



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service

County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8LE

19th January 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service

Address

County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8LE

Local Authority Manager

Shannon Clarke

Tel No:

01225 713000

Address

County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8LE

Fax No:

Email Address

shannonclarke@wiltshire.gov.uk

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

Date of Inspection Visit		19th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Martin Davis	132266
Name of Inspector	2	Diane Waters	
Name of Inspector	3	Michael Williams	
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		Shannon Clark	

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Wiltshire's Family Placement Services are provided by two different groups of staff. Mainstream services are provided by the family placement teams and respite care fostering placements for disabled children are provided by the Home-from-Home Team. The mainstream services are divided geographically with two team managers. The Kennet and Salisbury team has a manager and six qualified Family Placement Officers (FPO's). Historically there appears to have been recruitment difficulties for this team and there are currently long-standing vacancies including that of Senior Supervising Social Worker. The North and West Team have one manager but two sites, the team comprises of nine qualified social workers and two recently appointed unqualified support workers. This team had successfully recruited to the post of Senior Supervising Social Worker; Inspectors felt this was particularly important given the split sites over which this team works. The Home-from-Home Service has a manager and two social work qualified FPO's, a third social work position is currently vacant, this post was not being advertised at the time of the inspection and there appeared to be confusion over whether there was a recruitment 'freeze' affecting this post.

The Fostering Service is a core component of the Children and Families Branch of the Department for Children, Education and Libraries within Wiltshire County Council. The stated aims of the Branch's work with children in need is to promote the well-being and development of each child throughout childhood by; ensuring secure care, protecting children from harm, respecting and promoting cultural ties and identity and promoting life chances by supporting and enabling parents and extended family to care for their own children wherever possible. Where these aims cannot be met within a child's own family and alternative care is needed, the fostering service aims to ensure that all children looked after by the authority receive the best possible care and attention to meet their individual needs.

Currently the service has 129 foster carers managed by the 'mainstream' teams and 17 Home-from-Home carers. The teams also provide support to a further 10 kinship placements. At the time of the inspection the service provided placements to 125 children. The service currently aims to recruit 3 carers during 2004 to provide specific Bail and Remand placements and to increase the number of carers to 159 by December 2004 so that further placement choice is offered thereby increasing the accuracy of matching. The service is also planning a 'solo' placement scheme to provide 6 placements with carers whose particular strength is managing challenging behaviour. The service currently has a number of fee paid fostering schemes, Contract Carers and Fostering Plus Scheme A and B. These areas of the service were not specifically highlighted during the inspection but should be an area considered more closely during future inspections.

The service currently has two foster care panels, one in North Wiltshire and one in the South. The Chair of both panels is the current Head of Placement Services. The nominated Agency Decision Maker is the assistant Director of the Children and Families Branch.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

The number of Requirements and Recommendations highlighted in this report are in part a reflection of the fact that this is the first time that Wiltshire County Council's Fostering Service has been inspected by the National Care Standards Commission. The number of Requirements and Recommendations identified during future inspections should fall considerably.

The inspectors met with four sets of foster carers in their own homes and had the opportunity to meet and talk to the majority of children placed with these carers. Inspectors had access to case files for carers and children, they interviewed key staff including the managers, panel chair and link workers for carers tracked. Contact was also made with placing social workers and with birth family members. Pre-inspection questionnaires were sent to children in placement, their family, foster carers and placing social workers. Further evidence was gathered through group discussions with staff and carers, unfortunately no children's group was available for the inspectors to observe.

The inspectors noted the breadth and depth of experience displayed by many of the carers interviewed. One inspector met with a carer that had received the British Empire Medal in recognition of the care she has provided to children over many years as a foster carer. Many carers displayed a clear commitment to the children placed and considerable resilience in the face of problematic behaviour. The fostering teams are staffed with experienced and knowledgeable social workers that individually and collectively have a great deal of family placement experience. They work well with their child care colleagues and displayed a commitment to working to agreed goals identified through individual care plans.

The service has undergone considerable change in recent years. Until relatively recently it did not have a fostering panel, foster carer retention and recruitment was threatened by the expansion of local independent fostering agencies and the service had to adapt during restructuring as Social Services, Education and Libraries became a unified department.

Inspectors found inconsistency in service provision throughout the whole Fostering Service, the extent to which practice and provision met with the expectations of the Statement of Purpose varied considerably. Considerable inequality in the service provided to children and carers throughout the county was noted. To some degree this had been acknowledged by the Service however clear action plans had not been developed to counter this. It appeared that the appointment of a specialist Head of Placement Services has helped to provide a clearer direction and fill some gaps, most notably by re-instigating foster panels, however the extent of her responsibilities has prevented detailed auditing and development work. The appointment of a Deputy Head Of Service is noted as a positive development, and should enable greater delegation of responsibility and development planning. However it was too soon to assess the full impact of this.

A summary of the main issues identified is provided below. These have been grouped together under a series of key topics as identified by the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2002

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)
(This Standard was not met)

The quality of detail provided by the statement of purpose was not sufficient, the information provided for the 'mainstream' teams was not matched by that provided for the Home-from-Home Service. The statement is currently in draft form; it has not been widely distributed for consultation and has not been presented to elected members. The statement of purpose is not an accurate summary of the services currently provided across the whole department. The service does not have a Children's Guide that would provide a summary of what the service sets out to do for children, this must be developed and should be provided to all children as soon as they are fostered.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2 - 3)
(Two standards were partly met)

Only one of the managers in day-to-day charge of the fostering teams held an appropriate NVQ in management.

Managers should exercise effective leadership of staff and operation to ensure that best possible child care is delivered. Significant gaps in service provision were noted between the teams leading inspectors to question the extent to which effective leadership is always exercised.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4 - 5)
(These standards were partly met)

All staff and carers should be aware of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interests. Recruitment of family placement officers and senior social workers where there are vacancies should be prioritised, thereby allowing further delegation of duties and responsibilities so allowing managers to prioritise more time for service development.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6 – 14)
(Three standards were met, four were partly met, two were not met)

The Emergency Duty Service may place children with carers where children would be required to share bedrooms. Inspectors were concerned that under such circumstances insufficient risk assessment may take place.

