



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Isle of Wight Authority Fostering Service

Isle of Wight Council Headquarters

Fairlee Road

Newport

Isle of Wight

23rd February 2004

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

Isle of Wight Authority Fostering Service

Address

Isle of Wight Council Headquarters, Fairlee Road,
Newport, Isle of Wight

Local Authority Manager

Mrs Sarah Pepys

Tel No:

01983 566011

Address

Ryde Social Services Centre, Lind Street, Ryde, Isle of
Wight

Fax No:

01983 612918

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

11/02/03

Date of Inspection Visit		23rd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Lynda Mosling	074953
Name of Inspector	2	David Coulter	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		N/A	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Sarah Pepys	

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of Isle of Wight 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 NCSC 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 Isle of Wight Local Authority fostering service is currently managed by Mrs Sarah Pepys and is based at Ryde Social Services Centre in Lind Street, Ryde, Isle of Wight.

The service has approximately 155 carers offering a variety of Family Link placements for young people with disabilities, long and short-term foster placements and placements with kinship foster carers. At the time of the inspection there were 166 children in foster placements and an additional 29 receiving short-term care.

The service recruits, trains, assesses and supports foster carers across the Isle of Wight. There is a dedicated fostering panel for Isle of Wight carers.

One of the aims of the service is to provide foster placements on the Isle of Wight for all Island children needing placement. However, insufficient numbers of carers mean some Isle of Wight children are placed on the mainland.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This was the annual inspection of the fostering service and was undertaken by two inspectors over five days. The inspection included visiting carers, fostered children and meeting with support social workers and supervising social workers. The inspectors observed two team meetings, a fostering panel and attended a local foster care association meeting. The manager and a range of social workers were also interviewed.

The inspectors had the co-operation of all those they met and were impressed by the openness and honesty shown.

Questionnaires were received from 32 young people and 30 carers.

The service met most of the standards and demonstrated a commitment to providing a good quality service.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

1 of the 1 standard assessed was partially met

There is a statement of purpose that clearly sets out the service provided. The children's guide has been developed but some children reported they had not received a copy.

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

2 of the 2 standards assessed were exceeded

The manager has the necessary skills to carry on the service. She has appropriate qualifications, experience and knowledge to lead the team of social workers and provide a service that safeguards and promotes children's welfare.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 – 5)

1 of the 2 standards assessed were met, the other was partially met

All of the staff have job descriptions and are aware of their responsibilities. The cost of the service is not published and the carers do not have itemised payments. The lines of accountability are clear and there is good cover arranged in the absence of the manager.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6 – 14)

6 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 2 were partially met and 1 was exceeded

The sample of foster homes visited confirmed that the young people were being cared for in warm and nurturing homes. Health and safety issues were assessed and recorded. The assessments prior to approval of carers were thorough. The shortfall is with regard to matching difficulties caused by insufficient carers being available. Although examples of consultation were provided by the service, some carers and young people responded in the questionnaires that they did not feel they were consulted about the way the service is

delivered.

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

5 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 2 were partially met and 3 were exceeded

Recruitment practises for both carers and staff are thorough and meet the required standard. Support and supervision of staff was judged to be good by staff. There was a mixture of views from carers, but the majority felt the supervision given by the fostering team was positive. Carers felt support by way of access to allowances, support to young people who are out of school, psychological support and consultation could be better. Training for staff was felt to be above average. Training for carers was generally thought to be good, but the carers who have been fostering for a long period of time felt they needed more choice of courses.

Records (Standards 24 – 25)

2 of the 2 standards assessed were met

The records looked at by the inspectors met the standards. The records are kept in locked cupboards and information is kept confidential. The fostering service is supported by a dedicated administrative team. Systems are in place and well maintained.

