



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Local Authority Fostering Service

Gloucestershire County Council

Shire Hall

Westgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 2TR

24th 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

Gloucestershire

Address

Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TR

Local Authority Manager

Catherine Shea

Tel No:

01452 425000

Address

Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TR

Fax No:

Email Address

sheather@gloscc.gov.uk

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 ?

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		24th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Diana Waters	093866
Name of Inspector	2	Barbara Davies	
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			

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

At the point of inspection there were 268 approved foster carers. A total of 197 children were placed with mainstream carers (105 boys and 92 girls), a further 71 children were in specific placements (36 boys and 35 girls). There were a further 104 children placed by the family link service for predominantly respite placements. The fostering service is divided into four main components:

The Fostering Recruitment Team (FRT) recruits, trains and assesses prospective carers and has the stated aim of offering support for up to a year post-approval prior to carers transferring to STEPS or PFT. This team also includes a children with disabilities post, a supported lodgings post, and a respite care post.

The Short-Term Placement Service (STEPS) supports short-term, emergency and respite carers. This team also undertakes re-assessment of foster carers wishing to offer a permanent foster placement to young people in their care.

The Permanence Fostering Team (PFT) supports long-term foster carers and recruits, assesses and supports long term carers. The adoption function of the team was separated following the recruitment of a fifth team manager in September 2004 for the permanent fostering team. The adoption function is now operationally separate from the permanent fostering team.

The Family Link Service operates with a large degree of independence from the other three components of the fostering service, it has separate line management and has a different geographical base. It has developed its own statement of purpose and a specific foster care agreement. Whilst the Family Link Scheme was inspected it should be acknowledged that this aspect of the inspection was limited.

In addition the service operates a "TASK" fostering team who at the time of the inspection were recruiting carers to the newly formed Multi-Agency Family Support Service (MAFSS) team with a target of 8 carers. At the time of the inspection no children had been placed.

The Looked After Children Service Manager was the person nominated under Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001.

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.)

The service is still some way from achieving full compliance with the National Minimum Standards but there have been significant improvements since the last inspection. Developments include the drafting and implementation of a range of key policies. Other priorities for improvement in the last year have included: The foster care panel, reviewing staffing levels for the service, improving carers and children's files and recording, improved supervision of staff and carers, annual reviews, foster carer liaison and introducing further support groups for carers. Close monitoring has enabled the managers of the service to have a clearer overview of their achievements to date and review the gaps that continue to exist.

Forthcoming priorities include: Review of the Single Referral Service (SRS), commissioning services, review of payment for skills, friends and family assessments and support, and risk assessments for young people prior to placement. Maintaining this programme with increasingly challenging placements and complex support is essential whilst the identified future plans are implemented. The planned recruitment of a Fostering Services Manager during the next year should enable the current progress to be consolidated and continue.

The service has been under pressure to meet the National Minimum Standards in a timely manner. At the same time, some carers feel overwhelmed by the speed of change and have needed additional support to consolidate their learning. It is to their credit that the service has done well to manage these competing demands. The majority of carers were found to be realistically hopeful and new carers expectations of the fostering service were high. Staff in the fostering service presented as realistic, positive, hard working and committed to improving the service for both carers and children and the majority were highly valued by carers.

The family link service for children with disabilities remains largely independent from the other fostering services and therefore has not benefited from some of the shared developments and training.

The newly formed MAFFS team and its TASK placements were not inspected this year and the service should remain mindful of the need to incorporate both these teams and the Family Link service into good practise developments by sharing relevant policies, procedures, systems and training.

The major concern of the inspectors during this inspection was the evidence that there were not sufficient placements for young people requiring short term and emergency care to achieve choices in matching. There is an increasing use of variations and exemptions to carers approval to obtain any placement with existing carers, therefore some children, young people and their social workers have little or no choice of placement. In addition, there was little evidence that foster placement agreements have specific reference to matching and additional support to compensate for any gaps. There were often no introductions and some young people have experienced multiple placement changes.

Statement of purpose

1 standard nearly met

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

2 standards met

Management of the fostering service

1 met, 1 almost met

Securing and promoting welfare

3 standards met, 4 almost met, 2 not met

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

4 standards met, 5 almost met

Records

2 standards met

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service

1 standard met

Financial requirements

2 standards not applicable 1 standard almost met

Fostering Panel

1 standard almost met

Short term breaks

1 standard almost met

Family and friends as carers

1 standard almost met

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	<u>Diana Waters</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Barbara Davies</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	<u>Ian Godfrey</u>	Signature	_____
Date	<u>26th May 2005</u>		_____

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	
	3	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must provide a full overview of the services provided including the types of placements and offered by the service.	1 st Jan 2006
	3	FS1	Complete work must be completed on the children's guide for children with disabilities.	1 st Jan 2006
	33	FS8	The Single Referral Service must have access to sufficient information to ensure that no placements are made unless they are the most suitable available having regard to all the circumstances	30 th June 2005
	34	FS8	Foster Placement Agreements must contain references to matching considerations and areas where additional support is required.	31 st August 2005
	34	FS12FS9	Carers must be provided with full information about foster children and their families, including health care information to enable them to offer sufficient protection to the child, themselves and their own children	31 st August 2005
	16	FS17	The service must ensure that a sufficient number of suitably qualified people are employed by the fostering service	30 th Sept 2005
	24	FS30	The Service must ensure that all panels meet the requirement for quoracy	30 th June 2005

