



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Walsall MBC Fostering Service

Children`s Resources

Walsall MBC, Civic Centre

Darwall Street

Walsall

WS1 1RG

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

Walsall MBC Fostering Service

Address

Children`s Resources, Walsall MBC, Civic Centre, Darwall Street, Walsall, WS1 1RG

Local Authority Manager

David Bovell

Tel No:

01922 658239

Address

Children`s Resources, Walsall MBC, Civic Centre, Darwall Street, Walsall, WS1 1RG

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

NA

Tel No

Address

NA

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

NA

NA

Name of Registered Provider NA

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable) NA

Date of first registration

NA

Date of latest registration certificate

NA

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

22.03.04

Date of Inspection Visit		24th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Chris Fuller	079134
Name of Inspector	2	Linda Elsaleh	
Name of Inspector	3	Christine Lancashire	
Name of Inspector	4	NA	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		NA	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		NA	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		David Bovell	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
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Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to the development of a comprehensive fostering service to children/young people and their families. The Authority aims to recruit foster carers from as broad a representation of the community as possible, in order to meet these diverse needs. The main task of the fostering service is to provide of children/young people with family placements. This is achieved through the recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a wide range of prospective foster carers.

The statement of purpose re– submitted and approved by Cabinet in September 2004 includes the following details. The fostering service provides a range of placements including 99 Temporary, 31 Permanent and 13 Short Break. It currently provides 249 placements for children and young people (excluding short term breaks). There are 13 resource carers providing 15 placements for short term breaks. There are 59 relative friend carers offering 82 placements. Placements are provided by 130 approved foster carers of which 16 are African/Caribbean, 2 are Indian, 2 are Pakistani, 3 are dual heritage and 120 are White/European.

132 of the LA foster carers are In Borough, 44 LA foster carers are Out Borough. Relative/Friend foster carers In Borough are 35 and Relative/Friend foster carers Out of Borough 6. Agency foster carers In Borough are 10 and Agency foster carers Out of Borough are 86. This provides a grand total of 318 Foster carers.

The carers are supported by one strategic manager and three team managers, 6 senior practitioners, 15 qualified social workers, 4 family support officers; a training officer, a marketing officer, a peer support development officer and a co-ordinator of foster carer reviews. The two fostering teams, the Recruitment and Training team and the Fostering Support and Development support team provide the whole range of placements, including emergency, temporary and long term/permanent placements for children and young people aged between 0 and 18 years. The Fostering Service has developed a new permanency support team which provides support to Permanent Foster Carers, Family and Friend Carers and Adoption support cases.

In addition, the service offers short term breaks and a matching service for children with disabilities. Specific arrangements have been made to meet the particular requirements of individual children, including structural alterations, aids, adaptations and personal support. Other aspects of the service are the provision of a single referral point for referrals for all types of placements of looked after children, excluding short term breaks, which go through a referral meeting process. Matching is an important aspect of the service for in house resources, external and out of borough placements.

Walsall offers the opportunity to foster carers for career development and a professional fee. Training is being promoted by the organisation through the recent appointment of a training officer. A dedicated supervising social worker provides ongoing supervision and support to the foster carers to carry out the fostering task. Annual reviews of foster carers are completed.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

The second inspection of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service took place the week beginning 24th January 2005, just ten months after the first inspection. The inspection of the Fostering service followed immediately on from the CSCI Adoption inspection. Management of the services did express concern that this affected the respective services ability to show themselves in their best light. The Fostering Panel of the 13th January 2005 and Foster Carers Committee on the 26th January 2005 were observed. A small number of children and young people met the inspectors during the visit to the placement foster carers. This was a proportional inspection of key inspection standards; including a review of the action plan and progress made with statutory requirements from the previous inspection.

A Service Development Officer assisted the Management Team with the planning and preparation of the inspection. This was well organised with a good level of pre inspection information provided as requested. The inspectors wish to express appreciation of a good response of feedback questionnaires received from children in placement (19), foster carers (26) and placing authority social workers (55). All records requested were made available by the fostering service. All members of the organisation including foster carers and children/young people in placement assisted fully and responded constructively.

The first inspection in March 2004 had found that 21 of the 32 National Minimum Standards and Statutory Regulations had a number of shortfalls with a total of 63 matters to be addressed and 32 recommendations for good practice. Areas that gave major cause for concern were historically there had been ineffective management, staffing levels and vacancies, poor quality Looked After Children information and filing and administration systems, the standard of the premises, changes needed to the fostering panel, lack of service to family and friend carers and the lack of a Foster Placement Agreement.

On this occasion the Inspectors found the ethos of the service was positive and dynamic with a commitment to improving service provision and providing outcomes for children. This was evident in the enthusiasm and energy at all levels of the service. The majority of the large number of statutory requirements had been met. A number of those outstanding had been started, planned or ordered with timescales of works to be completed. The management acted upon some of the current issues raised before the inspection ended.

The overall findings reflected that the management of the fostering service have continued to progress the implementation of the National Minimum Standards. During the past inspection year there has been further development of the service through the new establishment posts, restructuring of the service, new members of panel, review of policy and procedures, new filing systems, provision of IT systems, provision of foster carers handbook and planned changes to the use of and some immediate repairs and maintenance of the premises have been actioned. The Children's Resources Service Manager has been seconded to the post of Looked After Children Project Manager. The new manager has been in post since November 2004.

Many aspects of the services were operating effectively. All aspects of the service are being reviewed and updated as monitoring and quality assurance systems are established. The statement of purpose has been reviewed to reflect the service provided. A foster carers handbook has been provided and there has been further consultation and involvement of foster carers in the review and updating of the information. There has also been consultation and inclusion of children/young people in the production of a Children's Handbook. Progress has been made in the provision of a Foster Placement Agreement. This is due to be implemented and in its current format will be dependant upon the LAC team staff and involvement and contribution from foster carers if it is to be successfully and meaningfully implemented. The Fostering Panel operates in compliance with regulation. There is an appropriate membership with the required persons represented.

