

inspection report

Fostering Services

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Fostering Services

Social Services Department
4 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
SL6 7YR

12th – 19th May 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

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Fostering Services

Address

Social Services Department, 4 Marlow Road,
Maidenhead, SL6 7YR

Local Authority Manager

Ros Whittaker

Tel No:

01628 798888

Address

Social Services Department, 4 Marlow Road,
Maidenhead, SL6 7YR

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

09/06/03

Date of Inspection Visit		12th May 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		2.00 pm	
Name of Inspector	1	Sandra Sullivan	071811
Name of Inspector	2	Lucy Martin	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
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.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Ros Whittaker	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead 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.

The Housing and Social Services Directorate of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead operates a family placement service in relation to Adoption, Fostering and Family-Based Respite Care for children with a disability. The team is known as “FARS” (fostering, adoption and respite).

The team is located in central Maidenhead with other local authority children’s services. A Team Manager, who is, in turn, responsible to one of three service managers, heads the FARS team. The three service managers oversee all children’s work and are responsible to the Head of Children’s Services.

Although workers within the team may take a lead on, or have a special interest in, some aspects of the work, all engage in the variety of tasks associated with the work of the team. Fostering services provided by the team include:

- Short term placements

- Long term placements

- Emergency placements

- Short breaks for children and young people with disabilities.

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 second annual inspection of the service since the introduction of the Fostering Services Regulations in April 2002. Two Inspectors carried it out over a period of six days in May 2004. The Inspectors were appreciative of the time given by the Manager and members of staff team, including the administrative staff.

Questionnaires were sent to all foster carers, foster children and placing authorities in advance of the inspection

A sample of foster carers and foster children was seen in the foster homes as part of the inspection and their respective social workers interviewed. In addition the managers and members of staff of the FARS team were interviewed individually. Inspectors met with an invited group of foster carers and with two invited groups of foster children.

Documentation relating to the service, including policies, procedures and records was read both before and during the inspection.

Verbal feedback of the main findings of the Inspection was given to the Director, the Head of Children's Services, the three Children's Services Managers, and the Manager of the FARS team at the conclusion of the Inspection.

Overall the service met, or almost met, all of the 32 National Minimum Standards. There are no areas of major shortfall. The service is well managed and foster carers were appreciative of the support received from staff. Some requirements and recommendations are made, and some advice given in the text of this report, to underpin the good practice seen on the inspection.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was met.

It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Statement of Purpose be updated and formally approved by the Elected Members. This has now been done.

It was a recommendation last year that the Children's guide be produced in a range of formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. It was evident this year that a good range of booklets and leaflets is available for children giving information about the service.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

These standards were met.

It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Manager undertake a management qualification. It was evident this year that she had embarked on training shortly after the last inspection and is due to complete an NVQ 4 in management shortly.

The Manager impressed Inspectors with her leadership skills, and the manner in which the team is managed.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

These standards were met.

There are clear lines of communication and accountability between Managers and staff. It was evident from the meeting with members of the staff team that they had a clear understanding of lines of responsibility. The Manager and all members of staff in the team have job descriptions. Since the last inspection an assistant team manager has been appointed

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

5 of these Standards were met. There were minor shortfalls on the remaining 4.

The foster homes visited had accommodation to meet the needs of the children placed.

There is a need to develop practice in relation to written risk assessments to ensure that they are specific to the child, the carer and the current situation. They also need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

The fostering service does support some cross-cultural placements. One of the placements looked at in detail on this inspection was cross-cultural. There was no clear evidence on file that a placement agreement had been drawn up which clearly identified gaps in the match between child and carer and the steps taken to compensate for them.

The Local Authority considered that the LAC paperwork they are using fulfilled the requirements of Regulation 34. On this inspection Inspectors examined the LAC paperwork carefully and do not consider that this paperwork fully meets the requirements of a Foster Placement Agreement as detailed in the Schedule. It is a requirement of this inspection therefore, that Foster Placement Agreements be introduced.

Foster carers spoken with gave clear examples of how the health needs of children are promoted, and children spoken with confirmed this.