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
	FS4	The service should develop a reporting system to capture the details of schedule 8 for the whole fostering service
	FS5	The service should ensure there is adequate access to family placement workers/managers in times of staff absence particularly during staff sickness.
	FS6	The service should develop systems to ensure that SRS has access to information to enable it to accurately risk assess where placements made require children to share bedrooms and to ensure that the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there
	FS7	The service should develop its work to ensure that, where children are placed in an emergency and no suitable placement is available in terms of the child's needs as outlined in standard 7.2, remedial action is taken within six weeks to provide a suitable placement
	FS9	Safer Care Policies should include all relevant information, be shared with children and placing social workers and reviewed when necessary.
	FS11	The service should develop systems for ascertaining the views of children and young people about the fostering service as a whole
	FS21	Further guidance should be offered to foster carers about the payment for skills scheme
	FS21	The service should confirm the future process of foster carer annual reviews, amend policy and procedures to reflect this and inform foster carers
	FS22	The service should ensure that all foster carers receive at least one unannounced supervision visit a year
	FS22	Each carer should be provided with a handbook which covers policies, procedures, guidance legal information and insurance details
	FS25	Foster carers and children should be encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments
	FS25	Separate records should kept which bring together data on allegations and on complaints and there outcomes

	FS32	Support and Training needs of friends and families as carers should be met in the same as all other carers
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* 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
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The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	13
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• 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	24/1/05
Time of Inspection	9AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	X

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The statement of purpose has been formally approved by the elected members and was last reviewed and updated in October 2004.

The current fostering services statement of purpose has no reference to the fostering service for children with disabilities (family link), the provision of services for these children or the staff who work in that team. The new Treatment Foster Care (TASK) scheme details and staff employed were similarly missing.

The service manager has identified areas of potential conflict with the current statement of purpose and has plans in place to address them within the next inspection year.

Since the last inspection two new and attractive children and young peoples guides have been commissioned, published and distributed. 75% of the young people who returned questionnaires confirmed they had received one of these guides. Work has progressed on the children's guide for family link which is now in draft format and awaiting final work prior to publication.

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
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The Looked After Children Service Manager has a range of relevant qualifications and experience in excess of those required. This includes over seven years senior management experience and is registered for assessment at NVQ 5 in Strategic Management. This is due for completion by July 2005.

It was acknowledged by the inspectors, staff in the fostering teams, and carers that the role of Looked After Children Manager has a wide remit and places high demands on the incumbent. There is also wide acknowledgement of the huge amount of work that has been required and the hard work and commitment that has gone into improving the service thus far. It was clear she has the confidence of the staff group.

The individual team managers have an appropriate range of management and social work experience and also have extensive family placement experience. Two managers are enrolled on NVQ 4 in Management with portfolios due for submission by July 2005. The newly appointed PFT team manager registered in November 2004, and completion is due by March 2006. The manager of the family link team has an NVQ 4 in management.

Inspectors acknowledge the amount of development work that has taken place following the last inspection and the significant work undertaken by managers and their teams. A number of new systems have been introduced over the past year, for example foster carer annual reviews, safer care policies and health and safety checks. Monitoring has taken place by managers and via the fostering panel. Not all the files checked had all the relevant paperwork, although most were now complete.

The level and quality of support offered to carers was more consistent than last year, inspectors acknowledge that they found evidence of high quality support and recording in the majority of cases.

The quality of assessment and review reports sampled differed, The foster care panel observed had expectations of consistency and this was being proactively addressed. Managers were also developing their monitoring and quality assurance role.

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

The agency maintains records of the checks and references that have been obtained for the managers of the fostering service.

Two of the team managers within the fostering service have been employed by the service for some time, two were appointed in October 2002. The latest team manager was appointed in September 2004. Each manager has appropriate Criminal Records Bureau clearance. Personnel officers confirmed that these checks are now updated on a three yearly cycle and that a system is in place to monitor compliance with this.

Some shortfalls remain following a review of recruitment information. Personnel files examined indicated compliance with the standards in all but two respects. There was no evidence that one member of staff had provided proof of identity though the inspectors acknowledge that this would have been required as part of the CRB checking process. Also, at the last inspection a specific recommendation was made in respect of one appointment to follow-up concerns that had appeared on one reference. There was no evidence that this had been done however, there was evidence of telephone enquiries made to follow-up written references on all staff appointed within the last 12 months.

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

From discussions with managers and staff and from pre-inspection information received there is evidence to confirm that there are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication between managers, staff and carers. Carers interviewed confirmed that they have access to individual managers and through the liaison group to the Looked After Children Service Manager, the majority felt well supported.

Staff shortages and carer recruitment problems continue to blur some of the boundaries between teams. This has led to social workers in FRT maintaining an ongoing support role.

A number of new workers have joined the fostering service and whilst they may be experienced social work practitioners they do not all have significant family placement experience. Whilst they are supported to further develop their skills managers report that this has impacted upon allocation of work.

In the pre-inspection questionnaire the service manager acknowledged the need to develop monitoring systems in relation to Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 including offences committed by foster children, any involvement in prostitution, and levels of absconding. The service has developed a proforma for foster carers to complete to report significant events but carers the inspectors had contact with did not appear to be aware of this form. All carers spoken to confirm they report all events to both the placing social worker and the family placement officer who in turn discuss events in supervision with managers.

Appropriate financial processes were in place, the local authority is the sole user of the service. Details of the allowances and payments for skill levels are given to carers upon approval and updated as necessary.