There were significant shortfalls in the following areas. Some works have been completed to improve the security of the premises and remove the Adoption team to a new location with other teams due to move out. The location of the premises for the fostering service continues to be unsuitable for its stated purpose and it remains in a poor state of repair and maintenance. The building has some serious health and safety issues to be addressed in respect of use by staff, foster carers and service users. The Administration systems are under considerable pressure with three out of six staff vacancies. Constant changes in temporary staff providing cover. The relocation of an experienced skilled member of staff with the Adoption team. New technology and new systems coming on line. Limited training opportunities for unskilled applicants for posts. Records and recording in general had improved with the exception of family and friend's files as held on the Looked After Teams. Daily records, supervision, reviews were in the main found to be completed, relevant, current, signed and dated. Increased staff team and increased level of tasks and workload. There is some progress being made in the service delivery for family and friends carers. It is gradually being brought in line with that of resource foster carers. The sample of files seen, information at panel and placements visited indicate a disparity in the service provision. There are significant issues for staffing, level of service provision, training, support, policy and procedures and payments to be addressed. The monitoring of agency staff is unsatisfactory and inconsistent and must be addressed. The inspectors noted from feedback and operational structure the arrangements for family finding appears to be fragmented, resulting in frustrating unsatisfactory experiences for all concerned. A few comments were noted expressing concern for delays in the progress of care plans where a child's social worker was not allocated or the fostering service personnel were on leave (sickness or otherwise) and pertinent meetings were subsequently cancelled and set back.

The report makes some new requirements and recommendations in addition to those outstanding from the previous inspection. Overall there has been excellent progress made with the majority of the standards that have been assessed being met. The range of service provision was inspected through a sample of fostering placements observed, staff interviewed and records seen. There was evidence of good communication systems, improved LAC information, consultation and involvement of children/young people and foster carers and regular, purposeful supervision for foster carers and staff. The random selection demonstrated some excellent examples of foster care and good practice by staff and management with a commitment to providing suitable placements for children/young people.

The reviewing officer, development officer and quality assurance officer all contribute to effective monitoring and development of the service and systems. The new foster carers committee is an excellent new development. It is representative of the foster carers and eager to establish its parameters and working relationship in respect of the fostering service. The management ethos is proving effective in raising and maintaining the morale of the service through a period of tremendous change and development. It is being creative in maximising the potential of existing resources both in terms of staffing and foster care placements. It will be important to continue to receive and incorporate feedback from all stakeholders the children/young people in placement, parents, the foster carers, the fostering service staff group and placing social workers.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Not applicable.

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(a)(b)(c)	FS1	The responsible person must provide a Children's Guide which includes the following; a summary of what the Service sets out to do, information for the child on how to access independent advocacy, how to complain and the contact details for CSCI. 1.5	30/04/05
2	3(a)(b)(c)	FS1	The responsible person must ensure the Guide is available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.1.5	30/04/05
3	Schedule 7.9	FS4	The responsible person must provide a system for the management and monitoring of medication, first aid and medical treatment in foster homes. 4.1,	30/04/05
4	19	FS7	The responsible person must ensure there is an allocated social worker for the child to work cooperatively with the foster carer to progress a child's care plan. 7.3	31/03/05
5	33	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that information on LAC forms provide sufficient information to be satisfied a placement with the particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all circumstances. 8.3	31/03/05
6	Schedule 6 34(3)	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that foster placement agreements identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. 8.4	31/03/05

7	19	FS17	The responsible person must ensure that the high number of external and often geographically distant placements is addressed. 17.5	31/06/05
8	22	FS12	The responsible person must ensure that records held by the fostering service are suitable for access by children and foster carers, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including dissent. 25.12	31/05/05
9		FS26	<p>The responsible person must ensure that hazards are assessed and remedial action taken in respect of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asbestos ceiling panels throughout the building which have been assessed as safe as long as they are not moved or damaged • Window frames broken and rotten. • Flat roofs damage surface covering. • Provide adequate heating and ventilation systems. • Cleansing / repair of sewage drainage systems (to prevent odour). <p>26.1</p>	31/06/05

10		FS26	<p>The responsible person must ensure that the following items receive attention:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repair flat roof (permanence team room) and water damage to internal walls and ceilings. 2. Remove and repair damp mildewed patches on the interior walls of the short breaks staff room. 3. Provide adequate heating in all rooms. 4. Assess and repair cracked wall plaster in hallways and stairwell. 5. Replace the floor surfaces in the toilets and kitchen with sealed washable floor covering. 6. Replace the sinks with worn enamel or metal surfaces. 7. Provide bin lids in kitchen. 8. Replace top corridor carpet. 9. Make safe uneven slabs on walkways and in courtyard. <p>26.1</p>	31/06/05
11	17	FS32	<p>The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service addresses and recognises the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers.</p> <p>32.1</p>	30/04/05
12	17	FS32	<p>The responsible person must ensure that support or training are provided to family and friend carers. 32.3</p>	31/06/05
13	17	FS32	<p>The responsible person must ensure that annual reviews are completed for Family and Friends carers and their needs are met and assessed in the same way as other carers.</p> <p>32.3</p>	31/06/05

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	
NA		
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
NA		
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
NA		
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
NA		
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Chris Fuller	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Linda Elsaleh	Signature	_____
Third Inspector	Chris Lancashire	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Mike Gerard	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	The registered person must ensure that the fostering service's policies, procedures and any written guidance reflects the statement of purpose and is made available to staff and foster carers. 1.6	30/06/05
2	7(2)(b)	FS2	The Manager(s) must hold a NVQ level 4 in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by the NVQ level 4. 2.2	31/07/05
3	43(1) (2)	FS4	The registered person must ensure written notifications are provided without delay. 4.1	immediate
4	43 (1) (2) Sch 8	FS4	The registered person must ensure the outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers is reported. 4.1	immediate
5	12,26	FS9	The registered person must ensure there is formal evidence of lessons learnt from the findings of complaints and allegations and recommendations for action' to inform future provision of the fostering service. 22.8	31/05/05
6	14	FS10	The manager must ensure that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The views of the child/young person must be sought and appropriate records kept. 10.4 • Detailed information is included in the Foster Placement Agreement with regards to contact arrangements for the child/young person.10.7 	31/03/05