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

This standard was met

The premises, although not spacious, are suitable for use as a fostering service.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27 – 29)

1 of the 2 standards assessed was met, 1 was partially met

The Isle of Wight Council determines the budget set for the fostering service. The financial processes are in place. Payments to carers are regular, but they are felt by many carers not to meet the cost of the placements. The allowances paid compare unfavourably with fostering agencies, but are based on the minimum allowances suggested by the Fostering Network.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard was met

The panel meets all requirements. The inspectors observed a fostering panel and witnessed careful consideration of the issues brought to it. Carers are invited to attend the panel when their approval is being considered and reviewed.

Short – term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was met

There is an increase in the demand for short-term breaks and there have been attempts to recruit specifically for this. In addition there is a Family Link scheme providing short-term care for children with disabilities. The process for approval and assessment are as thorough as any other fostering arrangement.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard was met

The statement of purpose states that one of the aims of the service is to consider family and friends as the first option as carers for looked after children. The carers in this category are assessed in the same way as other carers and are paid an equivalent allowance.

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:

YES

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:

The inspectors saw evidence to suggest that the Fostering Service meets the required standards and provides a service that promotes the welfare of the children and young people fostered by the service.

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 National Care Standards Commission 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 Lynda Mosling **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager _____ **Signature** _____
Date 18 May 2004 _____

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 and recommendations 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.	Reg 3(4)	FS1	Ensure all foster parents and children (subject to age and understanding) receive a children's guide	01.05.04

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.	FS4	Allowances to carers to be accompanied by itemised payment details.
2.	FS8	Regularly record the failure to match the needs of young people with placements made.
3.	FS11	Consider more effective way to consult with carers and young people about the development of the service.
4.	FS21	Investigate further support for carers i.e. discounted public transport.

5.		Consider asking carers to produce introductory information for children considering placement in the home.
6.		Develop a more transparent process regarding decisions about additional allowances are made and the way extra funding is spent.

* 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	9
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
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	NO
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	23/02/04
Time of Inspection	09:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	78

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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

There is a statement of purpose that clearly sets out the service provided, the aims of the service and details the personnel involved. The statement of purpose has been updated and was ratified by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Isle of Wight Council and the Portfolio Holder for Social Services on 04/02/04. The National Care Standards Commission was provided with a copy by the manager of the service. The statement covers all of the areas suggested by the standards. In addition there is a Children's guide. This is clear and informative and meets the requirements. However, in the responses received from the children's survey it was noted that some of the children had not received a copy of the guide. It is a requirement that all foster parents and children (subject to age and understanding) receive a guide. The service must ensure that those with responsibility for distributing the guide do so routinely.

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?

4

The manager qualified as a social worker in 1974 and worked as a child care social worker before joining the family placement team on the Isle of Wight in 1987. Her qualifications include Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, Certificate in Family Placement and Certificate in Management Studies NVQ 3. She is currently undertaking NVQ 4 in Management and is due to complete this in June 2005. She has a great deal of experience in managing the fostering service, including financial processes. She is seen by the team as a competent and supportive manager. She keeps up to date with the changes in legislation and research regarding fostering and looked after children.

The deputy manager is a qualified social worker, has many years experience of working with children in public care and is a trained Practice Supervisor. She is a respected member of the team and combines management with ongoing practise. Both managers have up to date CRB checks.

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?

4

The manager of the fostering service was recruited by the Isle of Wight Council in 1987 according to the Council's recruitment processes. All the necessary references were taken up. The Isle of Wight Council gave notice to the Commission of the manager's fitness. The inspectors confirmed that the manager is suitable to manage the service. She is particularly aware of her responsibilities to ensure the safety of children cared for by the service and has a good understanding of current issues. Carers reported that they found the manager responsive, understanding but appropriately challenging. The manager has undertaken training in supervising staff, health and safety, equality and harassment issues.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

All of the staff working in the fostering service have job descriptions and are aware of their role. The staff spoken to were clear about the accountability within the team and felt supported by the managers. Financial budgets are set at the beginning of the year by the I.W Council who are working to very tight budgets. The actual cost of each service is not published and this is an area where development is planned. The carers have been asking for many years to have itemised payments as they currently do not know what child or service the payment relates to, this leads to some overpayments and other inaccuracies. It is recommended that itemised payments to carers is put in place as soon as possible.

