



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Oldham MBC Fostering Services

Oldham M.B.C. Social services

Civic Centre, West Street

Oldham

OL1 1UW

18th-20th January 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Oldham MBC Fostering Services

Address

Oldham M.B.C. Social services, Civic Centre, West Street,
Oldham, OL1 1UW

Local Authority Manager

Steve Slater

Tel No:

0161 474 4637

Address

Oldham M.B.C. Social services, Civic Centre, West Street,
Oldham, OL1 1UW

Fax No:

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

12/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		18 th -20 th January 2005 1 st February 2005- 14 th –17 th February 2005		ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am		
Name of Inspector	1	Helen Humphreys	074698	
Name of Inspector	2	NA		
Name of Inspector	3	NA		
Name of Inspector	4	NA		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		NA		
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		NA		
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Maris Elkington and Steve Slater.		

Introduction to Report and Inspection
Inspection visits
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)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 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**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

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 Oldham MBC Fostering Services. 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.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service currently has 120 approved Foster Carers. This includes 34 'Friends and Family' carers and 17 carers who are part of the family Link Services offering short breaks to families with children with disabilities.

The service has temporary carers offering a placement in an emergency and medium to long-term care. The Service has permanent carers who provide long term permanent care as an alternative to adoption. The Friends and Family carers provide care to children who are known to them and this may be on a short or long-term basis.

The Respite Carers provide short breaks to families and other carers with caring responsibilities.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service has four methods of categorising their carers, which is related to the placements they take and what fee they receive.

Scheme 1 Carers take children aged under 11 and will take children in an emergency.

Scheme 2 Carers are 'Child Specific' Carers who foster children who are known to them as friends or family members. These carers are paid 'Boarding Out Allowance'. Scheme 3 Carers are caring for children on short or long term basis or permanency are paid a fee in addition to Boarding Out allowance. The Service also has 'Contract Carers' who provide care to children and young people. This fee is negotiated between the Authority and the Carer and is a legal contract.

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.)

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service was inspected for the third time against the National Minimum Standards. The Inspection took place over seven days and included interviewing, carers, and a group of carers, young people and staff, the inspection of records and policies and procedures and an observation of The Panel and a training session.

There is evidence that good progress is being maintained in different areas and there was evidence of implementation of various initiatives relating to support to carers and recruitment.

One of the biggest challenge to Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service remains the recruitment of carers, although there was evidence of developments in this area and particularly within the Black & Ethnic Community.

Statement of Purpose

A new Statement of Purpose has been devised which meets the Regulations and NMS. The service has created a range of suitable leaflets for young people, which have been incorporated into a Children's Guide.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

The Manager has a social work qualification and is undertaking NVQ level 4 in Management.

Managing of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service has devised systems to monitor the service and the work of staff and carers. There was more evidence that the service is being managed effectively and efficiently, although in some areas the practice did not always match the policy.

Securing and promoting welfare

The majority of carers interviewed were found to be providing safe, healthy and nurturing environments. Since the last inspection there has been an overall improvement of the allocation of staff to carers most of whom are receiving regular visits, although there is no consistent practice regarding unannounced visits. The majority of annual reviews are now being undertaken within the specified timescales.

Carers reported that they find it difficult to access social work staff and their general criticism was at social work staff. It was reported that the Fostering Service is now in a position to make more appropriate matches on a more regular basis and that from time to time they have Foster Carer vacancies.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

The Fostering Service is now fully staffed. The staff presented as loyal and committed to the Service and carers. The Fostering Service still has an insufficient number of carers.

However there has been some specific recruitment initiatives and in particular with the Black and Ethnic community. All this should be supported by a formal recruitment plan. There is now more opportunities for training for both staff and carers and carers reported that they had enjoyed training and found it useful. There is a drive to get more carers onto training. It was reported that the training department are now working more closely with the Family Placement team to commission more appropriate training and there has been an increase in the crèche budget. The Foster Care Agreements meet the Regulations but not all carers had them and not all were on file. Most carers were unaware of the legal status of the Agreements. Urgent attention must be given to the creation of an effective out of hour service for carers. Prospective carers reported differing views on the reception they had received following their initial enquiry.

The newly re-established support group was not seen as accessible for all carers.

Records

The Fostering Service holds all the records required by the Regulations, with the exception of a record of allegations. The majority of the children's files inspected contained the key documents, including care plans and placement agreements. A sample of carer's files were inspected and found to be in good order but not all contained Foster care Agreements.

Fitness of Premises

The service is located appropriately in a building with other Local Authority provider services. The staff have sufficient room to work. There are plans in hand to move to new premises in the summer.

