for each carer. The Inspectors support this plan to help identify any training deficits and those carers who may be resistant to undertake training.

Some of the training events that have occurred during 2004:

Managing Behaviour  
First Aid  
Putting Children First  
Children Act 1989  
Life Story Work  
Family Nurturing Network  
Food Hygiene  
Attachment issues  
Stress Management  
Child Protection  
Education – Reach Up

In total 160 places were taken up on 14 courses. 15 foster carers have achieved level 3 NVQ Caring for Children and Young People with 23 carers undertaking the award at the time of the inspection. 2 foster carers have trained as a NVQ assessor with another undertaking the assessor's award.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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A sample of records of individual children and young people in foster care were examined during the inspection along with a sample of records relating to foster carers. On the whole these records were well maintained with appropriate documents and up to date entries.

The handbook provides guidance on recording practices and this is further supported by discussions in support groups about recording skills. A small number of foster carers have attended training in producing Life Story Books.

Some carers spoken to had differing views and understanding on the need for making a record of the child/young person's stay with them, including the keeping of appropriate memorabilia. The fostering service will be introducing a 'placement file' for each child/young person during the Spring of 2005 and some training will be arranged to assist with its implementation. The maintenance of these files will hopefully encourage foster carers to assist children and young people in reflecting and understanding their early years and events that occur whilst in placement.

Carers were aware of the need to keep records stored securely.

### Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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The registers maintained for foster carers, and children and young people require minor amendment to meet Schedule 2 and Regulation 31. The address for a child/young person prior to the placement was needed along with the address on leaving placement and the date on which they ceased to be placed there. For foster carers the date of birth was omitted and the date of each annual review.

Records inspected for one Kinship carer had no evidence that follow up interviews with referees had taken place. Following presentation to the panel the agency decision maker highlighted that this should be followed up promptly.

Confidential records are stored in locked filing cabinets and the Inspector was assured that all premises are secure outside of office hours. The handbook does not inform carers of the

procedure for returning information to the agency once a placement has ceased and it is recommended that this is included and made known to foster carers.

The local authority has a number of corporate policies and procedures on the management of case recordings and maintenance of case files, these take into account the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Information is also published about the Access to Personal Records policy.

Only a few case files sampled by the Inspector evidenced that they had been monitored by a senior manager, the Service Manager of the fostering service acknowledged that this practice had recently been addressed and was in need of thorough implementation.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>				306
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>				333
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>				333
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>				58
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>				58
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>		124	<b>Maximum £</b>	398



## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

As already stated earlier in the report the fostering service is spread over four different local offices around Oxfordshire. Whilst inspectors heard that there had been an improvement in the provision of IT equipment in some offices this was not consistent across the service, in one office six members of social work staff were sharing one computer, this needs to be addressed. With the increased accessibility to IT equipment in other offices, some fostering service staff reported that they were now expected to do more of their own administrative work and felt that they were not skilled enough in these areas and were, 'not trained to be a typist'. The Local Authority provides IT training, it is recommended that the fostering service assess individual staff IT skills required alongside professional development and training needs.

The Abingdon office had moved into a new location in November 2004 and at the time of the inspection there was still no signage in place outside of the building or in reception. Foster carers reported their difficulties in getting through to the team by telephone since being in the new office, the Inspector also experienced such difficulties when planning the inspection. Staff reported their frustrations in adapting to an open plan office that had a thoroughfare through the middle of the room to another team office. The Inspector felt that there was limited space for the fostering service and a filing cabinet was placed in the corridor due to lack of office storage space. The Inspectors sympathise with the Abingdon team having a thoroughfare through their team area and recommend that some screening is considered to improve the working environment. Despite the frustrations staff spoke of the benefits of being on one site with colleagues and closer to other social work teams for children and young people.

Inspectors were informed that all computers are password protected and that a separate password was needed to get into the social services departments' database. It was reported that there is a corporate buildings and contents insurance in place.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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Standard not assessed during this inspection.	
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### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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Standard not assessed during this inspection.	
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**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

There were clear and effective systems in place for paying foster carers allowances and other incidental expenses. Foster carers confirmed with the Inspector that payments were made regularly and promptly. Written information on financial matters is included in the handbook.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Oxford Health and Social Care Department presently operate three joint fostering and adoption panels. The panel adviser has developed a draft written policy and procedure (November 04) about the handling of the functions of these panels. These had not yet been fully ratified by senior managers. Inspectors found that these policies and procedures did not fully comply with the National Minimum Standards and further additions were required to ensure that they included the policies and procedures to deal with;

- the appointment of the chair and vice panel of the chair;
- declaring an interest in the case and consideration;
- emergency procedures for the adoption panel to meet before the next planned meeting to deal with urgent placements;
- the method of providing feedback to the agency on the quality of cases being presented to the panel;
- the promotion of good practice and consistency of approach and fairness by panel members in assessing cases ;
- the process for receiving progress reports on individual cases.

The Inspectors felt that a number of these issues, mentioned above, are recognised and managed very ably by the Panel Chair and professional advisor but need to be considered within the written policies and procedures.

Inspectors were informed that there had been a number of temporary posts of the panel administrator, believed to be due to the lack of recognition and understanding of the importance of this role. Senior managers have now agreed to undertake a job evaluation of this position and it is hoped that the salary and status of this job will be recognised and attract the right applicant in the future.