Staff are reminded of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest in the employee handbook. The service must ensure that foster carers are reminded of their responsibility to declare any conflict and this might usefully be added to the Foster Carer Agreement or Handbook

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

NA

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

<p>Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.</p> <p>Serious complaint about a foster parent.</p> <p>Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.</p>	<table border="1"> <tr><td>X</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td></tr> <tr><td>X</td></tr> </table>	X	X	X
X				
X				
X				
Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	0			
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0			

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Clear job descriptions are provided for all posts upon appointment. Inspectors found that the level of delegation and responsibilities of the managers along with lines of accountability are clearly defined.</p> <p>In the absence of a front-line manager, managers from the other fostering teams share responsibility for decision-making and staff support. Staff and carers indicated this was not always adequate in times of longer-term sickness and this should continue to be closely monitored.</p> <p>In the absence of the Looked After Children Service Manager the Fostering Recruitment Team Manager assumes day-to-day responsibility for the service with support from other senior managers.</p> <p>All staff spoken to were aware of these arrangements and felt that they usually worked well. The inspectors were pleased to note the proposed addition in 2005/6 of a Fostering Services Manager to lead and develop the fostering resource.</p>		

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Inspectors had the opportunity to meet with a number of individual foster carers, with groups of carers and with a number of children and young people who are fostered. Inspectors wish to acknowledge the level of skill, commitment and resilience displayed by these carers. Some of the young people that inspectors met were in long-term placements and appeared to have significantly benefited from the security that these placements have provided.

The views of placing social workers and children were sought by pre-inspection questionnaire and via contact during the inspection. 113 placing social workers and 30 young people returned questionnaires. A large majority of these felt that individual carers provided a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Where there were exceptions to this placing social workers emphasised how they worked with their fostering counterparts to find solutions.

All those homes visited by the inspectors were found to be warm, clean and adequately decorated. Arrangements for individual privacy were appropriate. Health and safety checks had been completed on the majority of foster homes (85%), these had been updated with their annual reviews. Foster Care panel had clear expectations that workers would present completed and updated health and safety checks.

Whilst the service does not promote bedroom sharing and would expect a risk assessment to be completed prior to any decision being made as to whether it is appropriate to allow sharing of bedrooms, inspectors were concerned that the Single Referral Service (SRS) may make placements which require sharing without sufficient information to risk assess. Inspectors read the information that SRS held on carers which detailed accommodation arrangements but they continued to depend on carers informing them of when a child may have to share a room. Similarly inspectors found that for some children the background information available to SRS was limited and therefore did not allow appropriate risk assessment.

Risk assessments were not yet in place before placements were made and there was evidence that whilst matching was attempted by SRS at the time of the request, many carers who were inappropriate were being approached.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service emphasised that it aims to meet all needs arising as a result of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. However a limited supply of foster carers means that some elements of matching criteria are inevitably compromised. The service has recruited 4 placements from black and ethnic minority groups during 2004/5.

Evidence was seen that, during child care reviews and supervision visits to foster carers, placement plans and day-to-day care are monitored to ensure that they remain consistent with the principle goals of each child's placement plan.

Placing social workers and fostering social workers all continue to raise concerns about the lack of placement choice and were concerned that if an inappropriate placement is made in an emergency it is difficult to identify a suitable placement within six weeks as required by the National Minimum Standards. A recommendation was made in relation to this following the first and second inspections of the service.

Following the first inspection the service planned and provided post-approval 'Diversity and Equality Briefing' training for all carers. Four sessions were held throughout the county during March 2004 at different times of the day to enable as many carers as possible to attend. This training is mandatory for all carers at all levels, Additionally valuing diversity training also forms a component of the NVQ Level 3 course to which some carers have access.

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?

1

While the service endeavours to find the right placement with limited resources, frequently placements found were not well matched, with little or no choice available. Carers and placing social workers identified this as a concern and matching factors whilst initially attempted were often ignored, minimised, or disregarded. Some carers reported a desire to help where possible with others feeling strongly that they should not be asked for placements outside of their approval range.

Placement changes for young people varied, for some young people they were numerous. One young person had moved 20 times in 4 years of which only 2 were planned placements. Another two young people in long-term placement had 2 and 3 changes.

Social workers report that planning, preparation and introductions for young people become difficult or impossible when timescales are too short and despite several weeks notice that a placement is required, are frequently not notified early enough that a placement has been found. They report having little or no choice in these cases

Some young people interviewed and in questionnaires confirmed there had been little or no discussion about placement choice and little in the way of introduction. Other long-term placements and pre adoption placements have a much higher matching and placing profile. Some young people confirmed they had been placed in successful long term placements with appropriate introductions.

In one case there was a inadequate information available to SRS about children already in placement with a carer and had the carers themselves not been forthcoming with information a placement may have gone ahead and exposed children to unnecessary unidentified risks. Matching criteria are made known by placing social workers but they report that placements often do not sufficiently meet these criteria. It is essential that relevant information known to the field social workers, family placement officers and foster carers on both young people in placement and young people requiring placement is available to all those involved in matching. This information should be available in an accessible form and used in decision-making about suitable placements.