Financial Requirements

Two of these standards were not assessed. However, there is a very wide variation in the range of fees paid to carers. Carers complained with just cause about the arrangements for clothing and other allowances, which are controlled by social work staff. Most carers reported that they were 'out of pocket' due to fostering and an urgent review of the payments to foster carers must be undertaken.

Fostering Panels

The constitution of the Panel inspected met with Regulation. There was evidence that the Panel is adopting more of a Quality Assurance role and appropriate policies and procedures have been developed. The Assistant Director is the Decision Maker for the Panel and this has made an impact on the decision making for the Panel and has improved the overall quality of decision-making.

Short Term Breaks

This service is located within the Disability Team and was found to be satisfactory. The team has employed an additional member of staff to support the team and new carers have been recruited to the team.

Family and Friends as Carers

These carers are not treated any differently to other carers. They receive the same level of support as other carers. However one relative Carer was found to be caring for more children than her approval was for and no additional assessment had been undertaken.

Service User Involvement.

The homes of four foster carers were visited and the inspector spent time with some of the young people placed and children of the foster carers. The inspector also met with a group of carers who meet as a support group.

Questionnaires

A random selection of fifty carers were sent a questionnaire and seven were returned. Their comments are reflected in the report, over whelming their criticism was directed at placing social workers, fees and allowances and frustration at the use of outside agencies. Two questionnaires were received from placing social workers and both gave positive support for the fostering service and carers.

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Helen Humphreys **Signature** _____
Second Inspector NA **Signature** _____
Locality Manager Sarah Woods **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	8(3)	FS2	OMBC Fostering Service must ensure that the manager completes NVQ level 4 in management.	1/1/06
2	42 (1)	FS4	OMBC Fostering Service must create a record of allegations made against carers and monitor this.	30/4/05
3	43(1)	FS4	OMBC Fostering Service must ensure that all notifications are made to CSCI without delay.	30/4/05
4	35	FS6	OMBC Fostering Service must ensure that carers are visited in line with their own policy and to meet Regulations and that unannounced visits are carried out consistently.	30/5/05
5	17	FS8	OMBC Fostering Service must ensure that they obtain all the information they require in order to make an appropriate placement. (This requirement has not been met within the timescale specified at the last inspection)	30/5/05
6	34 (3)	FS8	OMBC Fostering Service must create a Placement Agreement, which meets the Regulation.	30/6/05
7	34(1) 37(1) (2)(3) 38(1)(2)(3) (4)	FS8	OMBC Fostering Service must only make Placements, which comply with the Regulations. (This requirement has not been met within the timescale specified at the last inspection)	30/4/05

8	12 (2) (b)	FS9	OMBC Fostering Service must follow appropriate procedures in all instances of alleged and actual abuse.	30/4/05
9	17(3)(a)(b)	FS12	OMBC Fostering Service must provide all carers with appropriate information in relation to the health matters for the young people they care for.	30/5/05
10	21(4)	FS16	OMBC Fostering Service must provide regular formal supervision for all staff.	30/4/05
11	8(b)	FS16	OMBC Fostering Service must take forward the plans for restructuring.	30/9/05
12	17	FS21	OMBC must improve the service to carers and fostered children from placing social workers. (This requirement has not been met within the timescale specified at the last inspection)	30/9/05
13	17 (1)	FS18	OMBC Fostering Service must provide all carers with an effective out of hour's service. (This requirement has not been met within the timescales set at the previous two inspections)	30/6/05
14	17	FS21	OMBC Fostering Service must devise a written policy on the support available to carers.	30/6/05
15	35	FS22	OMBC Fostering Service must ensure that all carers receive supervision in line with their own policy.	30/5/05
16	28 Schedule 5	FS22	OMBC Fostering Service must issue all carers with the revised Foster Care Agreements and ensure that all carers are aware of the status of the document. (This requirement has not been met within the timescales made at the previous two inspections)	30/5/05
17	35	FS22	OMBC Fostering Service must devise a plan of unannounced visits to carers. (This requirement has not been met within the timescales made at the previous two inspections)	30/6/05

18	17(3)	FS24	OMBC Fostering Service must audit of all the information provided to carers to ensure that they all have copies of the key documents required to enable them to care for the young people adequately. (This requirement has not been met within the timescale specified at the previous inspections)	30/6/05
19	17	FS29	OMBC Fostering Service must revise the range of allowances paid to carers and the systems it operates. (This requirement has not been met in the timescales made at previous inspections)	30/6/05

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	FS5	OMBC Fostering Service should ensure that the long-term management arrangements are resolved.
2	FS6	OMBC Fostering Service should ensure that all foster Carer's homes meet basic health and safety measures and are kept clean with satisfactory environmental standards.
3	FS7	OMBC Fostering Service should provide training for carers on respecting and preserving children's ethnic and, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and enhancing children's confidence and self worth.
4	FS9	OMBC Fostering Service should ensure that all carers follow the safe caring policy.
5	FS12	OMBC Fostering Service should develop a policy on mental and emotional health, and the development of self-esteem.
6	FS12	OMBC Fostering Service should provide carers training on health promotion, health and safety and health and hygiene.
7	FS13	OMBC Fostering Service should provide all carers with PEPs.
8	FS16	OMBC Fostering Service should create a system to monitor enquiries from prospective carers to ensure that there is not unnecessary delay.