Significant differences were found in the rate at which carers are appropriately completing health and safety risk assessments and serious differences identified between teams in relation to safer care policies. At best 50% of carers in one area have safer care policies, in one team implementation stalled at the planning stage and in another a decision made that carers would not complete the policies. Safer care policies should be in place for every foster home, they should be detailed, taking in to account any known risks within the carers home or family, and cross referenced with risk assessments for those children to be placed. Children should be consulted about these policies and copies provided to placing social workers.

The Council has published a Race Equality Scheme and plans appropriate training for family placement officers and foster carers in relation to best practice related to minority ethnic issues but placement choice for black or other ethnic minority children is seriously restricted.

Appropriate placement matching is undermined by a lack of placement choice. Placing social workers are concerned that this increases the likelihood of placement disruption.

The current system for granting exemptions concerned inspectors who felt that foster panel should have a more significant role in recommending and reviewing exemptions.

No evidence could be found of senior managers systematically evaluating information on allegations of abuse and neglect. Inspectors were concerned to find incomplete recording on a case file in relation to a specific allegation and the required action plan.

Departmental guidance had not been agreed in relation to what constitutes a serious enough concern about a worker or foster carer for the agency to make a referral to the Secretary of State. Neither is guidance available on the process that should be followed to make a referral.

Positive evidence was found that the service appropriately encourages and facilitates contact for children with their family, friends and previous carers.

Children's opinions are not regularly sought by the fostering service, however children reported being listened to by their foster carers.

The Mainstay Project, the Long Term Carers Discussion Group and the availability of a play therapist were noted as areas of good practice, helping to ensure that children receive appropriate health care. However inspectors were concerned that LAC information was often incomplete and therefore inadequate.

The Education for Looked After Children Support Service is a positive development as is the appointment of this service's manager to one of the foster panels.

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

(Three standards were partly met, six standards were not met)

The development of an in-house, out-of-hours support service for foster carers is a positive development. This will provide support by a team of social workers who have extensive knowledge of family placement work. The support they will be able to provide should be more sensitive to the needs of foster carers.

Positive evidence of carer access to NVQ's has been noted and the joint planning between the fostering service and the Council's training section should ensure access a greater variety of high quality post-approval training for foster carers.

The service was seen to have an appropriate complaints procedure for children and carers, and access to the Children's Rights Officer was considered particularly valuable to many of the children that inspectors had contact with. However there appeared to be little evidence of how any analysis of the complaints the service received informed future practice planning.

Significant difference was noted in the process of carer assessment and the quality of

reports written. Greater uniformity in approach could be achieved thereby helping to ensure greater equality for applicants.

The service identified staff recruitment as an ongoing problem. Inspectors found that this had adversely impacted upon service provision and contributed to the gaps and inconsistencies noted between teams.

Positive evidence was found in relation to carer support and supervision on some case files, and many of those carers that inspectors had contact with reported that they received appropriate levels of support. However significant concerns were also identified with some carers appearing to be inadequately supported and supervised.

Some staff have an appropriate annual appraisal, however in one team appraisals do not take place. This is a further example of difference in practice between teams and is an important area in which further work is required.

Differences in practice were also noted in relation to foster carer annual reviews and the extent to which targets for reviews were being met. Here the service was judged to be inconsistent and failing to meet the minimum standard required.

Records (Standards 24 – 25) **(Two standards were partly met)**

Records were found to be stored securely within the fostering teams. Foster carers had been provided with lockable cabinets when requested.

Many of the files sampled were found to be appropriately maintained in line with departmental guidelines. However again differences in practice emerged. In one team significant information was held on children within the fostering team. This was stored in an ad hoc fashion, information was placed loosely in a folder, there was no index and no guidance as to what should be found on the file, rather it appeared to be a random collection of information which was difficult to make sense of.

Many of the carer files were professionally maintained, and provided a comprehensive record of a foster carer's career. However others were found to be poorly maintained. On these files records were not always signed or dated, entries were hand written and not always clear, tracking of information was made particularly difficult.

A significant concern was to find inadequate records following an allegation made against a foster carer. This made it difficult to ascertain whether the allegation was dealt with appropriately.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26) **(This standard was partly met)**

Premises were considered accessible and had appropriate levels of security. However concerns were raised about the adequacy of space for one area team and general access to suitable IT equipment.

Financial requirements (Standards 27 - 29)**(Two standards are not applicable and one was met)**

The service had recently increased the allowances paid to foster carers so that these are in line with the Fostering Network's recommended minimum. The only issue raised related to over payments which can continue for some time and cause carers considerable anxiety

Fostering panels (Standard 30)**(This standard was not met)**

Considerable concerns were noted about the service's foster panel. Neither panel was appropriately established or adequately performing their quality assurance functions. Inadequate information is retained on panel members and insufficient checks completed to establish the fitness of individuals to serve on panel. A number of panel members were new to the role, they had not been provided with appropriate written guidance and no programme of training had been planned.

Foster panels have a crucial role to play in ensuring that standards throughout the service are maintained. Developmental work for foster panels must be urgently undertaken. Panels should then work to ensure greater levels of consistency throughout the service.

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

The Home-from-Home Service was inspected alongside the other 'mainstream' teams. In the future it may be possible to highlight this service for specific consideration, allowing more comprehensive inspection.

This service operated relatively independently of the other services and could be described as marginalized. The extent to which this service is consulted and included in developmental work is questionable. Concerns were noted about the level of foster carer supervision and the lack of any safer care policies for carers in this service. Foster carer recruitment is a particular area of concern for the Home-from-Home Service.