Foster placement agreements rarely identified additional support needed to compensate for any gaps in matching, and there was often little or no specific action taken to redress the deficiencies highlighted whilst matching as specified in Standard 8.4

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

Since the last inspection safer care training has been made available to all foster carers throughout the county. Inspectors were informed that most (76%) of the carers currently have a safer care family policy on file. Some of those seen provide very specific detailed information others contained little specific information and said little about the family composition or routines. Inspectors were concerned that the safer carer policies they read did not include reference to children in placement and any associated potential risks. Safer care policies were not found to be shared with and cleared with the child's social worker and had not been explained to children in placement. There is now a system in place to review / update the policies at the carers annual review.

The fostering service makes clear to carers in the Foster Care Agreement that corporal punishment is not acceptable. Behaviour management strategies are discussed during pre- and post-approval training. Carers and staff interviewed confirmed that appropriate sanctions are discussed during supervisory visits and following significant events, they would however welcome further training on this subject with an emphasis on positive interventions.

Inspectors were provided with information relating to individual allegations made about foster carers, this demonstrated that the agency investigated these appropriately. The management information system 'SAFE' is operational and a monthly monitoring system of allegations and complaints is in place. Letters have been sent to foster carers outlining their responsibility to inform the service of all matters listed in Schedule 8. Whilst the information is reported, it is not yet available in a format that is sufficiently clear to provide an overall picture and effectiveness is thus limited. The Looked After Children Service Manager is responsible for scrutinising this information on a three monthly basis and reports findings to inform annual service development.

Inspectors were told that information is provided for carers in relation to bullying. Carers said they would welcome more detailed information and specific training. The newly published attractive children's guide provides information for children and young people on sources of support about bullying

The service has developed a checklist for carers on the questions to consider and the information they should have access to for each child placed with them. Inspectors found this to be a useful tool and some carers reported feeling empowered by this to ask questions and request information. During case tracking inspectors found that some carers still had very limited information about children for some time following placement, others had received sufficient and timely information. Further work needs to be developed to fully implement the procedure.

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

Inspectors drew evidence for this standard from discussion with young people, their carers and social workers. Inspectors also had the opportunity to read case files and speak to social workers in the fostering team. In the majority of cases the arrangements for contact appeared to be clear to all parties.

Contact is a core component considered when arranging placements and efforts are made to ensure that placement location does not threaten contact arrangements. However inspectors were repeatedly told that due to limited resources children and young people are sometimes placed at considerable distance from their family and community making contact problematic. Inspectors also heard that where this is the case considerable efforts are made to ensure that contact is maintained and extra finances made available to facilitate this.

Inspectors found individual foster carers understand the importance of contact and found examples of foster carers working hard to establish positive relationships with birth family members. Where difficulties had arisen carers described the support they received from their support workers to resolve these problems so that contact arrangements were maintained.

Limited information on contact arrangements was found in placement agreements, whilst the frequency of contact was usually set out, other guidance was missing. The fostering service must ensure that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements, including any arrangement for the supervision of contact, is clearly articulated in the Foster Placement Agreement.

The records that foster carers keep on the outcome of contact arrangements also varied. Inspectors found that some carers kept detailed logs of daily events; others appeared to keep very limited records. The Service had started to provide carers with the appropriate resources to enable them to maintain full records of contact by issuing them with files for specific recording, these had been recently delivered by the family placement officers during supervision visits. The service has developed good practise guidance and briefings for carers with at least 75 carers having completed training in "Recording and the policy on recording". This work is ongoing and training was observed during the inspection.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

During discussions with foster carers they demonstrated a clear commitment to consultation with the children and young people in their care. One of the pre-approval training sessions focuses upon listening to young people and this is reinforced with written information. The Children's Rights Officer had also arranged 'Total respect' training for carers and staff. 60% of young people who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that their carers often asked them for their opinions and ideas, a further 35% reported that they were sometimes asked.

The Children's Rights Service includes a Young People's Looked After Network (Y-PLAN) which has a specific role in canvassing the opinions of all looked after young people to ensure that their views are represented within decision making processes. The majority of young people spoken to were aware of Y-PLAN but did not feel that it represented them.

In pre-inspection questionnaires 70% of young people had been asked about their opinions concerning their foster carers. Many young people spoken to, and their carers confirmed that, children are asked for their views as part of the foster carer annual review process. Less than 30% could recall being asked their opinion of the fostering service as a whole. The service acknowledged in the pre-inspection information that it does not have formal systems in place to consult young people on the running of the fostering service.

The service does not currently run support groups specifically for young people in foster care. Various carers and staff said that they felt the addition of these would be a positive step and that consultation would be improved.

A post created to support foster carers who care for children with disabilities and a specific support group has been established. The service aims to establish a joint working party to develop procedures to ensure that the views of children who have communication difficulties are established.

All young people and their carers are provided with information about the complaints system. All young people have access to the Children's Rights Officer and carer's, staff and young people knew about and sometimes accessed her services.

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

Inspectors were told that referrals to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) remain problematic. The 'fast track' system for Looked After Children is no longer available. There are plans to appoint a primary mental health nurse who would have responsibility for filtering and tracking CAMHS referrals, but this appointment is awaiting confirmation.

During case tracking inspectors found that some carers had limited background health information on children placed. Here significant gaps were found in the Looked After Children information.

In all tracked cases carers had made appropriate arrangements for routine medical and dental treatment. Carers were found to be assertive in requesting access to specialised services where they were considered necessary and demonstrated commitment to ensuring that appointments made were kept.

The service has provided guidance, issued in January 2004, to foster carers on their role and responsibilities in relation to children's health and well being, this includes a statement that carers should keep a written health record for each child. Some carers were found to maintain adequate health records whilst others kept limited information. Evidence from case tracking suggests that some work is still needed to ensure full and consistent implementation.