9	FS17	OMBC Fostering Service should devise a formal recruitment strategy.
10	FS21	OMBC Fostering Service should consider creating additional support groups, which will be accessible to more carers.
11	FS24	OMBC Fostering Service should ensure that their carers follow the policy on recording.

* 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	7
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	17/1/05
Time of Inspection	9AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	40

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?

4

The Statement of Purpose presented for the inspection meets the Regulation and NMS. It was reported that all carers have copies of this and that it had been circulated to appropriate personnel.

It was reported that the document is formally approved by elected members and that there are arrangements for the review on a regular basis.

The Children's Guide is an excellent set of documents providing appropriate information to all young people on a range of matters including public transport, health and bullying. The pack also detailed the arrangements for overnight stays (sleepovers) with friends, following the change in legislation.

Although none of the young people interviewed were aware of the Guide it was reported that there is a system in place to ensure that they are distributed to all young people at either the initial review or for those young people in placement it is the responsibility of the supervising social worker. The Senior Practitioner reported that further development of the Guide is under way to make it accessible to young people for whom English is not their first language.

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?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

At the time of the inspection the manager was on extended sick leave and the service was being managed by the Service Manager and Senior Practitioner. Both have appropriate qualifications. It was reported at the last inspection that the manager had almost completed NVQ level 4 in management. It was reported that due to various reasons the manager has been unable to complete this, however to meet the NMS, the manager must complete this qualification by January 2006.

The staff indicated that in their opinion there continues to be steady overall improvement and in the service with new initiatives coming on stream and they reported that they felt supported by in particular the senior practitioners.

The staff team has no vacancies at the time of the inspection the team were supported by additional agency staff. It was reported by the Service Manager that additional funding has been agreed for additional staff and for the restructuring of the Service.

The service is separated into two functions, fostering and adoption. They are managed overall by one manager. There are two senior practitioners, one allocated to Adoption and one responsible for Fostering. The staff are divided into two teams and undertake work relating to either function.

As was reported at the last inspection the service is to be restructured with a clearer distinction between the two functions with separate managers.

The finance of the service is generally managed by the Service manager who reported that there have been budget increases since the last inspection and he was confident that this would continue to allow the restructuring to take place.

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?

0

Not assessed on this occasion.

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

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service has devised a system to monitor all matters outlined in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations. There was evidence that this has been implemented, supported by an appropriate policy and information for carers. All carers who were interviewed were aware of the requirement to inform the service of matters under the Schedule. The Service needs to devise a separate record on allegations made against carers, as currently these are stored on the separate Carer's files. This must be created.

The financial arrangements are outside the control of the manager and there are no other purchasers of the service. However the Service Manager confirmed that the payment system for carers has been revised and is awaiting implementation.

Following the inspection in 2003 OMBC created a development group to ensure that the service develops in line with the Regulations and NMS. It was reported that the group meets less frequently now but that progress is monitored via individual strategies and action plans.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service has created a system for notifications to relevant authorities. However not all notifications have been made in a timely fashion to CSCI and on occasions the Inspector has been required to request the information from the Service. OMBC must ensure that all notifications are made without delay to CSCI.

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

4

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

At the time of the inspection the manager was on extended sick leave and the service was being managed jointly between the Senior Practitioner and Service Manager.

The manager does not hold another position within the organisation.

At the present time OMBC are making plans to restructure the service and create two managers, one for adoption and one for fostering.

The team confirmed that in the manager's absence the senior practitioner was ably managing the team. However this cannot continue long term as the Senior Practitioner also holds a small caseload and she cannot be expected to manage the team effectively as well as carry out the role of supervising social worker. OMBC should ensure that the long-term management arrangements are resolved.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The homes of four foster carers were visited. The majority of these were found to be satisfactorily meeting the needs of the young people placed there with appropriate environmental standards and each fostered child had their own room or shared with siblings. All young people who were interviewed were satisfied with their accommodation and care arrangements. OMBC should ensure that all foster Carer's homes meet basic health and safety measures and are kept clean with satisfactory environmental standards.

There was evidence that carers' annual reviews were being undertaken more frequently and the majority are now taking place on time. The manager has created a 'trigger system' to alert to staff that a review is due. All initial foster care reviews and any requiring changes or amendments go to the Panel and the Manager and Service Manager review the remainder. This is appropriate.

