



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Coventry Family Placement Service

Stoke House

Lloyd Crescent

Coventry

West Midlands

CV2 5NY

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

Coventry Family Placement Service

Address

Stoke House, Lloyd Crescent, Coventry, West Midlands,
CV2 5NY

Local Authority Manager

Jack McConnochie

Tel No:

02476 659009

Address

Stoke House, Lloyd Crescent, Coventry, West Midlands,
CV2 5NY

Fax No:

02476 659004

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?

Date of last inspection

04/08/03

Date of Inspection Visit		24th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Pamela Shelton	
Name of Inspector	2		
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

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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

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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**

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Coventry Fostering Service is part of Coventry Social Services' child care provision. It provides accommodation and care for children and young people who are being looked after, either temporarily or on a long-term basis, by the local authority. The service caters for children and young people aged 0 – 18 years of either gender. It makes available a wide range of foster carers in order to respond to the varying needs of those requiring a service.

The service is part of the Children and Families' Placement Service that is based on one site. There is one overall service manager and a number of team managers. The fostering service comprises four teams, each with one team manager. They include: a recruitment team that undertakes the recruitment and preparation of potential foster carers; two fostering teams that supervise and support all approved foster carers, including specific workers for family and friend carers; and a placements team that receives requests for placements, whether fostering or residential, and matches requests to placements. Social workers within all four teams undertake the assessment of potential carers and submission of the application to Panel for approval. In addition, there are two adoption teams.

Coventry has established separate adoption and fostering panels. The Fostering Panel is chaired by the Service Manager for the Children and Families' Placement Service. The agency decision-maker is the Head of Children's Services. Applicants are invited to attend Panel.

The service provides long-term and permanent foster placements, including with family and friends. It also provides emergency and time-limited placements, the latter when workers have identified a particular task, such as preparation for longer-term fostering or adoption, or a twin-track arrangement when the plan is either a return home or adoption. The service offers, on a limited basis, respite placements for children placed with other foster carers or living at home where workers identify that a break from caring will support the placement. Day care is also available in similar circumstances, and to allow foster carers to attend training or other foster care activities. There is a specialist scheme for children whose difficulties present a particular challenge. The Council has a contract with a national voluntary organisation to provide short breaks or longer-term care for children and young people with disabilities.

Foster carers progress through a fee-paid scheme based on their level of experience and skills. The specialist scheme operates separately with carers receiving a flat-rate fee that is higher than the highest rate of the general fee-paid scheme. They also have 28 days' paid leave and retainers up to a specified number of days when no child is placed with them.

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.)

Coventry City Council is providing a sound fostering service to the children it looks after. There is strong and decisive leadership and a clear sense of direction. Progress has been made on all the matters of concern raised in the last inspection, and developments are planned to improve the service further. Managers were mainly aware of any current shortfalls in the service, and responded positively and promptly to issues raised in the course of the inspection.

This is a well managed service, including the ready availability of data and systems to manage performance. Managers are accessible and viewed positively by staff and carers alike, and there are satisfactory channels of communication. However, there is too great a reliance on the Service Manager who currently shoulders an unreasonable workload. This is being rectified as the mainly inexperienced team managers assume greater responsibility for day-to-day decision-making, and a post of service deputy is being established; the latter must be expedited. The Service Manager chairs the Fostering Panel which creates a potential conflict of interest as he inevitably is drawn into discussions relating to foster carer applications and reviews. There is an agreed plan and budgetary provision to appoint an independent chairperson, and, again, this needs to be carried through.

The service is doing very well in supporting carers to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. The process commences with very full assessments of the prospective foster home which sets a baseline. Extensive preparation, advice and training are provided for carers, and follow-up checks are undertaken as part of the annual review. Appropriate arrangements are made to protect children from abuse and neglect, in particular the safe caring agreements completed by carers. Foster children overwhelmingly expressed the view that they felt cared for. The one shortfall is the absence of placement plans for every case. This denies the foster carer a written record of the key information about the child and terms of the placement. It undermines the ability of the carer to provide safe care, and this deficit must be rectified immediately.

There is a good range of carers, including from minority ethnic groups. The service supports carers in responding appropriately to children's differing backgrounds and encouraging their talents and interests. However, too many placements are made as an emergency which militates against suitable introductions and matching, and contributes to the increasing number of placement moves for children.

Contact arrangements are being handled well, and young people expressed satisfaction with them. The service is also making good progress in its arrangements to hear the views of children and young people. There are satisfactory systems in place for children to raise any concerns about their care, and a clear majority of those interviewed or responding to the questionnaire said they knew how to complain. However, a small number did not, and the Department needs to ensure that it regularly advertises the arrangements.

The service plays its part effectively in promoting the health and educational needs of foster

children. The recent appointment of a CAMHS worker specifically for children looked after is greatly appreciated by foster carers. The service is positively supporting numbers of young people to remain in their foster home beyond the age of 18. However, there is a lack of written guidance about the role of foster carers in supporting care leavers and a dearth of information about the contracted-out care leaver service. This has to be rectified.

The organisation and structure of the service delivers an efficient and effective foster care service. The staffing complement is adequate and, despite some difficulties in recruiting to posts, the service is creating a suitable environment in which to recruit and retain staff. This includes appropriate and diverse workloads, good quality and regular supervision, and satisfactory levels of administrative support.

The service has a dedicated team for the recruitment and preparation of foster carers. It is making systematic attempts to recruit from under-represented areas and groups but would benefit from the input of a professional marketing person to enhance its recruitment activity. Staff are making thorough assessments of prospective carers and, mainly, undertake regular supervisory visits which carers find helpful. Annual reviews were completed in a satisfactory manner, and presented individually to the Fostering Panel or in summary form depending on circumstances.

The service sets out very clearly its expectations of carers through preparation and induction sessions, written guidance and the Foster Carer Agreement. There is excellent support of a practical nature available for carers. Support groups and a local Foster Care Association provide satisfactory channels of communication with the service although some carers still considered that their views were not heard. Carers progress through skills levels that clarify the required competences; these levels are related to the payment of a fee. The training programme is suitably broad in focus but there is no training plan setting out what the programme aims to achieve or evidence of an evaluation of its effectiveness.

The service is maintaining appropriate case files and other records of its work in suitable conditions. The records inspected were of a satisfactory quality and the files in good order. Foster carers receive support and guidance on the maintenance of records relating to children placed with them. However, they need more training and guidance about helping children come to terms with their past, and both carers and children should receive more information and encouragement about having access to their records.

