



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Fostering Service**

Dept of Social Services and Housing
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
RG12 1JD

13th December 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Fostering Services

Address

Dept of Social Services and Housing, Time Square,
Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD

Local Authority Manager

Diane Grist

Tel No:

01344 351534

Address

Dept of Social Services and Housing, Time Square,
Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

22/03/04

Date of Inspection Visit		13th December 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Maire Atherton	074456
Name of Inspector	2	Bob Dawes	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Diane Grist	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

'The Fostering Service within Bracknell Forest Borough Council is provided by the Family Placement Team. The team is part of Children's Services (Inclusion) and sits within the Social Services and Housing Department.'

'The Fostering Service is an integral part of the Borough's Children and Families Service sharing the same senior management structure.'

'The team operates generically, delivering not only the Fostering Service but also adoption, community child-minding and placement finding services.'

Services provided in respect of foster care include:

'A general fostering scheme, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups aged 0-18 years, in short term, long term and relief care placements.

A specialist family based day/overnight respite care scheme to support children and young people with disabilities and their families.'

(Excerpts from the latest Statement of Purpose held by the Commission, dated October 2004)

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This inspection was carried out over an extended period beginning on 22nd November 2004 with an inspector attending a planned foster carers event, a meeting with the manager on 30th November, a children's group meeting on 1st December, a visit to a carer on 7th December, meetings with link workers and social workers on 9th December, between 13th and 15th a range of meetings and document reading took place and on 20th December the panel was observed and feedback was given to the managers.

The inspectors were appreciative of the time, co-operation and assistance provided by the whole of the staff team during this inspection.

Questionnaires were sent to all foster carers, foster children and placing authorities in advance of the inspection. Parents of children seen during the inspection were written to and an offer made to meet with them to discuss their view of the quality of care provided to their child. The inspectors met with one birth parent.

Overall the team met or almost all of the 30 standards that are applicable to this service. Two areas were particularly commended. The service is well managed and foster carers were generally appreciative of the support received from staff.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was met.

The latest Statement of Purpose is dated October 2004 and meets the requirements of the standard. It was not clear whether elected members had approved this latest version, which had been updated in line with the recommendation in the last report.

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

One standards was met the other exceeded.

There have been no changes to the management personnel of the fostering service. The manager has completed a management qualification and impressed the inspectors with the wealth of knowledge of and commitment to the fostering task.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

These standards were met.

During the course of the inspection the inspectors observed the frequent communication between the whole of the staff team. This included the administrative support workers attached to the fostering service. Carers reported the benefits of effective communication

and had a clear understanding of the roles of the staff of the fostering service. There was evidence from discussion with staff members that they had a clear understanding of the roles within the management team and of the lines of responsibility and accountability.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

6 of these Standards were met. There were minor shortfalls on the remaining 3.

The foster homes visited were all warm and adequately furnished and communal areas were decorated to an acceptable standard. An issue identified with regard to an individual child's accommodation was passed to the Manager for attention. As accommodation issues were highlighted in the last report it is recommended that a more robust approach to the accommodation aspect in the annual review of foster carer's be adopted.

Some comments made to the inspectors during the course of the inspection indicated that training for foster carers on valuing diversity would be useful both to raise awareness and improve understanding.

There was evidence that the fostering service takes a pragmatic approach to the placement of children on an emergency basis, where placements may be made outside the terms of approval to meet emergency needs. The fostering service had taken a number of carers back to panel in October and November 2004 to change the terms of approval for a broader remit. It is anticipated that this will result in a further reduction in the number of placements outside the terms of approval.

It is acknowledged that progress has been made but the requirement from the previous report has been restated.

Foster carers and staff confirmed that training in safe caring had been made available. The files seen evidenced that safe caring guidelines had been written.

There are clear processes for dealing with allegations of neglect or other abuse of a child in foster care, and processes for managing allegations against carers.

There were clear contact arrangements in place for those children for whom this was required. An area of some concern to carers was that the names, addresses and contact details of placements were provided routinely to birth parents whose children were accommodated. This would appear to need consideration as part of the placement plan in order that issues relating to particular families can be fully addressed.

The fostering service has started to use Foster Placement Agreements, as required in the last inspection report, where new placements have been made.