There was evidence that the majority of carers receive regular visits from both fostering staff and some social workers. However records indicated that some carers are not receiving visits and supervision in line with OMBC's policy. OMBC must ensure that all carers are visited regularly and that this includes unannounced visits, which are not being undertaken consistently.

OMBC has devised a system to monitor visits by placing social workers and fostering staff to children in placement, which is monitored by the Reviewing Officers.

Discussions with staff indicated that the promotion of welfare within the foster homes is supported and promoted.

The staff undertake a health and safety Inspection at the point of approval and at all annual reviews. There was evidence of the checklists on the Carer's files.

All carers were aware of the inspection and the Foster Carer's Handbook provided details of the NMS and the role of CSCI.

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 Fostering Service has developed a number of strategies to recruit carers from members of the Black and Ethnic community. This has included working with other agencies and has resulted in the recruitment of carers who will be able to provide placements to young people with a range of needs relating to religion, culture and language.

The Fostering Service has secured a grant to launch a Borough wide campaign to recruit from the Black and Ethnic communities.

The Family Link Service is able to provide a range of carers who can offer placements to children with disabilities. Carers who are not part of this service who care for young people with disabilities are provided with additional equipment and support. The Family Link carers are offered specific training to meet their needs.

Carers are encouraged to support young people to be involved in activities and maintain interests and hobbies and this information is contained with the Foster Carer's Handbook.

It was reported that promoting diversity and Anti Discriminatory Practice is promoted through all aspects of the service including recruitment material, Statement of Purpose, training during the preparation groups and other training.

Carers are not currently offered training on respecting and preserving children's ethnic and, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and enhancing children's confidence and self worth this should be provided.

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**

The staff reported that in their opinion they are increasingly able to make more appropriate matches, with an increase in the number of carers. It was reported some carers have vacancies and that on occasions the staff have had a choice of placement. The staff outlined the process they undertake when making a placement and this was observed and found to be satisfactory. This included making a record of the process of matching.

However staff did report that they still find it difficult to place large sibling groups and children who are asylum seekers.

The service has devised a policy and procedure for making placements and this makes clear to placing social workers the need for information and appropriate paperwork.

However carers did report a lack of paperwork and information prior to placement. A Carer who was visited on the day a placement was to begin reported that she had no paperwork at all and was not aware of some of the basic details of the young people about to be placed.

OMBC must ensure that all placing social workers and fostering staff supply carers with all available information in order for them to be able to make an appropriate decision about placements and be able to care for the young people appropriately.

The Service currently uses the LAC Document Placement Plan Part One as the Placement Agreement. This does not meet the Regulations and as the service relies on the placing social worker to complete this, the quality of the information varies. OMBC must devise a Placement Agreement, which meets the Regulations and in particular records why the placement can meet the needs of the young people and if it cannot where that need is being met.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service does place some young people with carers who are employed by the Independent Agencies. If these carers are to be 'long term', matching reports are undertaken and brought to Panel. This was evidenced on the day of the inspection and a member of staff from the agency, attended the Panel. This is good practice.

During the inspection it became clear that a relative Carer was caring for two children outside her approval status and without any further assessment having been made. One young person had been placed on 10/9/04 and it was unclear how this decision had been made. It was reported that the matter was being referred to the next Panel, which would meet in March 2005. OMBC must not make any placements, which are outside the approval status of the carers, without following appropriate decision making processes. Supervising social workers must monitor all placements to ensure that they always comply with Regulations and refer any matters of concern to the manager.

The previous inspection also highlighted a situation where a child had been placed with carers prior to approval at Panel. The inspector was advised at the time by the Head of Service that this was not normal practice and an exception. The evidence uncovered on this inspection brings that original statement into question.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The foster carers have access to a rolling programme of training on child protection, which has been devised to be appropriate to their needs. Some of the carers interviewed had attended training on child protection and found it useful. The staff should continue to encourage all carers to attend.

Since the last inspection further work has been undertaken on the safe care policy and this was found to be satisfactory. Safe Caring Policies were found to be on most Carer's files, although one Carer was found not to be following the policy entirely. OMBC should ensure that all carers follow the safe caring policy and have created their own policy, which is available on file.

All the carers were aware that corporal punishment is not acceptable and a policy has been developed to support this. This policy has been updated since the last inspection and contains some appropriate and useful advice to carers.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service has devised a system to collate and evaluate the information relating to allegations of abuse. The Carers who were interviewed were aware that they could contact the CSCI at any time if they have concerns and this information is contained within the revised Foster Carers Handbook. An investigation had taken place following a Carer admitting a child in placement. Initially when this matter was referred to CSCI procedures had not been followed. OMBC must ensure that appropriate procedures are followed in instances of allegations or actual instances of abuse by carers.