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?**

4

A new multi-disciplinary (Health, Education and Social Services) service has been developed for young people with severe behaviour problems. The project includes a treatment foster care model and carers have been recruited to this scheme.

During case tracking inspectors found a number of examples of good practice where carers and others have supported children and teaching staff to promote positive outcomes.

The Social Service Department has forged a close working relationship with the Education Department and the appointment of a Joint Head of Children's Services across both departments should help to improve strategic planning. An education officer monitors Personal Education Plan's via contact with child care social workers prior to Looked After Children reviews to ensure that all children have an appropriate plan in place.

The Education Department has developed a value added scoring system to monitor the progress of Looked After Children and has developed training for primary and secondary school teachers. All schools within Gloucestershire County Council have a designated teacher for Looked After Children. A clear policy is in place for exclusions with a new protocol developed during 2004/5. All Looked After Children have access to a specialist team (LACES). A support group has been established for young people who are refusing to attend school and Looked After Children are now fast tracked to receive support from the reintegration service. It was reported that by April 2005 all Looked After Children would have access to computers to aid homework and educational achievement.

As with health records, inspectors found the quality of education records maintained by carers varied. The service have recently introduced training on all aspects of recording by carers and this work is ongoing.

Parental responses, link workers and carers associated with the family link scheme consistently described the arrangements for supporting children in education. The responsibility of liaising with schools remained with the child's permanent carers. Any need for carer involvement was agreed as a result of direct negotiation between parents and carers.

All young people tracked were in appropriate education at the time of the inspection and carers were supporting these young people well.

Evidence from case files confirms that financial support is available for extra-curricular activities. Placement agreements did not always identify where financial responsibility lies for school related costs however inspectors understand that a scheme of delegated decision making identifies who can approve the level of departmental expenditure for particular purposes.

There was evidence from some of the young people interviewed of high expectations with reference to further education and they confirmed they had received good support from carers.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A review has taken place with a new countywide service managed by a multi-agency board in place since April 2004.

A deputy team manager's post was created to lead on service developments to provide a consistent service to all care leavers. The service is linked to National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum standards. The supportive lodgings officer who is based in the fostering service is linking with the leaving care team. Pathway planning processes are defined in the leaving care policies and procedures.

The service reported that 100% of cases open to Solutions had pathway plans and all year 11 Looked After Children were having pathway assessments.

The inspectors were informed that planned developments in 2005/6 include closer working with connexions and joint work with the leaving care service and foster carers.

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

There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures which follow good practice in safe guarding children and young people
 All people are interviewed as part of the recruitment process and an adequate record of interviews was found on file for newly appointed applicants. Telephone enquiries were made to follow-up references.
 All social work staff files checked indicate staff hold an appropriate qualification, many have considerable family placement experience. All have a working knowledge of the Children Act, Working Together and the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.
 Field social workers and others completing friends and family/specific assessments have been offered four training sessions in the last year
 The figure of 27 workers excludes those who work on the family link scheme.

Total number of staff of the agency:

27

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**

The service operates a workload management system that attempts to ensure that tasks are prioritised and allocated appropriately. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy in the STEPS team and three vacancies in PFT. Three new posts had been created.

Appropriate management monitoring systems have been developed to monitor the percentage of completed carer reviews, safe care policies on file, unannounced visits to carers and foster care agreements. Systems to monitor assessment, and approval practice were already in place.

The majority of staff reported receiving appropriate levels of supervision from their team managers, some staff had experienced difficulty in accessing the stated frequency of supervision though this had not had a detrimental effect on service delivery. In specific situations external specialised advice has been accessed. Many staff were appreciative of the quality of supervision given. Inspectors found evidence of feedback on performance and professional development issues within supervision. Performance Annual Reviews (PAR) were found on files examined.

Staff and carers reported having access to a range of on going training and appropriate professional and skills development, this includes internal and external courses, and inspectors were shown evidence to confirm this. A dedicated full-time fostering training officer has now been appointed to the Training Department and takes a lead in developing and delivering foster carer training.

An administrative review took place in 2004/5. Individual social workers did raise specific concerns about the level of administrative support, including a rapid turn over of clerical staff resulting in training, retraining, and support issues particularly in the STEPS team.

There was a general feeling expressed by staff that Family Placement Officers are inundated with "clerical tasks" that could be more appropriately and cost effectively completed by clerical staff. Additional information technology equipment has been purchased for social workers. Some staff told inspectors that greater efficiency would be achieved through provision of laptop computers enabling staff to work from a variety of sites.

Procedures are in place to deal with enquiries from prospective carers through the FRT, carers reported that these systems work well.

The Single Referral Service co-ordinates placement requests. Communication problems identified in last years inspection where fostering officers appeared not to be consulted on the day placements are made have been largely eliminated.

A range of advice is made available by the agency to carers including childcare, medical, and educational and other professional and legal advice. These services continue to be developed and a number of new initiatives have been identified in the last year particularly in regards to education and child health.

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

Following the last inspection the service reviewed the fostering service staffing levels in December 2004. The review concluded that current workloads were appropriate but suggested a number of initiatives to consider around recruitment and retention of staff.