The Fostering Panel manages its work efficiently and effectively.

Family and friend carers have relatively recently come under the management of the fostering service and were not previously formally approved as carers. The service has made positive progress in assessing all of these cases and presenting them to the Fostering Panel. It has established dedicated posts to assess and support these carers in future. To this extent, the Department is demonstrating its commitment to placing children within their family network. It would be beneficial to include some reference to this commitment in the service's Statement of Purpose.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Overall the service is being managed in line with regulatory requirements. There are a small number of standards that are not fully met, in respect of which this report identifies requirements for action, but the agency generally meets the needs of children placed by it.

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 _____
Second Inspector _____
Regulation Manager _____
Date _____

Signature _____
Signature _____
Signature _____

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	24.2	4.5	The Department must appoint as chair of the Fostering Panel a person who has no responsibility for the day-to-day management of any person carrying out assessments of prospective foster carers.	30 September 2005
2	8.1	5.3; 5.4	The Department must expedite their stated intention of appointing a deputy of the fostering service who will also be the registered manager.	31 December 2005
3	17.3	9.7	The Department must ensure that the placement plan and other relevant LAC documentation are provided to foster carers at the time of placement or within the first week of placement.	7 March 2005
4	17.1	14.2; 14.4	The Department must ensure that there are clear written requirements to assist foster carers in understanding their role in preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living; this should include a clear statement about the provisions of the after-care service.	31 December 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
1	1.5	The Reviewing Officer should check at each review that the child or young person has received a copy of the children's guide to the service and understands how to raise any concerns about his or her care.
2	9.8	The service should review and revise in consultation with foster carers the guidance relating to foster children missing from home and arrangements for them to have overnight stays with friends.
3	11.5	The reports about complaints should include reference to how many complaints or representations are directly made by children and young people, including via the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service.
4	16.10	The Department should review the availability of PCs to social work staff in order to facilitate and encourage access and usage in the interests of good communication and the efficient use of resources.
5	17.5	The service should review the staffing of its recruitment team and consider establishing a professional marketing post.
6	23.9	The service should clarify what it is aiming to achieve through its training programme for carers and evaluate its effectiveness.
7	24.5, 6 & 7	The service should offer training and guidance to foster carers to assist them in helping children to understand and come to terms with their past.
8	25.7 & 12	The service should ensure that foster carers and children know the nature of the records held about them, and are enabled and encouraged to have access to them.
9	32.4	The statement of purpose should include reference to the commitment to and value of placing children and young people with friend and family carers.

* 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	10
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NA
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	NA
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	NO
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	NO
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	24/02/05
Time of Inspection	09:00AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	57

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

The Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service was updated in 2004. It was approved by Cabinet in November 2004, and subsequently a copy was sent to every foster carer.

The Statement covers all the requirements as set out in the regulation except that the section about complaints has not been fully completed. This is rectified by the production of quarterly reports to the Children's Services Group that provide the number, category and detail of all complaints received. The information can be easily transferred to the Statement of Purpose.

The Statement accurately reflects the practice observed by the inspector during fieldwork. It includes reference to links with the Education and Health services provided for children looked after.

The Statement has been translated into a guide for children and young people that describes the service and clearly explains how young people can complain. Details are included about NCSC (yet to be updated to CSCI), the NCH Children's Rights Service, and Children's Rights Director; and how the information can be provided in another format or language. The guide is temporary pending discussions with children and young people about the contents and format. It is colourful and contains essential information for young people living with foster carers. However, its language is less accessible than it might be. Responsibility for providing the guide to children and young people who become looked after falls to the locality social worker but, in addition, a copy has been given to every foster carer. Of the 34 young people responding to the questionnaire, 24 said they had received the children's guide and 25 that they knew how to complain (these were not the same young people in all instances). This leaves a small but significant number who say they are not clear about what to do if they have concerns about aspects of their care. The reviewing process offers an opportunity to check on the position directly with the young person.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The Service Manager for the Children's Placement Service is a qualified and experienced manager of many years' standing. He demonstrates his business and management skills by means of the business plans and performance information that he produces on a quarterly basis for consideration by the Children's Services Group in a meeting with the Director. His financial acumen is evident from his handling of the introduction of the fee-paid scheme for foster carers in order to reward carers appropriately, and to attract and retain more of them. Since his arrival less than three years ago, he has clearly led from the front and introduced many changes and new developments to the benefit of the service. Staff and foster carers alike were positive about what he has achieved, and remarked upon his accessibility and responsiveness. He has not undertaken the NVQ level 4 in management but is due to commence the Corporate Management Development Programme which he affirms is commensurate with the competences required of the NVQ programme.

Of the four team managers, one is very well experienced and has achieved the NVQ level 4 in management in addition to her professional qualification. She effectively acts as the deputy in the absence of the Service Manager, although the position has not been formally recognised as such. The other team managers are all qualified but relatively new to the management role. They demonstrated their understanding of what is required of a manager, including the management of performance, and were beginning appropriately to assume increased responsibilities: for example, the approval of additional allowances for foster carers. Staff were positive about their managers' accessibility and support, and foster carers referred to their availability in the absence of their own link worker.

All of the managers demonstrated a good knowledge of the service at the frontline. They displayed appropriate expertise in child care work as well as a commitment to the children's welfare. At all times during the course of the inspection they conducted themselves in a professional manner.

The Head of Children's Services also displayed an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the current position in the fostering service and planned developments. He expressed full support in his management team.

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

All the social work staff are appropriately qualified. CRB checks have been carried out on all staff whose appointment pre-dated the introduction of this requirement and an undertaking given to renew them every three years. All new staff are subject to CRB checking before commencing work, in addition to telephone confirmation of their references, and a check of the validity of their qualifications.

In respect of agency staff, the service uses agencies approved by the Council who forward details of potentially suitable candidates based on the job description and person specification. Team managers interview them and the usual checks are made prior to appointment.

Appropriate staff records are being maintained and are available on site.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Staff and carers were clear about management arrangements within the service, and there was evidence of appropriate levels of supervision and monitoring of practice: specifically, individual supervision, annual appraisal, quality checking of files by team managers, and of foster home reviews by the Service Manager. The service was working to produce quality standards to inform service expectations.

The Service Manager is based on site and is visible and accessible to staff and carers alike. Foster carers reported that they have a channel of communication with the service via the local Foster Care Association, which managers attend on a regular basis. Link social workers also attend the local support groups. A fostering forum is to be re-established during 2005 to which it is hoped to attract a wider audience than attend the Association and support groups.

