



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Dorset County Council Fostering Team

Princes House

Princes Road

Dorchester

Dorset

9th/10th/12th/15th/16th/ 17th/18th
December 2003

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

Dorset County Council Fostering Team

Address

Princes House, Princes Road, Dorchester, Dorset

Local Authority Manager

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01305 224643

Address

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Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

06/11/02

Date of Inspection Visit		9 th December 2003	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09.30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Delia Amos	096257
Name of Inspector	2	Susan Harvey	078139
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Peter Finn	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Dorset County Council Fostering Service is managed within the Adoption and Fostering Team. The team operates from two sites reflecting the wide geographical span of the Local Authority area.

The manager of the Adoption and Fostering team is responsible for the fostering work undertaken by two senior practitioners, ten fostering social workers, and two social work assistants. One of these senior practitioners together with a social worker is primarily involved in the development of the Shared Care Service for children with a disability. In addition there are six adoption workers, including a senior practitioner for permanence and a post-adoption worker. Several experienced workers are sometimes commissioned on a part-time sessional basis to undertake fostering assessments and training.

The fostering service workers are organised to cover different geographical areas and have a link role with the Local Social Services Office in each area. In this link role they have the opportunity to develop relationships with the local childcare teams, to be aware of the children who might need placements, to identify local placements, and to supervise and support the carers in that locality. They also have the opportunity to use local knowledge and links in the recruitment of new carers. Support groups for carers are held locally.

One of the social workers has been appointed as a recruitment and training officer. There is a rolling programme of pre-approval training of foster carers organised in different localities. Two workers are responsible for the Project and Assessment foster care provision, a specific scheme offering increased support to carers who look after young people with complex needs and behaviours. Another worker has been undertaking reviews of foster carers as a pilot scheme to introduce some independence into the reviewing process.

The Turnaround fostering scheme is a new initiative developed during the last year as a Treatment fostering programme. The scheme has a Project co-ordinator and a separate team consisting of a placement social worker, an assistant, a sessional worker, and has separate administrative support. The team has a multidisciplinary remit with input from a family therapist. This service was being developed at the time of this inspection and no foster carers had yet completed the assessment and approval stage. The Turnaround project was not separately inspected at this stage although it would be more appropriate when the service develops if a separate focused inspection were undertaken.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

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

This was the second annual inspection of Dorset County Council's fostering service under the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspectors found that considerable attention has been given by the service to implementing the requirements and recommendations of the first inspection. They consider this is particularly commendable in view of evidence that the fostering service had been particularly ill-fated during a large part of 2003 with pressures from staff shortages arising from extended periods of sickness in some cases, and because of experienced staff leaving the service. The manager was aware that some shortfalls in practice would be identified in this inspection.

The fostering service had been under pressure but at the time of the inspection, new members of the team had recently been appointed, several roles within the team had been reviewed, and an optimistic approach was evident. The inspectors noted that the fostering service team was enthusiastic; they spoke about feeling energised. They conveyed a committed approach to moving forward following the more crisis led strategy that had characterised the service.

In the course of this inspection, six foster families were visited. An inspector met carers at an evening support group, and also met representatives from the local independent foster care association group.

Questionnaires were sent to all children over eight years old in foster placements. 34 were returned. In the vast majority of cases, children's comments about the foster care arrangements that had been made for them were very positive. A small number of birth parents were contacted by phone and their comments were also positive about the foster placements.

Questionnaires were sent to the social workers of the children. There responses from 37 social workers, in regard to 99 children. In the majority of cases these were extremely positive reports about foster placements and the fostering service. A small proportion contained more qualified or negative observations and indicated areas where there might be communication or training needs.

Questionnaires were sent to all approved foster carers. There were 44 responses; more than 40% of them reported they felt well supported by the service, and 35% quite well.

This report will include recommendations and comments arising from some of the shortfalls that were indicated in the survey and in other inspection activity. The inspectors would emphasise that the proportion of positive reports far outweighed any areas of concern that were brought to the attention of the inspectors.

The inspection took place at a time of considerable change for the fostering service. The appointment of a member of staff to focus on developing training and recruitment issues for carers is positive. This inspection has indicated a number of areas where training needs have been evidenced. Another welcome innovation since the first inspection is the appointment of a separate worker to undertake foster carer reviews. Although this was described as a pilot, the approach is good practice and may help identify any issues arising from those carers who do not routinely attend groups or respond to the survey.

The Treatment Foster Care Project has now been established in partnership with Bournemouth Borough Council, Borough of Poole, The Maple Service, Dorset Healthcare Trust, West Dorset General Hospitals Trust, Bournemouth and Poole Youth Offending Team, and Dorset Youth Offending Team. Inspectors met the staff in the Turnaround Project and examined relevant documents, including assessment work that had been undertaken. Seven couples were being assessed with the plan for the first presentations to the Dorset fostering panel to take place in January. The proposal is that Turnaround will provide a specialist resource with up to nine planned, time limited foster placements with therapeutic intervention for young people with complex needs aged 10 to 16 years old.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard is partially met

There was a statement of purpose which was reasonably comprehensive although more specific details about the fostering schemes would be helpful. A children's guide had been produced and recently circulated to children. It is recommended that the service develops the guide to make it more user-friendly and in varied formats.

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

One standard was partially met and one met

The local authority appointed suitable people to manage the fostering service and undertook adequate vetting procedures. A recommendation has been made that the Project Manager of the Turnaround scheme should undertake management training.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

One standard was not met and one met.

The inspection identified some areas of work where management oversight needed particular review, specifically the management of family and friends as foster carers. Financial procedures for those payments to carers that were managed by different childcare teams were also an issue. Staff confirmed that there were clear lines of accountability and delegation within the fostering service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

3 of these 9 standards was met, 3 partially met and 3 not met.