7	16	FS13	The manager must ensure that education plans (PEP) are provided for each child/young person. 13.3	31/03/05
8	16	FS13	The foster carer's role in school contact, e.g. parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan, is clearly laid out in the placement agreements. 13.4	31/03/05
9	16	FS13	The service must ensure that foster carers are provided with clear information, which forms part of the foster placement agreement, of who holds responsibility for giving consent to take part in such trips. 13.5	31/03/05
10	20 (3)(b)	FS15	The manager must ensure that suitable policies, procedures and guidance are produced in relation to the supervision of unqualified workers carrying out social work duties and maintain appropriate records of this practice. 15.5, 15.6 & 15.8	31/05/05
11	21(4)(a)	FS16	The registered person must ensure there is a formal system for the collation of feedback from annual appraisals of individual development needs, for the effective planning of training programmes for staff. 16.9	31/06/05
12	19	FS16	The registered person must ensure a appropriate level of clerical and administrative support. 16.11	31/03/05
13	Sch6	FS16	The registered person must ensure there is a clear understanding between fostering service social workers and the children's social workers of how they can work effectively together for the effective implementation of the Foster Carer Placement Agreement Format. 16.15	30/04/05
14	17	FS22	The manager must ensure that written copies of foster carers' supervisions are kept available on their files. 22.6	30/04/05
15	23	FS26	The registered person must provide an action plan to the Commission for Social Care Inspection with timescales for the relocation of the fostering services. 26.1	31/05/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS6	Provide clarification of the fostering service policy and procedure and practice in information to foster carers of the impact of the standard, for “no room sharing” for a child in placement, on individual approval category. 6.4
2	FS6	However, the service is advised to review its current recording format to ensure the assessment cover any individual environmental issues. 6.2
3	FS6	It is recommended the service ensures that detailed written records are kept of the assessment undertaken and outcome on each child/young person’s records. This must include the views and wishes of the child/young person in accordance with their age and level of understanding. 6.5
4	FS6	It is recommended a more structured approach to record keeping and training plans need to be implemented by the service. 6.7
5	FS12	Foster carers should maintain separate health records for each child placed. 12.8
6	FS14	It is recommended that there should be a period of joint work where the involvement of both the childcare social worker and the Leaving Care worker continues to ensure that carers understand the changing requirements of supporting the placed child towards adulthood. 14.2
7	FS14	It is recommended that training is provided in respect of preparing young people for independence. 14.3
8	FS14	It is recommended that the information system of the Transition & Leaving Care team should have an information system on education needs that dovetails with that of the Education Support team, so that carers can continue to support placed children’s educational needs. 14.4
9	FS16	The maximum frequency between supervisions should be included in section 4 (“Frequency/Duration”) of the supervision policy. 16.8
10	FS26	Consideration should be given to the provision of a staff changing area. 26.4 & 18.5
11	FS19	Review three different inductions offered; a corporate one, one for the Department and one for the Fostering Service with a view to rationalising this situation.19.2
12	FS21	A copy of the National Minimum Standards should be made available to all foster carers. 21.2
13	FS21	Review the support offered through respite provision to foster carers. 21.2

14	FS24	Foster Care Agreements should be updated to meet the 2002 Regulations as carers are promoted to new Levels with the new expectations and responsibilities that go with that. 22.4
15	FS22	Fee for membership of fostering network should be paid for all carers. 22.7
16	FS22	The manager should provide foster carers with the opportunity to discuss their concerns in relation to complaints and allegations of abuse. 22.9
17	FS29	Consideration should be given to the involvement of finance staff in the induction training of carers. 29.2
18	FS30	It is recommended that the quality assurance and monitoring of the panel functions is to be developed. 30.5
19	FS31	It is recommended that carers are provided with information regarding insurance cover provided in respect of the administration of invasive medication. 31.1 & 6.7

* 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	15
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	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	NO
Date of Inspection	24/01/05
Time of Inspection	9.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	105

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The statement of purpose was re-submitted and approved by Cabinet in September 2004. The statement reflects service development and changes within the service structure, as a result of the work of improvement projects. The update has included changes to the staffing structure and includes the qualifications and experience of Team managers and staff. The information will be amended at the annual review to include the qualifications and experience of the Manager of the service (Service Manager of Children's Resources). 1.4

The authority already has information available for children and families about services across Children's Social Services, as part of the "Need to know" pack. Since the last inspection systems are being developed to routinely offer access to the Statement of Purpose to children and their families.

It is pleasing for the inspectors to report that much work has been undertaken in order to produce a suitable Children's Guide. This work has included active involvement from the children and young people who have attend 'workshops' and responded to questionnaires. The consultation exercise with children and young people was held, about the information they would want to see included in the children's guide to fostering, as a central part of the project to develop the guide. The inspectors were informed that the children and young people had highlighted other items of information that they would like to be provided with, such as written profiles on the foster carers they will be placed with and preparing to leave care. The service will be exploring this further with the children and young people and foster carers.

The fostering service stated that the proposed final draft of this Guide is expected to be available in March 2005 and an evaluation process will be take place in April 2005.

A project to develop the Children's Guide which includes the following; a summary of what the Service sets out to do, information for the child on how to access independent advocacy, how to complain and the contact details for CSCI is in progress. 1.5

The project aims to provide the Guide in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.1.5

A review is currently being undertaken by the service on its policies and procedures since May 2004. The inspectors were informed that this process has already identified some training issues which appropriate action is being planned to address these. Three foster carers participate and contribute to the workgroup identifying those most relevant to foster carers, children in placement and the service. The policy and procedures are being incorporated on the IT systems in the Child Care Manual by TRI X. The Inspectors were

able to access a sample of policy and procedures through a lap top. Hard copies can be printed off and made available as required. The official launch to staff group is planned for April 2005 and then it will roll out to foster carers during the summer. 1.6

The inspectors look forward to commenting on the progress at the next inspection.

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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	0
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Standard not assessed on this occasion.

It was noted from written information provided the three team managers do not hold a NVQ level 4 in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by the NVQ level 4. 2.2

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?
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	3
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The statement of purpose provides a management structure which identifies a Service Manager of Children's Resources. The Manager meets the criteria of suitability. There has been an improvement to procedures for references as set out in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Telephone enquiries are made as follow up of the written references and a record is kept of the outcome.

The police checks are completed through CRB and will be renewed every three years. It was identified that two have been sent for and remain outstanding for the staff group. All others are complete and satisfactory.

The fostering service now receive return slips of CRB checks; these are held on site. These confirm and mirror the records held centrally.

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 staffing structure was provided in the pre - inspection information. There is a Service Manager of Children Resources. At operational level there are three managers with designated responsibilities in the fostering service but no lead manager with overall day to day responsibility. The inspectors have identified this as an area for concern to be checked out for the positive or negative outcomes of this in management decision making and delays in process.

The fostering service has access to very good quality assurance systems / tools at strategic level within the department. There is evidence of a range of project groups to look at different areas of the service development including leaving care.