Inspectors found evidence that there are insufficient numbers of staff in post to meet the needs of the fostering service. The service reported that the only carers without an allocated worker were those who were leaving the service. However, the inspectors did identify some carers not falling into this category who did not have an allocated support worker. At the point of inspection records indicate that 11 carers did not have an allocated support worker. Whilst measures were in place with relevant team managers nominated as a contact person in the absence of the allocated worker carers reported some difficulty, particularly during periods of sickness absence, of having no consistent contingency. The service offered to these carers is not commensurate with the statement of purpose. In addition, 67 carers responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, of these 66% felt that the fostering service was understaffed. Questionnaires from carers indicated that some have been left without an allocated support worker for significant periods.

The service has a recruitment policy and strategy in place for recruiting new carers. Where shortfalls in particular types of placements, eg based on geographical or longer-term needs, the strategy includes actions to address the shortfalls. The effectiveness of this recruitment strategy should continue to be monitored and relevant information from SRS regarding difficulties in placement choice should be used to inform the strategy.

The assessment of foster carers follows a well-established process and integrates a competency-based approach. Timescales for assessment are in line with national recommendations and clear information is available to applicants on 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?****3**

Staff are employed by the Local Authority that has well-established employment policies and practices.

Carers are able to access out-of-hours support via the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and the Family and Placement Support Service (FPSS). Carers generally reported they were able to contact FPSS and had received helpful support. Some carers reported that they would contact their Adoption & Fostering Officer if they required support out of hours and had been given mobile telephone numbers for specific expected scenarios.

The carers allocated fostering worker provides ongoing support and supervision of carers. Managers have developed specific monitoring systems to ensure that carers receive monthly visits from their allocated worker. The caseload management system is used to identify caseload priorities and can help managers to identify where there are shortfalls in the level of support due to competing demands.

The Local Authority has its own 1st, 2nd and 3rd tier Health and Safety Policies to which staff are expected to adhere.

The Local Authority has an established whistle blowing policy that is made available to all social work staff.

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**

Staff interviewed reported that there is now a formal staff induction process in place, and new staff felt that this provided a useful structure to their initial introduction to the fostering service and their new role. The most recent recruit reported they had a generic local authority induction as well as opportunity to work shadow colleagues.

The majority of staff questioned reported to inspectors that they receive appropriate training opportunities; these have included joint courses with foster carers. Take up of post-qualifying training still appears to be a low priority, particularly the PQCCA.

The Looked After Children Service Manager has co-ordinated a series of staff briefings during team meetings to ensure that staff are informed of changes in child care legislation and related policy, this includes the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The foster care training officer based in the training department has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of courses provided along with the individual team managers and service manager.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>All staff are supplied with an appropriate job description setting out their duties and responsibilities. Policies and procedures are available to staff and the service has embarked upon a process of updating these.</p> <p>Staff confirmed that team meetings and team discussions are regularly held and minutes for one of the teams were seen.</p>		

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>Records and discussions indicate that there is a strategy in place for working with carers. A number of carers raised concerns about the payments for skills scheme. Some reported that they believed they had developed the skills of Level 3 carers and were concerned that this had not been recognised by the department and that consequently they were not being paid at Level 3 rates. Confusion also existed amongst carers as to whether the level of payment received related solely to the skills of the carer or in part to the needs of the child placed. Other carers believed that a quota system is operated so that whilst they may have the skills they are prevented from progressing through to Level 2 or 3. The inspectors could find no evidence to support these comments however, the service report the payment for skills scheme is scheduled for review in 2005/06.</p> <p>The service has set up additional foster carer support groups throughout the county. Carers interviewed were enthusiastic about this development and some are invited to co-lead these groups with a Family Placement Officer. Some of groups were well established whilst others were reported to be struggling with attendance and further work is needed to establish the viability of the groups. One group had incorporated training sessions into their meetings.</p> <p>Some responses from carers, whilst recognising the value of the new groups, also referred to the value of the original less structured support groups previously in existence. The groups need to be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis to effectively support a wide and diverse range of carers.</p> <p>The inspector met with the newly established foster carers liaison group, who were able to discuss achievements and concerns. They confirmed the value of regular meetings with the Looked After Children Service Manager. The group need to consider how they can further develop an effective liaison role with a wider range of carers.</p> <p>55% of carers have received an annual review since the last inspection. A plan is in place to secure 100% of completed reviews by 31st March 2005. The service still needs to confirm the process for annual reviews and provide staff and carers with written guidance.</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?

2

In the majority of cases carers are supervised by an appropriately qualified Adoption & Fostering Officer (But see NMS 17).

Evidence was found during case tracking to confirm that the support offered to carers is generally of a high quality. Further evidence was found to confirm that Adoption & Fostering Officers monitor carer practice and encourage practice developments in a sensitive and consistent manner. Evidence of unannounced visits was found on most files audited although the service report only 24% compliance as of January 2005

The service has yet to develop its own specific foster carer handbook. Carers do receive a nationally produced publication on approval but this obviously does not detail local practices services and expectations. The service intends to publish and distribute a carer handbook by the start of April 2006. The lack of a service handbook contributes to some of the confusion and misunderstanding that appears to exist within the foster carer network

Interim foster care agreements have been reissued following some comments made by carers. Further consultation remains ongoing through the carers consultation and liaison group.

All approved foster carers automatically become members of The Fostering Network and are therefore eligible for the services this provides. Support workers make carers aware of their membership and this is also referred to in the new Foster Carer Agreement.