In the sample of children tracked all children of school age were receiving education. One young person, on the brink of leaving foster care, was clear that the support he had received from his foster carers was instrumental in helping him achieve GCSE's, A levels, and a University place, thus increasing his life chances and choices.

The Royal Borough ensures that every child of an appropriate age in a foster home has access to a computer.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

8 of these Standards were met. There was a minor shortfall on the remaining 1.

Recruitment processes for permanent staff are robust and, on the sample of personnel files examined, appropriate checks are undertaken. It was noted last year that the practice of

routinely telephoning referees to verify references needed to be developed. This is now routinely done.

There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. A Children's Services Manager has recently been appointed to oversee the work of the FARS team. The Manager concerned has considerable experience within the Authority and within children's services. She does not, however, have a background in Family Placement. Currently the Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children's Services. It is advised that the Children's Services Manager is provided with training in this area prior to any delegation of this role.

Assessments of carers seen were conducted thoroughly and appropriately, and all are seen and read by the manager prior to presentation at Panel.

The service operates under the employment and Health and Safety policies and procedures of the Local Authority.

From discussion, and from information provided prior to the inspection it is evident that good training opportunities exist.

Meetings with foster carers both individually and as a group indicated that foster carers considered that they were well supported.

There is a clear system in place for the conduct of annual reviews of foster carers, with the task being delegated to a sessional member of staff recruited for this purpose. Reviews for carers approved prior to 1st April 2002 had not been taken to Panel, as required under Regulation 29(5). Arrangements need to be made for this to be done

There is a monthly support group meeting to which all carers are invited.

There is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Staff spoken with confirmed that they received regular supervision from their line manager, and were positive about both the formal and informal support networks in place.

There was evidence that assessments of prospective carers are carried out thoroughly, and by suitably qualified workers.

Records (Standards 24-25)

These standards were met.

Comprehensive case records were available for the children and young people tracked as part of this inspection. A sample of records of individual children and young people living in foster care was examined, alongside a corresponding sample of records relating to the foster carers caring for them. All records were in good order.

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

This standard was met

The team is located together in an open-plan area on the upper floor of a two-storey building. There are interviewing and meeting room facilities on the ground floor, although there is limited access for people with a disability, or children in pushchairs.

All confidential documentation is securely stored.

Current accommodation is adequate, although there are limited storage facilities, and the

accommodation for the Manager and Assistant Manager is very cramped.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

Two of the three standards in this section are not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services. The third was met.

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. There is one allowance payable to all carers, whether placements are short term, long term, or placements with family or friends as carers.

The level of allowances is reviewed annually and changes are well publicised to carers. An additional increment is paid to carers who complete NVQ level 3.

Carers spoken with all said they received payments promptly and that the payments were always correct

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard was met.

The Panel is a joint one with one other Local Authority and an Independent Fostering agency. The constitution of the panel is in line with Regulation.

Inspectors were told that efforts are continuing to be made to recruit a person who has been in foster care, or whose child has been in foster care to the Panel.

Panel members attended a training day earlier this year and further training in specific areas is planned. Panel business meetings take place twice a year and form part of the Panel's Quality Assurance function.

It is planned that the Panel chair will produce an Annual Report.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was met.

The team provides two types of short break care for children. 'Relief Care' is available to foster carers needing respite from children that they care for on a full time basis. 'Respite Care' is a service providing respite care for children, usually with a disability, who usually live with their parents.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard was met.

The Authority has a clear set of policies and procedures relating to 'Kinship care'. The kinship carers spoken with during the inspection felt well supported by the Team. Allowances to kinship carers are paid at the same rate as to non-related carers. One child had recently been placed under Regulation 38, and the home study was still underway. The initial assessment had been conducted thoroughly and presented to Panel in a professional manner.