- In general the inspectors directly observed, and read comments from children and social workers, that foster homes provided nurturing and safe environments. Health and safety policies and procedures had been introduced in the assessment and review of carers. A small number of critical reports indicated that expectations about standards of cleanliness and hygiene need to be clarified. A more rigorous

approach to recording risk assessments is recommended especially in relation to sharing bedrooms and privacy arrangements. There was insufficient information on some applications for exemptions which were seen and the foster carers' files did not always include the recorded management decision.

- There was a continuing lack of carers from minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds although recruitment literature had been updated and reflected the need for more diverse range of carers.
- There were procedures in place to try and identify appropriate matches. Pressure on foster care resources restricted choice. There were a number of references to placements being made for reasons of expediency rather than because of them being good matches.
- Safe care guidelines had been issued to carers and a bullying policy distributed. No concerns were raised directly by children about the use of punishments but a recommendation has been made that incidents of restraint should be collated and guidance reviewed. Foster carers in a small number of cases reported they had been given insufficient information and a requirement has been made about the provision of information.
- The majority of carers were reported to support contact appropriately. Distance from home and friends was raised as a negative factor by some children and social workers. Some carers reported that they did not feel consulted about expectations.
- There were good opportunities for children to be consulted about their arrangements in foster care and there was an independent advocacy service.
- Emergency first aid training had been introduced for foster carers. The council was also introducing the services of a nurse with responsibilities for Looked After Children. Carers reported that they were provided with information about children's health needs.
- There was a commitment to promoting the educational needs of young people. The Education Co-ordinator worked closely with social workers and carers.
- Foster carers were supporting young people moving into independent living. Opportunities for training to enable them to provide effective support should be encouraged.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster carers (Standards 15-23)

2 of these 9 standards were met, 6 were partially met, and 1 not met.

- Information provided to the inspectors was insufficient to evidence that all relevant recruitment processes had been undertaken.
- There had been some significant staff shortages which had impacted on the service provided. Staffing levels had recovered and additional posts had been funded.
- Staffing levels were much improved. A number of assessments of carers were read and some good practice was evidenced. A move towards competency based assessments was being considered.
- Staff generally expressed satisfaction in regard to the council's employment practices. Support to carers from the out of hours service had been reviewed.

- The council has a training programme and other training opportunities were available to staff through Fostering Network and other organisations. There was no systematic regular review of training needs evidenced. There were some opportunities for joint training for fostering service staff and foster carers. Staff were positive about induction processes.
- Lines of accountability were clear to staff in the fostering team. There was a regular pattern of supervision and appraisal and staff meetings were held regularly.
- Foster carers received support from their family placement worker, and in some cases a support worker. Practical help was available in some cases, including respite. Support groups were organised at different venues.
- Family placement officers were allocated to each carer and there was a system for recording visits. The foster carer handbook was in the process of being reviewed. Unannounced visits to carers were not evidenced in files that were read.
- Pre-approval preparation courses were available to all applicants to foster. Carers reported that there was insufficient post-approval training and a recommendation is made that there should be a review of the strategy for the ongoing training of carers.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Both standards were partially met.

Separate records were kept for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. Some omissions were noted in the records of complaints.

The fostering service's administrative records contained the information relevant to the running of the service and as required by legislation. Records were kept securely.

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

This standard was met

The fostering team was based on two sites. The Wimborne office was in the process of some changes which involved the move of the administrative team downstairs. This would increase the level of security which had not been altogether satisfactory. The Dorchester site had adequate space and storage and had appropriate security arrangements.

Financial Requirements (Standard 27- 29)

2 of these 3 standards do not apply and Standard 29 was partially met

There were some critical comments from carers about the current fees and allowances. There was also concern about the inconsistencies between local childcare teams who had responsibility for responding to carers' requests for expenses or holiday allowances.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)**This standard was partially met**

The panel observed during the inspection was effectively managed. Panel members evidenced a capacity to challenge and to express dissenting views in a constructive manner. Policies and procedures needed to be updated, particularly in regard to having procedural guidance on issues about families and friends carers, and about management information that should be regularly brought to the attention of the panel.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)**This standard was met**

Although the shared-care scheme for children with a disability had been stretched because of the senior practitioner having extended sick leave, there was evidence of good practice in assessment and in placement arrangements. There were plans to develop a short-breaks fostering service for children whose families would benefit from such support but this was not yet available.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)**This standard was not met**

There had been an increase in assessments of carers who were family and friends of a specific child. There was evidence of some confusion in the process of assessment and in some cases applications were being presented to panel with insufficient information. There was a need for more guidance and training.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

1. The management and monitoring of applications to foster in the case of family and friends as carers needed to be more consistently within the management of the fostering service, and assessments did not always meet the requirements of Regulation 27.
2. There was insufficient documentation on foster carers' files when exemptions were made for placements outside the terms of the foster care agreement.
3. The inspectors were told about examples of matches which were not appropriate to the needs of the children.
4. There were examples of foster carers not having adequate information about a child in placement.
5. Personnel records seen did not contain sufficient information as specified in Schedule 1.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

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

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Delia AmosSignature *Delia Amos*Second Inspector Susan HarveySignature *Susan Harvey*

Locality Manager _____

Signature _____

Date 19/04/04

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	38,10	FS32FS4	The local authority must ensure that applications to foster in the case of family and friends as carers with placements made under Regulation 38 are monitored and controlled by the manager of the fostering service. These assessments must be carried out in accordance with Regulation 27 and contain all information as specified in Schedule 3. (See also Standard 32)	09.06.04
2	(C.A. 1989) 34(3)	FS6	When the fostering service makes placement arrangements outside the terms of the foster care agreement (e.g. exemptions from the usual fostering limit), there must be clear evidence of decision making in accordance with the 1989 Children Act, and to ensure the Foster Placement Agreement (Schedule 6 (7)) contains relevant documentation.	09.04.04
3	33(b)	FS8	The local authority must be satisfied that a proposed placement is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.	09.04.04
4	17(3)	FS9	The fostering service must ensure that a foster carer is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him/her to provide appropriate care for the child.	09.04.04