The staff and carers were aware of recognising instances of bullying and the carers have access to training and information on dealing with this. Carers described some good examples of good practice. The Anti bullying policy has been revised and is appropriate. One Carer outlined how she is advocating on behalf of a young person in placement to obtain a change of schools to ensure that he is not vulnerable to influences, which would put him at risk. She reported that at present she is finding this difficult without the support of the placing social worker.

The Service has devised a policy and procedure for dealing with a missing child and this requires slight amendment.

Young people who were interviewed reported that they felt safe in the placement and that the carers helped them to be safe when they went out and into school.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

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**

At the time of the inspection Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service had developed a policy on promoting contact, which was available in draft form. Appropriate information is provided in the Foster Carer's Handbook.

The arrangements for contact were described in all care plans, placement agreements and foster carers agreements, which, were seen. However not all carers had these documents.

All the carers interviewed were appropriately supporting contact arrangements and good practice was described. One Carer wrote, 'Contact was a free for all with all siblings vying (sic) for most time, most affection, this was sorted out into time slots at our request, and all children get quality time, and no more tears'

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

At the present time, the Fostering Service is developing plans to ascertain the views of the young people placed with carers. This should continue.

The staff were aware of the children's participation officer's youth forum and the restrictions of this in that children under 11 cannot attend and that there is a need to find an additional resource.

The young people interviewed as part of the inspection process confirmed that their carers, and some social workers consult with them on any matters in relation to their daily living.

The young people who were interviewed and were able to express a view were aware of how to make a complaint and the range of people they could contact. This information is contained within the Children's Guide.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Fostering Service has developed a range of policies relating to health issues, including a sexual health policy and administration and safe storage of medication. However at present the service has not developed a Health Promotion Policy, which includes mental and emotional health, and the development of self-esteem and it was reported that this is being developed. This was required at the last inspection.

The carers confirmed that the young people are registered with the local GP, dentist and opticians as required. The Foster Carers' Handbook provides information to carers on how to register a child at the GP or that young people can keep their own GP if this is appropriate.

The childcare files indicated, and the staff confirmed, that although improvements have been made there is still a need to obtain more information about the health needs (including immunisation records) of the children and young people. Carers are not always provided with all the information they require. OMBC must strive to obtain all available health information about the young people in placement. Carers who were interviewed were well aware of the health needs of the young people placed.

Since the last inspection carers have been receiving training in first aid and most reported that they had found this useful. Staff reported that they trying to ensure that all carers attend this. However the records indicated that no carers have received training on health promotion, health and safety and health and hygiene and this should be provided. However carers have been offered and attended training on HIV/AIDS, sexual health, drugs and attachment theory.

Since the last inspection Oldham SSD has developed a range of health professional's posts to provide an improved service for all looked after children. The LAC Nurse is a member of the Panel and the staff reported that they have been working with her to develop some initiatives

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**

Information for carers in relation to accessing and supporting education for young people is outlined in the Foster Carer's Handbook.

The carers visited as part of the inspection were aware of the progress made by the young people in school and attended events and had copies of school reports and other documentation. The young people interviewed confirmed that their carers support them in education. The carers interviewed were aware of the need to provide a supportive environment in relation to school and education.

Oldham SSD have employed a range of people to support the educational needs of looked after children. It was reported that carers had been made aware of this. One Carer discussed the support she had received from her social worker in trying to obtain a satisfactory educational placement for her fostered child.

There was evidence on file and from the Carers that the leisure interests of young people were being promoted and young people could describe this.

Not all carers had copies of the Personal Education Plans (PEP) and these should be provided. This was a recommendation of the last inspection.

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?****3**

It was reported that a specific policy is being prepared in relation to independent living skills and leaving care plans. It was reported that staff had received training from the After care Team on two occasions on these related matters.

Information is contained in the Foster Carers Handbook on preparation for Adult hood. A training course was provided the records indicated that some have carers attended this.

On this occasion no carers or young people were seen who were eligible for leaving care plans/pathway plans so no assessment could be made as to their effectiveness.

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?

3

The personnel files were not inspected on this occasion. Previous inspections have revealed that for all appointments made after 2002, appropriate practice has been followed, with the acquisition of references CRB checks etc. No new appointments have been made since the last inspection.

The staff have access to a range of training opportunities and a number have the PQ award or are undertaking this. The social work assistant is undertaking NVQ level 4. All staff currently undertaking the assessment of carers have social work qualifications. Assessments undertaken by the Fostering Service are based on the competency-based assessment of carers produced by Fostering Network. The manager reported that there are plans to develop the methods of assessment of carers and in particular the assessment of 'friends and family' carers to concentrate more of the capacity to parent. This would seem appropriate.