Despite these concerns carers were considered to be skilled and seen to display high levels of resilience offering placements over many years to children who can display many challenges.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)**(This Standard was met)**

The service was considered to be sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing family and friends as foster carers. These carers are included in the services offered to other foster carers.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

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	Martin Davis	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Malcolm Sykes	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	Reg 3	FS1	Statement of Purpose must accurately set out the services and facilities provided by the whole fostering service	30.06.04
2	Reg 3	FS21 & FS1	Ensure that the Fostering Service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose	30.06.04
3	Reg 3	FS1	Make the Statement of Purpose available to those listed in Regulation 3(2)	30.06.04
4	Reg 3	FS1	Produce a Children's Guide and provide a copy to each child placed, each foster carer and the Commission	30.06.04
5	Reg 7 & Reg 20	FS15 & FS3	Ensure that all information required by Schedule 1 is in place for managers and staff	31.05.04
6	Reg 12	FS31 & FS9	A safer caring policy must be adopted and adapted for carers' individual circumstances	30.06.04
7	Reg12	FS9	Management systems must be implemented to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of children in foster care. This information should be subject to regular scrutiny	30.06.04
8	Reg 17	FS12	Adequate health records must be made available to all carers	30.06.04

9	Reg 20	FS15	Ensure that all consultants commissioned to work with children and carers are fit for the purpose, ensuring that the requirements of Regulation 20(3) are met	31.05.04
10	Reg 29	FS21 & FS16	Foster carer reviews should take place not more than a year after approval and thereafter at intervals of no more than a year	30.06.04
11	Reg 21	FS22, FS20 & FS15	Ensure staff receive appropriate supervision	31.05.04
12	Reg 21	FS15	Ensure that all employees have appropriate, up-to-date job descriptions	30.06.04
13	Reg 27	FS17	Ensure that all foster carers have been assessed and approved appropriately	30.04.04
14	Reg 21	FS20 & FS19	Ensure that all employees receive appropriate appraisal	30.06.04
15	Reg 28	FS22	Ensure that Foster Carer Agreements include accurate information and all of that set out in Schedule 5	30.04.04
16	Reg 12	FS9	Ensure that action plans following allegations of abuse within foster homes are completed or appropriately amended	30.04.04
17	Reg 24	FS30	Ensure that any Foster Panel has appropriate membership in accordance with Regulation 24	30.04.04
18	Reg 24	FS30	Establish a formal constitution for Panel that provides guidance on members' terms of office	30.04.04
19	Reg 20	FS30	Ensure that the appropriate checks are completed on all panel members.	30.04.04

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	Elected members should formally approve the Statement of Purpose, and review, update and modify it at least annually
2	FS16 & FS2	Fostering managers to complete appropriate NVQ Level 4 training
3	FS2	Managers should audit practice against the statement of purpose to identify gaps and necessary action plans to ensure that best possible child care is delivered
4	FS15 & FS3	Telephone enquiries should be made to follow up written references for staff
5	FS15 & FS3	CRB checks should be renewed every three years
6	FS4	The fostering service should inform managers, staff and carers of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest
7	FS17 & FS5	Prioritise the recruitment of the Senior Supervising Social Worker in the Kennet and Salisbury Team so that clear arrangements are in place to identify who is in charge in the manager's absence and to enable further delegation of responsibility
8	FS6	Consider ending the practice whereby EDS can place children with carer's where they will need to share a bedroom with a child already in placement
9	FS31 & FS6	Ensure that Health and Safety assessments are in place for all carers and are regularly reviewed
10	FS21	Ensure that the process of carer annual reviews is consistent across teams and in accordance with the process set out in the statement of purpose
11	FS7	Prioritise the recruitment of black and ethnic minority carers
12	FS8	Where placements fall outside the terms of approval prompt referral should be made to Foster Panel. Panel should be supplied with full, written details and agree a date at which any exemption should be reviewed

13	FS31,FS17 & FS8	Develop and prioritise a clear foster care recruitment strategy so that more appropriate matching can take place
14	FS9	Develop a protocol to follow when considering referrals under PoCA
15	FS10	Ensure that the records maintained by carers record the outcome of contact arrangements and their perceived impact upon the child
16	FS11	Ensure that the opinions of children, carers and birth family are ascertained on all matters affecting them including the running of the fostering service
17	FS11	Re-establish support groups for children who are fostered
18	FS12	Foster carers should maintain adequate records so that they can supply information about a child's health needs for the planning process
19	FS13	Foster placement agreements should identify where financial responsibility lies for all school costs including school trips
20	FS16	Ensure that systems designed to monitor and prioritise workloads are effective, particularly where teams are short staffed
21	FS16	Where placements are made via independent fostering agencies Commission inspection reports should be checked to identify any concerns
22	FS16	Ensure that appropriate clerical and administrative support is available
23	FS16	Ensure that external consultants are provided with appropriate written contracts and conditions of service
24	FS17	Clarify the assessment process to be used for different groups of carers so that greater consistency in practice can be achieved
25	FS31 & FS18	Ensure foster carers receive an appropriate level of support and supervision
26	FS19	Develop a training programme for Foster Panel members, including joint training events with family placement staff
27	FS22	Ensure that appropriate records of unannounced visits are maintained
28	FS31 & FS23	Ensure that preparation training meets the needs of Home-from-Home carers
29	FS23	Ensure that foster carer annual reviews appropriately set out carers' training and developmental needs
30	FS23	Ensure all carers receive appropriate safer care training