There are well established, audited financial processes in place.

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

0

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 NCSC 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

In discussion with the staff in the fostering team the inspectors were informed that there were clear processes of accountability. The manager provides valued supervision and support. When the manager is absent the deputy is able to undertake all necessary tasks. Carers' questionnaire responses were generally positive about the fostering team and the way it is managed. They felt it to be effective and supportive.

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

The inspectors visited a sample of foster homes and were able to confirm that these met the needs of the young people in terms of accommodation. The homes were comfortable, warm and homely. Children/young people had bedrooms that were suitable for their needs and where there was sharing of rooms the young people confirmed that they were happy to do this and felt they could still have privacy. The written assessments of foster carers were thorough and gave details of the accommodation provided. There were health and safety checklists and records relating to the safe care of the young people. Where there are multiple placements the transport arrangements are assessed. If required, a large vehicle can be leased to the carers. One carer visited by the inspectors commented that the provision of a larger vehicle, in which all the children of the household can be transported together, had been a particular support. The carers spoken to by the inspectors appeared very committed to the children and were keen to ensure their safety within the home.

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 service recognises the diverse needs of the children requiring placements. They attempt to recruit from a wide range of families and are aware of the need to value children's culture, background and preferences. The service has taken appropriate advice when needing to provide placements for children from minority groups and make specific recruitment plans to try to identify families to meet these needs. There were good examples in the foster homes visited that carers were aware of the young person's needs and were working, with social workers, to raise their self-esteem, confidence and self-worth. This was particularly true in a placement where the young person had communication difficulties. The young person was able to tell the inspectors how much she had improved in her placement and how the family had helped. The fostering team meeting where the need for placements of children was discussed demonstrated a good understanding of differing needs and the need to consider preferences, interests etc.

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
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The staff spoken to in the fostering and the 'looked after children' teams were very aware of the principles of good matching. They had identified the young peoples' needs and had a clear idea of what they were looking for in a placement. This was informed by both experience and research. However, the reality is that there are so few available placements at any one time that these matching considerations are often only theoretical. Social workers talked with sadness about having to place children in foster homes that they knew were a poor match. The difficulties this presents for the carers and the young people were understood and often lead to repeated moves for the young person. In common with other local authorities, the Isle of Wight is not able to recruit enough carers to give children a positive choice of carers. This is despite numerous, varied attempts to recruit carers, including using the local press and radio, attending local events with leaflets and posters, delivering leaflets to targeted areas etc.

Although the intent, and understanding, to make good matches is present within the service it often does not happen. It is recommended that there is regular recording of the failure to match the needs of young people with the placements made. Managers should then use this information to inform the recruitment process and assess their success at meeting children's needs.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Foster carer preparation training covers abuse and safe caring. The assessment of carers attempts to indicate any areas of vulnerability within the foster home and the references taken up focus on the safety of the carers. Abuse procedures are published in the carer's handbook and signs and symptoms of abuse are discussed in foster care training. The carers all have a safe caring plan that is reviewed at each placement. There are clear statements about permissible punishments and the carers who responded to the questionnaires were very clear about this. Children's responses to the questionnaires showed that carers were using permissible punishments. One carer talked with great sensitivity about the effects on the child and her family of previous abuse and was working to reassure and protect the child.

Allegations of abuse by carers are taken seriously and investigated through the child protection process. The outcome of the investigation is taken to the fostering panel in order for the panel to review the approval of the carers.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)
The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The fostering team and those supervising social workers were very aware of the benefits of maintaining contact with the child’s family and friends. This is a clear expectation and forms part of the foster care agreement. It is discussed in detail in foster carer training. In each of the placements visited, the carers and children were able to talk about the contact arrangements and understood the reasons for the arrangements. Carers generally felt empowered to make provision for contact, although social workers commented that this was not true in every case. Carers appeared to understand the child’s need for contact even where this led to some disruptive behaviour. The children’s survey showed that children were enabled to see their family and friends.