The team has a position for one member staff who does not have a social work qualification. It was confirmed that she undertakes work, which matches her job description and is supervised by a qualified worker.

The figures below relate to the staff employed to undertake work relating to fostering and includes the Agency staff. As has been reported previously there are plans to increase the staffing and restructure the teams with dedicated managers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

9

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

0

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?

2

Since the last inspection the team has continued to make steady progress and the staff presented as committed and excited about the developments and future plans.

However all staff reported that they felt that they were working to capacity and would welcome a rationale for caseload management, the Service recognises that it needs to develop a rationale for caseload management and allocation of work. This will be developed within the restructuring it was reported.

As has been reported the manager has been on extended sick leave since October and the senior practitioner reported that staff have not received formal supervision since November, although there has been opportunities for informal consultation and support. All staff must receive formal supervision on a regular basis.

Since the last inspection the arrangements for administrative support have been made permanent and continued overall improvement was reported. The member of staff employed to work in the service was aware of the needs of the service and the work, which is undertaken by staff. She presented as competent to undertake the work, which was clearly valued by the team.

Carers, staff and other professionals reported that there are still difficulties in accessing social work staff by phone and it was reported that the phone system is not effective.

The phone system at the office for family placement service has been changed which has led to improvements.

Staff and the administrator could outline the process for dealing with enquiries from prospective carers. However some prospective carers reported that they had difficulties in accessing information and reported long delays following their initial enquiry. The Registered Person should create a system to monitor this.

All staff have access to computers and email and some of the main systems operated by Oldham SSD. Since the last inspection more office space has been created improving the working conditions for staff. All staff have job descriptions and person specifications.

Staff were aware of various HR policies, including health and safety and grievance procedures.

The staff reported that generally they have good working relationships with placing social workers and some good practice was described. Two placing social workers returned the questionnaires and they also reported good working relationships, one wrote, 'In respect of Oldham's fostering service I am impressed with their level of professionalism. I find them very approachable and helpful'. It is unfortunate that no other questionnaires were received.

For the last three years the fostering service have been working towards a formal restructuring and this has been reported on at the previous inspections. The pending restructuring has prevented the development of other initiatives, for example, caseload management and audit systems.

At this inspection it was clearer that the restructuring was closer that in previous years however OMBC must ensure that this proposal is taken forward and therefore deal with all other outstanding matters relating to the management of staff and the service.

--

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

All staff employed within the service have appropriate qualifications and experience. For additional information see NMS16.

Since the last inspection the service has continued to recruit carers, via various initiatives and with the increased use of publicity, presence at community events, and information in key locations across the borough. The service has developed new recruitment material and a detailed pack for prospective carers. However some prospective carers had not seen the information.

However there is no overall written strategy, which includes for example targets to recruit carers to care for young people where there is the greatest need, for example adolescents and large sibling groups, which is linked to unmet need via referrals. The strategy should also include consideration as to how the service will work with the independent agencies proactively rather than reactively when no 'in-house' Carer is available.

OMBC should develop a written strategy for the recruitment of carers.

A number of carers' assessments were read and, on the whole, were found to be thorough and objective and some good practice was observed. The staff confirmed that they include all the matters outlined in NMS 17 in the assessment process.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The staff are employed by Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council. The majority of staff and reported that there has been an overall improvement in the support to them over the last 12 months and feel more valued in the work that they undertake.

The carers however reported that they felt well supported generally by the Fostering Service Staff, one wrote 'I have positive support from Family Placement, I can pick up the phone and talk to my support worker any time, leave a message and she will respond, I feel comfortable talking to her'

However carers (with the exception of three) were dissatisfied with the level support they

received from placing social workers and their written and verbal criticism was consistent and overwhelming. 'Social workers say they will ring you back-but they don't', 'We flagged up the need for support over and over again from the child's social worker and didn't receive any resulting in placement breakdown'.

It should be noted that 'relative' carers reported that they have had good support from placing social workers. Some carers did not recognise the difference between the fostering service staff and placing social workers.

OMBC must improve the overall service to carers from placing social workers.

The out of hours support for carers is offered through the Social Services Department's Emergency Duty Team and this is unsatisfactory and not appropriate for carers. OMBC has been required to devise a more effective out of hours support for carers at the previous two inspections. The present suggestion that carers should provide this service is unacceptable. OMBC must provide an effective out of hour's service for carers.

The current system for carer support, supervision and appraisal has also been revised and the support group has been re-established and there are plans to develop two more to work, one of which will be for relative carers.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council has comprehensive health and safety policy for staff and whistle blowing policies for staff and carers, which was included in the Foster Carer's handbook.