31	FS24	Where the fostering service holds significant information on children placed this should be maintained in a separate file in a coherent fashion
32	FS25	Ensure that appropriate, legible records are maintained in every case
33	FS25	Ensure records of complaints and allegations are clearly recorded on file, including details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken
34	FS25	Ensure that separate records are kept on allegations and complaints so that a strategic response can be considered
35	FS8	All Foster Placement Agreements should contain references to matching considerations and areas where extra support is needed
36	FS26	Consideration should be given to increasing staff access to appropriate IT equipment thereby increasing efficiency and quality of work
37	FS26	Work to resolve the problem of limited office space in one area team
38	FS29	A solution should be found to prevent foster carer overpayments
39	FS30	Maintain adequate records for all panel members
40	FS30	Provide Foster Panel with clear written procedures and policies about the handling of their functions
41	FS30	The Foster Panel should ensure that formal mechanisms are established to enable it to provide a quality assurance function paying particular attention to consistency of approach in assessment across the service
42	FS30	Further consider the adequacy of the current review system for foster carer approvals
43	FS30	Further consider whether foster panels have access to appropriate medical expertise

* 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 8

Survey of placing authorities YES

Foster carer survey YES

Foster children survey YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals YES

• Directors of Social services NO

• Child protection officer YES

• Specialist advisor (s) NO

• Local Foster Care Association NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements YES

• Interview with children YES

• Interview with foster carers YES

• Interview with agency staff YES

• Contact with parents 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 YES

Observation of foster panel YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents YES

Inspection of records YES

Interview with individual child YES

Date of Inspection 19.01.04

Time of Inspection 09.00

Duration Of Inspection (hrs) 57

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?

1

A draft statement of purpose was written in December 2003. Three teams provide Wiltshire County Council fostering services. Mainstream services are provided by two area teams and managed by the Head of Placement Services. Placements for disabled children are provided by the Home-from-Home Team, which is managed by the Head of Special Needs. The draft statement of purpose has been divided into two sections reflecting this approach to service delivery.

In general Section 1 of the statement of purpose is clearly written, it outlines its aims and objectives setting specific targets, and it provides details of the facilities and services that are available. Section 2, which relates to the Home-from-Home service, lacks the specific detail that is found in Section 1. For example no information is included in relation to the frequency of support/supervision visits to carers, or whether these are to be made on an announced or unannounced basis, and no details are provided about the process of annual reviews. Amendments to the statement of purpose are therefore required.

Inspectors found significant gaps in service delivery across the whole fostering service when auditing against the statement of purpose. Inspectors were concerned that this could potentially lead to inequality in outcomes for both children and foster carers. Regulation 3(3) of The Fostering Services Regulations 2003 require the foster service provider to ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. This inspection report will identify the gaps and the inconsistencies that were noted across the teams. New draft procedures for the Departmental Procedures Guide were being written at the time of the inspection. The updates for the fostering service make reference to the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the National Minimum Standards, and the UK National Standards for Foster Care. These procedures have the potential to improve consistency across the teams.

Once amendments have been made, elected members should formally approve the statement of purpose and continue to review, update and modify it where necessary, at least annually. It should be made available to those listed in Regulation 3(2).

No children's guide was available at the time of the inspection this is a significant shortfall. A guide should be developed summarising what the service sets out to do for children as a priority, this should be provided for all children in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.

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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The three team managers all have an appropriate professional social work qualification. They each have considerable family placement experience as well as a background in direct work with children. Those members of staff interviewed were positive about the support and guidance offered by their line managers, noting the breadth and depth of experience. Only one manager has an appropriate management qualification. By 2005 each manager should have a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management or equivalent.

Inconsistencies in practice were noted across the teams, this may relate in part to the historical lack of clear Departmental Procedures, but inspectors were also told that shortfalls in service delivery were attributed to differences in culture and styles between the teams. Managers need to exercise effective leadership so as to ensure that their team is organised and staffed in a manner that provides the best possible child care. Many examples of good practice were noted by inspectors, and reported by placing social workers, foster carers and children, but shortfalls were also reported and clear action plans to remedy these gaps were not always in place.

The managers reported that the appointment of a specialist Head of Placement Services had provided them with additional support and guidance. Inspectors found this Service Manager to be knowledgeable and committed to service development, however her responsibilities were so wide ranging that she was unable to allocate the necessary time to developing the foster service. A deputy has more recently been appointed which may enable the Service Manager to dedicate more time to fostering, but it was too early for inspectors to assess this.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

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

Departmental approved systems are in place to ensure that managers are suitable people. However documentary evidence of qualifications was not found nor was positive proof of identity including a recent photograph on all of the files sampled. The remaining requirements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations were met.

Personnel officers informed inspectors that current practice is to update CRB checks every five years, the National Standards recommend that these are updated at least every three years.

Appropriate evidence of professional and personal references was found on file, however historically these have not been followed up with telephone enquiries. This practice should be instigated for future appointments to the fostering service.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Managers' job descriptions have recently been revised. These clearly set out roles and responsibilities and lines of communication. Staff and carers all appeared to be aware of the internal structure and lines of accountability within the service.

The Department for Children, Education and Libraries, within Wiltshire County Council, oversees the financial procedures and is ultimately responsible for reviewing these. The allowances paid to carers are clearly set out. These have recently been revised and are now in line with The Fostering Network's recommended minimum. The service pays fees to some carers in recognition of specific skills and the rates are published internally.

Inspectors could not find evidence that the fostering service informs carers, managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

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.

4

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.

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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?****2**

The Managers have clear job descriptions that set out duties and responsibilities.

The two 'mainstream' teams have recently had a Senior Supervising Social Worker post created, although this post remains vacant in the Salisbury and Kennet team. This development should enable managers to delegate some of the day-to-day responsibilities enabling them to focus more upon service development. This was noted as being the case in the North and West team where a Senior has been appointed and had been allocated specific areas of responsibility and is able to deputise in the manager's absence. The service should aim to fill vacancies wherever they exist but in particular the senior post in the Kennet and Salisbury team, which has been under-staffed for some time. This should be prioritised so that required developmental work can take place. This would enable clearer delegation and lines of accountability to be established and would further enable the fostering service to ensure that it meets the aims and objectives as set out in its statement of purpose.

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?