The family placement service employs a professional advisor to the panel whose job involves the screening of all papers coming to panel, ensuring that proper advice including medical and legal advice is obtained to clarify any arising issues and chasing up any documents that are required as evidence for panel members. An "easy guide" to panels has been produced for social workers which outlines the process of the panel and gives guidance on which documents need to be included in any submission for the panel's consideration, including pro forma documents and checklists.

The professional advisor has recently devised an adoption and fostering panel newsletter  
The professional advisor has recently devised a panel newsletter which is sent to all children's and Family placement social workers providing updates and feedback on many issues relating to panel. These measures are helping to drive up standards in the quality of work undertaken and presented to the panel.

The fostering service panel is a shared one with the local authority's adoption service, and as such the panel's policy and procedure for its constitution and membership complies with the Regulations and Standards for both fostering and adoption agencies. However, it was noted that at the time of the inspection one panel did not have a councillor as a member but the panel chair was addressing this matter. It has been recognised by the senior management of the family placement service that the arrangements of a joint fostering and adoption panel need to be altered to take into account new legislation in adoption and it is planned that the fostering and adoption panel will be split later in 2005.

The Inspectors sampled recruitment records of 8 panel members and found a great improvement from last year's inspection. Application packs have been produced that contain details of panel tasks, a job description, selection criteria and an application form. The records sampled evidenced that all members had been checked through the Criminal Records Bureau. There was one omission of proof of qualification from a panel member.

The panel chair indicated that she tried to ensure that all new panel members have the opportunity to observe all of the three different fostering and adoption panels before commencement as a panel member. An induction pack has been produced for panel members and the panel chair reported plans to introduce a buddy system so that the panel members can support and inform each other. She informed inspectors that there would be an informal review of each panel member (probationary period) after three panel meetings as an active member. It is intended that an appraisal system for panel members will be set up in the future. Panel members have the opportunity to undertake any of the training provided by the Social and Health Care Directorate as well as the training specific to the panel.

The Panel Chair and Panel Advisor were very clear of the panel's role to monitor the quality of the home studies presented and to ensure that a consistent approach is applied to thorough and rigorous assessments of foster carers and the matching of placements. The panel needs to develop its quality assurance function in receiving management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews.

An Inspector observed one panel and read minutes of previous panel discussions and recommendations. Key issues were raised by panel members from the reports presented and the Panel Chair appropriately conducted the meeting. It is recommended that the panel minutes could be improved by summarising the strengths and weaknesses identified during the panel discussion.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

The fostering service operates a scheme called Breaktime offering short breaks for children with disabilities. The Inspector met two families who had been approved as carers for this service and it was evident that they were very clear that the birth parents retained parental responsibility whilst they offered short break care. The Inspector also observed a preparation group for prospective Breaktime carers.

Parents of children who use the Breaktime Scheme were invited to complete a questionnaire as part of the inspection process and reported very positively about their experiences. Many spoke highly of the quality of care that their disabled child received whilst enabling them to have time with other members of the family and some respite themselves.

The negative comments received were about the lack of availability of short breaks with parents requesting more than once a month and more flexibility on dates available. Many parents felt that they were not informed as to when other children may be present during the short break and 2 parents were concerned that the Breaktime carers had arranged for their child to have a haircut without their consent.

When asked in the questionnaire, 'How well do you think your child is being cared for by the Breaktime carers?' all the responses indicated 'The carers are great'.

Carers of the Breaktime Scheme reported that their assessments had been lengthy and thorough. Planned introductions had taken place with good involvement of birth parents and siblings at an appropriate pace to suit the child/young person.

Records seen evidenced that as a result of the health & safety assessment some issues were identified such as the instalment of a stair rail, window locks and fire guard. Training in a particular medical condition and administration of the medication required had been arranged for carers by the school nurse with the birth mother present, this was reported to have been well managed and helpful to all parties.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

### Standard met?

3

The fostering service reported on the progress of Kinship Care since last year's inspection as it has become an acceptable form of care for children and young people in Oxfordshire supported by the increase of Family Group Conferences.

Two staff have been designated to promote Kinship care throughout the county and work on the development of this type of care. A steering group has met regularly throughout 2004 contributing to the information produced for professionals and carers. Information about Kinship care placements within Oxfordshire has been shared with a research project at Oxford University.

Carer Co-ordinators for Kinship carers have been active in responses to referrals from the social work teams. The two co-ordinators are located in the North and South of the county and continue to raise their profile by introducing themselves to new Kinship carers.

The Inspectors were informed that the fostering service are keen to develop an assessment tool that is specific to Kinship care as the current general format is not very appropriate and there is no written guidance to determine what areas may be compromised to approve a family member or friend as a carer.

The Inspectors were informed that good links have been forged with the Grandparents Association and other local authorities involved with Kinship care. From the information gathered the Inspectors concluded that the fostering service has been committed to consider Kinship care and has put some foundations in place to support this type of care but now needed to consider developing it further in the following areas as identified by those involved.

- An assessment format specifically for Kinship Care placements.
- Promote kinship care and its differences to panel members.
- Develop some training specific to Kinship Care.
- Set up support groups for Kinship carers.

The Inspectors support these identified areas of development for the service.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_



**D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.**

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on the 31st January – 4th February and 10th February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

**Note:**

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

**D.2**

**Status of the Provider's Action Plan, in respect of Statutory Requirements made (if applicable), at time of publication of the final inspection report:**

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

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I .....of .....confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the 31st January – 4th February and 10th February 2005 and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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