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?

0

Not assessed on this occasion, no concerns were raised at the last inspection and progress has been maintained.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The staff were clear about their roles and responsibilities and commented on the positive introduction of the policies and procedures to support them in their work.

It was reported that all staff have received an annual appraisal in line with the corporate strategy. However it was reported that staff have been receiving irregular supervision since November 2004. See NMS 16

The team has regular staff meetings, which are well attended and the staff reported that they were useful and supportive meetings.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

It was reported at the last inspection that the Fostering Service has started to devise a clear written strategy for working with and supporting carers. On this occasion a written policy was presented for supervision for carers, which does not include an overall strategy on the range of service available to carers. The Registered Person must prepare a written strategy for support to carers, which meets the Regulations and NMS and takes note of the impact of placing social workers on the work of foster carers. (See NMS 18)

All carers who were interviewed or completed a questionnaire reported that they were happy with the level of support they receive from the staff on a personal basis if the contact was during the working day. Good relationships were described with individual workers, one Carer stated, 'my worker is like my right arm'

The Fostering Service has re-launched the support group and the carers who attend these reported that they had been useful, although attendance is limited and attended only by a small number of carers most of who have been caring for many years. Other carers reported that it is difficult to join the group for various reasons and would welcome the establishment of more accessible groups. It was reported that this is not possible at present due to staffing constraints but OMBC should consider this.

The out of hours support is not suitable for carers who require assistance in an emergency. (See previous standards and requirements).

The system for annual reviews appears to be thorough and some good practice was observed. There was evidence that more carers are having their annual reviews within the specified timescales.

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?

2

Since the last inspection continued progress has been made with the system of supervision for carers. This is supported by an appropriate policy.

However there was inconsistency in the amount of supervision carers were receiving, with good and poor practice noted. Some carers were receiving regular visits, the standard of recording was good and there was evidence of a supervisory process, whereas other carers had limited visits and the standard of supervision was poor. Not all carers had copies of the supervision notes.

OMBC must ensure that carers receive regular visits and that the pattern of supervision meets the requirements of the policy.

The Foster Care Agreements meet the Regulations. Three of the carers visited did not have copies of their agreements and one Carer had an unsigned copy. All carers must have Foster Care Agreements relating to their approval and copies must be laid on file. This has been a requirement of all previous inspections.

The Foster Carers' Handbook has been recently revised and welcomed by carers and has been revised since the last inspection.

The Complaints Procedure has been revised and informs carers that they can contact the CSCI to make a complaint. Records of complaints are kept separately to allow effective monitoring.

The Service has devised a policy and procedure for dealing with allegations against carers, which is included in the Foster Carer's Handbook.

The Service do not currently undertake unannounced visits on a regular planned basis and these must be undertaken. (See NMS 6)

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

It was reported that there has been continued improvement in the training offered to carers, more of which has been specifically tailored to meet their needs. The records indicate that a range of training is offered, although not all the training specified in the NMS is being provided. (See previous NMS). The records also indicate that more carers are accessing the training and carers reported that they had found this useful. Staff reported that they are proactively encouraging carers to attend training, by offering transport and support.

However further improvements could be made regarding accessibility, re timings of courses to fit in with the demands of foster carers, (collecting children from school) and recognising that some carers find the learning process difficult.

Some carers are still resistant to training and this frustrates other carers as was reported in questionnaires and the support group. The service is aware of this and reported, 'The value of training and Carer's responsibility or their personal development needs to be encouraged and re-enforced. Carers need to be encouraged in their development through linking training and development activity to the payment for skills scheme development'.

OMBC Fostering Service should continue with this strategy.

The service is able to offer a crèche and this budget has been increased since the last inspection.

All new carers reported that the pre-approval training had been good, helpful and useful. One session of this training was observed and found to be satisfactory. A member of staff acted as an interpreter for two carers, which allowed them to access the course.

It was reported that all training is delivered within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

Each carers review includes a report on any training they have undertaken.

An NVQ programme is in place and some carers have this qualification.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A sample of social work files were inspected for the purpose of this inspection. These are maintained by social work staff based in another area of social services and there was evidence on some files of regular auditing and review by team managers.

The files varied in quality and quantity in relation to the amount of information recorded about each young person. The majority of files contained completed comprehensive LAC documentation including care plans, action and assessment records and records of reviews.

There was evidence of further improvements in the range of documents held by foster carers and some good practice was seen. Not all carers had signed placement agreements and copies of other key documents.