Children spoken with and those that responded to the questionnaire confirmed that they were consulted about things that were important to them. Several young people gave concrete examples where things had changed at their request.

The carers reported that they were given full health records and appropriate consent forms for the children they were looking after. The manager of the service and the carers were clear that the responsibility for the healthcare of children remained with the social worker. Two particular deficits were identified during the course of the inspection and at feedback the Service Manager outlined how it was proposed to address this.

The young people and the carers spoken with all gave clear examples of how education is supported and promoted.

The Authority has policies and procedures in place in respect of young people leaving Local Authority care. An older foster child spoken with felt he was being given appropriate help to assist him in developing the skills needed for independent living.

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

7 of these Standards were met. There were minor shortfalls on one and one was exceeded.

The inspectors were informed that all staff now have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks in place. This was confirmed on the sample of staff personal files seen.

There is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Most staff reported that they received regular formal supervision from their line manager and that this was recorded. Where formal supervision does not occur as regularly as planned the informal support networks were reported to be very robust. All staff reported that the management were readily available and approachable for informal support and supervision and this was observed during the course of the inspection.

Inspectors were told by staff and carers and observed in practice the real strength and benefits in having dedicated clerical/administrative staff for the fostering team.

The fostering service social workers and the children's social workers share office accommodation. Both groups of staff commented positively on this and said how this arrangement promotes very effective communication and joint working.

The manager and the worker with lead responsibility for recruitment outlined the initiatives that had been put in place to recruit carers this year. It has been a quiet year for recruitment and there have been sufficient staff available to undertake the fostering assessments required.

There is a commendable commitment to training.

Foster carers spoken with generally felt well supported by their supervising social workers and described the relationship as positive.

Since the last inspection all carers approved prior to April 2002 have had their last annual review taken to panel, as required in the last inspection report. The inspectors were advised that the plans to provide a degree of independence to the foster carers annual review had now been agreed and an implementation date was to be set.

Attention is drawn to standard 22.3', which states that foster carers are to be "supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker". The link work provided by the service is of a good quality but does not fully meet this standard in terms of social work qualification.

The records seen showed that unannounced visits were being undertaken and recorded.

Records (Standards 24-25)
These standards were met.

All records were in good order.

It is advised that training for carers in keeping records and memorabilia would benefit future life story work with the children.

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

This standard was met.

The Authority's Children's Services are situated on one floor. The workers in the family placement team sit together in one area of the open plan office.

There is a high commitment to IT and appropriate safeguards were in place.

There were robust security measures in place to regulate access to the building at the time of this visit.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

Two of the three standards in this section are not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services. The third was met.

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. They are well publicised and reviewed regularly. Carers spoken with all praised the Authority saying they received payments promptly and that the payments were always correct. This aspect of the service is managed directly by the administrative section of the service.

Fostering Panels(Standard 30)

This standard was met.

This panel is well established. It is a joint panel with one other local authority and an Independent Fostering Agency. The constitution of the panel is in line with the Regulation. The panel was chaired by the vice chair on this occasion. She confirmed that she had attended relevant training. The panel was conducted effectively.

There was evidence that all panel members had prepared for the panel and all were invited to contribute to the process. The vice chair was confident in the role and it was noted during the observation of the panel that the quality of the assessments was commented on.

Short term breaks(Standard 31)

This standard was not evaluated.

Family and friends as carers(Standard 32)

This standard was met.

The Authority has a clear set of policies and procedures relating to 'Kinship care'. The inspectors spoke with one kinship carer. She generally felt well supported but it was acknowledged that the distance involved meant that visits were not easily achievable in an emergency.