There was evidence of regular financial monitoring of the budget. The fees and allowances paid to foster carers are reviewed annually, and carers are advised by letter in advance of the new financial year of any changes.

The Fostering Panel is chaired by the Service Manager responsible for the Children's Placement Service who directly line-manages the team managers in the fostering service. Observation of the Panel in session indicated that the business was handled professionally and effectively. However, on some occasions, the Service Manager inevitably, and appropriately, becomes involved in matters that directly relate to applications coming before the Panel, and this constitutes a potential conflict of interest. Both the Service Manager and Head of Children's Service stated that it was their intention to appoint an independent chair of Panel, as is the case for the Adoption Panel, and that they had identified finance in the current budget to achieve this. This aspect represents the only shortfall identified in the service under this standard.

The Head of Children's Service appropriately acts as the agency decision-maker.

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

30

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.

4

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. Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	2
	2
Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4) The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The service is managed effectively but too much responsibility is currently vested in the Service Manager. This is neither appropriate nor efficient, particularly when he has a wider range of other responsibilities that demand his attention as well. The current organisation of the service dates from the arrival of the Service Manager, whose level of investment and tight control have brought about some necessary changes. With a full complement of team managers in post, albeit mainly newly-appointed and relatively inexperienced, it is an appropriate time to increase their range of responsibilities and formalise a post of service deputy. As well as easing the workload of the Service Manager in respect of detailed matters of management, it would increase the number of managers who are available to make what are frontline decisions, and enhance their level of skills. The Service Manager and Head of Service advised that they recognised this situation and had in hand measures to create a deputy post from within the current establishment who would also become the registered manager of the service. <i>Subsequent to the inspection fieldwork, the Service Manager advised that the changes to the staffing establishment were agreed by the relevant personnel and were being put into action.</i></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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The inspection process included the following: visits to four foster homes where both foster carers and children were seen and interviewed; separate meetings with a group of foster carers and young people in foster care; perusal of responses to questionnaires from carers and children and young people in foster care; interviews with staff; and access to 12 files, the complaints file, and a range of policy documents and procedures. Together, they provide the evidence to assert that foster carers in Coventry are providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment to a high standard.

The assessment of potential carers includes a thorough appraisal of the accommodation in terms of its size and fitness to accommodate children, and its level of comfort and cleanliness. The homes visited were of a very satisfactory standard.

Written guidance has been produced to assist link social workers in determining the level of occupancy in bedrooms, taking into account the normal family standards, and the wishes and feelings of young people in placement. There was evidence in one case, where sexual abuse was a matter of concern, of a careful assessment and production of a detailed safe caring plan.

A health and safety check is carried out as part of the assessment for approval, and is considered again as part of the annual review. This includes checking car licence, insurance and MOT details. There is a separate assessment when potential carers are dog owners. The preparation and training programme for carers includes reference to health and safety including safe caring practices. Link workers work through an induction pack during their first visit to recently approved carers, which includes expectations in respect of health and safety matters. All carers complete a standard safe-caring document and this is enhanced when a child or young person is placed who presents particular challenges. In addition, the Foster Carers' Handbook has detailed guidance on all aspects of health and safety, including the safe transportation of foster children in carers' cars.

The service provides safety equipment. It also has in place schemes to assist carers with the purchase of a vehicle suited to their caring responsibilities, and to adapt their home to provide more space or more suitable accommodation.

Foster carers who participated in the inspection understood and were content to be visited and interviewed as part of the Commission's inspection process. They had received information in writing about the process.

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 has a good range of carers covering different ethnic origins, cultures, gender and sexual orientation. It has recruited proportionally a higher number of carers from black and other ethnic minority groups than feature in the local population, including a high number of African-Caribbean carers. Even so, it has proved difficult at times to match children and young people who are mainly of dual heritage with available carers. This is particularly the case with older children where placements with white British carers continue to be made. Managers monitor these trans-racial placements and will move a young person if a more culturally-suitable placement becomes available and it is judged in his or her interests to do so.

The Foster Care Agreement makes clear the expectations of carers in respect of children's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Preparation sessions and subsequent training clarify these expectations. There is a specific Black Children in Care group to enhance the children's sense of identity, and a separate black foster carers' support group where they can focus upon the particular matters that affect their caring experience.

Children and young people who responded to the questionnaire overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with their level of care. They indicated that they felt supported and loved, that their views were sought on a range of matters, and that they participated in a range of leisure activities. The service will pay additional allowances where appropriate to support children and young people to pursue their interests and talents. Carers can apply for a leisure passport that gives access to leisure facilities at a reduced cost.

The service for children with disabilities is mainly provided by Barnardo's under a service-level agreement. This is subject to a separate inspection.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The service has a separate placement team that receives and processes all placement requests. The placement request form includes the relevant information needed to identify a suitable placement, including ethnic, religious and linguistic factors.

In reality, a high number of placements are made as emergencies, which militate against the involvement of the child and family in placement choice or a process of introduction. Foster carers referred to the problems experienced when placements were made in an emergency, including a lack of prior knowledge about significant aspects of a child's care. Only one matching report was seen on the small sample of files inspected and one placement plan.

There was no evidence of planning meetings being held either before or immediately after the placement in order to discuss, amongst other things, any additional support that might be required to support the placement.

The self-assessment questionnaire makes reference to the difficulties of routinely being able to match children and young people requiring a placement to those available. There was evidence of a substantial number of children having two or three moves within their first year of placement.

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
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The preparation sessions for potential carers and subsequent training programme covers dealing with abuse and safe caring practices in an appropriate manner. This includes the provision of relevant literature from the Fostering Network and a copy of the ACPC Summary of the Inter-agency Child protection Procedures for Coventry. The child protection training is designated core training, which means that newly-approved carers have to attend as part of their agreement with the service and to allow them to progress to a higher level.

Each foster carer completes a safe caring pro-forma document and this is reviewed at the time of the annual foster home review. A specific and more detailed document is produced when it is evident that a child or young person's past experiences or current behaviour indicates the need for enhanced measures. A foster carer couple seen as part of the inspection talked about how they dealt with a particular situation, indicating very well their understanding of the need to protect both themselves and the child.

The service makes clear what forms of punishment are acceptable and unacceptable in a policy statement that features in the Foster Placement Agreement, and provides written guidance in the Foster Carers' Handbook about managing difficult behaviour. All the children and young people who responded to the questions regarding punishment and restraint indicated that punishments were appropriate and restraint methods acceptable. The Service Manager expressed surprise that some young people, albeit small in number, referred to restraint methods having been employed by foster carers, and intends to investigate this matter further. The vast majority of children and young people responding to the questionnaire stated that their locality social worker always or at least sometimes saw them on their own and that they were asked for their views about their foster carers.