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:

YES

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?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Sandra Sullivan	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Lucy Martin	Signature	_____
Locality Manager		Signature	_____
Date	16th June 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 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	Regulation 34	FS8	Foster Placement Agreements are to be introduced.	By 19 th July 2004
2	Regulation 29(5)	FS21	Ensure that Panel considers the first review for all carers undertaken since 1.04.02	By 19 th November 2004

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	FS6	It is recommended that risk assessments are made specific to the child, carer, and situation, and regularly reviewed.
2	FS7	It is recommended that evidence of any 'gaps' identified during the matching process, and how they are to be filled, is recorded on the foster carer's file.
3	FS9	It is recommended that Safe Caring Guidelines are reviewed and updated at the start of each placement, and cleared with the child's social worker.
4	FS12 and FS23	It is recommended that training needs identified, either as a result of annual reviews, or as a result of the matching process, are met.

* 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	12
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)	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	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	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	12/05/2004
Time of Inspection	14.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	92

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?

3

It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Statement of Purpose be updated and formally approved by the Elected Members. This has now been done. Members approved the Statement in August 2003. This now needs to be repeated on an annual basis as a minimum.

It was a recommendation last year that the Children's guide be produced in a range of formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. It was evident this year that a good range of booklets and leaflets is available for children giving information about the service. All are in English, although Inspectors were informed that these could be produced in a range of languages as required.

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?

3

There has been no change of Manager in the past year, and the manager has now been in post for almost two years. It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Manager undertake a management qualification. It was evident this year that she had embarked on training shortly after the last inspection and is due to complete an NVQ 4 in management shortly.

The Manager impressed Inspectors with her leadership skills, and the manner in which the team is managed.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Recruitment procedures were found to be robust. For further details please see comment under Standard 15.

It was recommended last year that telephone enquiries be routinely made to follow up references. This is now being done. There is a need to ensure that these are carried out for administrative staff as well as social work staff.

The human resource section of the authority has set up a system to ensure that CRB checks are repeated on a three-year cycle.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Manager monitors the team's activities on a regular basis. She reads all assessments prior to their presentation to Panel and monitors the records of allegations and complaints about the service. In addition an annual report of the service has been produced for the year January – December 2003, giving an overview of the work of the team over the year.

There are clear lines of communication and accountability between Managers and staff. It was evident from the meetings with members of the staff team that they had a clear understanding of lines of responsibility.

Although Local Authority fostering services are not statutorily required to notify the Commission of the incidents listed below, this information is requested annually as part of the pre-inspection information.

It was evident from discussions with foster carers that supervising social workers monitor their records.

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

0

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.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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**

The manager has a clear job description, setting out the main duties and responsibilities. At the time of the inspection last year there was a vacancy for an assistant team manager, and temporary arrangements in place for the management of the Manager. Both these situations have been resolved in the past year.

An assistant team manager has been appointed from within the team. Some areas of delegation for day-to-day activities are now in place, allowing the Manager to focus on the strategic development of the service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

On this inspection the care of four children was 'tracked', and their foster homes visited. All accommodation seen was appropriate to meet the needs of the children and young people concerned. All had their own bedroom (one child was sharing, but was due to have his own room within a week).

There was a risk assessment on file for the one young person sharing a room, along with assessments of other identified risks, but Inspectors considered them to be somewhat superficial. It is recommended the area of risk assessments be developed. Inspectors advise that they are completed jointly by both the FARS worker and the child's social worker, to ensure that all relevant factors are taken into account. Risk assessments should be specific to the child, the carer and the current situation. They should be reviewed regularly, re-done on a change of placement, and considered as part of the child's LAC reviews and the carer's annual review.

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?

2

Inspectors acknowledge the difficulty in recruiting the range and diversity of carers needed to ensure that children can be placed with carers who reflect their own heritage. One of the placements tracked was for a young person placed with a carer who did not reflect his cultural heritage. It was evident from records and from discussion that the placement is now very settled, and the young person is clear that he would not wish to move. However it was also evident that there had been difficulties earlier in the placement, some of which were due to the cultural differences between the young person and the carer. There was no evidence on file of how 'gaps' in the match between carer and young person were identified and of steps taken to 'plug' them.

Training needs for the carer had been identified at the last two annual reviews, but there was no evidence to suggest they had been met.