Foster carers have access to the Corporate Complaints Procedure and are provided with written information about this. The processes should also be set out in the Foster Care Handbook that is currently being developed. The inspectors recommended that the provision of support that will be made available to carers who are subject of an allegation and investigation should also be included.

Records of current allegations, the investigations and outcomes, are maintained and inspectors were provided with a summary of these. These showed that incidents were thoroughly investigated. The service should continue to track both ongoing complaints, monitor historical complaints and provide details of outcomes of complaints.

Inspectors found evidence that where appropriate the service removes carers from the register. Policy guidance in relation to this area of work has been developed since the last inspection. There is now specific policy guidance available to the fostering service in relation to making a POCAL referral.

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

All “mainstream” carers receive pre-approval training. This is delivered by Adoption & Fostering Officers and includes input from experienced carers. Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers there is an expectation that they both attend this training.

The service has a mandatory training programme for Level, 1, 2 and 3 Carers, this includes: Equality and Diversity, Health and the Looked After Child, Education and the Looked After Child, Safer Caring, Managing Behaviour, Recording Skills for Foster Carers, and First Aid. There are other optional courses available to all levels

NVQ’s for foster carers have now been launched with 10 carers currently undertaking the award and further carers identified for the next intake in September 2005. A number of carers raised concerns about lack of access to NVQ’s, currently only being available to level 3 Carers.

The service expects a Foster Carer Training proforma to be on each file, and there is a training plan on the annual review form. Panel were observed by the inspector to carefully consider training undertaken by carers.

The support group for carers own children was launched at the “very successful” Christmas party, and further support groups are scheduled for the February holiday 2005 with others planned for Easter. Many carers and their children have commented how much they appreciated and recognised the commitment of those who planned and coordinated this event.

Carers reported that most Adoption & Fostering Officers ensure that they have contact with their children and explore the impact that fostering has upon them, others have more limited contact. The majority of carers were concerned that their children received no formal recognition for the significant role they play when their family fosters and the formation of a recognised group whilst too late for some, was viewed positively.

Training for both carers for children with disabilities and the newly formed “Task “fostering project was not examined at this inspection. Both need to be evaluated and brought within the umbrella of fostering services generally in addition to pursuing their individual specialities to provide consistency of training opportunities to all carers.

The effectiveness of training is reviewed on an ongoing basis and the foster care trainer has responsibility for formally evaluating this on an annual basis.

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

The service has undertaken a major piece of work since the last inspection. The resulting carer file recording policy has been implemented across the resource in all areas except for children with disabilities and the inspectors found improved consistency in records. There is a specific audit policy which has been developed and further work is planned to improve Quality Assurance systems during 2005/6. The files seen are well organised, audited and monitored with dates and signatures to confirm this.

There is a good understanding from carers and details from the service about what paperwork is required and expected with carers increasingly insisting on being provided with relevant papers. Some difficulties do still exist; whilst on most files the appropriate paperwork was available not all was completed comprehensively and in some cases information was very sparse. Some contained just front sheet details and forms on file were often not dated or signed.

Information given to carers was sometimes more up to date than the information on young peoples files in the fostering resource and basic information available before commencement of a placement from some placing social workers was highlighted as poor.

Foster carers were aware of the basis for their current placements, they knew the intended duration of the placement where this was clear and carers understood the purpose of the placement and the child's legal status. The service had recently introduced training in record keeping for all mainstream carers, and a proportion of carers had recently attended.

Inspectors found examples of carers encouraging children to reflect upon and understand their history. There were examples of appropriate material being kept for when life story work is undertaken. Carers described Adoption and Fostering Officers offering guidance and support in these areas but had received no written information.

The extent to which carers maintained ongoing recording for the children in placement varied. Most kept records that were read and signed by their AFO's during supervisory visits, these records provided valuable reference material when carers were preparing information for reviews. These carers also felt that their records would afford them with a level of protection in the case of a malicious allegation or complaint being made. In other cases records kept were more limited. The service should continue to carefully monitor the standard of recording and provide assistance where needed.

All carer's seen maintained records in a suitably secure fashion, they were aware of the

confidential nature of the information disclosed to them and took care not to share this inappropriately. Some carers remained concerned that field social workers do not disclose all relevant pre-placement information to them; here carer's have challenged this with the support of their Adoption & Fostering Officer.

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**

Separate records are maintained for staff, carers and children. These are in a permanent form and are stored in the County Council archives when they are no longer required but can be accessed on request. Guidelines exist for staff on the keeping and retention of files and there is a procedure for storage and managing confidential information.

Policy guidance states that it is the Adoption & Fostering Officers responsibility to ensure that files are appropriately maintained. All entries are expected to be legible, signed and dated. In the majority of cases this guidance was followed and files were of a good standard.

The Customer Relations Officer holds records of complaints and investigations are co-ordinated by child protection teams. Comprehensive reports are compiled following investigations into allegations including reports by independent consultants commissioned to lead some investigations. During the inspection carers reported some confusion about historic complaints and felt they were not kept informed. Inspectors found the outcome of one investigation was unclear. The service is advised to keep a summary of all complaints and investigations, including historical, in order to track the action taken, the outcome and notification.

The service have developed a system that monitors the records held. All records were found to be stored securely and there is a departmental policy on access to records.

There is no evidence that carers and children are encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments including any disagreement with what is written. The service accepted the recommendation made for encouraging user access following the first inspection and prioritised this for action in 2004/5. This recommendation is repeated. This information might usefully be included in the children's guide and foster carer handbook.