The Service Manager collates information about any allegations of neglect or abuse of foster children. He maintains a watching brief on all such matters and reports individual cases to the Fostering Panel and CSCI as appropriate. An ongoing case was being handled in an appropriate manner in the face of considerable opposition from the foster carers involved.

The service has a policy on bullying that forms part of the Departmental manual of procedures and also features in the Foster Carers' Handbook. One of the preparation sessions gives helpful guidance to potential carers. The Department has produced a policy on personal relationships and sexuality, which was the subject of a conference for foster carers at the time of its launch.

Foster carers expressed concern that they did not always receive adequate information

about a child or young person placed with them, particularly when the placement was made in an emergency. Completion of the placement plan and other LAC documentation is the responsibility of the locality social worker, and there was no evidence on the files seen that these had been completed in all cases. Such an omission undermines the capacity of the foster carer to undertake their caring task safely. It also undermines the performance of the fostering service which, in all other regards, is achieving very well in respect of this standard.

Foster carers also raised some justifiable concerns about the quality of service provided by the taxi firms that are under contract to the Department. These include one situation in which young children spend long periods of time travelling because other children are transported in the same vehicle, and one in which a child was allegedly taken to visit a parent outwith agreed arrangements. Managers were aware of some of these situations and advised that transport arrangements are being reviewed. This review should be expedited.

There is written guidance about children and young people missing from the foster home that refers to different categories of concern. However, there is insufficient guidance about which children fall into which category, and whether or when staff and foster carers should be deciding on the category for a particular child. Similarly, the guidance about children and young people staying with friends overnight does not provide sufficient clarity as to who is responsible for making the decision. Foster carers expressed some confusion on this matter, and it was a source of contention for the young people seen as part of the inspection.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Children's Service's manual of procedures includes a clear statement about supporting and promoting contact between children and their families unless it is not in their interests to do so. This principle is also reflected in the Foster Carers' Handbook. The one placement agreement seen dealt satisfactorily with contact arrangements, and there was evidence of contact arrangements being reviewed as part of the LAC review.

Young people interviewed indicated that their contact arrangements were satisfactory. Some young people responding to the questionnaire regretted a lack of contact with their family but stated that they understood the reason why it could not happen.

The preparation and training of foster carers deal with contact matters. The Foster Placement Agreement clearly sets out the carer's role in supporting contact arrangements. Foster carers referred to contact arrangements positively. The assessment of competence

as part of the foster carer's progression through the different levels of fostering specifies the need to demonstrate a range of skills in managing contact. The service has provided record sheets to foster carers to assist them in maintaining suitable records of the child's placement with them, including in relation to contact. There was evidence of some excellent, detailed records being maintained.

The service facilitates contact by arranging for it to take place at a separate location to the foster home where this is deemed appropriate. It provides transport or pays mileage costs to foster carers where they provide the transport.

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

Policy and practice guidance emphasises the importance of listening to the views of children and young people. Foster carer preparation sessions cover the right of children to be heard, and the assessment of competence for progression through the different levels of fostering deals specifically with the ability to communicate effectively with the child or young person.

The LAC review provides an opportunity for the child or young person to express their views. In the third quarter of the year 2004-05, 98.8 per cent of children aged four years or over attended their review, a figure that is above the national target. Some young people interviewed during the inspection were not happy with the conduct of their review, in particular that school staff were present when personal matters were being discussed. However, those responding to the questionnaire were clear that they were involved in decisions about their lives, mainly in day-to-day matters but some more fundamental ones as well.

The service arranges an annual conference for children and young people looked after. A group of young people looked after, mainly those living in foster care, has recently begun to meet under the facilitation of a well-experienced ex-residential worker. They are producing a newsletter and have met with councillors on two occasions. The aim is to provide a channel through which they can express their views about their experiences in the care system.

An audit of the first 72 hours of being looked after was reported in March 2003. It made a number of recommendations, including that: information about foster carers should be available to young people ahead of the placement being made in order to assist their sense of security; an information pack for children looked after should be produced; and more ways should be established to listen to the views of children and young people on a regular basis. Progress is evident on each of these matters. Coventry subscribes to the NCH Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, which will support any child or young person looked after in raising concerns or making a complaint. In addition, the Department has a designated Complaints Officer for children and young people who deals with any complaints raised by or about their care. The vast majority of children and young people responding to the questionnaire said that they knew how to make a complaint. A recommendation has already been formulated in this regard.

A quarterly report about complaints and compliments is made to the Children's Services

Group. This is helpful and includes brief details about the nature of the complaint. However, it does not indicate how many, if any, complaints were received directly from young people. To include information about complaints or representations received from children or young people via the Children's Complaints Officer or the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service would be a further indicator of the extent of children's knowledge of how to raise concerns. It is also another source of information about what troubles children and young people looked after.

The service has taken some positive steps to ensure that it hears the views of the children and young people in foster care, and has the means in place to establish this as a systematic part of its arrangements.

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
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The service has a designated Medical Advisor from Health who sits on the Fostering Panel, undertakes medical assessments, and is available to provide advice. There is an agreement to appoint a nurse specifically to cater for the needs of children looked after. In addition, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service now includes staff whose specific role is to support children and young people looked after and be available to staff and foster carers for advice. They have recently moved to the location of the fostering service, which helpfully facilitates contact between the two services. Staff and foster carers alike were positive about the CAMHS development. The above arrangements ensure that the service is aware of available health services.

The placement request form includes information about any medical or health risks that can be taken into account when considering a suitable placement. The placement plan includes sections relating to health care and to consent for medical treatment. Placement plans were not available on all the files tracked for the purposes of the inspection. In addition, some foster carers responding to the questionnaire complained that they did not receive adequate information, including consent for medical treatment, at the time of placement. Experienced carers who were interviewed during the inspection indicated that they would not accept a child in placement without the requisite information. A requirement has already been placed on the service in relation to the production of placement plans that are the responsibility of the locality teams.

Red Books used by Health are now available for children aged under 5 years in which to record all health related matters. This will move with the child. The service has set up a working group that includes the Medical Advisor with the intention of introducing the BAAF Carers' Child Health Record. Performance data indicate that 74 per cent of children looked after had completed a medical and dental check in the last quarter of the year 2004-05, a decline from the previous quarter and below the national target.