5	20(3) (c)	FS15	The fostering service must have full and satisfactory information in relation to all persons employed. This must include each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.	09.04.04
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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	FS1	The statement of purpose should be reviewed to include more details about how the different fostering schemes operate, and how family and friends are assessed and supported as specific carers.
2	FS1	The children's guide should be produced in a format that would meet the needs of children with a learning disability. The overall design could be more child-friendly.
3	FS2	The project manager of the Turnaround fostering scheme should have an appropriate management qualification.
4	FS4	The local authority should give attention to ensuring that staff have awareness of the policy about any conflict of interest, including Regulation 20(5).
5	FS6	There should be clear expectations to foster carers and social workers about foster homes meeting a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.
6	FS6FS6	There should be documentary evidence of the consideration of the need for a risk assessment when children share bedrooms.
7	FS6	When placements are made which involve children moving bedrooms there should be clear documentation about each child's assessed needs for privacy and other needs.
8	FS7	Continuing efforts need to be made to identify carers from diverse ethnic and cultural groups.
9	FS8	Written foster placement agreements should contain specific reference to elements of matching that were taken into consideration, and identify any areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match.
10	FS9FS9	The fostering service should devise a system for collating information about the use of restraint by foster carers and should consider whether guidance needs to be reviewed.

11	FS10	The fostering service should ensure that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements is clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement.
12	FS11FS11	The fostering service should consider a wider range of strategies to ensure that children are made aware of the complaints procedure and other ways of raising concerns.
13	FS14	Carers who work with young people who are moving towards independence should have specific training in the Pathway Planning process and work closely with the leaving care workers.
14	FS16	Staffing levels in the fostering service should be further reviewed if the service is more adequately going to address the assessment of family and friends carers.
15	FS17	When a shortfall in staffing occurs, contingency plans should be made which allow an adequate service to be maintained.
16	FS18	The whistle blowing policy should be made known to carers.
17	FS19	The effectiveness of training programmes for the staff providing the fostering service should be routinely evaluated, and should reflect the policies of the fostering service.
18	FS22	The fostering service should undertake occasional unannounced visits to foster carers, at least once each year.
19	FS22	The revision of the fostering handbook should be progressed and copies distributed to carers. It should be updated regularly.
20	FS23	The fostering service should review the post-approval training strategy for foster carers. Consideration should be given to promoting the development of specific skills, and for tackling weaknesses. The effectiveness of training should be evaluated and reviewed annually.
21	FS23	The fostering service should provide guidance to carers about the provision of childcare and reasonable expenses to support their training needs.
22	FS24	There should be a review of the management of foster carers' files to ensure that they contain up to date information including the foster placement agreement in regard to placements made with them.
23	FS25	The records of complaints and allegations should include clear outcomes and these should also be clearly recorded on the relevant files for carers.
24	FS29	There should be a review of allowances and fees payable to foster carers, which includes how information is provided to social workers and to carers about holidays and expenses, and which aims to reduce the inconsistencies between different areas.

25	FS30	Policies and procedures for panel should be updated and implemented to ensure panels receive information about disruptions, management information about foster carer reviews and the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children.
26	FS32	The local authority should have a clear policy and procedures in respect of the assessment, approval and support of family and friends as carers which should be made known to and implemented by staff and panel members.

* 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	11
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• 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	09/12/03
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	58.5

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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A statement of purpose had been produced which met the minimum requirements of this standard. It is clear and informative. The inspectors recommend that the statement of purpose should include more specific details about some of the services. For example, it would be helpful to outline more of what could be expected in the different fostering schemes. Also it would be an opportunity to state more clearly how family and friends are assessed and supported as carers of a specific child. The inspection identified these as areas that needed clarity for foster carers and for social workers. This recommendation would also meet more closely Standard 1.6, i.e. that the fostering service's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and carers accurately reflect the statement of purpose.

A children's guide had also been produced which meets the requirements although the design could be more child-friendly. It indicates that it can be produced in other formats (audio, large print and Braille) on request. The inspectors recommend that the range of formats could be extended, for example to meet the needs of children with learning disability.

The leaflet had been recently produced and may need some promotion to ensure children receive it when they are placed with a foster carer.

The children's survey asked 'have you been given a children's guide or a leaflet telling you about the fostering service? Of 31 responses, 12 children said 'yes' and 19 'no'.

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?	2
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Peter Finn, the manager of the adoption and fostering team has a relevant professional qualification and management training. He has been in the management role since 1995.

Staff reported that they experienced effective leadership. They expressed very favourable views about the open and honest management style. Foster carers made frequent references to the responsiveness of the manager.

The newly established Turnaround fostering scheme is managed separately by a Project manager, Sheena Parking, whose line manager is the Service Manager – Resources. At the time of this inspection there were no approved foster carers available in the scheme and the scheme was not separately inspected. The project manager has an appropriate professional qualification but would need to undertake management training to manage this separate service, and this is recommended.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Records provided to the inspectors indicated that Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks have been carried out on both the team manager of the fostering service and the project manager of Turnaround. A system had been established to ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years.

This standard is reported as met. However, insufficient details were provided to evidence that the practice is established of telephone enquiries being made to follow up written references or whether documentary evidence of qualifications is retained. The relevant requirement in respect of these issues in regard to all staff is made elsewhere in this report (Standard 15).

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?

1

The fostering service staff confirmed to inspectors that they were clear about lines of communication and accountability. Despite the pressures that the team had experienced because of staff shortage, the manager had maintained an effective overview of activities in the fostering team. Several carers referred to the continuing accessibility and approachability of the manager.

