



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Luton Borough Council Fostering Service

Housing and Social Services

Unity House

111 Stuart Street

Luton

Beds

LU1 5NP

19th to 30th January 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Luton Borough Council Fostering Service

Address

Housing and Social Services, Unity House, 111 Stuart Street, Luton, Beds, LU1 5NP

Local Authority Manager

Ms Jenny Coles

Tel No:

01582 546000

Address

Housing and Social Services, Unity House, 111 Stuart Street, Luton, Beds, LU1 5NP

Fax No:

01582 547215

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

13/2/03

Date of Inspection Visit		19 th to 30 th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Ms Fiona Mackirdy	079465
Name of Inspector	2	Mrs Sally Snelson	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr Lionel Boyce and Mrs Lynne Howells	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

1. Statement of purpose

2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service

3. Management of the fostering service

4. Securing and promoting welfare

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

6. Records

7. Fitness of premises

8. Financial requirements

9. Fostering panels

10. Short-term breaks

11. Family and friend carers

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Luton Borough Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Luton became a Unitary Authority in 1997 following Local Government reorganisation. The Fostering Service Team is part of the Children and Families Division of the Housing and Social Services Department and is based in Unity House in the centre of Luton.

The service recruits, trains and supports foster carers and at the time of inspection had 113 general carers, 35 shared carers and 28 carers for specific children. In total these carers were supporting 264 children and young people.

Within this, the service was offering a range of types of foster care including emergency placements, short term or bridging placements, longer term placements, including permanent placements, shared care and short breaks for disabled children, preparing for independence placements, mother and baby placements and one contract care placement.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This inspection took place on 8 days between 19th and 30th January 2004. In addition one inspector observed the fostering panel on 12th February. The inspection consisted of meeting with managers, staff, foster carers and children as well as looking at records, tracking the cases of nine carers and the children placed with them and sending postal surveys to children, carers and placing social workers. The inspectors were Fiona Mackirdy and Sally Snelson.

The inspectors found the fostering service to be offering a good standard of foster care to children in placement. The service had continued to successfully recruit and retain foster carers and, following a period of staff shortage in the summer of 2003, had also filled vacant staff posts. Most of the national minimum standards were met or almost met. There were plans in place to develop the service in those areas where the national minimum standards were not fully met.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

The one standard assessed was not met.

The Statement of Purpose had been in place since the last inspection and had been reviewed. Draft copies of the children's guide were made available for the inspectors to see. A group of looked after young people had designed these guides and it was expected that they would be ready for distribution by the end of March 2004.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

One of the two standards assessed was met.

The fostering service was managed on a day-to-day basis by one full-time and one part-time operational manager. Their work was overseen by the Service Manager for looked after children. All were experienced practitioners in child care social work.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

One of the two standards assessed was met

The fostering service was being managed efficiently and effectively, although some staff and carers seemed unclear about the division of roles and responsibilities between the two operational managers.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Six of the nine standards assessed were met

The fostering service had recruited foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds. Those who met with the inspectors were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, including promoting children's safety, health and education. Those caring for older children were enabled to prepare them for independence.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

Three of the nine standards assessed were met

The inspectors found that the service had robust recruitment procedures for new staff, but that some records relating to CRB checks and qualifications were not contained on existing staff's files. Generally carers reported that they were satisfied with the level of support they received from the fostering service. The service had not made significant progress with planning and providing for carers' training needs since the last inspection.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Neither of the 2 standards assessed were met

The inspectors found that while recording systems in the fostering service were generally in order, a central record of complaints was incomplete. Children's records were kept within the child-care teams. Whilst these were mostly of an acceptable standard, in some files LAC documents were incomplete, unsigned or had not been recently updated.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

The one standard assessed was met

The premises were adequate, but space was at a premium and the inspectors understood that the accommodation and facilities were to be reviewed during the coming year.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

The one standard assessed was not met. Two standards were not assessed.