2

Inspectors had the opportunity to meet with a number of individual foster carer's, with groups of carers and with applicants upon the initial preparation training. Inspectors were impressed with the knowledge and skills that carers displayed and were left with an overwhelming impression of the commitment and resilience of the majority of these carers.

The views of placing social workers and children were sought by pre-inspection questionnaire and via contact during the inspection. A large majority of these felt that individual carers provided a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Where there were exceptions to this, remedial work between the fostering service and placing social workers was underway or planned.

Through case tracking inspectors were able to audit the services provided against individual care plans and found that in the majority of cases the environment provided was appropriate. However across the service significant issues were noted.

The service will now only take up applications from potential carers who are able to provide a child with their own, separate bedroom. But there remain carers who have fostered for some time with whom the service has assessed that it is safe for children to share bedrooms. In these cases, inspectors were told that planned placements have been made following appropriate risk assessments, which have included consultation with all relevant professionals. However managers also informed inspectors that some foster carers who have been made available to the Emergency Duty Service would require any child placed to share a bedroom with a child already in placement. Inspectors were concerned about the safety of this practice as the level of risk assessment and consultation that can take place in an emergency situation is limited. Further, it is unreasonable for a child already in placement to be required to share their room without proper consultation; otherwise their needs for privacy and respect are marginalized.

During foster carer annual reviews, health and safety checks are updated; these include evidence of household and motor insurance as well as MOT's. Health and safety checklists were seen on some, but not all files read. In one case a health and safety checklist had not been updated following a carer moving house despite an annual review subsequently taking place. The extent to which annual review targets were being met varied considerably between teams, therefore the extent to which health and safety checks are completed is variable. The foster carer's preparation and training and assessment do consider issues of health and safety.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

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

Day two of the foster carer preparation training focuses upon young peoples' identity, culture and heritage. An inspector observed part of this training. Issues were covered sensitively and participants were clearly able to examine their own and other's views and beliefs. This training was co-led by an experienced foster carer who was able to share her own experiences. Post-approval training includes courses for carers working with 'children with special needs' and a course on diversity and promoting difference.

The fostering service's policy states that wherever possible children will be placed in families that meet their needs including those of race and ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender, sexuality and or disability. However with limited placement choice this can sometimes be difficult to achieve. A recent SSI inspection concluded that placement choice was limited for all young people but especially those from black and minority ethnic groups. Managers acknowledged the need to recruit more black and ethnic minority carers as well as male carers particularly for older adolescent males within the Home-from-Home service.

The County Council has been required to prepare and publish a Race Equality Scheme, and associated with this it has developed a further program of training. It is too early to assess the impact of this training as this is ongoing throughout 2004, but it provides training opportunities for both staff and carers. It includes training to raise the awareness and skills of family placement workers in the assessment and preparation of carers and training to provide all carers with information in relation to best practice related to minority ethnic issues.

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 fostering service expects that a Planning Meeting precedes every admission into care and that children should only be admitted in an emergency where they are considered to be at immediate risk of significant harm. This would usually mean that a Section 47 investigation has taken place. An aim of this process is to prevent children from coming into care inappropriately and to provide the necessary information to allow placement matching.

Prior to offering a placement the Fostering Service would expect details of the child's Care Plan, information from planning meetings, previous assessments, risk assessments, any information relating to court orders, previous placement history and a completed behaviour checklist. Wherever possible pre-placement introductory visits are arranged before any short-term or long-term placement, and an emphasis is placed on sharing available information with the foster carer.

Inspectors saw evidence of attempts at matching taking place for emergency placement requests received via the duty desk. This is essential given that 68% of carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that they had been asked to take

emergency placements.

LAC documents are used for all placements and Placement Agreements expected to be in place. Evidence of these processes and paper work were seen in the cases that Inspectors tracked. Of those files seen with placement plans there was not always mention of matching considerations and how gaps in matching could be compensated for.

84% of foster carers who replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they felt that they had received adequate background information on the children placed.

Significant concerns were raised by placing social workers about lack of placement choice and the consequential impact upon matching. Carers, support workers and managers within the fostering service also expressed these concerns. A recent SSI inspection had also found that recruitment and retention of carers was difficult and restricted choice for a significant number of young people, leading to poor matching of placements. Fieldwork social workers reported this as a major factor in placement disruption.

Inspectors were told that in recent years a significant number of carers had left the service to join Independent fostering agencies. Whilst a recent recruitment campaign appeared to be successful, leading to 16 households attending a preparation course, numbers of carers remained relatively low.

Exemptions to the normal fostering limit are sometimes used to provide placements for children. These may be applied for if there is evidence of a positive match, for example if a child has previously been in the placement, but this is not always the case. Team managers are given the authority to temporarily grant exemptions until further agreement is sought via a verbal report to the next Foster Panel. Inspectors felt that this system could be improved by presenting a written report to panel outlining the reasons for the exemptions and including evidence of consultation with carers, social workers for the other young people in placement and appropriate risk assessments and background information. Panel members would then be in a better position to make a reasoned recommendation and agree an appropriate date to review the exemption.

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 department employs a third tier manager as Head of Child Protection and Safer Care, they manage the Children's Rights Officer and Service, which recruits and supervises independent visitors.		
The initial foster carer training introduces child protection procedures and the concept of safer care. There are expectations that this is expanded upon within the carer's assessment and through post approval training that is offered on managing difficult behaviour, child protection, safer care and dealing with disclosures.		
The statement of purpose expects there to be a safer care policy in place for all carers. The extent to which this has been achieved varies across the service. The Home-from-Home service does not currently complete these and this is particularly concerning given the potential vulnerability of the children and young people that it places with carers.		

The Kennet and Salisbury team had worked on a modular training program that all carers would be required to attend and which would lead to specific safer care policies for each carer household. Unfortunately this training had been postponed indefinitely due to staffing shortages and safer care policies not completed leaving children and carers without the extra protection these policies aim to provide. In North and West Wilts the manager estimated that 50% of carers had these policies in place and was working towards 100% within a year, monitoring via annual reviews.