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**

There is a Matching policy last updated in May 2003. This policy requires a social work assessment to be completed prior to a placement being sought. The policy recognises that the nature and depth of the assessment will be dependent on the circumstances. The possibility of placement with family and friends will always be considered before a decision is made to use another carer.

The fostering service uses the formats produced by the Department of Health for the recording of information and plans in relation to a child or young person Looked After by a Local Authority. These contain specific reference to any needs that cannot be readily met by the placement and the plans that have been made to compensate for such omissions.

The Local Authority considered that the LAC paperwork they are using fulfilled the requirements of Regulation 34. On this inspection Inspectors examined the LAC paperwork carefully and do not consider that this paperwork fully meets the requirements of a Foster Placement Agreement as detailed in the Schedule. It is a requirement of this inspection therefore, that Foster Placement Agreements be introduced.

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**

Children and young people over the age of eight in foster care were surveyed prior to the inspection. However the number of children was small, and the returns too few to draw accurate statistical information from.

The Authority makes it very clear to carers through documentation that corporal punishment is not acceptable.

There are written policies on Bullying and Safe Caring. Safe Caring guidelines were in evidence on two of the four files examined. There was an indication on one of the files that the guidelines were to be developed alongside the home study that was in process.

It is recommended that the guidelines are reviewed and updated at the start of each placement, in conjunction with the child's social worker. The guidelines then need to be signed by both the child's social worker and the carer's supervising social worker.

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

X

%

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**

There was evidence from records and from a variety of discussions that the Authority is diligent in maintaining and developing family contact.

This is a topic that is covered in the pre-approval training programme, and discussed with prospective carers as part of their assessment. Carers spoken with were generally very positive about the arrangements made for contact. Inspectors received some concerns, both from discussion and via questionnaires, about the detailed arrangements for contact, cancellations etc. Inspectors consider that much of the confusion and apparent dissatisfaction could be eradicated by diligent completion of the Foster Placement Agreement.

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**

Responses to the confidential questionnaire of children indicated that they do feel listened to by their carers, and that they were aware of what to do if they had concerns. This was confirmed in individual interviews with children and in discussion with the small groups of children and young people in foster care.

Discussion with the Children's Services Consultation Officer confirmed that her remit extended to children in foster care. Inspectors heard of a recent development in accessing the views of children Looked After, using an interactive web site entitled 'Carezone'.

The Authority has commissioned an advocacy service for Looked After young people run by the Voice for the Child in Care.

There was evidence in records of children's views on their care being sought, especially through reviews.

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**

Foster carers spoken with gave clear examples of how the health needs of children are promoted, and children spoken with confirmed this.

There is a programme of first aid training for carers. Inspectors advise that there is a more systematic approach to ensuring that all carers are trained and that that training is then updated at the prescribed intervals.

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**

Ensuring children in foster care receive appropriate education is clearly a priority for the Directorate. In the sample of children tracked all children of school age were receiving education.

There was very clear evidence of young people receiving support with homework and education in general. One young person, on the brink of leaving foster care, was clear that the support he had received from his foster carers was instrumental in helping him achieve GCSE's, A levels, and a University place, thus increasing his life chances and choices.

The Royal Borough ensures that every child of an appropriate age in a foster home has access to a computer.

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**

The FARS team have developed very good links with the Leaving Care team, both in respect of individual children and in the development of the service.

A policy paper has been written on care for young people aged 18+, and a Supported Lodgings Scheme is in development.

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

Recruitment processes for permanent staff are robust and, on the sample of personnel files examined, appropriate checks are undertaken. The HR section of the Authority has introduced corporate recruitment procedures across the Authority to ensure that all employees are subjected to the checks appropriate to their position. A decision has now been reached to recruit a member of staff to the Authority specifically to process the CRB checks and maintain a database.

It was noted last year that the practice of routinely telephoning referees to verify references needed to be developed. This is now routinely done.