A list of all notifications made was provided by the service in the pre inspection information. There has been progress with the reporting of notifications. In many instances there is a verbal notification of the incident to CSCI. This is followed up with a detailed written notification in clear type print. There is however a considerable delay in the production of the written notification often a month to six weeks following the incident. Significant is also the absence of the notification of the outcomes of Child Protection Investigations. 4.1

The management stated that there has been some progress in provision of a system for the management and monitoring of medication, first aid and medical treatment in foster homes. A working group is developing monitoring systems and guidance for foster carers. In the meantime the medication is monitored through supervision and logged on the supervision record. 4.1

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:	36
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.	14
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.	11
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?	0
Standard not assessed on this occasion.		

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 has been working closely with its Marketing Officer in relation to recruiting new foster carers. A thorough assessment process is carried out on all prospective foster carers. This includes attendance on the 'Skills to Foster' training and individual discussions are held with prospective carers. This enables any concerns to be discussed at an early stage.

Foster carers are provided with training in health & safety matters as part of their initial training and information is provided in the Foster Carers' Handbook. The inspectors were informed that post approval training is provided for foster carers. Records of training attended and copies of certificates obtained were shown to the inspectors by some foster carers during the visits to their homes. It is recommended a more structured approach to record keeping and training plans need to be implemented by the service. 6.7

The inspectors received positive feedback from the children/young people, placing social workers and parents about the environmental standards. Observations made by the inspectors found the homes visited to be decorated and furnished to a good standard.

The records examined show regular risk assessments are carried out on foster carers' homes. However it is recommended, the service reviews its current recording format to ensure the assessment cover any individual environmental issues. 6.2

The inspectors were informed of the new arrangements to enable foster carers to choose and purchase specialist equipment in order to meet the care needs of the children/young people placed with them.

There is evidence to show children/young people, who are not siblings, sometimes share the same bedroom. It is recommended the service ensures that detailed written records are kept of the assessment undertaken and outcome on each child/young person's records. This must include the views and wishes of the child/young person in accordance with their age and level of understanding. 6.5

Foster carers are provided with training in health & safety matters as part of their initial training and information is provided in the Foster Carers Handbook.

It is recommended that clarification is provided, in information to foster carers of the fostering service policy and procedure and practice, of the impact of the standard for "no room sharing" for a child in placement, on individual approval category. 6.4

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A sample of records were seen of placing authority child's social workers, fostering service workers, panel submissions, placement referral activity summary, post panel summary Dec. 2004 and feedback from placing authority workers, foster carers and children in placement.

It was found that the recent LAC documents held on files had improved with entries appropriately completed and readable. Sections regarding diversity and identity issues held relevant information. Joint training on understanding trans-racial placements involving both Fostering Service workers and childcare social workers has been included in the comprehensive training plan. The Fostering service training programme has been taken forward by the service training officer and complements the departments training opportunities and addresses specific needs including funding some external training. Links have been made with the Black Country Development Group with pre approval training being provided across the participating local authorities. There is an annual Black Children Conference hosted by respective local authorities. The Walsall local authority have launched the links into Excellence project to maximise children and young people's potential.

Feedback from foster carers, children's social workers and children's records show that there continue to be periods of time when children do not have an allocated social worker and the foster carer is frustrated with attempts to progress a child's care plan as review meetings, matching meetings or social work visits are cancelled or postponed. 7.3

The service acknowledges that it does not always meet the different cultural needs of Black and Asian children and / or needs of families and/or foster carers of different cultural backgrounds. There were examples where the fostering agency contracted external services to provide the appropriate support and facilities. An example being therapeutic support to children focussing on meeting needs of ethnic minority children. Independent support to a foster carer in the instance investigation of allegations. This continues to be an area for further service development.

There were some examples of adaptations to a carer's home to provide for short breaks for several children with disability. The standard of work, equipment and furnishings were all of high standard providing a good quality placement.

Several carers were observed to fully support the children and young people placed with them in pursuing particular interests hobbies and activities.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There has been an improvement in the information written in the LAC forms. LAC forms and LAC review forms were available on children's files. This is of particular importance as the quality of the new fostering placement agreement will be dependant upon the information provided by placing authority social worker. This will determine whether the placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all circumstances. 8.3

The records seen held evidence of planned placements. Children's risk assessments are included in the referral matching process. There is a new referral/matching pro-forma waiting to be implemented in line with the Foster Placement Agreement

The referral / matching format contains specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identifies areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child. It is not evident that the Foster Carer has been consulted about what they may consider to be any gaps or shortfalls. 8.4

The new Foster Carer Placement Agreement format is due to be implemented. The effectiveness of the form will be dependant upon the placing authority workers full understanding of its purpose and their contribution to the process and the direct involvement of the foster carer in the preparation of all the documents.

Children and young people have requested that they receive some introductory information about the prospective foster carers prior to visiting and this is being developed by the service.

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?****3**

Pre inspection information was provided in respect of the protection of children and young people. The process of complaints and allegations in respect of foster carers was inspected including observation of decision making and monitoring at fostering panel. The fostering service training officer was interviewed and training programmes provided.

The appointment of the Training Co-ordinator and the new ACPC programme of training have made a considerable impact on the child protection training available to foster carers. The training officer provided a programme of joint ACPC training opportunities that have been organised for 2004/2005. Foster carers complete a child protection module during the pre approval training. Child Protection 1 & 2 have been well attended and two more courses are planned. There are also courses in related subjects such as; working with sexually abused children, positive handling of children, bullying, missing person's policy, self harm, safe care, men in foster care and stress. There are also some joint training opportunities.

Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information of accidents and incidents and on the circumstances number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. The notifications made to CSCI included the instigation of eleven instances referred for Child Protection enquiries. All instances are referred to the Initial Response Team and a decision made whether it follows the ACPC route. Notification of CSCI is included in the procedure on Allegations of Child Abuse against Foster Carers.

The observation made of Fostering panel indicated that there had been some progress with the Independent Support available to Foster carers regarding dealing with complaints and allegations in respect of the service provided by foster carers. Policy and procedures regarding "Allegations against foster carers have been provided through Tri X and are due to be launched in April 2005.

However feedback from foster carers and observations at Fostering panel indicate that this remains unsatisfactory with timescales of the process being too long and drawn out with insufficient contact and information regarding progress. Also the foster carers feel the stigma attached to being involved in an enquiry is never formally removed as all relevant stakeholders are not informed of the outcome.

The quality assurance role of panel and the fostering service is being developed. There was no formal evidence of lessons learnt and recommendations for action for the fostering service and or others from the findings of complaints and allegations. See standard 22.8

The bullying procedure addresses bullying inside and outside the foster home. In the questionnaires returned none of the children identified that they were experiencing being bullied. There was no information available on the percentage of children who do not report bullying (see below). The aspect of bullying is covered with foster carers during supervision and management intend to set up monitoring systems.