Information is provided to foster carers about health promotion, including smoking, and

communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Carers are required to attend a first aid course during their first year of approval. The Foster Care Agreement sets out the expectations of carers in promoting the health of children in their care. The LAC review in which the foster carer participates includes specific reference to the child's health needs.

Apart from the failure to provide adequate health information at the time of placement, the service has made good progress since the last inspection in achieving this standard. As the requirement regarding placement plans features in another section, the score for this section reflects the progress made rather than the shortfall.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service maintains children who become looked after at their existing school where it is appropriate to do so. This includes the provision of transport where necessary. The service also participates in a scheme with the library service to promote reading. It has a programme to supply personal computers to foster homes and to date has provided them where young people attend secondary school and upper junior school.

The Education Access Service supports children looked after and their carers in all educational matters. Plans are in hand for the team to move to the same location as the fostering service which will further facilitate communication. The Education Department tracks the educational attainment of children looked after and the information is shared at an Education Reference Group established to enhance communication and collaboration between Education and Social Services with a view to improving educational outcomes for children looked after. A multi-agency Placement Support Panel considers cases where there are substantial difficulties that might precipitate a placement breakdown. They have authority to initiate additional support, including educational support where necessary.

At the end of December 2004, 83.7 per cent of relevant children had a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place. Foster carers are named as responsible adults for children's education and are expected, as a minimum, to be competent in liaising with the child's school over routine matters. They should also participate in the production of the PEP and attend school functions as appropriate. A training course is available to assist carers in supporting children's educational achievements.

The service ensures that children and young people excluded from school are provided with alternative education or day care in the short-term where other provision is not immediately available. Coventry has participated in the Widening Participation Project that encourages young people looked after to complete their compulsory education and move on to further or higher education. Although a direct link cannot be proved, the numbers of young people who are in some form of education, training or employment has increased.

Additional allowances are paid to cover expenses arising from school attendance, such as uniform, trips and equipment.

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?

2

The Department has a leaving care strategy with which the service complies. The Foster Carers' Handbook makes brief reference to the Leaving Care Act and informs carers about the location of the after-care service. It is, in fact, provided by NCH under a service-level agreement. However, this is unclear in the description: there is insufficient detail about what the service comprises, and not enough guidance for carers regarding their role and responsibilities. No other information was evident from the leaving care service about what it provides and when it will become involved and for how long.

Preparation sessions for foster carers include reference to leaving care. A two-day training programme was arranged during 2004 on supporting children towards independence.

There was no indication that the service and foster carers were not supporting young people to move towards independence, and providing support thereafter. The small sample of foster carers and young people interviewed demonstrated that care is provided for school-leavers and beyond. There is a scheme to allow fostered young people to remain in their placement until at least age 20 where circumstances indicate a need, and currently some 18 young people are benefiting from this arrangement. The fostering allowance is paid and a recent agreement has been concluded as to how this should be divided between the carers and the young person. Young people going on to university, or who specifically require it for their continuing studies are provided with a laptop. The computer suite to support young people looked after with their education has been opened.

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?

0

Staff files were not scrutinised as part of this inspection.

Total number of staff of the agency:

34

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

2

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?

4

The management structure is clear and appropriate with clear lines of accountability which were understood by staff and carers alike. The team managers and Service Manager are appropriately skilled and qualified to undertake their tasks, and were observed to be carrying them out in an effective manner.

The Service Manager has exercised a tight rein since his arrival nearly three years ago, his rationale being that he needed to understand what was going on and initiate some changes very quickly. Having achieved sufficient of his aims, he is appropriately delegating to his team managers an increased level of responsibility for day-to-day decision-making.

There has been an adjustment to the work undertaken by the different teams and staff within the service to achieve a balance in workloads. Staff were happy about the level and variety of their work. There were no waiting lists for work, and applications from potential foster carers were being processed in an acceptable timeframe – although some carers still considered that the process took too long. Assessments, approvals and reviews of carers were being completed effectively. Social workers in each of the four teams share the assessments in order to maintain the workflow and develop expertise; this is entirely

appropriate. The Service Manager considers that there remains further room to amend or inter-change tasks to the greater efficiency of the service and is continuing work in this regard.

Staff said that they receive supervision from their line-managers at an appropriate frequency, and that it was of good quality. They referred to the ready availability of their own manager or another in her absence for consultation purposes.

Staff considered that, in the last six months, training has become better matched to their needs. They commented positively on the induction provided for overseas staff. Staff and foster carers interviewed said that the training programme for carers is good, but that training should be differentiated to suit carers of varying experience. Carers said that it is difficult to get a place on the courses which they are required to take during their first year of approval, whilst staff reported that it is difficult to get some carers to attend training. They expect the situation to improve with the growth of support groups and hence greater contact with and between carers post-approval.

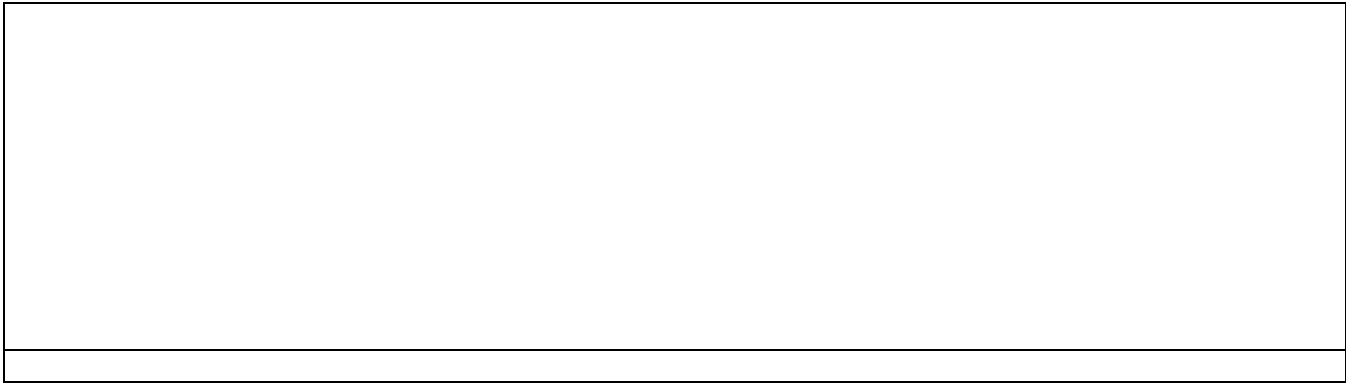
Carers are approved on a probationary basis for their first year. They have to build up a portfolio demonstrating their skills and achievements in order to move to full approval and then progress through the three levels of skills. These set out clearly the competences expected of carers at each level.