There was a need for more monitoring and control in relation to immediate placements made under Regulation 38. Examples were seen of less than satisfactory information made available when they are intended to exceed six weeks and were be presented for approval as a fostering arrangement. (See also Standard 32.) Childcare social workers indicated that there was sometimes confusion and inconsistent practice about these placement arrangements. Applications to foster arising from these placements were managed independently of the fostering service by the childcare fieldwork teams. The manager of the fostering service stated he has not had the capacity to oversee or manage those cases. New arrangements were being considered about this. It is required that arrangements are reviewed in order that these applications to foster are more consistently managed.

There were clear arrangements for informing foster carers when fees and allowances were reviewed and statements of the amounts they have been paid. Less clear were the financial procedures (see also Standard 29 and Standard 22) for more discretionary payments to foster carers, for example travel and holiday allowances. The inspectors heard frequent comments from carers dissatisfied about the inconsistencies between different local offices.

Guidelines, previously seen, were available to staff about their responsibility to declare any conflict of interest. There was some evidence in this inspection that staff had variable understanding of this, for example in the application of a sessional worker to foster. Inspectors suggest that some awareness raising should be considered.

Strategic development and monitoring of the Turnaround project was the responsibility of a multi-agency Steering Group meeting six times yearly.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:	0
Death of a child placed with foster parents.	0
Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.	0
Serious illness or accident of a child.	X
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	X
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	X
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	X
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	6
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	3
Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The manager of the service has a general manager's job description with reference to a specialist service. Lines of accountability were clearly defined and known to staff in the fostering service. He in turn is line managed by a senior manager responsible for resources, who also line manages the Project Co-ordinator of Turnaround.</p> <p>Staff were confident about to whom they would go in the absence of the manager. Delegated responsibilities were clearly documented.</p> <p>The broad span of the manager's role is noted as an issue that will need regular review. There were three senior practitioners in the fostering team, each with a different area of responsibility and specialist input. During much of this last year one of these posts had been vacant because of the retirement of the previous worker. Another senior practitioner had yet to return from an extended period of sick leave at the time of this inspection. The manager's ability to delegate had therefore been considerably reduced.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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The inspectors visited six foster homes in the course of this inspection, all of which were adequately furnished and maintained. An Adoption and Fostering health and safety policy had been introduced with guidance from the Corporate Safety Team. Health and safety assessments had been introduced as a regular part of the annual review process, as well as in the pre-approval process, and evidence of this was seen on files. There were also examples of panel members or the decision maker requesting information concerning safety factors.

The majority of children made comments about having healthy food and being encouraged to do exercise. They indicated they felt cared for in foster homes.

A small number of social workers reported variable standards of cleanliness and hygiene in foster homes, sometimes to the extent of causing concern. The view was expressed that there should be more consistency about the standards that foster homes are expected to meet. A recommendation is made that these expectations need to be clear. The regular reviewing process should contribute to this and inspectors also recommend that unannounced visits should be undertaken and documented (see Standard 22). No evidence was seen in any of the files read that these had been undertaken although staff said that they did endeavour to do them occasionally.

There was an expectation that there would be a recorded risk assessment in regard to children sharing bedrooms if a child has been abused or has abused another child; an example was seen on one file. The inspectors recommend that there should be more attention paid to documenting arrangements which involve sharing bedrooms. Inspectors saw examples where bedrooms were shared and no risk assessment was recorded, and no evidence that consideration had been given to whether one was needed. The complex and sometimes emergency nature of the arrangements indicated that an assessment might be advisable.

The practice of moving a child to another room because of other placements was an issue which a social worker felt intruded on the privacy and needs of a child. Inspectors recommend that there should be clearer documentation about the bedroom, space and privacy arrangements when the arrangements for one child are effected by a new placement. Privacy and sharing bedrooms were issues commented on by three placing social workers.

In particular there should be details about the arrangements made to safeguard young people when requests are made for exemptions to make placements above the normal fostering limit. A number of such requests were seen and in general they had minimal information and inspectors noted that the copy of the request on foster carers' files rarely included management signature. A risk assessment approach to these arrangements is advised and foster carers' records should include clear evidence of the decision making process for these requests. The foster placement agreement as outlined in Schedule 6 must indicate compliance with the terms of the foster care agreement and if placements are made outside those terms of agreement, the decision must be clearly documented. There was insufficient information available to the inspectors to confirm they had been signed by the appropriate local authority officer in accordance with the Children Act, although inspectors were told that this process was known and implemented by staff.

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

The fostering service had taken some positive steps in working towards identifying carers from minority groups. Adverts and leaflets had been produced which reflect the diversity of children in the care of the county council. Prospective foster carers from minority groups were 'fast-tracked' when they were identified. The information required by the fostering service when a social worker was seeking a short term placement, had been revised to include more information in respect of the child's religious, cultural, racial and linguistic needs. It remained the case that the number of carers from minority groups was negligible. There were four children identified as having an ethnic origin other than white British, out of the 150 on the list provided to the inspectors.

Children's surveys produced a number of responses which indicated that they felt supported and that their confidence was enhanced by their experience of foster care. In a small number of cases they referred to the more negative feelings about being 'treated differently'. Staff in the fostering team identified that there was a need for more awareness training with foster carers to better equip them for recognising discriminatory practices and attitudes. Ongoing training about this should be made available as part of the post approval programme for carers (see Standard 23).

Many children made comments about being encouraged in a rich variety of activities since being in foster care.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The inspectors visited homes where some excellent matching arrangements were evidenced and there were a considerable number of comments from social workers about children in very well matched foster homes.