The fostering service is gradually developing robust practice in respect of child protection through policy and procedures, comprehensive systems and informed and trained staff and foster carers and children. A new Overnight stay policy and Missing from home procedure have been developed. Full statutory checks are undertaken on carers at the approval stage

and are renewed every three years. The Post placement meetings and the Foster Placement Agreement set out any specific arrangements for safeguarding individual children and young people. The health and safety checklist asks specific questions about safeguarding children; it is reviewed in supervision and as part of the foster home review. Carers are provided with information and telephone numbers of organisations that children can contact directly if they need to. They can also access the Children's Rights Service. A physical intervention policy covering permissible safe methods and accountability recording and notifications to link/social worker has been developed and training commenced.

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?

2

Foster carers demonstrated their awareness of the importance for children/young people to maintain and develop family contact and friendships, wherever possible, and their commitment in supporting these arrangements.

Escort and transport arrangements are organised by the child/young person's social worker.

The records seen at this inspection demonstrated that appropriate levels of support are provided to foster carers by the service in relation to complex contact issues. Records are kept of the discussions that take place between foster carers and their supervising workers in relation to contacts/visits with family and/or friends. However, more detailed information needs to be included on individual foster placement agreements. 10.7 The views of the child/young person must be sought and appropriate records kept. 10.4

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Responses to the questionnaires indicated that children's opinions are sought at each stage of their placement, from referral to review. Children indicated that foster carers listen to their views. They also indicated that they are consulted by social workers from time to time. The children's handbook is still being prepared and children are being involved in its preparation. Children confirmed that they had been provided with information about how to make a complaint. This includes information about the Black Country Children's Rights service. Carers confirmed that they would enable the children in their care to complain; should this be necessary.

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

There is a Health Coordinator and a nurse link to mainstream Trusts. This enhances communication with regards to health matters. Foster carers hold information about the child's medical history in the LAC forms. Details of health appointments and events were recorded within the children's individual records. Carers confirmed that they have the necessary delegated medical authorisations. There were records of examples of good practice in relation to support and the promotion of health care for children using the short break scheme. Permanent placements for children with disabilities also pay particular attention to the health needs of the children placed.

It is proposed that foster carers will maintain separate health records for each child placed. It is expected that systems will be implemented by the end of March 2005. 12.8

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?**

2

In general, foster carers encourage and support children/young people with their educational studies. Suitable facilities are provided for home study and foster carers attended parents' evenings and open days. Where there are any concerns arrangements are made to discuss these with the relevant teachers.

The records examined by the inspectors varied in content with regards to education. Of the files examined the inspectors found two contained copies of both, a completed education plan (PEP) and review records. The service must ensure that appropriate plans are provided for each child/young person. 13.3

More details of foster carers' responsibilities with regards to a child/young person's education needs to be included in the foster carer's agreement and placement agreement. 13.4

Discussions took place with some foster carers with regards to arrangements for children/young people attend school trips. Not all the records seen by the inspectors included consent arrangements for school trips. 13.5

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?

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

It is recommended that there should be a period of joint work where the involvement of both the childcare social worker and the Leaving Care worker continues to ensure that carers understand the changing requirements of supporting the placed child towards adulthood.

14.2

It is recommended that training is provided in respect of preparing young people for independence. 14.3

It is recommended that the information system of the Transition & Leaving Care team should have an information system on education needs that dovetails with that of the Education Support team, so that carers can continue to support placed children's educational needs.

14.4

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?
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Standard met?

Standard met?

The records held at the Civic Centre for the recruitment of staff and foster carer CRB checks were not inspected on this occasion. The fostering service follows the Local Authority policy and procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff.	
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The administration team that supports the service is in the process of being reviewed. Once this is complete, the process for recruiting permanent staff to the positions that are currently being covered by agency workers will commence.

The service is aware that job descriptions and induction programmes for new staff will need to be revised to meet the operational changes that have been made to the service and are in the process of being made.

The inspectors were informed that the introduction of new posts to support the service is working well. These include a Service Development Officer, Marketing Officer and a Foster Carers' Peer Support Coordinator. These officers have all been active in planning for the development of the service and facilitating various project groups which include foster carers and children/young people.

The inspectors were informed of the difficulties experienced by the service in recruiting qualified social workers. The service is looking to recruit some experienced, although unqualified staff and arranging for them to undertake relevant training courses which will lead to a recognised qualification. In the meantime, agency/bank social workers have been engaged to carry out specific task-centred work.

The Fostering Service had been proactive in seeking the advice of the Commission regarding the status of employment of unqualified staff within the service. Clarification of this issue was given at the time of the inspection.

Managers are aware that a qualified, named, social worker must be allocated to foster carers. Social worker duties being carried out by unqualified workers must be done under supervision of a qualified social worker. Suitable policies, procedures and guidance must be provided on how this is to be implemented and managed. Appropriate records must be kept in relation to this practice. 15.5, 15.6 & 15.8

Interviews that took place with some of the staff team indicated that appropriate job descriptions; comprehensive induction sessions; relevant training and regular supervision are all provided. Supervision sessions are recorded and agreed by the supervisor and supervisee.

The service has access to professional psychologists who work within the councils social or healthcare sectors. They provide support and help in meeting the needs of the children/young people being looked after.

At the previous inspection it was reported that foster carers had concerns about taxi arrangements. These concerns appear to have been addressed and more continuity is being provided in respect of drivers and escorts.

Total number of staff of the agency:	31	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	1
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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
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There is a clear structure with roles and tasks clearly differentiated between the teams in this service. Workloads are monitored through the supervision process and at team meetings. There are systems in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews take place within the necessary timescales.

Since the last inspection, there has been an improvement in the completion of reviews within timescales. However more care needs to be taken with regards to the information provided to panel at this time. Reviews of some relative carers are still outstanding and the service is in the process of addressing this.

Feedback from staff and those who were interviewed confirmed that in general they receive regular and appropriate, monthly supervision. Records are maintained of these sessions and signed copies provided to staff. There are some exceptions with priorities of work, meetings management availability being the reasons for cancellations. It is recommended that the maximum frequency between supervisions should be included in section 4 ("Frequency/Duration") of the supervision policy. 16.8

There is also an annual appraisal of the progress and training needs of each worker on an annual basis. There is, however, no official channel through which to feed back development needs. 16.9

There are monthly meetings held in each of the teams and these provide an opportunity to discuss practice issues.