There was a clearly documented system of payments for carers. Some carers reported delays in receiving some payments.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

The one standard assessed was not met

The fostering panel was meeting monthly. Since the last inspection the membership of the panel had changed and the panel also had a new independent chair. The panel was fulfilling its statutory duties and there was appropriate recording of decisions made. One panel member needed to obtain a CRB check.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

The one standard assessed was met

The provider operated a system of short-term breaks for children with disabilities. The provision of this system had not been able to expand to include children with behaviours that challenge as had been anticipated.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

The one standard assessed was not met.

Since the last inspection the service had made more placements with friends and family, taking account of children's pre-existing relationships. Unfortunately the service was not meeting the statutory requirements or timescale in respect of assessing these placements as suitable.

The inspectors would like to thank staff, foster carers and young people for the help and time they gave to this inspection.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Although a number of Fostering Regulations were not met, the failures were not substantial. There was evidence from the fostering service of action required and plans had been made to address these matters in a timely fashion.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	3	FS1	The Manager must produce and distribute a children's guide to the fostering service	<u>Original Date:</u> 30 September 2003 <u>New Date:</u> 30 April 2004
2	17(1)	FS23	The Manager must ensure that the fostering service's expectation of carers to attend 4 courses in two years is maintained and monitored	<u>Original Date:</u> 31 December 2003 <u>New Date:</u> 30 September 2004
3	34(3)	FS12FS8	The Provider must ensure that placement agreements contain all the information listed in Schedule 6 and are signed	On receipt of this report and ongoing
4	35(1) & (2)	FS9	The Provider must ensure that all children in placement are visited in accordance with Regulation 35	On receipt of this and ongoing

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Fiona Mackirdy **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Sally Snelson **Signature** _____
Locality Manager _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	7,30	FS3FS15	The Provider must ensure that all records of staff employed by the fostering service meet the requirements of Schedule 1	30 June 2004
2	20	FS15	The provider must ensure that all staff, including administrative staff, carers and fostering panel members have applied for a Criminal Records Bureau certificate	30 April 2004
3	12(2)	FS4FS9	The Manager must keep accurate records of all complaints and allegations about foster carers and the fostering service and ensure that copies of this information are stored on individual files as appropriate	30 April 2004
4	17(1)	FS9FS23	The fostering service provider must implement an ongoing programme of training for new and experienced foster carers, which takes account of carers' availability and other responsibilities	31 September 2004
5	19	FS20FS15	The fostering service provider must ensure that unqualified staff carrying out social work functions do so under the direct supervision of qualified social workers who are accountable for their work	At all times
6	19	FS16	The fostering service provider must review the amount of administrative support for the team with a view to increasing it	30 May 2004

7	21(4)	FS20FS19	The fostering service provider must ensure that staff are appraised annually.	30 September 2004
8	21(4)	FS19	The fostering service provider must implement a training programme for all staff, including induction and in-service training, which reflect the policies of the fostering service	30 September 2004
9	17(1)	FS29FS22	The fostering service provider must ensure that payments to carers are made promptly and at the agreed time	30 May 2004
10	17(3)	FS12FS24	The provider must ensure that LAC documentation is completed in sufficient detail to enable foster carers to safely care for children, including, specifically, the state of health and health needs of children and the arrangements for giving consent to medical or dental treatment	30 May 2004
11	38	FS32	The Manager must ensure that where children are placed under Regulation 38 (kinship placements) that the carers and accommodation are assessed in accordance with this regulation, that a written agreement is entered into and that the placement does not exceed six weeks	At all times
12	27	FS15	The fostering service provider must ensure that foster carers are not approved unless the assessment detailed in Regulation 27 is fully completed	At all times