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

All Social Services premises including those used for the main functions of the fostering service are accessible to all workers during normal working hours.

The premises used by the service do have an equipped base from which staff can work. Access to IT equipment has been further improved in the last year. Staff reported that they have adequate desk and storage space. The staff have suggested some would benefit from the provision of laptops to aid timely record keeping and flexible working.

There are facilities for the secure retention of records. Appropriate measures exist to safeguard IT systems.

The County Council has insurance arrangements in place to cover all of its premises. Foster care panel continues to meet at Shire Hall following a survey undertaken with carers who attended Panel in 2004.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	9
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This standard does not apply

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	9
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This standard does not apply

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

Carers receive an allowance and fee, depending upon their skill level, for each child in placement. These allowances are well publicised throughout the service.

Whilst there were some examples of delayed/over payments this did not appear to be widespread or excessive.

A review scheduled for 2005/6 will address skill levels for carers and payment for skills.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service has made considerable progress in this area and there was evidence that much work had been undertaken to fulfil the quality assurance function of the Panel.

The inspector scrutinised 4 sets of Panel minutes, observed Foster Care Panel in January 2005, met with the Panel Chair, the educational psychologist and the proposed Looked After Children Health representative.

The Foster Care Panel has now been appropriately established and takes place on one day each month with extra panels scheduled in when necessary. These include approvals and reviews for the whole range of fostering services. Members of the Panel included those with expertise in education and a member who had been placed with carers. A further member with expertise in child health is due to join panel in February 2005.

Panel training Days had taken place and more were scheduled for 2005.

Observations from the inspector include: professional chairing of panel, a clear explanation of the process, all members contribute and are involved in discussions and selected questions to applicants were appropriately asked. Panel minutes are comprehensive.

The service has issued guidelines on the reports that are required for Panel and applications will continue to be monitored and improvements advised. The feedback from Panel to the managers and the quality sheet from the Agency decision maker (Head of Service) should ensure the service continues to improve the quality of the assessments.

With the following exceptions Regulation 24 is fully met:

The service is advised to be especially vigilant in respect of quoracy, whilst all Panels appeared quorate, the Panel held on 5/10/05 had 5 members present but only one was an independent member (Reg 25 (1) requires at least 2 independent members) . The good practice recommendation identified at the last inspection for a suitably qualified but more independent chair had been considered and should be kept under review. Particularly in respect of the potential conflict of interest of the Looked After Children Service Managers operational role in authorising placements/agreeing variations to carers approval in emergencies.

Checks for all the Panel members were now in place, with the exception of one confidentiality agreement and a 2nd reference for one member.

Variations and exemptions have been presented to Panel since September 2004 with recommendations for approval from panel going to the Agency Decision Maker. (Head of children's services)

There were a considerable number of variations made in the 3 months prior to the inspection. This could indicate that issuing variations has become common practice and is a worrying indicator that insufficient suitable well matched placements are available with often little or no choice of alternative placements. The inspector highlights this as a serious cause for concern and, along with the comments of standard 8 urges the service to address as a matter of urgency.

Currently the Service Manager (chair of Panel) signs these variations and exemptions for emergency admissions. It has been agreed that these will then go through the normal panel process of careful consideration with a recommendation to the agency decision maker. The Panel needs to be careful that with large numbers of exemptions and variations needing attention, the process does not become merely a monitoring exercise.

One exemption was found to have a time scale of more than 2 years. This should be unnecessary if all annual reviews are up to date, are reviewed within statutory timescales and any change of approval taken to Foster Care Panel.

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 Family Link Service has 104 carers all of whom have an allocated support worker.

A Family Link Reference Group has been established; this includes parent and carer representatives and meets quarterly. The statement of purpose has been ratified by this group but has not yet been presented to councillors.

The service is in the process of developing and refining a children's guide that will be available in Makaton.

Family Link social workers based in the team for Children with Disabilities complete assessments that are presented to foster care panel, although gaining sufficient panel slots was reported to be problematic

Parents are reported to be central to the information sharing and decision making in placing children in respite care and remain central in most cases in promoting children's educational needs.

The Family Link service would benefit from shared training for managers, staff and carers and involvement in both general and specialist key developments in the wider fostering service.

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?

2

Inspectors found evidence through contact with a range of people to indicate that the Local Authority is sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing family and friends as carers. Systems are in place to encourage family and friends to offer placements and increasingly the authority is encouraging the use of residence and adoption orders to secure greater permanence for young people living with family and friends.

Family and friends assessments are currently completed by field social workers. As reported earlier these workers do not feel that they have the relevant skills or expertise to complete this work. This has been addressed in the last year by making available assessment training four times a year for these workers. Inspectors were informed that the authority are due to transfer responsibility for family and friends assessments to the fostering service in 2005/06, whilst this may help to integrate these carers in to the mainstream fostering service it will have significant workload implications for the current fostering teams. The previously mentioned recruitment to three newly created posts will support this increase in workload.

Within the family link service parents are encouraged to identify potential carers and these specific carers are assessed and supported by Family link workers in the same way as non-specific carers. In the questionnaire returns many specific family link carers did not see themselves as foster carers.

Family and friends carers for mainstream placements do not have access to the same quality of support and training as other foster carers. They are not allocated an AFO as a support worker and are not always routinely invited to training provided for other registered 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 24th January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

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

NO

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 July 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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

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 Cathy Shea of Local Authority Fostering Service 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 Cathy Shea of Local Authority Fostering Service am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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