An individual safer care policy should be in place for every foster home; these should be drawn up through consultation with the carer and everyone in the home. These guidelines should be cleared with the child's social worker and appropriately explained to the child. They require updating with each new placement. This was not found to be the case, those policies sampled lacked sufficiently detailed information to be a useful tool. These appeared to be generic policies that were a description of routine rather than detailed analysis of risk and risk management.

The Foster Carer Agreement and guidance in the Foster Carer Handbook makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable, this includes smacking, slapping, shaking and all forms of humiliating treatment or punishment.

Inspectors raised concerns following case tracking where case records failed to clearly document how an allegation relating to foster care practice had been resolved. An Inspector saw records of an initial investigation and action plan but could find no evidence that this plan had been completed or subsequently amended. All serious allegations against foster carers are investigated by an independent service provided by the NSPCC. The Head of Placement Services informed inspectors that she meets regularly with the Head of Safer Care and Head of Area Services to track individual action plans and to address themes arising from allegations. These have formed the basis of a county wide family placement development day. The Head of Placement Services keeps a database of all allegations and complaints. Senior managers meet with the NSPCC on a quarterly basis to monitor the service level agreement and address themes and actions.

Inspectors saw evidence of appropriate de-registration of carers where there were concerns, and were shown evidence of referral to the Secretary of State under PoCA. The current Head of Service takes legal advice in each instance where she believes that the threshold for a PoCA referral has been reached, but there is no departmental guidance upon this and in the absence of the Head of Service it is not clear whom or how these decisions would be made.

An anti-bullying policy is in place and has been distributed to foster carers, this defines bullying, outlines strategies for dealing with bullying and the procedures to be followed when bullying is reported to the foster carer.

Each carer has a clear written procedure to follow if child is missing from home. Carers talked to had a working knowledge of this guidance.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:		
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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**

Guidance on contact is offered to carers in a variety of forms. Throughout there is emphasis upon the key role that foster carers have to play in promoting successful contact. Contact arrangements are usually discussed at the placement meeting and set out in the placement agreement. Support workers and carers identify together the limits for each carer in relation to the frequency and nature of contact that they can facilitate. The arrangements for the supervision of contact, where this is required, are expected to be clearly set out.

Around 80% of placing social workers that responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that carer's worked very well, or fairly well, with birth families. Children's records and discussion with children appeared to confirm this with most reporting that contact arrangements were met, although many also commented either directly or indirectly that they would like greater levels of contact. Limited evidence could be found of foster carers automatically recording the outcome of any contact arrangements, although the service has provided a proforma for this in the daily diary sheets.

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?****2**

The majority of foster carers that Inspectors had contact with appeared to be assertive advocates for the children in their care. In particular the Long Term Discussion Group that one inspector attended impressed by their ability to consult children and listen to their wishes and feelings.

The department has a Children's Rights Officer and a well established complaints procedure; both are outlined in the preparation training and within the foster carer handbook. The Home-from-Home service has begun to work on a PICs complaints leaflet for its service users.

Of the children who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire 70% reported knowing how to make a complaint within the department. The majority of these wrote that they knew of the Children's Rights Officer, only 16% were aware of the NCSC as an independent agency that they could contact. 82% of children said that they were regularly asked their opinions about their foster carers but only 10% reported ever being asked their opinions of the fostering service. The SSI has also recently reported that children and foster carers felt that their views were not sought on the running of the fostering service.

Historically the fostering service has run a number of children's support groups and staff and carers told inspectors that the children valued these. The absence of these groups and a formal consultation process reinforces the children's perceived lack of consultation, and deprives the service of valuable information.

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**

A recent SSI Inspection concluded that the health indicators for children were good. This report highlighted the Mainstay Project as an area of good practice. The majority of Mainstay members work in the local CAMHS team. The SSI found that this project had been instrumental in preventing placement breakdown and ameliorating the harmful effects that this may have upon a child's health and development.

A positive area of practice noted during this current inspection was the support and guidance offered to carers through the Long Term Carers Discussion Group in the Kennet and Salisbury area. This group was facilitated by a senior family therapist from the local CAMHS team, had been running for a number of years and was valued by the carers who explained that it afforded them with an opportunity to discuss specific concerns but also to explore more general themes and to learn from one another's, often quite extensive, experience. On the day that an Inspector observed this group a guest speaker was the newly appointed LAC Nurse. This nurse explained her role in taking a lead for health monitoring of all looked after children.

The Kennet and Salisbury area of the service also commissions a private play therapist who offers a self-referral consultation service to foster carers, support workers and placing social workers, this therapist has also undertaken direct work with children and their carers.

The Foster Carer Handbook outlines carer's responsibilities meeting Standard 12.6; it provides clear procedures governing consent for a child to receive medical treatment. Carers visited generally felt that they had adequate background information, including health information, for the children placed. Evidence was seen of LAC documentation and health assessments, however inspectors found that this information was not always complete and were concerned that potentially limited health information is provided to carers, particularly for placements made at short notice.

The service holds different expectations in relation to the records that carers maintain depending upon whether they are mainstream, or fee paid carer's. The relevant forms developed for carers to record information do not all clearly require health information to be recorded, and the extent to which these records are kept by carer's at all appeared inconsistent and valuable information may therefore be lost.

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 recent SSI Inspection of Children's Services found that the department as a whole prioritised children's education, however it also noted that the number of children who were looked after and missing from school was of concern.

The council has developed a new service; the Education for Looked After Children's Support Service, which will help identify and support those children at risk of absence from school. The service aims to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children, it will review care planning and Personal Education Plans, and where a child is at risk of exclusion the team provides individual support to the child, their carers and school. The manager of the service is a new member of the North and West foster panel.