The service has increased the number of clerical and administrative staff and they provide an appropriate level of support to the operational staff. There are satisfactory arrangements in place to deal promptly and efficiently with enquiries from prospective carers. Clerical staff spend a not insubstantial amount of their time in word-processing reports for the social workers, whilst the running records on case files were mainly hand-written. Staff have recently been supplied with PCs in the ratio of one to two members of staff, which does not make for ready access. Access to an individual PC would encourage usage for the purposes of research, communication or word-processing. The latter would potentially save clerical time, which could be utilised in other ways to support the service.

On CD-Rom, staff have access to operational procedures covering all aspects of Children's Services. There was evidence in the files of advice being sought and provided on childcare, educational, medical and legal matters where needed.

Staff and managers in the service were duly aware of the pressures upon social workers in the locality teams, not least as a result of the difficulties in recruiting permanent staff. They were clear about the limits to their own roles; equally, they were willing to assist with tasks where appropriate, and to raise concerns where the lack of progress from the locality team was adversely affecting the welfare of the child. The service has introduced progress-chasing meetings when the plan for the child is a permanent placement. The aim is to ensure that staff from the fostering service and locality teams work effectively together in order to expedite plans and avoid drift. This is a helpful development.

The service only uses independent fostering agencies that are on the West Midlands Consortium approved list, a process that in itself ensures that required standards are met. The placement team draws up an individual placement agreement in every case. In addition, the Service Manager has introduced a questionnaire to ascertain the level of provision made for each child placed by Coventry, and whether working arrangements are satisfactory between the two agencies. With such measures in place, the service is taking satisfactory action to assure itself that the placements it commissions are of a good quality.



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

The full-time equivalent staffing complement is judged to be adequate to the required tasks on the basis of the evidence submitted and observations during the inspection. It is in line with the statement of purpose. When there are shortfalls in staffing, the service makes use of approved agencies to recruit staff on a short-term basis; it has also contracted with independent social workers to carry out specific pieces of work, such as the assessment of friend and family carers. At the time of the inspection, there were six vacant social work posts in the service: These vacancies were covered by four agency staff. There is a mix in the workforce of experienced and of inexperienced and relatively newly appointed social workers. The service now has all its team manager posts filled, and decisive and well-focussed leadership from its Service Manager; it is providing satisfactory levels of training and supervision, and workloads are at an acceptable level. The service is, thus, creating a positive environment in which to support and retain its staff.

The service has a dedicated team of qualified social workers and an experienced team manager whose role is to recruit and prepare potential foster carers and adopters. It has a rolling programme of five preparation groups each year. It utilises a range of media to promote fostering and adoption and has access to a generous budget to support its activities. It uses the expertise of the corporate marketing unit but does not employ anyone with marketing skills to assist in its work. The team has recently revised its recruitment literature which is eye-catching and informative in content. However, the service as a whole lacks a consistent house style in its documentation, and the standard of some of its public documents is not high enough.

The team was making a systematic effort to recruit carers from across the City, with particular emphasis upon disadvantaged and minority ethnic groups. They have achieved some success particularly with the number of African-Caribbean carers. The response for carers for the specialist and remand fostering schemes has been more limited. Twenty-two mainstream carers have been approved in the nine months to the end of 2004 whilst 12 have left the service. However, 30 more children are placed with foster carers than at the end of 2003 indicating a better use of existing placements. Against this, the number of children looked after who have experienced three or more placement moves in a 12 month period has risen to 13 per cent suggesting that there are insufficient numbers of carers in the required categories to meet the needs of children and young people who need a placement. The Service Manager recognises as an area of difficulty that the service cannot always make an appropriate match, especially for emergency placements, and that this increases the likelihood of disruption.

The process for assessing foster carers is clearly set out and was very well executed in the files inspected. The assessments covered all the aspects required by the standard.

The service is making sound progress in responding to the challenge of providing sufficient placements for the range of children and young people it looks after, and is planning developments to deal with areas of deficit.

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?

4

The arrangements for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting foster carers are sound and well executed. The service makes clear throughout the process what will be expected of carers, and involves them fully in the different stages. The Foster Carer Agreement sets out expectations on both sides, and foster carers also receive a task description as part of their induction.

Volunteers are employed to provide transport for some foster children. They are managed by a volunteer co-ordinator who takes up CRB checks and references, and provides induction, training and ongoing monitoring.

Coventry Social Services has a generic emergency duty team available outside office hours. Foster carers' views about the team's levels of responsiveness and support were evenly balanced between the positive and negative. However, the service also runs its own out-of-hours service that is available to provide telephone advice and support. Foster carers valued this service although there was some confusion as to which service they should approach in what circumstances.

The link social worker draws up a supervision contract with each foster carer or couple, including frequency of contact based on guidance produced by the service. There was evidence of adherence to these arrangements on the files inspected, including a separate record of the supervision visit. Link social workers appraise their carers annually as part of the annual foster home review. The work was carried out thoroughly in the files inspected.

There was evidence of support offered to carers apart from the formal visits. Foster carers interviewed were positive about the support they received, in particular the accessibility and responsiveness of staff including in the absence of their designated link worker. Foster carers replying to the questionnaire gave a more mixed response. There were some very positive comments about the help received (for example, with learning to drive), the good quality of supervision, and the prompt provision of equipment. Some comments were about the lack of information received about the child, insufficient involvement in important decisions about the child, and a lack of support in coping during difficult times. These relate more to the level of support from the locality team. A few were specific to the fostering service, including concern that carers were not asked their views about the service, and about the number of emergency placement requests.

The arrangements for assuring the health and safety of carers and their children are very good. For all its carers the Council provides public liability insurance cover that includes legal

costs in defence of negligence claims. Indemnity insurance to cover any claim resulting from child abuse is covered by membership of the Fostering Network for which the service pays. A whistle-blowing policy is available on the intranet to which all staff now have access. Copies were sent to all staff two years ago, and a copy is provided to new members of staff as part of their induction. It is not clear whether foster carers are aware of this policy.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

The training programme for staff was not inspected on this occasion.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Staff interviewed, were clear about their responsibilities. They have ready access to a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for Children's Services. Staff confirmed that they receive regular supervision that is of good quality, and that managers are available to them for consultation at other times. There was evidence of performance management arrangements to assure the quality of work.

The Council has recently introduced an appraisal system, which is being applied within the service.