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:

As outlined in the requirements and recommendations sections of this report.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	Regulation 34 (1)(b)	FS8	Ensure that children are placed with carers who are approved to care for them.	From 29/03/04

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Maire Atherton</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Bob Dawes</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	<u>23/12/04</u>		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	15(2)(b)	FS12	Children's routine health care needs are to be met.	28/02/05
2	Regulation 34 (1)(b)	FS8	Ensure that children are placed with carers who are approved to care for them.	From 29/03/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS6	A more robust approach to the accommodation aspect in the annual review of foster carer's should be adopted.
2	FS22	A record of the outcome of complaints is to be kept to enable an evaluation to be undertaken.
3	FS31	It is recommended that the respite service be reviewed, and action taken to ensure that the identified staffing requirements are fulfilled.
4	FS32	It is recommended that evidence of the assessment on which the carers allowance is based in kinship care, be included on the carer's file.
5	FS22	Appropriately qualified social workers should undertake the role of link worker.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B	INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS
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The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	9
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	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	NO
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	22/11/04
Time of Inspection	19.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	73

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Since the last inspection the statement of purpose has been reviewed and the Family Placement Team no longer manages Supported Lodgings. It was a recommendation of the last report that the experience of staff be included in the statement of purpose, this has been done.

The children and young people spoken with confirmed that they had received a copy of the Children's Guide. In response to the recommendation in the last report about making the Children's Guide more accessible, the manager informed the inspectors that research was in progress on putting the information contained in the Children's Guide onto a CD-rom, with an interactive element for younger children and those with a disability.

It was a recommendation of the last report that the experience of staff be included in the statement of purpose, this has been done.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The manager has a substantial amount of experience, having worked in Family Placement since 1981. She has been the manager of this service since 2002. She holds a professional social work qualification and a gained a Certificate in Management Studies in Summer 2004.	
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Throughout the course of the inspection the inspectors were told by a number of sources that the manager of the service exercised clear and committed leadership and possessed a wealth of knowledge about fostering which was shared with those working for the service.	
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Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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There have been no changes to the management arrangements since the last inspection.	
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Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

During the course of the inspection the inspectors observed the frequent communication between the whole of the staff team. This included the administrative support workers attached to the fostering service. Carers reported the benefits of effective communication and had a clear understanding of the roles of the staff of the fostering service.

Discussion with carer's and access to the records kept by them evidenced monitoring by the supervising social workers.

Local Authority fostering services are not statutorily required to notify the Commission of the incidents listed below, this information is requested annually as part of the pre-inspection information.

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

X

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.

2

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence from discussion with staff members that they had a clear understanding of the roles within the management team and of the lines of responsibility and accountability.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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As part of this inspection Inspectors 'tracked' the care of four children and young people. Three foster homes were visited. The homes were all warm and furnished and communal areas decorated to an acceptable standard.

There was evidence of files seen that written risk assessments were completed in instances where a foster child shares a bedroom.

In one bedroom the bed being used was not suitable. There were steps in place to address this deficit.

The previous inspection report noted that some thought be given to how a particular bedroom was furnished. As a similar issue has been highlighted this year it is recommended that a more robust approach to the accommodation aspect in the annual review of foster carer's be adopted.

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?
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The fostering service does support some cross-cultural placements. The issue of diversity is covered in the Looked After children paperwork.

Some comments made to the inspectors during the course of the inspection indicated that training for foster carers on valuing diversity would be useful both to raise awareness and improve understanding.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council does not have an Equal Opportunities Policy in place.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Family Placement team operates a placement finding service for all children and young people identified by social workers as needing a placement. This includes the identification of suitable residential placements for children and young people for whom a family placement is not deemed appropriate, or for whom one is not available.

This is done through the duty service provided by the family placement team. Inspectors heard that this work could be very time consuming and detract from the team's core tasks. Although some knowledge has been built up through doing this work, the workers may not know either the child or the placement. It was a recommendation in the past two inspection reports that consideration should be given to appropriateness of the role of placement organisers for placements other than fostering. The Service Manager for the fostering team, who also manages a number of other services, is convinced that the placement finding service is appropriately situated in the fostering team. The staff reported that a more robust approach to the referral process had made the task more manageable, although on occasions the core tasks of the service were felt to suffer.

There was evidence that the fostering service takes a pragmatic approach to the placement of children on an emergency basis, where placements may be made outside the terms of approval to meet emergency needs. The fostering service had taken a number of carers back to panel in October and November 2004 to change the terms of approval for a broader remit. It is anticipated that this will result in a further reduction in the number of placements outside the terms of approval.

At the time of this visit the inspectors were informed that there were some placements outside the terms of the carers approval. It is acknowledged that progress has been made but the requirement from the previous report has been restated.

Discussion with foster carers and children indicated that where the placement was planned there were opportunities for introductory visits, which were appreciated.