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?	2
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The surveys of carers and young people demonstrated that some feel they are not consulted about the way the fostering service is delivered. The manager and staff were able to tell the inspectors about various attempts to consult with both carers and young people, including discussion prior to young people’s reviews. However, in discussion with some young people and carers it was clear that they did not feel involved in decision making. The inspectors did not have the opportunity to speak with parents of children despite sending invitations (through the child’s supervising social workers) to speak with them. There was no response to these invitations. If the lack of response is a common experience the service should consider how the parents’ views can be better accessed. Children appear not to make many complaints about the service, but commented, in the survey, that they knew how to do so. The recent appointment of an advocate for looked after children may improve the consultation opportunities for children. It is recommended that the service consider more effective ways to consult both carers and children in development of the service to enable them to feel more involved.

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**

Information about the child's health care forms part of the details collected at the point of placement. Children either retain their own GP or are temporarily registered at the foster carer's practice. There is a health record provided to those young people who have been in foster care for more than four months. This record can accompany the child if they move placement. A health visitor is an independent member of the fostering panel and will raise health issues when discussing foster carer's suitability and placement issues. Although the inspectors were advised of some special arrangements with a psychologist to provide support to looked after children, the carers still reported difficulties in accessing psychological support for children placed. First aid training is available to all carers. There was evidence in the children's files that specialist health care was accessed where necessary. Children reported attending dentist, optician and hospital appointments. The inspectors spoke with a social worker working with disabled children and heard that there is a good integrated service for children with disability. This included education and health services.

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**

There are a number of specialist projects to support looked after children in the education system. Each looked after child has a Personal Education Plan and the Looked After Children Education Scheme (LACES) has provided help to a number of children. The social workers were aware of the research regarding children in public care and the difficulties that exist. For a small number of young people there were still situations of great concern where young people were out of school and the carers felt there was little practical help available during the day. However, there was evidence that there had been improvements made in this area. Computers had been provided to children placed in homes without one and this was seen as a positive move. Foster carers are expected to maintain good links with the school and attend open evenings. Attempts are made to ensure continuity in schooling for foster children and support with transport can be given.

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?**

4

In discussion with young people and carers during the inspection the inspectors heard a great deal of positive comments about the 16+ team. Young people commented that the workers listened to them, understood their needs and were generally helpful. The young people appreciated the workers' honesty, openness and commitment to them. There were imaginative attempts to engage young people and to provide the type of support they were looking for. Independence skills were being taught by a number of carers. Carers who had provided long-term placements for young people expect to provide support to them throughout their adulthood. The Combined Accommodation Scheme aims to recruit carers who will care for young people up to 24 years. This has helped provide continuity of placements and continuing support to young people heading towards independence. The fostering service works closely with other providers of services and accommodation for this age group.

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?

4

The recruitment procedures for the fostering service are in common with the other sections of Social Services. They follow the correct procedures and include CRB checks. The inspectors looked at a small sample of personnel files to confirm that the processes met the standards. The staff working in the fostering service have many years combined experience of working with children. The inspectors spoke with many of the team and found them to be knowledgeable, confident and committed to improving standards. These qualities were also commented on by social workers in other teams. The staff knowledge of procedures and legislation is good and the manager monitors performance during regular supervision. All of the staff were appropriately qualified for their roles. Those workers who are not qualified social workers have their work overseen by a qualified worker.