Training workshops are currently being run across the county for child care social workers, family placement social workers and carers, to address improving educational outcomes for children. Inspectors were informed that I.T. systems were being improved so that they more accurately identify the educational attainments of looked after children.

The foster carer's role in school contact is agreed at the initial planning meeting and detailed in the placement agreement, further guidance is offered in the Foster Carer's Handbook.

Evidence from files suggests that financial support is available for out of school activities, including school trips. Placement agreements do not always identify where financial responsibility lies for school related costs.

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**

Evidence for this standard was not gained through case tracking due to the ages of children selected. Evidence is drawn from discussion with carers and staff and departmental guidance.

Staff from the Leaving Care Team are expected to become involved at the LAC review prior to a young person's sixteenth birthday. A Pathway Plan will be developed detailing how the young person will be supported towards independence and adulthood. Carers are considered partners in this process and young people are encouraged to remain with, or in contact with their carers. The service undertakes to provide financial support to enable young people to remain with their carers whilst they prepare for independence. The Leaving Care Team plan to run a rolling programme of workshops to which carers will be invited.

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

The service has clear recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff and the support of a personnel department that provides advice, guidance and auditing services.

All people working for the service are interviewed as part of the selection process, personal references are taken up to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities, however follow up telephone enquiries are not made. Records of enquiries made are maintained on file, but CRB checks are not currently updated on the recommended three yearly cycle, a number of checks were at least five years old and were in the form of old style police checks. All social work staff have an appropriate social work qualification but copies of these are not held on personnel files. With more recent appointments managers have signed to confirm that they have seen evidence of qualifications, but copies are not held on file which inspectors would consider better practice.

The majority of social work staff are very experienced family placement practitioners. Students within the family placement teams are appropriately supervised and appropriate checks are required prior to placement. Unqualified staff have recently been appointed to support worker posts, this is considered a positive initiative that should provide more responsive support to foster carers. Job descriptions for these posts appropriately set out the limits of responsibility and lines of accountability.

Through case tracking inspectors found evidence of independent consultants being commissioned to work with children and carers. Inspectors were concerned that inadequate checks were completed on these individuals to establish their qualifications and safety to work with children.

Total number of staff of the agency:

23

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

X

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?****1**

The Home-from-Home service has separate line management from the rest of the fostering service, this may account for this team appearing to be on the fringes of the fostering service.

Structurally the family placement managers are below their counter part childcare team managers. Inspectors were told that this anomaly may cause future recruitment problems and could potentially lead to some communication difficulties between teams. Inspectors supported the Head of Service's view that this situation should be reviewed. The individual skills and qualification of managers have been described previously; only one manager has an NVQ4 in management.

Inspectors found inconsistency in practice between teams. Inspectors found that there were occasions when managers were unaware of the true extent of the gaps in service. Staff interviewed believed that these gaps largely related to additional pressure caused by staff vacancies, with the remaining staff being required to fill the resultant gaps and therefore becoming over stretched. Despite the cause Managers should have rigorous systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff. Managers must notify senior managers of gaps in service.

The service should improve structures to ensure that carer's annual reviews are completed within appropriate timescales and in an acceptably uniform fashion.

The fostering team managers have a role to play when the department places children with independent fostering agencies. Inspectors found that enquiries were being made but would recommend that in the future manager's should ensure that they have had access to Commission inspection reports of the IFA's so that they are aware of any concerns about the agencies' assessment, approval and review processes.

Staff informed Inspectors that they valued the supervision provided by managers. Some had had access to external case supervision/consultation. Gaps were noted in the frequency of staff supervision. Staff and carers were largely positive about the on going training that was available to them but there is a need to establish a training portfolio for all carers and training plan for staff.

All the teams had significant concerns about administrative support, inspectors shared these concerns. Inspectors heard conflicting information about the outcome of an administrative review. This needs to be clarified and steps taken to ensure that adequate clerical and administrative support is provided.

Inspectors sampled personnel files. Contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service were found on file but some were very dated and not specific to family placement work. Contracts were not in place, or not shown to Inspectors, for at least one external consultant used by the service.

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?****1**

The full-time equivalent of staffing in terms of numbers, experience and qualifications would be sufficient to meet the goals of the statement of purpose if it were not for the staff vacancies that exist. Inspectors were informed that at least one of the teams had been understaffed as a result of vacancies for at least two years. This had led to significant shortfalls in service provision, not least in the areas of carer annual reviews and safe care policies. The service did not have appropriate contingency plans to resolve these staffing problems. 72% of carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they felt that the family placement teams were understaffed; many reported that this impacted upon the quality of support available. Inspectors found that there was confusion about whether some of the job vacancies had been frozen as a cost saving measure, leading to advertisements being delayed.

A recent campaign to recruit foster carers led to 16 households attending a preparation course; within the two mainstream teams there are dedicated recruitment officers. The Home-from-Home Service does not have a similar position and recruitment appears to be a particular problem. This service had developed a new fee paid scheme (One-to-One) but this had been unable to recruit appropriate carers and the scheme appeared to have been 'moth-balled'. A clear recruitment strategy should therefore be developed as a priority for this service.

In assessing the qualities of potential foster carers attention is paid to the areas listed in Standard 17.7, however the process of carer assessment varied considerably between social workers and teams. Managers acknowledged that the extent to which competency based assessment is used is inconsistent. Training has been provided by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering but some social workers remain more confident using a competency approach than others. The outcome of this is that the process of assessment and approval could vary considerably between applicants, such inequality is unreasonable and greater uniformity should be achieved.

Foster panels have a responsibility to monitor the quality of assessments. Foster Panel members stated that standards of assessment varied, they acknowledged that many were excellent but felt some lacked sufficient analysis of information. Inspectors shared this view.

During case tracking Inspectors also found that a carer initially approved as an adopter had subsequently taken a foster placement without referral to the foster panel. Whilst Inspectors had no concerns about the suitability of this placement all fostering applications should be presented to Foster Panel.