There are problems in respect of appropriate levels of clerical and administrative support. The administration section is undergoing regarding and some posts are being held back for advertising until this is complete. Administration staff have also moved with the Adoption Team reducing staff numbers, skills and experience. The constant use of short stay temporary staff does have a negative effect on the morale of administration staff and the effective delivery of the service. 16.11

The proposed implementation of the Foster Carer Placement Agreement Format will be

dependant upon the clear understanding about how fostering service social workers and the children's social workers work effectively together. 16.15

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The recruitment of foster carers is monitored and information is provided by the service to the fostering panel. Staff and foster carers are recruited with a variety of backgrounds and experience. There is a historical shortfall in staffing levels within this service, but several members of staff have been recruited since the last inspection and few vacancies are being carried.

The service has experienced difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. Advertisements have been placed in suitable locations on 5 occasions in the past year. However, there have been few applicants with the relevant training and experience. Alternative strategies are being employed, which will include the employment of staff who will undergo professional training after appointment. Use has also been made of workers on secondment from residential services. Discussions were held with the Inspectors to provide further clarity in relation to the role unqualified staff may play in the service. Staff reported good access to internal and external training courses.

There is a Marketing Officer for the recruitment of carers and the Inspectors were provided with examples of initiatives employed to recruit suitable carers. An information forum is held four times a year. A recruitment week is held and this involves local business personalities. It is clear that a range of action is being taken to address this matter through reassessment of the potential of existing resources, review of family and friends as a potential resource and marketing strategies. At the present time there continues to be a significantly high number of external and often geographically distant placements. 17.5

There is a clearly set out assessment process for carers. Assessments are completed on the British Association of Adoption and Fostering assessment form (Form F) and this includes competency based work. This takes place at the same time as training. The recruitment worker visits the family as part of this process and aids in preparation for the following training sessions. Prospective foster carers are provided with copies of the Foster Carers' handbook.

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?**

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

It is recommended that there is a review of the three different inductions offered; a corporate one, one for the Department and one for the Fostering Service with a view to rationalising this situation.19.2

Inspectors noted That two staff very recently commenced PQ2 training. IPM's are completed every six months. The record for one worker was seen dated Nov. 2004.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

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**

There is a clear strategy for working with carers and this includes the provision of training and support. The foster carers who were consulted indicated that the role of the supervising social worker is clear and that carers value this support. All had a clear understanding of the supervision process and held copies of the supervision records. They confirmed they find the sessions helpful and the supervising worker supportive. The only exception to this came from Family and Friends Carers still supported through the Looked After Children team where contact and support were stated to be extremely limited. The service to Family and Friends Carers is gradually being developed as they are reviewed and reallocated within the Fostering Service.

Carers have been encouraged and supported in developing their own local support groups. The Inspectors had an opportunity to meet the committee members of the newly formed Walsall Foster Carers Association. Respite care is offered to all carers, depending on the needs of the child in placement.

There is an Independent Reviewing Officer in post. There has been an improvement in meeting targets for the annual reviews of carers, although it is acknowledged that there is a small number of reviews outstanding (due to the sickness absence of a member of staff) and the gradual implementation of a system for the reviews of relative carers; ten of forty five have been completed. The issues of clarity from the CSCI regarding use of qualified and unqualified staff has contributed to the delay along with staff recruitment and workload management.

The Independent Reviewing Officer conducts exit interviews with carers, takes non-contentious reviews to the Review and Skills Level Board, whilst significant changes following reviews are taken to the Fostering Panel.

Foster Carers receive information in many different ways including a bi-weekly newsletter. The Tri X system is going on line to launch the policy and procedures. Foster Carers will be encouraged to access the system. The manager stated the National Minimum Standards had not been made available to all foster carers but saw potential for this to be made available on line for reference by foster carers. 21.2

The support offered through respite provision to foster carers was mainly an issue for permanence carers and the needs of their families as opposed to those of the foster child. There is more work to be done by the service in reviewing service provision and clarity about expectations of foster carers and the fostering service. 21.2

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

As previously reported in Standard 15 of this report, managers are aware of the need for foster carers to be supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. The Foster Carer Agreement has recently been reviewed. At the time of writing this report, preparation was being made for its implementation. The carers who were seen by the inspectors confirmed that they had been provided with a copy of the Foster Carers' handbook. As previously reported, this handbook is being reviewed and various project groups have been set up to assist in this process.

Social work staff and carers informed the inspectors that they meet on a regular basis for supervision. There is a pro-forma for recording these sessions and this is signed and agreed by both parties. However, some of the files examined by the inspectors did not contain records of recent supervision with foster carers. Records seen at the fostering service demonstrated that managers are monitoring foster carers supervision records.

Foster carers stated that they were satisfied with the level of support they received from the social work and the administration teams. The Foster Carers' Support Coordinator has been actively involved in assisting foster carers in setting up a local branch of the Foster Carers' Association and exploring the possibility of introducing a 'buddying' network. For out of hours support, foster carers are provided with Walsall Social Services Department's Emergency Duty Team's telephone number.

The fees for foster carers have been revised, agreed and will soon to be implemented.

Although there is evidence to demonstrate that foster carers are provided with information about the complaints and allegations of abuse procedures. Foster carers reported concerns about these processes in relation to support, length of time the investigation takes and the reporting of the outcome. The inspectors strongly advise the service to provide foster carers with the opportunity to voice their concerns and discuss how best these concerns can be addressed. 22.9

Lists of notifications and complaints were provided in the pre – inspection information. It was noted by inspectors, forms for recording of complaints and/or allegations made against a foster carer are noted on individual files. The inspectors found there to be omissions in recordings. These forms need to be monitored for consistency and reviewed with regards to directing the reader to the details of the investigation and outcome. 22.8

It is recommended that the manager provides foster carers with the opportunity to discuss their concerns in relation to complaints and allegations of abuse. 22.9

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The training officer was interviewed and departmental and service specific training plans provided. The Walsall Fostering Service is working co-operatively with other members of the Black Country Consortium to maximise use of training resources and increase availability and accessibility. There is a training plan for foster carers and this is monitored as part of the review. The service uses 'Skills to Foster' in place of the previously used 'Choosing to Foster', and this has proved to be a popular change. Workers reported that they have been able to make improvements in planning and managing and monitoring attendance. Competencies are high on the agenda and preparation is provided for foster carers prior to each session.

Some training sessions have been provided for the children of foster carers and these have been run alongside the induction process. The service plans to develop a group for these children.

There have been some joint training sessions for carers and social workers, but carers stated that they would prefer more sessions. There is a budget to enable access to specific training courses on an external basis, where children placed have specific needs.