The Local Authority uses the formats produced by the Department of Health for the recording of information and plans in relation to children Looked After.

Foster placement agreements were not in place on all files seen.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8) The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Foster carers and staff confirmed that training in safe caring had been made available. The files seen evidenced that safe caring guidelines had been written.</p> <p>There are clear processes for dealing with allegations of neglect or other abuse of a child in foster care, and processes for managing allegations against carers.</p> <p>Too few children's questionnaires were received to draw any general conclusions in respect of bullying.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9) The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There were clear contact arrangements in place for those children for whom this was required. There was some evidence to suggest that changes to the contact arrangements were not always communicated effectively to the children and carers, with a negative outcome for children in an area in which the carers felt they had no control. Another area of some concern to carers was that the names, addresses and contact details of placements were provided routinely to birth parents whose children were accommodated. Although carers clearly understood the principle behind this they did not feel that in all cases sufficient consideration had been paid to the potential risks, especially where there might be concerns about parental or family behaviour. This would appear to need consideration as part of the placement plan.</p> <p>The fostering service has started to use Foster Placement Agreements, as required in the last inspection report, where new placements have been made.</p> <p>Young people spoken with in a group felt that they were well supported in maintaining appropriate contact if they wished to.</p>		

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
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Children spoken with and those that responded to the questionnaire confirmed that they were consulted about things that were important to them. Several young people gave concrete examples where things had changed at their request. These included contact, an increase and a decrease, a new leisure activity and a different style of clothing.

Young people spoken with were clear that they knew how to complain and confirmed that the information was available in the Children's guide.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)
The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The carers reported that they were given full health records and appropriate consent forms for the children they were looking after. The manager of the service and the carers were clear that the responsibility for the health care of children remained with the social worker. In two cases tracked children had not been registered with a dentist, one for two years. In both cases the carers had taken steps to address this issue. At feedback the Service Manager informed the inspectors that the Authority was in the process of developing a system for identifying health issues through the 'Looked after Children' review system.

Children spoken with and in questionnaires indicated that they felt their carers promoted a healthy lifestyle and showed awareness of a healthy diet.

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
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The young people and the carers spoken with all gave clear examples of how education is supported and promoted. One young person told the inspectors about his part in the school Christmas production which his carer had been to see. In a group meeting a couple of carers outlined positive relationships with schools. One carer expressed some frustration that a personal education plan meeting had just been postponed for the third time.

Bracknell ensures that every child of an appropriate age in a foster home has access to a computer, linked up to the education network.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Authority has policies and procedures in place in respect of young people leaving Local Authority care. An older foster child spoken with felt he was being given appropriate help to assist him in developing the skills needed for independent living.

One young person had moved out of a residential care home with a respite foster placement to independent accommodation. This had not proved a successful move and the young person had returned to Bracknell and was in supported living. The Supported living scheme is no longer managed by the fostering team, but is placed in Housing. The respite fostering facility was still open to the young person but he had not chosen to use it when the inspector spoke with him.

In the pre-inspection questionnaire the fostering service manager outlined the structures that are in place to support young people in the acquisition of skills for independent living, primarily the After Care team and the After Care Group.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were informed that all staff now have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks in place. This was confirmed on the sample of staff personal files seen.

At the time of this visit there were two dedicated administrative officers in post, as the proposed changes had not been fully implemented.

There have been no new appointments to the fostering service since the last inspection. The post of social worker for respite fostering has been advertised several times with no success.

Total number of staff of the agency:

11

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

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

As previously noted there is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Most staff reported that they received regular formal supervision from their line manager and that this was recorded. All staff reported that the management were readily available and approachable for informal support and supervision and this was observed during the course of the inspection.

All staff have a wide-ranging workload, which covers areas outside the scope of this inspection. Inspectors were informed that time in lieu can build up but that they are supported and encouraged to take this time back, some find this easier to do than others.

Inspectors were told by staff and carers and observed in practice the real strength and benefits in having dedicated clerical/administrative staff for the fostering team. Previously these staff sat with the social workers. A recent change to administrative support within the wider department has resulted in these staff moving desks to be part of an administrative team. Although the relative distance involved is negligible the potential losses should be considered.