A sample of carer's files were inspected. The majority were found to be organised and in good order. However they did not all contain all the information as specified in the Regulation, including foster care agreements and a record of the placements made. These files must be audited against Regulation 30. This was a requirement of the previous inspections. It was reported a systematic audit process for all files is being developed during 2005 and this should lead to better practice

The Fostering Service has devised a policy for carers on recording and this information was contained within the Foster Carer's Handbook

None of the carers kept regular records on the young people other than diaries. The policy of the service is that carers keep regular records about the young people they care for and have been provided with Log Books for this purpose. This must be made known more thoroughly to the carers and be regularly inspected.

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**

Since the last inspection the Service has developed all records as required by Regulation with the exception of records of allegation and this must be created. See NMS 4

The Register of Carers is kept electronically and contains all the information required by the Regulations, it was reported that the improved database would improve accessibility for all staff to better information.

All records are stored confidentially.

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service has devised appropriate policies and procedures for the recording of information.

The carers and young people who were interviewed were aware that they could access their files and records.

The records of staff employed are maintained in another part of Oldham Social Services Department and was not inspected.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	168
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	156
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	149
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	35
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	14
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	56.14
Maximum £	875.23

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?

0

Not assessed on this occasion, no concerns have been raised out the premises and there are plans to relocate in the next few months.

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
--	---

Not assessed on this occasion not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
---------------------------	---------------

	0
--	---

Not assessed on this occasion, not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fees paid to carers are published and were known to carers and staff.

Additional allowances are paid at the discretion of the Head of Service and are a cause of dissatisfaction for many carers who are frustrated by the process. Carer's allowances are paid by placing social workers and not by the fostering service staff. The biggest area of criticism is in relation to clothing allowances and money for equipment. The examples given by carers described unacceptable practice, and most carers reported that they are 'out of pocket' by being foster carers.

The Relative carers who were interviewed or returned questionnaires reported that they had been provided with adequate equipment and clothing allowances.

It has been reported at all previous inspections that the fees paid to carers were being reviewed and carers stated that this had been reported on in the local paper. The Service Manager reported that there are plans to increase the fees paid to carers and that hopefully these would be in line, with Fostering Network suggested payments. The fees paid are less than neighbouring authorities and are a block to recruitment.

OMBC must revise the payments and allowances made to carers.

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 Panel is chaired by the Service Manager of Central Resources. Since the last inspection the Assistant Director (Children's) has been appointed as Decision Maker and this has had a positive impact on the Panel and the decision it makes. All staff commented on the improved professionalism of the Panel.

The minutes of previous Panels indicate that the Assistant Director reads the relevant paper work and makes appropriate comments as required.

A meeting of the Fostering Panel was observed during the inspection. Good practice was observed and the carers who attended were made to feel welcome and their contributions were listened to.

Since the last inspection the meetings of the panel have been quorate and have operated in line with Regulations and NMS. The Panel Chair reported that the Panel did not meet on one occasion, as it was inquorate.

New policies and procedures relating to the panel have been created and the records indicated that the Panel members have received training.

Two members of the administrative staff take the minutes on a rotational basis and the minutes presented indicated an overall improvement.

The Panel is continuing to develop a quality assurance role and the Panel Chair reported that assessments have been withdrawn where the quality of the work was in question and on many occasions staff have been required to provide additional information. Assessment are now read prior to Panel by the Manager or Senior Practitioner.

The composition of the Panel meets the Regulations and has a good number of independent members, including access to medical advice; education and two Elected members attend on rotation.

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 short break scheme called Family Link is situated within the Children's Disability Service. The service manager and two staff members presented as competent and well experienced to carry out and supervise this service.

The Family Link carers receive regular training, which is specific to their needs.

The Family Link Carer spoke highly of the service she received from the worker, as did a Carer who is caring for a child with a disability who is supported by a social worker from the disability team.

It was demonstrated that there are good links with the family placement service and the staff member attends training and meetings.

It was reported that all the policies and procedures have been amended to reflect that the parents remain the main carers and the needs and care carried out by carers is often different to that of scheme carers.

The staff reported that there has been an increase in the number of carers recruited and the range of activities the small team have been involved in, is impressive.

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 Friends and Family carers are offered the same standard of support as all other carers. The assessments of carers through this scheme are as thorough as for other carers, it was reported that the relationships within the family are recognised. Relative carers reported on the high level of support they had received from the family placement team and placing social workers. One wrote, 'I have lots of support from the fostering service and link worker- everything is explained to me by the staff' and 'The staff we have contact with have never let us down'.

It was reported that the service hopes to develop the way in which OMBC works with relative carers, including a review of the method of assessments and support mechanisms.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

A Lay Assessor was not used on this occasion.

Lay Assessor NA **Signature** _____

Date NA _____

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 18 January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

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

YES

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 1st April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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 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 above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

S0000043218.V142985.R01

© This report may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection



The paper used in this document is supplied from a sustainable source