All staff undertaking assessments of foster carers have a social work qualification.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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**

There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. A Children's Services Manager has recently been appointed to oversee the work of the FARS team. This has been an internal appointment, and the Manager concerned has considerable experience within the Authority and within children's services. She does not, however, have a background in Family Placement. Currently the Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children's Services. It is advised that the Children's Services Manager is provided with training in this area prior to any delegation of this role.

The team all receive regular supervision, either from the Manager or the Assistant Manager. All staff were very complimentary about the support they receive from both the Manager and the Assistant Manager.

The team meet together on a regular basis. Discussions about work allocation take place at these meetings, which are minuted.

Assessments of carers seen were conducted thoroughly and appropriately, and all are seen and read by the manager prior to presentation at Panel.

The team is adequately supported administratively, and operates to an agreed range of policies and procedures. All staff have written job descriptions.

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?****3**

All permanent staff have job descriptions and contracts. Staff confirmed that they have regular supervision and are appraised annually.

Staff themselves assessed the team as continuing to be committed, well supported and with high morale. At the time of this inspection the team was one member of staff down, owing to an internal promotion. The team is stable and experienced, with a low staff turnover. All of the social workers in the team are female and part-time. This does have implications for the management of the team and the work.

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 service operates under the employment and Health and Safety policies and procedures of the Local Authority.

Records seen showed that there were sound employment practices in place.

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?****3**

From discussion, and from information provided prior to the inspection it is evident that good training opportunities exist. All qualified staff are encouraged to undertake post qualifying training, and a range of internal and external courses are available. Staff from the FARS team had also undertaken a 'Training the Trainers' course the week before the inspection.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

All staff have regular supervision and annual appraisals are planned over the coming months. There are regular staff 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
<p>Meetings with foster carers both individually and as a group indicated that foster carers considered that they were well supported.</p> <p>There is a clear system in place for the conduct of annual reviews of foster carers, with this task being delegated to a sessional member of staff recruited for this purpose. Reviews were up to date. The first review for new carers, approved since April 2002 had been taken to Panel. However, reviews for carers approved prior to that date had not been taken to Panel, as required under Regulation 29(5). Arrangements need to be made for this to be done</p> <p>Reviews for carers within the respite service were also being undertaken annually, and there was evidence that these had also been scrutinised by Panel.</p>		

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
<p>The majority of foster carers are supervised by a named social worker. As there is a vacancy in the team following the promotion of one of the social workers to the post of Assistant Manager, a small number of foster carers are held on duty. Carers spoken with both individually and in a group situation were very positive about the support they received from the manager, assistant manager and their supervising social workers.</p> <p>There is a monthly support group meeting to which all carers are invited. Meetings are minuted by one of the carers and distributed to all, so those who are not able to attend have details of what is discussed. There has been a change in the last year in that these meetings are no longer facilitated by the FARS team, but by the experienced foster carer recently recruited to the Professional Foster Carer role. Carers were appreciative of these meetings and said they found them helpful</p> <p>Foster care agreements are in place for all carers.</p> <p>There is a system of out of hours support for carers.</p> <p>At the time of this inspection carers were about to be provided with a handbook. It was noted last year that the Handbook was badly out of date. It has been a major piece of work this year to develop the new Handbook. There was evidence that carers had been consulted about the contents, and the draft handbook provided for Inspectors appeared comprehensive.</p>		

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?****2**

Prospective carers undergoing assessment are provided with pre-approval training. This is provided as part of a consortium arrangement with neighbouring authorities. Inspectors were able to observe a small part of this training on this inspection. The format of the pre-approval training follows a recently updated nationally accepted format. Workers conducting the training were seen to be well prepared, although much of the training material was new to them. They were seen to appropriately assist each other, and to engage all the applicants in the training.

All training that is put on by the Authority for social workers is available to carers to attend post approval. In addition, specific training is organised for carers by the FARS team. Over the past year training has been more systematic. Although carers are encouraged to attend training there is no obligation to attend any training other than first aid training. The recruitment of the Foster Carer Professional has encouraged more carers to attend training events.

Carers are encouraged to participate in NVQ training, with a financial incentive for successful completion.