Total number of staff of the agency:

18

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Each member of staff in the fostering service are aware of their responsibilities individually and as a team member. Although there are some special roles all have an involvement in recruiting, training and support of carers. Relationships with other teams was felt to be improving. This was seen to be the result of the re-organisation of children's services and the looked after children's team being located in the same office as the fostering team. Allocations are often made at the team meeting and take into account other work pressures. The Family Link scheme has dedicated workers who cover all aspects of the service. All of the team are based together in one office and this aids easy communication. The staff are supported by dedicated administrative officers. The inspectors spoke with two of the administration officers and were told that there had been improvements since the last inspection. This is with regard to the number of administrative workers and the computer access. There are clear and efficient systems set up for recording, filing, preparing for panel etc. The administrators feel part of the team and are included in the team meeting. Messages for the team are taken by the administrators. Staff are appreciative of the support they receive from the admin team.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The workers in the fostering team are appropriately qualified for their role. The number of workers has increased and members of the team feel valued. The support of carers has improved since the team has been fully staffed. There were many positive comments from carers, in response to the questionnaires, about the support provided by the team.

The issue of supply of carers is covered in Standard 8 with comments about matching. There is also an issue about retention of carers as the service has lost as many carers as it has recruited over the last twelve months. Some carers spoken with explained that the only reason they had not applied to a local fostering agency was their commitment to the children already placed with them. Their dissatisfaction with the local authority service includes poor fees, difficulty in getting special allowances, not feeling valued and lack of involvement in decision making.

Carers commented that they would appreciate discounts on public transport, including the ferries, attending sports and leisure facilities, cinemas etc. It is recommended that this is considered in order to demonstrate the service's commitment to retention of carers.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The staff are employed by the I.W Council using the agreed recruitment and employment procedures. The procedures are all well tested and there is a thorough handbook covering disciplinary, grievance and sickness procedures. The team manager is aware of health and safety issues for staff. The carers have their own handbook, but they are not employees so are not covered by procedures for sickness, leave etc. There is insurance cover in place for all carers. This includes cover for legal fees in the event of allegations and public liability. There is a whistle blowing policy known to all staff and carers. There is access to the fostering team support workers out of hours by way of a mobile phone. This is an improvement since last year when access was via the general 'out of hours' system. This often caused delay in getting a response, the telephone number now goes directly to the fostering social worker on call. Carers report that this feels much more helpful and supportive.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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Staff have access to training arranged by the Social Services. There is an annual training calendar offering courses to all staff. Additionally, the team can access one off training courses through a range of sources including the Fostering Network and BAAF. The staff spoken to commented that the team is particularly good at sharing the training they individually undertake. The team has regular team days and part of the agenda is feedback on any training attended. In discussion with the manager and the staff it was apparent that the team keep up to date with recent research by reading, discussion with colleagues and attending regional and national events. New legislation is shared with staff and training arranged, as appropriate. The staff demonstrated a knowledge of the standards and legislation the service is working to. There is a large library of books and videos for the staff and carers to use. Training needs are discussed in supervision and audited annually.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)
All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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The staff spoken to said they felt well supported and valued by the service. There are clear lines of accountability and the staff demonstrated a collective desire to provide a good service. Staff felt their individual skills were used to the best advantage. The inspectors observed a team meeting and evidenced a good humoured, easy relationship between the team and the managers. There was a great deal of generosity displayed between team members in terms of helping each other out and valuing each other's skills.

The staff in the fostering section and the looked after children team had a clear understanding of the line of management. They felt they had been consulted in discussion about re-organisation of children's services. The staff generally felt able to have their views heard.

The Social Services has clear lines of accountability and processes to monitor performance.

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**

Each carer has a named support worker from the fostering team. Most carers spoken with, and those who responded to the questionnaires, were positive about the support that they receive. Carers are generally visited on a monthly basis and spoken to by telephone in between these visits. The observation of the team meeting by the inspectors demonstrated that support workers hold a great deal of knowledge about the families they support. This is used effectively in discussion about matchings.

Each fostered child also has a supervising social worker from one of the children's teams. There was a range of views regarding the support offered to the child by the social workers, with the most frequent negative comment being about the frequent changes of social worker and the lack of time they appear to have to work individually with the child. This was acknowledged by the social workers spoken to. However, it is hoped that the re-organisation of children's services and the creation of a looked after children team will improve this situation. The team has been short staffed but recruitment has now been completed. There are already signs that the situation is improving for young people in longer term placements. The location of the fostering team and the looked after children team in the same building has had a positive effect on the communication between the two teams.