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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A sample of six files were seen; those held by fostering service link workers relating to the sample of foster carers to be interviewed and the children and young peoples files for case tracking. In addition a further three files were seen two of which were family and friends foster carer files as yet still held with the LAC teams. A selection of files were also seen from the recruitment and assessment team. Tri X holds the written policy on case recording.

There has been considerable progress in the organisation and presentation of files held by the fostering service. A quality assurance review of files was held on 2.01.05 and the Victoria Climbié recommendations for recording implemented. Deficits in the content and organisation of those seen had been addressed and improved markedly making them easy to access. The files held the required LAC information, PEP's, health plan. It was found that most files held a preliminary guide to contents and relevant, current documents were in place.

In the majority of instances the LAC information on the files had improved significantly with clear typed formats with relevant current detail signed and dated. The fostering service has worked closely with the LAC team to establish positive links and prepare for the application of the PARIS system to make the recording and reporting systems more efficient.

There has also been some progress with the files and records held for family and friends foster carers. There is one designated qualified senior social worker that has lead responsibility for family and friends foster carers. Together with the reviewing officer ten of forty five have been reviewed and files and records brought into the fostering service system. (see standard 32).

Management stated that staff use of a "Working File" is monitored through supervision to ensure records are moved on to files regularly. An audit tool is used in supervision and assists with maintenance of the quality of recording and filing.

Link workers operate similar monitoring systems during supervision of foster carers. Files and records are viewed and discussed and any information on children no longer placed with them are returned to the child's social worker or area team administration.

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

Records were made available pre inspection and as requested throughout the period of the inspection in respect of staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. There are systems in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and remedial action is taken when necessary. Considerable effort has been made by management and staff to improve the administrative records. At the time of the inspection there had been significant changes in terms of the Administration staff team. One member of staff had transferred with the adoption team there were long term staff vacancies and only three of six permanent staff in post. The temporary staff were regularly changing. Candidates with the suitable skills were not coming forward and there were no in house training schemes or support to achieve the necessary qualifications to administrative staff. The administration posts were being regarded.

Records are kept securely at all times in lockable filing cabinets and rooms. Gradually office furniture is being replaced to provide staff desks with lockable drawer facilities. The building is kept secure with key-pad systems and perimeter fencing. Administration environment hinders the effective and efficient operation of the service. Administration staffing levels; vacancies and temporary staff all impact on service delivery.

The foster carer register was provided and found to be satisfactory.

The foster child register was provided and found to be satisfactory.

The Tri X system for policy and procedures involves the revision and updating of guidance for staff for the keeping and retention of case files and of how to access them. As this launched to staff, carers and children participation and accessibility will be implemented.

There had been an improvement in LAC recording where recording is type printed. Some of the hand written entries can be difficult to read. There is a programme for the introduction of IT equipment to all staff. At the present time access is limited and use of IT must be negotiated with some staff working having to work on home computers to complete work. These arrangements should be formalised with proper safeguards for confidential information and safe working practices for staff. 25.8

Some work is being done through supervision of staff and through supervision of foster carers to ensure that records held by the fostering service are suitable for access by children and foster carers, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including dissent. There is still work to be done to make this a meaningful exercise and demonstrate participation of relevant persons. 25.12

There are systems for keeping records about allegations and complaints and for handling these confidentially and securely. Summary data in respect of the former was provided to the inspectors.

Figures below include agency and kinship placements and short term care/respite placements.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			318
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			636
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			630
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			18
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			16
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	108.49	Maximum £	191.37

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?****1**

A tour of the premises was made. There had been some superficial progress made and basic maintenance and repairs completed. However it remains that the premises, the location and facilities are not fit for purpose. Some serious health and safety concerns remain nine months on from the previous inspection. There are plans to move some of the other current occupants out of the building and ultimately to move the fostering team into central Walsall; this process has begun with the Adoption Team having already been relocated. An action plan must be submitted to the Commission for Social Care Inspection with timescales for the relocation of the fostering services. 26.1

The interior and exterior of the premises were poorly maintained and in need of repair, refurbishment and in some instances replacement. The premises were originally a purpose built children's home. The fabric of the building is worn and beyond repair. The Inspectors were most concerned that some aspects of the building present an immediate health hazard to staff and visitors to the building.

A survey of the local authority buildings had been commissioned Essington Lodge had been prioritised for attention. A building surveyor made an inspection and electrical works and plumbing were also assessed. The summary report describes the building as a traditionally constructed from cavity wall with brick facing about 1974. The premises were originally a purpose built children's home. The fabric of the building is worn and damaged by leaks from flat roofs causing cracks in ceilings and mildew on walls. Areas of the building accessed by staff and visitors has unpleasant odour of sewage presumably from the sewage drainage system. There are rotten window frames and damage to wooden fire doors and frames. All the buildings are linked together to form one continuous block A, some of which are single floor flat roof and the rest two floor with mono pitched roofs. They form a central courtyard which is a derelict area with broken slates and brick work and uneven slabs. The building is set back on the site from Essington Road and has a security fencing with a gate and with some external lighting. The site is generally flat with tarmac car park along the main frontage and a grassed area to the left of block A. Block B houses four garages.

The total cost for remedial works for Essington Lodge is estimated at £149, 228.00. This does not include the potential cost for removal of asbestos from 80% of the ceiling which requires a full asbestos survey initially. On the 14/12/04 priorities for the removal of asbestos tiling were agreed. There have been two episodes during the past inspection period (9months) where asbestos tiles have been disturbed by contractors. Environmental Health have tested the air and remedial action taken.

The responsible person must ensure that hazards are assessed and remedial action taken in respect of the following matters remaining outstanding from March 2004:

- Asbestos ceiling panels throughout the building which have been assessed as safe as long as they are not moved or damaged
- Window frames broken and rotten.
- Flat roofs damage surface covering.
- Provide adequate heating and ventilation systems.

- Cleansing / repair of sewage drainage systems (to prevent odour).

26.1

The responsible person must ensure that the following items receive attention:

1. Repair flat roof (permanence team room) and water damage to internal walls and ceilings.
2. Remove and repair damp mildewed patches on the interior walls of the short breaks staff room.
3. Provide adequate heating in all rooms.
4. Assess and repair cracked wall plaster in hallways and stairwell.
5. Replace the floor surfaces in the toilets and kitchen with sealed washable floor covering.
6. Replace the sinks with worn enamel or metal surfaces.
7. Provide bin lids in kitchen.
8. Replace top corridor carpet.
9. Make safe uneven slabs on walkways and in courtyard.