The manager outlined the systems that are in place to monitor agency foster placements. These include a monthly placement review meetings for all placements that are out of Borough.

There is evidence of a good commitment to training in the fostering service. A format for a staff training portfolio has been developed and it is intended to provide this for carers, as there is not a co-ordinated approach to the maintenance of a training portfolio for carers at the moment.

The fostering service social workers and the children's social workers share office accommodation. Both groups of staff commented positively on this and said how this arrangement promotes very effective communication and joint working.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The manager and the worker with lead responsibility for recruitment outlined the initiatives that had been put in place to recruit carers this year. The worker has systems in place to evidence the initiatives undertaken and endeavours to ensure that records are kept which reflect the effectiveness of each initiative.

It has been a quiet year for recruitment and there have been sufficient staff available to undertake the fostering assessments required. Where assessments have been undertaken by social work assistants this has been under the supervision of a qualified social worker.

The movement of the management of the supported lodgings scheme from the fostering service resulted in the loss of one post. Otherwise the team has remained unchanged since the last inspection and there are ongoing difficulties in recruiting to the post for respite care.

There is clarity about the functions of the fostering team, which includes placement finding in addition to family based placements, one day a week on duty and one evening providing out of hours support and regular weekend out of hours support. The fostering manager keeps the workload situation under review and the Service Manager expressed the view that the fostering service was adequately staffed.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

In the sample of records inspected there were seen to be sound employment practices in place.

As previously noted there is an established out of hours support system for carers in place. The staff of the fostering service runs this until 11pm and thereafter the emergency duty team is available to carers. All carers were familiar with and appreciative of the out of hours support.

There is a comprehensive Health and Safety Policy in place.

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?****4**

There is a commendable commitment to training. The majority of staff have undertaken post-qualifying training. Staff demonstrated that a considerable range of relevant and appropriate training had been undertaken. Social workers attending external courses provide cascade training for other interested staff members and an example of this was given.

Training for carers is actively promoted and encouraged, particularly through the annual review process. An assistant social worker has lead responsibility for organising foster carer training. It was reported that as carers can access training from a number of sources it could prove difficult to keep track of the full range of training undertaken. Hence the development of a training portfolio for carers.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

There is a planned programme of regular supervision and appraisal. Where formal supervision does not occur as regularly as planned the informal support networks were reported to be very robust.

Staff meetings are held fortnightly and the inspectors saw records of these meetings.

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**

Foster carers spoken with generally felt well supported by their supervising social workers and described the relationship as positive.

There is a duty system in place Monday to Friday, which provides foster carers with support if their supervising social worker is not available. In addition, as previously noted, the telephone out of hours support provided by the fostering service is much appreciated. A log is kept of the calls made to the out of hours so that the service may be monitored and evaluated.

Since the last inspection all carers approved prior to April 2002 have had their last annual review taken to panel, as required in the last inspection report. Some of these reviews had taken place more than 12 months since the previous review. The plans outlined in the last report to move to a new system for annual reviews that would incorporate a considerable degree of independence had not been realised at the time of this visit. The inspectors were advised that the plans had now been agreed and an implementation date was to be set.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

In the sample of records inspected there was a copy of the foster care agreement, which meets the requirement of schedule 5.

Attention is drawn to standard 22.3, which states that foster carers are to be "supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker". The link work provided by the service is of a good quality but does not fully meet this standard in terms of social work qualification.

The handbook has been distributed to all foster carers.

The records seen showed that unannounced visits were being undertaken and recorded. The panel minutes also noted where unannounced visits were not recorded on the annual review and the manager was asked to follow this up.

The record of complaints was seen. In one case it was noted that the response to the complaint was not available on file. The complaint had been passed to the Head of Children's Services; a copy of the response was to be requested.

The record of allegations was seen. Both had been appropriately addressed by the fostering service as far as the investigations by the placing authorities permitted. In one case the allegations were unsubstantiated. In the other the carer admitted the allegations. In this case the fostering service did not feel able to provide independent support to the carers. The carers have been de-registered by the service.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

From discussion with the Manager, and from meetings with carers it is evident that joint arrangements with neighbouring authorities are in place for pre-approval training.