A more detailed short term request form had been implemented to help inform matching decisions. A matching form documented the detailed consideration given in longer term arrangements. With a shortage of suitable foster placements there was pressure on resources which sometimes caused shortfalls in the matching process. Staff shortages in the fostering services had also resulted in delays in many cases in establishing the fostering officer's role in some of the placement arrangements. It is difficult for this standard to be met when the fostering team is not always involved in setting up the placement arrangements. Where transracial or transcommunity placements were made there was no additional training for the foster family.

Some social workers stated that it was their perception that they often had to make placements in unmatched homes. It was reported that if there is an in-county resource they have to use it as a priority even if they do not consider it a good match. Similarly they are expected to keep young people at home until things get to a crisis point, and an unplanned emergency placement had to be used which often then became the ongoing placement even if miles from home. It was outside the scope and methodology of this inspection to ascertain how frequently such arrangements occur, but 11 of the 99 survey responses from social workers indicated they felt the placement was ill-matched. A requirement has been made about making suitable placements. One foster carer wrote 'when a placement is just because you have a bed it does not always work'.

There were numerous comments in the surveys from young people, carers and social workers about the distance from home that some children were placed. This contributed to difficulties in contact, in maintaining social relationships, and involving using taxis for school or contact. One foster carer described how 2 very young children were travelling in a taxi for an hour each way to get to school.

A birth parent spoke with praise of the present arrangements for the young person, but that a previous placement had been a very poor match, and it was vital to get 'the right child in the right place'.

Periods of introduction are arranged if possible (Standard 8.7) and one of the children met during the inspection confirmed this had been helpful. In many cases arrangements are made at a crisis time and introductions are at point of placement.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

1

The Child Protection Co-ordinator confirmed that no concerns had arisen in regard to procedures followed within the fostering service. The fostering service was in the process of assisting foster carers to form their own family safe care guidelines, to meet previous recommendations in respect of Standard 9.3. All foster carers had been provided with relevant leaflets and policies about safe care practice.

A management system had been put in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care.

A bullying policy had been distributed.

Children were asked about punishments that were used in foster homes and no concerns were raised by their responses. There were frequent references to grounding, withdrawal of treats, being told off and in some cases never needing to be punished. Seven survey responses from social workers indicated they did not find the carer's approach to control was acceptable.

A small number of children referred to being restrained on occasion. In none of these responses was there any indication that they had concern about being in their current placement. It would be good practice to evidence more management monitoring of the incidents of restraint and a consideration of whether there is a need to review the policy and guidance. This was also indicated in a response from a social worker who suggested foster carers should be trained in the use of restraint, and another who was critical of the practice of a carer. The use of restraint in placements when a child has a disability also needed to be reviewed and information collated.

Not all foster carers had full information about the child or children placed with them. Five survey responses from foster carers, as well as some direct observations, indicated to the inspectors that there were continuing difficulties about the sharing of information. One foster carer reported that 'you feel you have to pry'. Several stressed that the fostering service staff were very good at telling carers what they knew, but they in turn did not always know the available information held by the childcare social workers.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: *(Inspector's note: not asked in survey this year)*

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**

10 out of the 34 children's responses specifically referred to 'missing family' or 'not being with own family' as the worst thing about fostering.

Contact issues are covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Particular arrangements were outlined in LAC documents supplied by the child care social worker and discussed in placement arrangement meetings. As previously stated the fostering workers did not always have a direct role in these meetings. There were examples given by foster carers of expectations about their role in contact which clashed with the other demands on their time from their own children or with other placements. They did not feel they were always consulted. It is recommended that attention is given to Standard 10.7, i.e. that the fostering service provider ensures that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements is clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement.

The inspectors heard examples of good communication between carers, parents and social workers. The small sample of birth parents who were contacted reported 'good working relationships'. The survey response for social workers indicated that in 49 cases, contact was 'very well' supported by carers and in 29 cases, 'fairly well'. There were two instances cited by social workers of foster carers expressing judgemental attitudes about birth families. A more frequently described barrier to contact arrangements was the distance and locality of some of the placements and several children commented on this.

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**

Children had the opportunity of expressing their views through the consultation process for the LAC reviews. There was also a process for them to be consulted in regard to foster carer reviews and a small number of these feedback forms were seen on files. There is an independent advocacy service and the fostering service manager had made prompt responses to issues raised through the advocate. The children's guide had only recently been distributed.

Evidence from the survey of children and young people:

Do carers ask you for your opinions and ideas?

30 responses: 13 'yes often', 12 'sometimes'. 3 'not often' 2 'never'.

Have those running the fostering service ever asked for your opinions about your foster carers?

28 responses: 22 'yes' 6 'no'

Have those running the service asked you how the service could be made better?
29 responses: 9 'yes' 20 'no'

Does your social worker sometimes see you on your own to ask you your opinions?
30 responses: 11 'often' 15 'sometimes' 4 'never'.

Have you been told how to make a complaint about how you are being looked after if you need to?
30 responses: 7 'yes' 23 'no'.

Although this standard is reported as met a recommendation is made that strategies should be identified to further promote the children's guide and the complaints procedures.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Since the previous inspection the local authority had introduced a programme of basic emergency aid training for carers. This was included in the pre-approval training programme, and opportunities were being made available to approved carers, although the take-up rate had been low.

Foster carers who were visited confirmed they had received basic health information about the children placed with them. There was an example of a delay in a child receiving appropriate medical care because of problems in getting consent out of hours (see recommendation made at Standard 18).

The county council had recently appointed two nurses with special responsibility for Looked After Children who were expected to be a valuable source of advice. There were examples of specialist advice made available, and social workers made many comments about foster carers working well with other agencies, sometimes supporting therapeutic input.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The inspector met with the Education Co-ordinator for Looked After Children. He worked closely with the fostering service and carers when required. The inspector was impressed with his very high level of commitment to providing a good service to the children. He was an excellent advocate on their behalf. Funding had been allocated for two support workers, each of whom will have a caseload of 30 children, with a target of supporting children to reach educational goals. He said that foster carers were encouraged and expected to be involved in all stages of education. It was however very varied. Some supported a lot and others not so. He said the schools were encouraged to seek input from foster carers at all times and especially when developing PEP's. Foster carers were kept informed via newsletters and invitations to conferences. 25 places were to be earmarked in an event such as this purely for foster carers.