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS4	The fostering service provider should develop and publish a statement of how the tasks, responsibilities and role are shared between the two operational managers
2	FS8	The fostering service provider should ensure that written foster placement agreements contains specific reference to elements of matching which are taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match
3	FS16	The fostering service provider should keep a written record detailing the time, date and length of each supervision session, which is signed by the supervisor and member of staff at the end of the supervision and is available for inspection by the Commission
4	FS15	The fostering service provider should make telephone enquiries of referees in addition to obtaining written references for staff
5	FS16	The fostering service manager should develop written criteria for the weighting of social workers caseloads
6	FS22	The fostering service provider should develop a framework of circumstances under which a carer would be de-registered
7	FS4	The fostering service provider should establish a system for monitoring and improving the fostering service in accordance with Regulation 42
8	FS4	The fostering service provider should establish a system for making notifications in line with Regulation 43

* 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	19
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	19/1/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	138

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

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.
"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable. "X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A statement of purpose was developed prior to the previous inspection of this service; this met the requirements of the fostering regulations. A draft children's guide to fostering had been produced by a group of looked after young people with the support of Luton Social Services and local independent projects for children. During the inspection the inspectors were able to give feedback on ways in which this guide should be developed to fully meet the regulations. It was anticipated that a final version would be produced and distributed by the end of March 2004.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The appointed manager of the fostering service was the service manager for Looked After Children and, as such, had a number of years of experience in managing and monitoring services for children. She had a Social Work Qualification and an NVQ level 5 in Strategic Management. At an operational level, two very experienced practitioners in family placement matters were managing the family placement 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?

2

Procedures relating to the recruitment of the managers were robust with evidence of checks and qualifications retained on file. At the time of inspection Luton Borough Council had not implemented any system to renew police checks for existing staff or to routinely make telephone enquiries to follow up references.

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

The family placement team had one full time operational manager and one part time operational manager. There was evidence that they were clear about their respective roles and duties and worked well together, but it was not recorded anywhere how the tasks and delegated responsibilities were divided. Some staff and carers expressed a view that they were not sure how and by whom decisions were reached and implemented. The inspectors found that the fostering service was not effectively collating information about complaints and child protection enquiries; some information found on individual files did not appear in the central complaints record.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Job descriptions for managers were clear and outlined all main responsibilities and duties. All managers interviewed were clear about the level of delegation they had. There were suitable arrangements for deputising in the absence of the children's service manager.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The service had introduced structured supervisory visits, which took place at least three times a year, in between routine home visits. These supervisory visits looked in detail at the accommodation, health and safety issues and the standard of care provided. These matters were included in the annual reviews of carers' approval. The inspectors found evidence that the service was addressing the situation if carers were not providing an acceptable standard of care. An initial placement referral form had been developed which, if fully completed, would enable the service to consider the needs of the child comprehensively prior to placing. It also incorporated a detailed risk assessment in relation to the child and a potential placement. It was clear that this form was in the early stages of implementation and was not yet evident in every file. The foster carers that spoke to the inspectors were fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to health and safety.

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
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The service had successfully recruited carers from a range of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Due to the emergency nature of some placements it was not always possible to match children to carers in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language or culture. However, carers were made aware of their responsibilities for promoting the identity and culture of all children they were caring for. The service provided financial support for hair and skin care as necessary. Carers considered valuing diversity in the choosing to foster training and were given written information in the carers' handbook. Carers supporting disabled children had been provided with the necessary training and support to care for their specific needs.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)		
Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
As found during the previous inspection of this service the lack of available placements compromised the fostering service's ability at times to carefully match the child's needs with the carers available. They were still not recording why a particular placement was made, where this did not match the child's needs, although inspectors observed discussions of how to best place the child, from the limited availability. Placing social workers commented that the duty system enabled a single point of contact for making referrals for foster placements which was helpful. The inspectors were concerned that placement agreements were not always being fully completed and therefore did not serve their purpose in making carers aware of the specific needs of the child or aims of the 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
The service had explicit policies in relation to corporal punishment and all carers understood that there was no situation where this was acceptable. Carers had received some training on abuse and safe caring during their initial training before approval. There was no evidence that any training had been provided during the previous year on safe caring, managing behaviour or recognising abuse. Carers were now being required to develop a safe-caring policy, usually as part of the annual review process. Foster carers reported that having an identified duty worker meant that they received more information about the child prior to placements. However, this was not always supported by written information in placement plans or LAC documents.		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)		
The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
From the carers visited and files seen it was clear that the majority of contact was being risk assessed and usually took place in a family centre where supervision could be provided as appropriate. Carers were clear about their role in maintaining and developing family contacts and friendships. There was evidence that where possible children remained in the same school to maintain friendships and stability.		