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?****3**

There are supervision visits made by the support worker to the carers on a monthly basis. These give the carers the opportunity to discuss their experiences and assist them with understanding the young person's behaviour. Support is generally available to all of the foster carer's family. Training helps develop carers' skills, and contact with other carers is seen as particularly helpful when dealing with difficulties. Carers are also given a carers' handbook that provides useful information about procedures, dealing with children who have gone missing etc. The complaints procedure is outlined, as is the procedure for handling allegations against carers. Contact with carers is noted on the carer's file.

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**

Pre-approval training for carers is particularly valued by new carers. This training is then followed up by training courses including safe caring, managing challenging behaviour, autism awareness, substance misuse and anti-discriminatory practice. Annual reviews of carers identify training needs and how these will be met. The carers who have been caring for a number of years feel they need different training courses as the ones routinely offered have been undertaken by them on more than one occasion and have little new to offer. They feel there should be more training specifically for more experienced carers. Perhaps the fostering team could cascade their learning from courses attended to carers, as they do to their team colleagues. A great deal of information is available for carers to borrow from the team library.

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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The files holding information about looked after children are based with the supervising social workers. Those seen by the inspectors had information gathered for the looked after children process. Carers reported that, although there have been some improvements, information about the children they foster is often very slow in getting to them. This makes them feel vulnerable and can lead to some mistakes in the way they care for a child. There was a mixed response from carers about their involvement in information gathering with some feeling that their experience of the child is not regarded as important to some social workers. However, others felt very involved in the collection of information and the assessment process.

The department has a case recording policy and there was evidence of audits of files having been undertaken.

Carers spoken to had a good understanding about the need to keep records confidential.

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?	3
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The fostering service office stores the records relating to the recruitment, training and support of carers. There is also a record of the referrals of children and young people needing placements. The carers' files looked at by the inspectors contained the necessary information to meet the standards. In discussion with supervising social workers there was a suggestion that it would be helpful if foster carers could produce a booklet for children to introduce their family. This could be simple, factual and contain photographs. Descriptions of the home, whether they have pets, who makes up the family, family interests and traditions etc. could be included. These could be given to children prior to placement to give them an idea of what to expect when they arrive at the home.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			166
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			19
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			18
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering team is situated in Ryde Social Services Centre. The looked after children team is also based there. The building is in the centre of the town of Ryde and is easily accessible for visitors. The office is shared with a number of administrative staff, supporting other teams, as well as the team's own administrative staff.

The files are securely locked in suitable cabinets. The number of records held will become an increasing problem in the future, due to the requirement to keep them for many years.

The accommodation is not spacious and feels quite crowded when all members of the team are in. However, this happens infrequently, mainly on team meeting days. There is one large meeting room that is bookable for the team. Panel meetings are arranged at other, larger, more appropriate venues.

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?

0

The financial viability of the service was not inspected – this is the responsibility of the I.W Council.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The financial procedures for the fostering provision are agreed through the Council processes. There is acknowledgement by managers from the service that the Council's overall budget has a major influence on the funds available to spend on the fostering service. However, there have been many examples of additional funding being made available to support looked after children and carers in the last twelve months. This funding has been used to pay each carer £150 per year to provide respite for the family, monies for babysitting, purchase of a caravan for the carer's use, independent counselling services for looked after children, leasing of large vehicles for carers taking multiple placements as well as other support measures. However, there is unlikely to be enough funds available to satisfy all the support needs of carers.