There were information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of the Looked After Children, although these did not specifically differentiate the children in foster care from other Looked After Children. The information was known to the co-ordinator who confirmed there were 2 young people excluded from school at the time of the inspection.

Children generally made very positive statements about the ways in which they were encouraged by foster carers in their education. Examples included: given help with homework, helped to stay calm and concentrate, assistance with troubles, helped to stay a day in school. One young person indicated that their foster carers did not help. Another observed that they did not like to be made to feel different in school.

Social workers made some very specific references to the excellent educational support given to young people by their foster carers.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The fostering preparation programme includes issues about helping young people move on into independence. Examples were seen during this inspection of young people receiving appropriate support and guidance. Inevitably different carers will have different skills and abilities in this respect and there were some variable reports from social workers about the effectiveness of carers. An issue raised by some carers was that there were cases when foster carers were becoming lodgings providers and were less available for fostering.

Although moving on is a theme in the basic foster care training, there was no evidence of specific training for carers in the Pathway Planning process. Some carers had a particular interest in working with young people towards independence and a review of their skills and the guidance available to them is advised. Inspectors recommend that there should be opportunities promoted for joint training with workers in the post care service.

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?

1

Eleven personnel files were checked during this inspection, specifically the new appointments. Information made available to the inspector did not evidence the details as required in Regulation 10, Schedule 1. Information omitted included photographs. (Inspectors are aware that the council operates a photo identity card system for staff, but evidence was not seen on staff records.) Records made available did not include documentary evidence of relevant qualifications, in some cases a full employment history was not seen, and no written explanation of gaps in employment. The inspectors are aware from prior knowledge of practice in Dorset, and from previous discussions with personnel that it is likely that appropriate procedures and records are made of these points but insufficient information was made available to the inspection to evidence that this standard was met. A requirement has been made.

Qualified staff were employed in the assessment and approval of foster carers. Unqualified staff worked under the direct supervision of the qualified workers.

Total number of staff of the agency: (including 4 administrative staff)

19

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

4

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

As previously stated the manager of the service had been faced with significant staffing shortages, including administrative staff. During that time temporary arrangements had been made to ensure that the service was maintained as best as possible with priority work only being undertaken. Some assessment work was undertaken by sessional staff. The staffing levels had recovered and extra funding had been made available for additional posts.

Supervision of staff continued and staff valued the input of the manager. There was an impact on how the service could respond to requests. Several social workers referred to the lack of input from the family placement team. In particular, these comments were largely about when assessments were required for specific family and friends carers.

Carers who had been approved relatively recently spoke of delays in the assessment process although in another case a prompt assessment was evidenced to provide an appropriate match for a child with a disability. Overall there were ten negative comments made by foster carers about the length of time of the assessment.

A training portfolio for use by carers had been produced although was still in draft form. The service had increased the provision of office equipment and fostering officers indicated they generally had good access to computers.

Staff confirmed they had copies of the relevant policies in regard to their employment (Standard 16.16).

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 full time equivalent staffing complement had been increased and at the time of the inspection there was a much improved staffing situation. Vacancies had been filled; some staff were still in the process of induction. The inspectors and the manager of the team considered that the staffing level was at a more promising level to meet the needs of the service as it was currently operating. A recommendation is made that when staffing short falls occur the contingency plans should be more robust (Standard 17) in order to maintain an adequate service. Some carers expressed concern about the delays in appointing staff and about the impact on them because of staff sickness.

This report has identified a need for more fostering service input into the assessments of family and friends as carers and the capacity of the team to undertake this will need review (see Standard 16).

As previously stated, shortfalls in staffing levels had been managed by the use of some sessional worker time, and by reducing input into non-urgent work.

The more satisfactory staffing situation was giving the opportunity for implementing recruitment strategies. Particular areas were to be targeted, and the staff were aiming to recruit carers to meet the needs of the children and young people for whom placements had been hard to find.

The assessment process was clear and recent assessment reports that were read indicated that good practice guidelines were being implemented, for example in contacting ex-partners. Some staff were to have training in competency based assessments. There is a clearly set out assessment process for carers although this will need some further elaboration to prepare people for the more evidence based approach that is becoming established.

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?

2

Staff generally expressed satisfaction in regard to the council's employment practices and support to employees. The observation was made that recruitment practices did not make best use of modern communications systems. The manager and service manager confirmed that appropriate procedures were followed when performance or disciplinary matters were identified and they linked closely with the Human Resources section of the council.

A survey was undertaken of foster carers who had been in touch with the out of hours service. The inspector saw the responses which indicated in general that carers viewed positively the support that they received from this service. Two of the twenty nine responses had more negative views although several others referred to needing more locally based, immediate support. The manager of the fostering service described how a local scheme had been piloted but had been seldom used. The inspectors considered that this review of the level of out of hours service was a very positive approach. It will need to be regularly revisited with individual carers through foster carer reviews and in placement agreements, especially when there is an identified need for urgent back-up as part of the support package.

The inspectors heard of one instance when the foster carer understood that there had been delay about obtaining appropriate consent out of hours for a child on a Care Order to have an operation. The delay caused considerable concern for the foster carer. A recommendation was made that management processes for obtaining the necessary consent out of hours may need review. On receipt of the action plan, the inspector is satisfied that this situation has been reviewed and the circumstances of that particular case considered.

A health and safety policy has been introduced for foster placements.