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

The service had links with an independent Children's Rights Officer and other advocacy services. Some young people had also been asked to prepare the children's guide to the fostering service and had also worked on a guide about making complaints. The local authority had a children's panel, which was a committee of the council involving young people and elected members. There were plans to re-launch this as many of the young people were moving on from the service and there was a need to recruit new members. Carers spoke positively of the 'children who foster' group which arranged events and activities for the children of foster carers. The service had produced a format for seeking the views of children placed with foster carers and for the views of carers' own children about fostering. These had just started to be used as part of carers' review of approval. The authority was planning to buy a computer package, which would provide an interactive medium for seeking young people's views.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There were clear procedures and expectations of foster carers to support children to attend appointments and keep records of outcomes. These were checked during supervising social workers visits. The inspectors noted that few LAC documents had been completed with full details of children's health records or signed to confirm consent for medical treatment. There was evidence of good liaison between the local authority and the health care trust, enabling support from health professionals and training for carers.

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

Foster carers were very clear about their responsibilities in supporting children's educational needs. Where personal education plans were in place, foster carers had been involved in the planning and reviewing process. However, the inspectors were disappointed to find few completed PEPs on files, despite being told that over 50% of children had them. The programme of providing personal computers to foster placements had continued. The information management systems of the authority provided good information about the educational attainment of children looked after and the authority had an annual award scheme to recognise children's achievements, including attendance and effort. The allowances paid to carers took account of one-off expenditure on school uniform and equipment, although in speaking to carers, they were not always aware of this policy or

reported delays in being paid.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Foster carers who had been approved for placements of older children understood their role in supporting them to become independent. The 16+ team had developed written standards for enabling young people to gain skills in independent living. The fostering service had developed a proforma for use with placements for teenagers; this was a written agreement between the carer and the young person about the boundaries and expectations.

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?

2

A sample of personnel files were inspected. The local authority was operating robust recruitment procedures for new staff, although they were not taking up telephone enquiries as well as obtaining written references. The inspectors did note that those staff who had worked in children's services for some time did not have a recent CRB check on file, and there was no evidence on one file of a social worker's professional qualification. The authority had not applied for CRB checks for administrative staff. There were not systems in place to verify references, qualifications or CRB checks of agency staff. Family aides did express concern that they had been asked to do assessments of new carers without sufficient training or supervision of their work. The inspectors were also concerned to find that some carers offering placements to family members or friends had been given 'interim' approval, pending receipt of some statutory checks. This breach of regulations was discussed with the operational managers during the inspection.

Total number of staff of the agency:

20

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

4

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Within the family placement team there was a clear management structure and all staff were aware of their individual level of responsibility and accountability. Managers were weighting workers caseloads, but there was no written evidence of how this was determined. At the time of this inspection assessments of new carers were being undertaken by external contracted workers; in practice all these staff had previously worked for the fostering service and were aware of the quality standard expected for assessments. The inspectors were able to see evidence of the planned supervision sessions for staff – the managers were advised to keep a record of when supervision had taken place so that inspectors could verify the frequency. Since the last inspection staff reported that access to computers had significantly improved. The numbers of staff in the administrative team had not increased, despite the workload and tasks of the family placement team increasing significantly. At the time of the inspection the team were relying on the use of an agency worker to enable them to keep up with the workload, but it was not clear how long they would be able to have this extra help. Staff and carers clearly understood the different roles of the family placement

social workers and the children's social workers. A review of carers training needs had taken place since the last inspection, which highlighted a need for the service to consider how to support carers effectively to attend training. Carers who spoke or wrote to the inspectors endorsed this view.