The social work teams have regular team meetings. In addition, there is a monthly meeting of fostering and adoption staff in order to ensure an integrated approach to family finding and placements.

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?****4**

The service demonstrates a very positive commitment to supporting its carers through:

- a programme of training and development with courses arranged at varying times to suit carers' availability;
- a part-time worker whose role is to establish and support carers' groups across the City, including a specific group for black carers;
- payment of childcare costs to enable carers to attend training events and support groups;
- regular supervision that is viewed positively by carers;
- information, support and advice available at all times, including out of hours, from qualified staff;
- advice and support available from dedicated staff within Health and Education;
- access to the Fostering Network's mediation service;
- respite care, both during the day and overnight, available to all carers up to a maximum of 28 days per year, plus 28 days paid annual leave for specialist carers;
- support in purchasing a vehicle or extending or adapting their house;
- provision of good quality furniture and equipment;
- production of a newsletter for carers.

Some carers were unclear as to their entitlement to support in certain circumstances. The service is re-establishing the fostering forum as a direct channel of communication between the service and its carers at which such matters can be raised.

The first year of fostering is probationary and the first review of the foster home is formally presented to the Fostering Panel to confirm the carer's full approval. Thereafter, the Service Manager, who reads all the annual review reports, provides a summary of the reviews for Panel.

There was evidence of communication between the link social workers and child's social worker in order to maintain an appropriate flow of information.

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?

4

The Foster Carer Agreement sets out clearly the expectations of carers who foster for Coventry. It is written in straightforward language and covers all the matters relevant to provision of an effective service. It is signed by both the foster carer(s) and link social worker. The foster carer task description provides further clarity about the expectations upon carers.

Each carer is allocated to a qualified link social worker. The latter is responsible for working through an induction pack, once carers are approved, to ensure the provision of essential materials such as child protection procedures and weekly recording sheets. They also check that carers understand the support available to them and expectations of them. They complete the Foster Carer Agreement and Supervision Agreement forms, and provide a copy of the Foster Carers' Handbook. The latter is a comprehensive guide to fostering covering policies, procedures, legal information and insurance details.

The service gives guidance on the minimum frequency of supervision. Inspection of the files indicated that the guidance was mainly adhered to, save in the specialist scheme. In addition, there was not evidence of unannounced visits being undertaken on an annual basis in all cases. Supervision records were well maintained and the form gives a prompt about the matters to be covered during the meeting.

The practical support available to carers is set out in detail in the previous section. In addition, the service has taken positive steps to deal with complaints from carers about the delayed payment of their allowances. Neither the carers interviewed nor those replying to the questionnaire made reference to problems about prompt receipt of their basic allowances, and only one formal complaint was recorded up to the end of 2004 against several in the previous year. The process for dealing with additional allowances has also been simplified thus speeding up the process. Foster carers did, however, complain about delays in making payments for respite care, which rely on the locality social worker confirming the arrangement and inputting the information on to the system. The Manager could see no way round this under the current IT system.

The Foster Care Association has become more active recently and receives financial support from the Department. A team manager attends their meetings in order to act as a channel of communication with the service, and the Service Manager will attend by arrangement.

Information about the comments and representations procedure is provided to potential carers as part of the preparation session dealing with child development and child abuse. There are separate leaflets for adults and children. The record of supervision includes reference to complaints or allegations. These suggest a focus on complaints against the carer rather than those emanating from them. There was evidence on the complaints file of formal complaints from carers, and on foster files of concerns being raised. Responses to the questionnaire indicated strong feelings about a range of matters. It is important that carers are enabled to express any concerns easily both outside and as part of the formal complaints procedure. Re-establishment of the Fostering Forum will provide a useful arena in which to raise any concerns.

Procedures for dealing with allegations are clear. They are covered in a preparation session

and included in the Foster Carers' Handbook. In addition, every carer receives a copy of the summary of the ACPC Child Protection Procedures. Carers have access to the Fostering Network advice and mediation service for support during an investigation. The children's guide to the fostering service and leaflet about the children's complaints service provide information about what children should do if they have concerns about their care. The service maintains a record of complaints and allegations against carers.

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

The pre-approval training provides a comprehensive introduction to fostering. Experienced foster carers participate in the sessions and receive training to support them in this role. Different arrangements for holding the sessions have been tried (for example, during the day at a weekend) and feedback sought from carers. All newly approved foster carers are required to attend training on child protection and first aid. Some carers said that it is difficult to get places on these courses.

The training programme for 2004-05 covers an appropriate range of subjects, some with a direct focus on the child (for example, 'Meaningful Contact'), and others looking at the wider context (for example, 'Working in Partnership with other Professionals'). Some sessions have been held in an evening. The service held two conferences in 2004 on Problem Solving, and Sexual Relationships and Education. Childcare expenses will be paid to enable a carer to attend training.

To date, 19 carers have successfully completed the NVQ3 in fostering, and another 17 are undertaking the course.

Apart from the training programme, carers complete a self-development portfolio of knowledge, skills and experience in order to progress through the three levels of fostering. Each portfolio includes the competences that are judged necessary for the different levels. They assist carers in thinking about their fostering experience in terms of competences, and in demonstrating what they have achieved as well as what further skills and knowledge they require.

The current Foster Home Review form identifies carers' skills but does not link this to an appraisal of training and development needs. Instead, the portfolio has been used for this purpose. A new draft form was available during the inspection, which makes good this shortfall.

Despite the positive work being undertaken, there was a lack of clear direction of what the service was aiming to achieve through its training and development programme linked to a lack of evaluation and review of its current effectiveness.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Manual of Policies and Procedures for Children's Services includes a policy on case recording that sets out the purpose, format and required contents of files. Individual case files maintained by the fostering service contain a front-sheet detailing what records should be held on the file, whether for the child or carer, and in which section.

Each child's file contained sufficient information to establish the child's legal status and the reasons for being looked after. However, placement agreements were not evident on the sample of files inspected, a matter that is dealt with in standard 17 above. There was no indication from talking with foster carers that they were not aware of the purpose of the placement and status of the child but, in the absence of a placement agreement, it was not available in one document for the benefit of the carer.

There was evidence of foster carers keeping secure the records in respect of the child in placement. Carers are provided with weekly record sheets and guidance about maintaining them. There was evidence on the files of link workers viewing these records; some were an excellent record of the child's progress. The service is providing carers with memory boxes so that they can retain any items that record the child's achievements and key events in their life whilst in the placement. However, there has been no recent training on life-story work or helping a child to come to terms with his or her past, and there is no specific guidance for carers.