The whistleblowing policy has not yet been distributed to carers but will be part of the revised handbook. The recommendation about this is repeated from last year. Inspectors do acknowledge that carers have had a great deal of information sent to them over recent months and understand that the fostering service is cautious about overload, preferring to introduce ideas through discussion and summaries. Several carers surveys referred to 'too much paperwork'.

Some carers referred to the need to have more evidence that their role was appreciated by the council. Inspectors understand that senior management was proposing to attend support groups. Some carers specifically stated they would like to hear more directly from senior people in the council. The need to feel valued, even 'a bunch of flowers', was expressed.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

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

The county council has a training programme to which both staff and carers have access. This is reviewed annually. There was no evidence made available to the inspectors that the effectiveness of training programmes for the staff providing the fostering service was routinely evaluated and that programmes had been reviewed and updated. Some training needs were identified during this inspection. For example, the assessment and support of family and friends carers (see Standard 32), supporting young people into independence (see Standard 14).

Ongoing training opportunities are available to staff through specialist organisations, for example Fostering Network. The inspector was told that applications to the PQ award were on hold. Induction training was well evidenced. New staff commented favourably on the training they had received. There was a system for staff appraisal.

There were some opportunities for carers to attend training events with staff although the view was expressed that the system was unfair to carers since mileage claims were not provided to them (see also Standard 23).

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Staff reported that they had a good understanding of lines of accountability and of their own duties and responsibilities. They confirmed that they received management supervision and a record was made of this. There was a system for regular staff appraisals.

Staff meetings were held regularly and minutes of these were seen in the course of the inspection.

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**

The fostering service provided support to carers through visits, phone calls and support groups. Respite was provided in some cases. There was also an office hours duty system if carers needed advice and their own link worker was not available. Carers were allocated to a family placement officer although more direct support was often undertaken by the support assistants in the team. Carers generally reported that they felt satisfied with the support. Six carers wrote on survey responses that they did not get enough support. Comments included a reference to 'long gaps' between visits, the team being 'understaffed and undertrained', 'staff can't do two jobs', 'I just don't seem to see anyone unless someone's due', and 'not enough personal contact'.

Evidence was provided to the inspection that annual reviews of carers had been undertaken. An independent reviewing officer had been introduced as a strategy to improve the effectiveness of the reviewing process. Although this position was for a trial period, the proposal is consistent with best practice. It would help increase opportunities to better assess the needs of those carers who do not attend groups and who have been less forthcoming in stating their views.

The children's social workers generally reported positively about the fostering service.

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

The fostering service had a supervising family placement worker allocated to each carer and there was a system for recording regular supervisory visits. As previously stated, staffing levels had been insufficient to ensure that visits have been frequent in all cases and in some circumstances support workers undertook the direct contact.

The foster care agreement set out the terms and conditions of approval and the expectations of the local authority. The foster carers' handbook was in the process of being revised. The inspectors recommend that this work is progressed and that information is readily accessible to carers. There were several comments from carers about 'drowning in paperwork' and there will need to be a sensitive approach to ensuring they have up-to-date, useful information.

A recommendation has been made about ensuring that unannounced visits are undertaken at least once a year. None were evidenced in the files that were read, although some staff stated they endeavour to make these visits whenever they can.

The foster care association representatives confirmed they are able to provide support to carers if there is an investigation into allegations.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Pre-approval training was by means of a course based on Fostering Network's programme and is delivered by a foster carer and a family placement officer.

On a case by case basis support for childcare expenses had been made available but this was not widely known. A recommendation is made that guidance should be provided about support that might be available.

A number of comments were made in the survey by foster carers that there was insufficient post-approval training, and several referred to having had more training in previous years compared to recent times. A small number of carers have undertaken a NVQ. There was some dissatisfaction expressed by carers about training not being linked to any skills assessment approach which could be related to financial reward. Other carers described relevant training they had received especially in connection with specialist needs, for example in connection with the care of children with a disability.

There was no evidence that attention had been given to the training needs of male carers, or of support to the sons and daughters of foster carers. There was a programme of one-to-one work with carers in regard safe caring. Inspectors acknowledge that the annual reviews included an appraisal of training and development needs. Feedback from the reviewing officer was also contributing to a broader view of training needs and this was beginning to provide a valuable perspective about training needs.

Overall, the training was described as piecemeal. Inspectors recommend that there should be a review of the strategy for the training of carers. This should include an evaluation of the effectiveness of training and consideration to linking training more consistently with the services provided in the various fostering schemes.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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A system was in place to ensure that foster carers' files contained the required information in accordance with Regulation 30. Some children's records were kept separately by the fostering service. This inspection did not examine the main files held by the childcare social workers. Some carers' files examined had information about children no longer placed with them, some misfiling was noted; it is recommended that attention is given to more systematic file management. Some foster carers' files did not include the placement arrangement details for the young person in placement. Placing social workers confirmed in the majority of cases that there was a foster placement agreement for each child and foster carers confirmed they generally had the LAC documentation. It is recommended that the foster placement agreement should be included on the foster carer's file. Inspectors did see examples where detailed placement agreements evidenced that excellent practice had been undertaken in making the foster care arrangement.

Foster carers who were visited all had a good understanding of why the child was with them and the purpose of the placement. As previously stated some foster carers reported they had not been given full information and a relevant requirement has been made elsewhere in this report (see Standard 9).

Carers were encouraged in training to understand the importance of recording significant life events, for example by having photograph albums, and children spoken to were able to show inspectors awards and certificates as well as photos.