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 fostering service had experienced some staff vacancies in the year since the last inspection, which had meant that some carers had not had an allocated supervising social worker for some periods of time and had been supported through the duty system if needed. However, there was evidence that once the team was fully staffed there would be sufficient numbers of staff to support the service. As mentioned previously, the service had used agency workers to assist and had contracted assessments of new carers to independent social workers. The service had continued to successfully recruit carers and was planning to have a referrals officer whose role would be to recruit new carers. Assessments of new carers followed a clear process, based on completion of the BAAF Form F, including assessment of competences to foster.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Luton Borough Council was operating sound employment practices for staff. At the time of inspection out-of-hours support was being provided by the emergency duty social work team, but a pilot scheme whereby support was provided by the managers of the fostering service was due to start. The intention was that following the pilot any qualified members of the team could volunteer for this role. Generally carers were being supported by regular visits, including more structured supervisory visits three times a year. Some carers had not had an allocated worker for a period of time due to staff shortages. Of 25 carers who responded to a postal survey, only 3 said the support they received was not enough. The service had also made significant progress in catching up on the overdue reviews of carers' approval. A buddy scheme was also in place that offered regular lunches for carers and aimed to provide support for new carers from more experienced carers. The inspectors met with some experienced carers running the scheme, who felt the fostering service needed to review the effectiveness and operational aspects of the scheme. Comprehensive information was available for carers and staff on health and safety matters, which were monitored during the supervisory visits and during the annual review of carers' approval.

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?	2
<p>At the time of inspection the rolling programme of staff appraisals was not up to date. Although the managers of the service had identified training that was needed for team members, it was not clear to the inspectors how this would be commissioned during the coming year. Through talking with staff, the inspectors identified a need for training in the specific procedures of the family placement team, including the use of some new paperwork and systems that had been introduced. Staff and managers confirmed that a day had been allocated to look at this.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>All staff had job descriptions and contracts, outlining their role and responsibilities. Staff and managers confirmed that regular supervision sessions were held and records kept. At the time of inspection the programme of regular appraisals had fallen behind schedule. Team meetings took place fortnightly and there was evidence that all staff had the opportunity to contribute at this time. Staff felt that the managers of the team were open, approachable and supportive, although the family aides were concerned that their unqualified status and lack of training was not always recognised or fully supported when they were asked to do similar tasks to qualified workers.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)		
The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Carers were fully aware of the support that they could expect from the fostering service and understood the different roles of their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. The foster carer's handbook gave written information about support services available, including assistance with children's health and education. The family placement team were in an adjacent office to most of the children's social work teams, which enabled good systems of communication.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

All foster carers were provided with a manual, which gave them comprehensive information on the policies and expectations of the fostering service. The service was planning to update this handbook in the coming year. At the time of this inspection all carers had a named member of the team who was supervising them, although this was not always a qualified social worker. Following approval, all carers had to sign a foster care agreement, which met the requirements of Schedule 5. The service had implemented a formal structure for some supervisory visits, but both staff and carers reported this was cumbersome. There did not appear to be any structure to those visits that took place between supervisory visits. Unannounced visits were taking place at least once a year. Carers did express concern about delays in receiving payments, particularly for respite, shared care or day care placements. Foster carers had the support of an independent mediation and advice worker from Fostering Network who could be contacted directly to provide them with independent support. The inspectors found the central record of allegations of abuse was muddled and did not always contain full information about the investigations or clear decisions about future support needed for 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 service was offering pre-approval training courses based on the Fostering Network's 'Choosing to Foster' sessions. The inspectors did note that on occasions potential carers had to wait for many months before a course became available. Also not all kinship carers were required to undertake this training. There was no structured programme of induction training for new carers following approval. A review had taken place of the training needs and provision for carers and there were plans to look at this area in detail in the coming year.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Inspectors found that recording in children's files was generally acceptable. However, as found at last year's inspection, some LAC documentation was not completed in sufficient detail to be an effective record for the purposes of the fostering service and some computer-generated records remained unsigned. Foster carers had been given verbal information about the purpose of the placement and why the child was in foster care, but this was not always supported by written information, as placement plans were not always fully completed. Some carers were keeping a diary of the day-to-day lives and significant events of the children, as recommended by the service, but not all carers had yet received a diary for this year.