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 on site in respect of staff, carers and each child, and about any complaints or allegations. The children's files contain sufficient documentation to enable anyone reading the record to obtain an overall view of the case and the current plan. Likewise, the foster carer file contains sufficient information to make a judgement about their performance.

There is guidance about what should be maintained on the record, and all the files seen were in good order and well maintained. Written entries (the daily running sheets) were mainly legible. Other documentation including the LAC records were typed. All the records scrutinised were appropriate in tone and content. There is a robust system to monitor the quality of records.

Records are kept in locking filing cabinets in a room that is separate from other administrative files. They are stored in a systematic manner that allows ready access to authorised personnel. Only the latter have access to this area of the offices.

The service maintains an electronic record of its carers and children in placement, which is updated on a daily basis. It is a stand-alone system that provides data on the performance of the service but is not integrated with the Departmental database. It logs CRB checks and foster home reviews, and has recently been adapted to produce reminders of when a check needs renewing or a review is due. To date, the Department does not have electronic case records.

The Children's Services Manual of Policies and Procedures appropriately covers confidentiality, the retention of records and access to records. Similarly, the Foster Carer Handbook and Foster Carer Agreement refer to expectations about confidentiality, and the Handbook sets out what records are maintained in respect of children and carers and for how long. There is no reference to how carers and children can have access to their records.

In addition to the separate record maintained about complaints and allegations, there was reference on the files inspected of a record of the complaint. However, this was part of the running record and could usefully be separated out to provide easier access.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:		313
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:		22
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:		12
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 service occupies a house on the site of what was previously a residential unit for young people. It is of sufficient size for its purpose and provides satisfactory office accommodation for staff. It has an alarm and door entry system and together these ensure safety for the staff and premises. The reception area is limited and there are no interview rooms and one meeting room. However, there are adequate facilities in the main building for these purposes.

All the fostering service records are now held in locking filing cabinets in a room that is separate from other office facilities. This provides greater security and better access than the previous arrangements.

The internal telephone system does not extend to all the buildings on the site but an upgrade is expected imminently. The service has its own stand-alone IT system that satisfactorily provides management information on all aspects of the service. Developments are being made to improve further its facilities; for example, reminders about when annual reviews are due. It would be beneficial if the system was linked into the Department's database but this is not possible under the current system. Likewise, it would be useful if staff had ready access to the documents in use by the service in order to encourage completion by operational staff.

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
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The fostering service is part of Coventry City Council which is bound by publicly accountable financial management and reporting systems. This standard is, therefore, not applicable.

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
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The fostering service is part of Coventry City Council which is bound by publicly accountable financial management and reporting systems. This standard is, therefore, not applicable.

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

Foster carers receive an annual letter setting out the allowances and fees payable, including additional allowances for holidays, festivals and travel outside the City. The age-related allowances are based on the scale recommended by the Fostering Network, save for the specific child allowance, which is set at 75 per cent of the general allowance (see section 11 for further comment). Newly approved carers are given the letter about allowances as part of their induction process.

There have been problems in making payments promptly but these have now been largely resolved, as set out in section 5 above.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Fostering Panel is constituted as required by the regulations save in the matter of the chairing role, which is dealt with in section two. Two of the independent panel members are foster carers from other panels. A young person who has been looked after is being approached to fill a current vacancy. Two other independent members are from Education and Health and are equipped to provide appropriate educational and medical advice. CRB checks are undertaken before a member commences work.

Observation of the panel in session and scrutiny of the papers indicate that the panel fulfils its role efficiently and effectively in assuring the quality of the assessment process. It receives management information about the outcome of annual foster home reviews, and reviews in full any case where there is a significant change in the category of approval or where there has been a serious complaint or allegation.

The panel has not to date received information about the numbers and type of carers available, and how this matches the needs of the children requiring placement. The Service Manager will in future bring to panel the information prepared on a regular basis for the Children's Services Group.

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 Department has a contract with Barnardo's to provide its short breaks service to children with disabilities, save for a small number of children whose arrangement pre-dates the contract. That service is inspected separately. In addition, the Council's fostering service provides a limited amount of respite care for children living at home where a break will help to support the family. This is not part of an established respite care scheme and relies on availability of carers to undertake the task. This provision was not subject to inspection.	0
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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
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In late 2002, the Department realised that its arrangements for approving friends and family members as foster carers did not conform to the new regulations and national minimum standards. Carers were being identified, approved and supported by the children's locality teams with no reference to the fostering service, and hence were not being presented to and approved by the Fostering Panel. To its credit, the Department has taken decisive steps to rectify the situation. It has appointed a part-time temporary team manager to lead on this work and intends in the future to establish a permanent post of senior practitioner. In addition, two social worker posts have been identified from Choice Protects funding to provide dedicated support.

The task of assessing and approving these carers is well advanced, the aim being to complete it by the end of March 2005. No carers have to date been turned down, although managers reported that some carers have understandably found the process difficult to accept after having cared for the child for a lengthy period.

It has now been established as agency policy that the Fostering Panel should approve all friend and family carers where it is assessed that the placement will last beyond six weeks. Where a placement is made in an emergency, locality social workers are required to complete an initial assessment of suitability, undertake an initial police check, and commence the process of application for full approval. The case then passes to the fostering service, which will complete a full assessment. If this cannot be achieved within six weeks, the Fostering Panel is asked to give interim approval. The assessment is undertaken using the same format as for general carers in order to ensure that the applicants meet the minimum standards, whilst at the same time having regard to pre-existing relationships.

Carers are offered the same training opportunities as other foster carers but there has been limited uptake. A dedicated support group is not currently available. Friend and family carers receive the specific child allowance which is paid where a carer's approval is limited to a specific named child. This applies almost exclusively to friend and family carers. These allowances are set at approximately 75 per cent of the general allowances, which are based on the minimum recommended by the Fostering Network. Family and friend carers are not eligible to progress through the fee-paid scheme. These arrangements meet the letter but not the spirit of established case law.

The Department includes in its statement of policy for Children's Services that children have the right to be brought up by their parents or other family members if at all possible. It has

set a target of 10 per cent of children looked after to be placed with friends and family members. It achieved 11 per cent in 2003-04, which is in line with the national average. The request for placement form includes a question about the availability of family members to care for the child or young person as part of the process of ensuring that all avenues have been explored before arranging a 'stranger' placement. However, the statement of purpose for the fostering service makes no reference to family and friends as 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

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

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/> YES

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 5th April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Jack McConnochie of Coventry City Council 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 Jack McConnochie of Coventry City Council 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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