It was noted that training needs identified at annual reviews were not always met. It is recommended that training needs identified, either as a result of annual reviews or as a result of the matching process, are met.

It is advised that post-approval training is developed to detail training expectations for carers.

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

A sample of records of individual children and young people living in foster care were examined during the inspection. A sample of records relating to foster carers was also examined.

Foster carers are provided with a lockable storage facility to ensure records can be kept confidential and safe.

Case records in relation to the individual children 'tracked' as part of this inspection were in good order. Files contained chronologies and records of statutory visits.

Carers have been provided with training on recording, and there was evidence that carers records are routinely seen and signed by supervising social workers.

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

The Authority has policies and procedures on recording, storage and access to records. Records were seen to be securely and appropriately stored, and an appropriate range of records is maintained.

Records relating to both children and foster carers were in good order, and both showed evidence of auditing and monitoring.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
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:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
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 team is located together in an open-plan area on the upper floor of a two-storey building. The building is open to the public during office hours, with a reception area on the ground floor for all the services in the building. There are interviewing and meeting room facilities on the ground floor, although there is limited access for people with a disability, or children in pushchairs.

All confidential documentation is securely stored.

Current accommodation is adequate, although there are limited storage facilities, and the accommodation for the Manager and Assistant Manager is very cramped.

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?

9

Not applicable to Local Authority 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?

9

Not applicable to Local Authority 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?****3**

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. There is one allowance payable to all carers, whether placements are short term, long term, or placements with family or friends as carers.

The first principle of the scheme is that the allowance should cover the true cost of caring for a foster child. However they are allowances and do not include any element of remuneration for the carer. At the present time the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead does not employ any fee paid carers.

The level of allowances is reviewed annually and changes are well publicised to carers. An additional increment is paid to carers who complete NVQ level 3.

Carers spoken with confirmed that payments are made promptly, and that they are set at a level which does cover the costs of caring for the child, other than in exceptional circumstances.

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
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The Panel is a joint one with one other Local Authority and an Independent Fostering agency. All panel members have been provided with a booklet entitled "Joint Fostering Panel Information for Panel Members". This is a comprehensive document detailing relevant regulations and standards and giving guidance to Panel members who may not be familiar with the process. Inspectors were informed that this booklet is now being reviewed following the first two years of the Panel operation.

The constitution of the panel is in line with Regulation. Inspectors were told that efforts are continuing to be made to recruit a person who has been in foster care, or whose child has been in foster care to the Panel.

Panel members attended a training day earlier this year. Views on the effectiveness of the training varied, and it was felt that further training in specific areas would be most beneficial.

Panel business meetings take place twice a year, prior to the Panel meetings. Inspectors were able to observe one such meeting. In addition to Panel business, each of the three agencies is asked to submit details of its activities. This forms part of the Panel's Quality Assurance function.

From discussion with the Independent Panel Chair, and from observation of the Panel meeting, Inspectors formed the view that she is clear about her responsibilities, and is an effective chair.

It is planned that the Panel chair will produce an Annual Report.

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?
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The team provides two types of short break care for children. 'Relief Care' is available to foster carers needing respite from children that they care for on a full time basis. 'Respite Care' is a service providing respite care for children, usually with a disability, who usually live with their parents.

At the time of the inspection last year the respite care service was providing a service for both children and adults. Inspectors were informed this year that the service is now for children only. The reviews of respite carers are now routinely taken to Panel.

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
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There has been an increase in the number of kinship carers over the past year, from one at the time of the last inspection to three at the time of this inspection. One child had recently been placed under Regulation 38, and the home study was still underway. The initial assessment had been conducted thoroughly and presented to Panel in a professional manner.

These carers were taking part in pre-approval training. Their views on the training were positive, although they considered that some parts of the training were less relevant to them, as they felt it focussed on caring for children who were strangers. The FARS team have recognised this and are considering whether some specialist training is needed for kinship carers.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 12th – 19th May 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

This report reflects a second very thorough inspection with the evidence having been obtained through a variety of methods.

There are no factual inaccuracies.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

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 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 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead 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 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead 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:

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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.