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?

2

Since the last inspection administrative staff had completed a file audit for carers files; all carer's files seen were in good order. Records were stored in filing cabinets, most of which locked. The provider had clear policies for case recording, confidentiality and client access to records. Since the last inspection the service was keeping records about complaints and allegations on individual carers' files – unfortunately this was to the detriment of a central file, which was found to be incomplete.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	231
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	277
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	314
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	26
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	12
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	103.67
Maximum £	248.88

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service was located in the town centre in an office building that also housed other Borough Council departments. The area used by the fostering team was in close proximity to the space used by the adoption and looked-after-children teams which allowed for good communication. All the staff had desk space and access to a computer although access to the internet was limited. During the inspection the lay-out of the office was changed in an attempt to make room for new staff members who had joined the team. The office area was supplied with a range of filing cabinets and cupboards the majority of which could be locked. There was access for staff and the public during normal office hours via the front of the building and out of hours staff had access using a rear door and swipe card. Parking was very limited and staff had to find near-by road parking, which had health and safety implications.

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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This service was provided by a Local Authority and therefore was not required to demonstrate financial viability. However, there were clear delegations for budgetary responsibility and regular monitoring of expenditure on fostering services. Additional money for the service had been secured through Quality Protects and there were also plans for the use of monies secured through monies made available by government for a variety of projects.

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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There were adequate systems in place for the accounting and financial processes of the service.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Each carer was supplied with full details of the allowances that they were entitled to following approval. Allowances were paid at a weekly rate depending on the age of the child. There were also extra allowances available to provide clothing, school uniforms and holidays. Each child was given an age appropriate birthday and festival allowance. Carer's skills or development were recognised with a one off payment. During the inspection carers spoke or wrote of delays in payments. These delays appeared to happen when circumstances changed, for example when a new placement was made or when extra allowances were claimed. The service had made provision in the budget for the coming year to increase the allowances paid to its carers.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The foster panel was chaired by an independent social worker with over 20 years experience, of which many years had been spent in fostering and adoption. Over the last 12 months there had been changes to the panel membership necessitating a panel training session, which members said had helped to ensure consistency. The panel members included representatives from education and health services, independent representatives, a foster carer from another fostering service provider and an elected member of the council. The panel had robust terms and conditions which had been signed up to by all but one member of the panel. The inspector was concerned that not all the members of the panel had been checked by the criminal records bureau. The chair confirmed that she had the responsibility to monitor and review the work of the assessors. Following panel the chair would contact the decision maker to discuss any aspects of the panel.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A shared care scheme offering respite breaks for families of children with disabilities was operating appropriately. The scheme was open to children who were not looked after by the Local Authority and also offered breaks to carers who had chosen to care long-term for a child with a disability. A full-time social worker and a full-time family aide took responsibility for this service. These carers were offered the same training and level of support as all other carers with some extra training, particularly in children's medical needs, provided as needed. Previously the team had identified a need to include more looked after children with challenging behaviour in the scheme, although progress had not yet been made in addressing this. Carers spoken to were aware of the need to communicate well and build up the trust of the birth families who retained full parental responsibility for the children using the scheme.

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

The number of carers approved to look after the children of family and friends had increased over the last year. Whilst the inspectors were pleased that the service was becoming more sensitive to children's pre-existing relationships they were concerned that kinship carers were not being fully assessed in the six-week timescale required by the regulations. There was evidence that kinship carers were being taken to the fostering panel for consideration prior to a full assessment being completed. Kinship carers files that were inspected suggested that while some carers were being asked to attend the full choosing to foster course others were approved without training. The reason for these decisions were not documented. There was clear evidence that full checks were made on all kinship carers, although not always within the required six-week period.

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 19th January 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

A response from the provider is available at the Area Office

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

YES

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan within 28 days of receipt of this report, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

NO

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

NO

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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