The financial procedures seen by the inspectors appeared sound and appropriate. The I.W. Council spending is audited on a regular basis. The budgets are published and open to scrutiny.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was a great deal of discussion about fees with the group of carers who met with the inspectors. They felt that the fees paid only met a small proportion of the true cost of caring for the children they fostered. Allowances are published by the service and are now linked to the Fostering Network's minimum allowances. Although the records show that an additional £250,000 has been spent to improve the experiences of young people in the looked after system (see Standard 28), the group of carers spoken to felt that carers and young people were not properly consulted about how the money was spent. Although the small increases in fees were appreciated, the carers felt the money had been spent on projects that made a difference to a small number of young people and carers, but had made little difference across the board. Some carers were also quite negative about their access to allowances relating to young peoples' clothing, holidays etc. and felt these were not distributed equably and that they were made to feel they were begging for things which should be seen as a child's right. In discussion with the manager and the manager of the looked after children team it was stated that each request is judged on its individual merits. This inevitably leads carers to feel that they are dealt with differently. It is recommended that there is a more transparent process regarding decisions taken about approving additional allowances and the way additional monies are spent. The inspectors also met with carers who were happy with the allowances paid and had no issues of complaint about finances.

The carers were comparing the fees they receive with those received by the Independent Fostering Agencies that operate on the Isle of Wight. This comparison was also made when discussing the other support offered to carers. It is an issue that the managers are well aware of but, in common with other areas, feel is unlikely that the local authority will be able to offer competitive terms in the near future due to their financial restraints.

Carers said their allowances were generally paid on time but as they are not accompanied by details of what the allowances relate to it is difficult to challenge any incorrect allowances. (see recommendation in Standard 4).

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were able to observe a fostering panel. The panel is set up in accordance with the regulations and on the day of observation had a good mix of independent members and social work staff/managers. There was open discussion and equal weight given to members' views. Carers are invited to the panel when their approval and reviews are being discussed and are given the opportunity to address the panel. The panel was observed treating all visitors with respect and sensitivity. Panel members receive training prior to becoming voting members of the panel. The panel was attended by a legal advisor who assisted the panel in making a complex decision. Conflict of interest forms are completed by panel members prior to each panel, identifying items on the agenda that the member should be excluded from. Although every effort is made to make people feel at ease at the panel it remains a time of anxiety for most carers who are presented to it. Panel members are aware of this. There are ongoing attempts to recruit an independent member who has either had experience as a looked after child, or has been a parent of a looked after child. The inspectors feel this would enhance the work of the panel and demonstrate a commitment to consult with those who have experience of the issues being considered.

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 comments in this section relate to short-term fostering breaks, not to the Family Link service which was assessed at last year's inspection and judged to exceed the standards.

There is a reported increase in the demand for short-term, respite placements for children. This is partly to support regular foster carers, but also as an alternative to full time fostering for some children, who can remain at home the majority of the time, but need periods out of the home. The inspectors were told that there were not enough carers to meet this demand. There have been advertisements placed to recruit more, but it has not happened in sufficient numbers. It is generally felt to be a cost effective way of supporting families and the belief is that the demand will continue to increase.

At present the need for respite is documented in the same way as the need for any other placement and regular foster carers are often used. However, this does not provide a consistent or reliable service due to the demand on general foster carers.

The assessment, support and training of short term carers is equivalent to that of full time carers and the procedures, handbook and agreements are of the same high standard.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The statement of purpose states that one of the aims of the fostering service is to consider family and friends as the first option as carers for looked after children. This was evidenced by the records seen by the inspectors. One of the foster carers tracked was a family member who had been assessed as a foster carer specifically for her relative. The inspectors were able to discuss the child's needs with the carer, see the accommodation and get a good understanding of how the child's needs were being met. The carer felt very well supported by the fostering team and the child's social worker. The carer confirmed that she had been well prepared for becoming a carer and could discuss the particular complexities of caring for a relative. She is invited to all training and support groups and has been offered contact with carers in a similar position.

The assessments of relatives and friends are undertaken in the same way as other carer assessments and taken to the fostering panel for approval. (The written assessment process for this group of carers is currently being re-assessed). Payments to relative carers are based on the set fostering allowances. The carer spoken to would not have been able to commit long-term to the child without the payment of allowances.

The fostering team has positively supported relatives in becoming carers and has used their knowledge of attachment and belonging to inform this decision.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

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 23 February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 1 May 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

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

Public reports

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