26.1

It is recommended that consideration should be given to the provision of a staff changing area. 26.4 & 18.5

Management confirm that the local authority has adequate insurance for the premises and its contents.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

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?

0

Standard not assessed on this occasion.

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 Inspector read policy and procedures, minutes of panel meetings and the papers for the current panel meeting that was observed. The Decision maker and the Chair of the panel were also interviewed.

The policy and procedures about the operation of the fostering panel reflect the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. These are to be included into the Tri X system for the Child Care Manual. Information has also been provided in the foster carers handbook. These make clear the functions and responsibility for decision-making.

The composition of panel members reflects the NMS. The membership has stabilised with all The medical expertise is provided by a qualified GP who is also a member of the panel. The panel consisted of the Chair, an elected member (a new councillor member is due to be appointed), two social workers, one children's home manager and one fostering service manager advisor to the panel. There are four independent members including a child protection and reviewing officer, a foster carer from another authority and an education representative. One former young person in care is also becoming established as a participating member.

The panel minutes and the Chair confirmed the panel has consistently met the quorate membership requirements. This is an improvement with the new independent members regularly in attendance.

The fostering service manager confirmed that all but one of the checks are complete for the panel members and held secure by the service. It was stated CRB checks and medicals are updated every three years. There is some training in panel operations for panel members planned for April 2005; to be delivered by an ex BAAF professional. Written information is provided to new panel members including information on the National Minimum Standards and attendance as observers of the panel process.

The panel process was timely and well ordered. There were some complex issues discussed there was evidence that appropriate advice, guidance and support had been taken.

The Inspector noted several points during the panel meeting where members identified issues for service improvement or lessons to be learnt for practice issues. It was not evident that there were any formal recording systems for tracking implementation and monitoring of this provision of feedback and comment on good practice function. It is recommended that

the quality assurance and monitoring of the panel functions should be further developed.
30.5

The Inspectors noted that the post of fostering panel administrator has been vacant for three years with temporary staff or cover arrangements being made to cover the work to be done. This is proving unsatisfactory for the efficient production of assessments and other panel papers. Care must be taken to ensure that reports for panel are accurate and all relevant areas are detailed for discussion. A written record is kept of the business of the panel. The minutes and the agenda were clear with guidelines for time allocation. The outcomes, terms of approval and recommendations are clearly stated. (It should be noted that some discrepancies were identified between panel approval and the criteria of approval found on file records and foster carers understanding of their status). Any action proposed is monitored and taken forward to the next panel agenda. For good practice and clarity to aid focussed discussion of the items, a front sheet has been provided for each item to evaluate submissions strengths, weaknesses and any issues arising.

The Chair is effective in highlighting issues for discussion and will generally check out any inconsistencies prior to the panel meeting for information and clarification. It is proposed to have an Independent Chair through an exchange of Chair with Dudley Fostering Panel.

Members of panel make declarations of interest and absent themselves from panel where appropriate. Each panel member is given an opportunity to give feedback. Any further questions to be put are agreed and a member designated to put the question. Due consideration is given to welcoming those attending panel and enabling their participation in the process. The primary aim of ensuring the protection and welfare of children is kept foremost. The planned training will address panel protocol, members behaviours, expectations duties and responsibilities and the National Minimum Standards.

It was noted that practice has improved with Fostering panel regularly receives a summary report from the reviewing officer about the outcome of foster carer's annual reviews and outcomes. The Chair will meet with the Review Officer to discuss findings of reviews, the abilities of foster carers to pursue life chances for young people. The skills and review panel also consider their development and aptitude for the foster care function.

They also receive monthly reports from the advisor to the panel on recruitment and assessment and the presenting needs of children for placements as highlighted through the referral process. The fostering service presented panel with a Post Panel summary; December 2004. This gave basic information of ethnic origin, approval status, category, matching and children in placement. A Resource Carers monitoring summary from the period April 2004- was presented to panel with new approvals being 13 (including 1 back-up carer) and closures 12; in total there are 144 resource carers (including 4 back-up carers).

The panel system appeared to work effectively and to maintain an appropriate level of independence.

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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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The findings were drawn from records held in the service, discussion with management, fostering service staff, and feedback from short term break foster carers. The recommendations from the previous inspection had been reviewed. The manager stated the insurance cover in respect of the administration invasive medication by foster carers is underwritten by the local authority insurance cover. The manager stated the development of the service remains constantly under review and there had been no specific developmental needs identified in respect of those with hearing impairment that could not be met by the service.

Short term foster carers confirmed that they receive relevant information and reports prior to discussing placements. Their views are respected. Short term carers have some involvement in carers' support groups. They reported a good service from the supervising social worker, the fostering service in general and the children's social workers.

They reported good access to any specialist equipment needed. Short term carers have access to the Emergency Duty Team for out of hours emergencies.

Records are maintained by foster carers of the events in the young people's life. They maintain their own records of training. The link workers provide regular supervision, with fixed agendas for meetings. Foster carers indicated that they found these sessions useful.

Short term carers reported good relationships with children's birth parents and a cooperative relationship towards the occasional rearrangement of dates to take account of holidays and social commitments on the part of the birth family.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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There has also been some progress with the files and records held for family and friends foster carers. There is one designated qualified senior social worker that has lead responsibility for family and friends foster carers. Together with the reviewing officer ten of forty five have been reviewed and files brought into the fostering service system. The other thirty five remain with the LAC teams. The additional sample of two files requested were of family and friend carers from the LAC teams. The fostering staff did make the effort to provide files however these were found to be inadequate in organisation and recording. On one the Form F could not be found.

The fostering service is in the process of addressing the issues detailed in the previous inspection report relating to family and friends as carers. Carers who were contacted by the inspectors confirmed that fostering service workers were visiting them more frequently and reviews were being carried out. They informed the inspectors that their main point of contact was the child/young person's social worker though the frequency and quality of this support was variable. The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service addresses and recognises the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers. 32.1

With regards to support and training, some carers stated they had initially been offered training and receive information about forthcoming training. However, had decided to decline the offer. The responsible person must ensure that support or training provided to family and friend carers. 32.3

The responsible person must ensure that annual reviews are completed for Family and Friends carers and their needs are met and assessed in the same way as other carers. 32.3

The inspectors look forward to reporting on the fostering service's progress in relation to its developing relationship with these carers.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not applicable.

Lay Assessor NA **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 of Walsall MBC Fostering and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by (Please see attached letter), 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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