An assistant social worker takes the lead responsibility for organising training for foster carers and is an NVQ assessor. A range of training is available, including NVQ 3. Training is actively promoted, supported and encouraged through the annual review process. 24 carers attended a recent training event.

The fostering service arranged external training for children of foster carers. This was such a positive experience that from this a support group for children of foster carers was established. They meet once a term and this is co-ordinated by an assistant social worker. The participants have written an article for the fostering service magazine to promote the group. The co-ordinator informed the inspectors that there are clear guidelines and boundaries outlined in respect of confidentiality of a child in placement for example. It is advised that these are put in writing. The group of foster carers spoken with thought very highly of this provision for their children.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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At the time of this visit a new computer recording system had been introduced, SWIFT, which allows for the electronic storage of information. The inspectors did not access the electronically stored material during this visit. The main case file held most of the information required, in one case the most 'Looked after Children' review papers were not found.

Carers spoken with had differing views and understanding on the need for making a record of the child's stay with them, including the keeping of appropriate memorabilia. This is well outlined in the foster carer's handbook and it is advised that training in this area for carers would benefit future life story work with the children. Carers are given a lockable storage facility to store records.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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A sample of records of individual children and young people living in foster care was examined, alongside a corresponding sample of records relating to the foster carers caring for them. All records were in good order.

Any child or carer wishing to access their records can do so in accordance with the authority policy.

Five of the six carers who left the agency did so because they moved away or there was a change in their family circumstances.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			37
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			74
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			93
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			7
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			6
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	193.91	Maximum £	360.12

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 Authority's Children's Services are situated on one floor. The workers in the family placement team sit together in one area of the open plan office. There is a high staff density and it was reported that storage facilities are minimal on the premises.

There is a high commitment to IT and appropriate safeguards were in place.

There were robust security measures in place to regulate access to the building at the time of this visit.

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

Not Applicable to Local Authority Services

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

Not Applicable to Local Authority Services

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. They are well publicised and reviewed regularly. Carers spoken with all praised the Authority saying they received payments promptly and that the payments were always correct. This aspect of the service is managed directly by the administrative section of the service.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This panel is well established. It is a joint panel with one other local authority and an Independent Fostering Agency.

The constitution of the panel is in line with Regulation and there is a good independent representation as both the chair and the vice chair are independent. Continuing efforts are being made to recruit a person who has been in foster care or whose child has been in foster care.

The panel was chaired by the vice chair on this occasion. She confirmed that she had attended relevant training. The panel was conducted effectively.

There was evidence that all panel members had prepared for the panel and all were invited to contribute to the process. The vice chair was confident in the role and it was noted during the observation of the panel that the quality of the assessments was commented on.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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This standard was not evaluated.

There has been no change since the last inspection, which took place 9 months ago. The recommendation made in the last report is repeated.

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?	3
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The Authority has a clear set of policies and procedures relating to 'Kinship care'. The inspectors spoke with one kinship carer. She generally felt well supported but it was acknowledged that the distance involved meant that visits were not easily achievable in an emergency. The records showed that the carer received monthly visits from the supervising social worker.

There was no evidence on the file seen of the assessment of the child's circumstances and needs on which the fostering allowance is based. This was a recommendation of the previous report and is repeated.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 13th to 20th December 2004 of Bracknell Fostering Services and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

As a result of the inspection, all points detailed in the Statutory Requirements have either been implemented, or there is an Action Plan identified to ensure compliance within a given timescale.

The Good Practice Recommendations identified from the inspection are also issues that Bracknell Forest will undertake. An Action Plan with timescales has also been produced to ensure that all recommendations will be implemented.

With respect to the lack of an Equal Opportunity Policy, I enclose a copy of our departmental Fair Access Policy.

We consider that this inspection has been an open and honest reflection of the work undertaken and has highlighted the many strengths and few weaknesses that are present.

As commended in this report, training is highly valued as evidence of keeping up to date with and providing relevant skills to carer's and worker's alike.

The department is committed to achieving and providing an excellent Foster Care Service to carers and the children and young people as well as all those who may have contact with the department. In order to achieve this the Senior Management Team with the Team Manager keep under review through monitoring and supervision all aspects of the Fostering and Adoption Standards whether raised in this report or not.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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