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
<p>Separate records were kept for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. The manager acknowledged that the inspectors would find some files in a less than satisfactory order because of staffing difficulties. There were some examples of misfiling and of children's papers filed on foster carers' files (see recommendation made in Standard 24).</p> <p>Files were kept in locked cabinets on both sites.</p> <p>There is a policy and leaflets in respect of access to records by a child or by foster carers. Foster carer files contained a full record of checks and references that had been obtained. Evidence of checks with the CRB were kept centrally by the county personnel section, with a separate record made for foster carer files.</p> <p>A system had been established for collating data on allegations and complaints. This was still developing and there was insufficient data in some cases on the outcomes.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			232
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			29
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	91.09	Maximum £	446.30

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering team was based on two sites. Although this standard is considered met in that the premises are appropriate, some issues about the premises were noted. The Wimborne office was in the process of some changes. The fostering workers had been moved to a less crowded office. It was also planned that the administrative team would shortly move downstairs. This would increase the level of security which was not altogether satisfactory. The premises were shared by non social services staff at the time of the inspection although this arrangement was to finish shortly. The building was alarmed and access was through a door at request through an intercom system. Having the administrative staff downstairs will provide more opportunity for monitoring access. There is a large room used for training with space for storage of training materials and the premises has scope for being a valuable resource for the expanding needs of the fostering and adoption services.

The Dorchester site had adequate space and storage and had appropriate security arrangements. Staff were critical of the facilities at this office, because of the large open plan nature of the office, the level of noise, the poor quality temperature control and the difficulties in parking. The availability of computers was improved since the last inspection.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

This standard is not applicable.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

This standard is not applicable.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Foster carers generally reported that payments were made promptly. They were provided with written information about the current allowances on an annual basis. The level of fee was criticised by ten of the carers in the survey. Some of the comments: 'appalling', 'static', 'would get more for stacking beans', 'more would be good then you wouldn't have to ask for little things'. Improved tax arrangements had been welcomed by the foster carer association representatives. However this was less relevant for some carers and finances remain an area that needs review. There were several comments from carers who were considering whether fostering for Dorset was rewarding enough.

There was less clear information about expenses, for example in providing transport. Carers frequently reported inconsistencies between child care teams in the response made to requests for expenses. A foster carer described the experience of having children who were the responsibility of four different local childcare offices and each one having different expectations about what foster carers were entitled to. There were differences reported in the way that social workers responded to funding for holidays. This issue had been raised in the previous year's inspection and inspectors heard no evidence of any improvement. On the contrary some of the reports indicated that the differences and the lack of clarity were creating ill-will and were contributing to some carers thinking about withdrawing their services.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Policies and procedures for panel were in place but continue to need some updating. For example, panel minutes noted that members had identified they did not currently have a policy in regard to bringing information about disruptions to panel. There had also been an identified need for more procedural information on the assessment and approval of family and friends as carers.

Panel minute records evidenced that quoracy has been largely maintained and the panel chair acknowledged that it had been a close call at times. Panel membership now includes a person who was fostered and also the Senior Practitioner (Permanence) from the fostering service. The panel chair confirmed that new panel members did not start until checks had been completed.

The inspector observed a panel which was required to address some challenging issues, particularly in cases presented involved applications by relatives to care for a child. The assessments had not been carried out by the fostering service although training was offered in one case. Panel members asked pertinent questions and identified relevant issues. A thorough approach was evidenced and there was specific consideration to achieving fairness to applicants.

A process had been undertaken for a report of all foster carer reviews of this past year to be presented to the panel (in accordance with Regulation 29(5)) In general the panel would expect to give direct consideration to those reviews where there has been some concern. There is not a regular process established for the panel to receive management information about the outcome of the reviews as suggested in Standard 30.6. A recommendation is made about this and other information that the panel should be monitoring, i.e. the range and type of carers available to the local authority in comparison with the needs of children.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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A short-term breaks scheme for children with disabilities is provided by the fostering service. The senior practitioner with specialist responsibilities for this scheme has had an extended period of sickness absence but made herself available for interview in this inspection and was very committed to developing and promoting the service. The shared care scheme workers linked closely with the relevant social workers and parents. Excellent practice in the assessment of the carer, and the support made available, was seen in the case chosen for tracking in this inspection.

The fostering service was planning to develop a broader focused short-breaks scheme as part of the strategy to support families. The present arrangements for requests for short-term breaks for children who do not have a disability were within the mainstream fostering resources but it was acknowledged that this is an expanding need.

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?	1
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A considerable proportion of new carer approvals were of family and friends carers who were approved for a specific young person.

A number of issues about these arrangements were raised in the inspection. The independent foster carers' association's representative reported that they had received calls from carers in this position who were not always receiving the same financial support as other carers. Inspectors heard of one example of a kinship carer having to insist on being assessed to foster 'as a matter of principle'. This case and others indicated that child care social workers sometimes had insufficient knowledge of the legal requirements. Immediate placements made under regulation 38 in some cases were exceeding six weeks before being brought to panel as an application to foster. Social workers told inspectors that it took a long time finding out what to do in these cases.

Fostering staff observed that they sometimes only heard about prospective family and friends carers when the application was brought to panel by the social worker. In other cases they had an advisory role at an earlier stage or participate in a joint assessment following the presentation of an interim report. Regulation 27 indicates that it should be the fostering service provider who carries out an assessment of any person whom it considers to become a foster parent; it follows from this that the fostering team manager should be advised of the intention to apply for approval and should be responsible for overseeing the assessment. A requirement has been made in respect of the management and content of these assessments (See also Standard 4).

The fostering panel was evidenced as being flexible and sensitive in responding to applications made to them and were seeking to give a thorough consideration of all relevant issues. Members had acknowledged that they would welcome more guidance since they had experienced an increase in these applications. Some applications were presented to panel without the required information. (See requirements) A general recommendation is also made about the need for clearer guidelines for social workers and panel members.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted from the 9th December 2003 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

YES

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 19th March 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I Mr Peter Finn of Dorset Fostering Team 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	<u>Peter Finn</u>
Signature	<u><i>P Finn</i></u>
Designation	<u>Team Manager</u>
Date/	<u>14/04/04</u>

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.