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**

The Department for Children, Education and Libraries appears to have sound employment practices for staff and carers.

Out-of-hours support to carers is currently available via the department wide Emergency Duty Service (EDS). Carers reported that they received a variable service from EDS. This has been recognised by the fostering service and historically some family placement social workers have given carers their home numbers to compensate for this. More recently the family placement teams have begun to plan how they might run their own on-call service to complement EDS. Social workers have been asked to volunteer for this and will be paid extra per session worked. Social workers reported that they felt this was a positive development that would lead to more appropriate support being offered to carers, and aid carer retention. Social workers did not feel under pressure to participate.

Inconsistencies were noted across the service regarding carer supervision, appraisal and support, and significant shortfalls noted when assessed against the statement of purpose. During case tracking Inspectors found marked differences in the level and frequency of carer supervision. In one case there was only clear evidence of two supervision sessions within an eighteen-month period despite some significant concerns about the care provided. Inspectors also found that Home-from-Home carers often received limited support visits. Evidence from files, interviews with staff and with carers would suggest that some of these carers have as little as one support visit and one visit to complete the annual review each year. Inspectors were informed that additional visits would be made if needed, but felt that such limited contact with carers was inappropriate and compromised the effectiveness of supervision. Whilst these carers were offering respite placements it should be noted that for some the frequency of respite was high. The Home-from-Home Service fails to clarify the required frequency of support visits in the statement of purpose, but the standard across the rest of the fostering service is a minimum of monthly visits.

The agency has the requisite public liability and professional indemnity insurance and whistle blowing responsibilities appeared to be well understood by carers and staff.

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**

New staff have induction programmes and training needs are identified. Managers are responsible for following up identified training needs with the training manager.

The majority of staff reported that they had appropriate training opportunities. This included on-going in house training, access to external courses run by BAAF or the Fostering Network, as well as access to higher level professional courses such as the Post Qualifying Child Care Award. However other staff reported that accessing external courses was difficult and that excessive work loads made it difficult for them to commit to training.

The extent to which staff appraisals identify ongoing training needs is limited. In one team staff do not currently have an annual appraisal and there were no training plans in place. This is a significant issue and serious shortfall.

No specific training had been identified for staff and other members of the Foster Panel, and joint training between Panel members and staff had not taken place for some time.

Systems designed to keep staff up to date with changes to legislation include the internet, circulars from the Strategy and Development Team and internal training.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

In assessing the levels of accountability and staff support inspectors talked to individuals and groups of staff, interviewed family placement managers and had access to records.

Staff reported regular supervision with their line manager and generally felt that this was rigorous and helped to inform case planning. As well as formal supervision sessions staff reported that the managers had an open door policy and were generally accessible. The North and West Wilts team have a split site and there was therefore potential for difficulties in accessing managerial support but this was not found to be the case. The additional posts of Senior Supervising Social Workers should further improve access for staff to support and supervision, although it should be noted that this position remains vacant in the Kennet and Salisbury team.

Staff are supposed to have supervision on a monthly basis, however from the evidence presented to Inspectors there would appear to be gaps here. Adequate records of supervision were not always maintained, so that it became difficult to track specific issues that had been identified as areas of concern elsewhere, and that should have been discussed in supervision.

Staff should receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager. The fostering service expects staff to receive an annual appraisal. In some cases this is achieved and appeared to be a valuable process, however in one team appraisals are not held. The extent to which this practice is known to senior managers or challenged by them is unclear. This serves as a further illustration of the difference in practice across the service.

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?****1**

Around 80% of carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that they were happy with the level of support provided by the family placement teams and their individual support worker's, this was confirmed by the carers that inspectors had contact with during the inspection week.

The Foster Carer Handbook sets out the strategy for working with and supporting carers, this meets the requirements of Standard 21.2.

One manager estimated that only a third of annual reviews were completed on time and said that no new carers had been reviewed by foster panel within the first year of approval. The process of annual review differed between teams. In one team the team manager completed annual reviews, in another the support worker completed reviews and presented the manager with a written report, and in the third a social worker from the fostering team, but not the support worker, completed the review and then presented this to the manager and support worker. The extent to which practice meets the expectation of the statement of purpose differs widely as does the actual experience for individual carers.

The first annual review is supposed to be presented to panel, although as stated previously this is not always the case. Following this annual reviews are only taken to panel if there is a significant change to report.

A large majority of children's social workers reported that communication with fostering service social workers was good. They reported that they were adequately informed of significant developments and felt that they had developed a working partnership with their fostering counterparts.

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?****1**

Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. Additional professional services are available; examples include the Mainstay Project and the Long Term Carers' Discussion Group. During case tracking Inspectors saw evidence of high quality, focused supervision with carers, with clear action plans developed. Inspectors felt that in these cases the supervision provided to carers would have a positive impact upon outcomes for the children placed. In other cases Inspectors found it difficult to establish the frequency and substance of supervision. Again poor case recording hampered assessment and inspectors were left concerned that from the evidence presented to them some carers receive little formal supervision.

Each foster carer tracked had a Foster Carer Agreement on file. A new foster carer agreement has been drafted, to fulfil the criteria of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, this should be further amended to include the specific terms of the foster carers approval. The new draft procedures for the Departmental Procedures Guide states that Foster Carer Agreements will be amended, as necessary, following annual review. A

number of the agreements seen during case tracking had not been appropriately amended, one had incorrect details of the support worker and a second had not been amended a number of years after a husband and wife separated.

On approval carers are given a handbook, which covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. It is essential that this guide is regularly updated so that information about the new developments within the service are included.

Evidence of unannounced visits was seen on some files but not all. Inspectors heard from staff and carers that unannounced visits occurred, but in the absence of foster carer supervision sheets being adequately completed, this was difficult to audit. The addition of information about unannounced visits to annual reviews is one way in which managers could clearly check that these take place.

All foster carers automatically become members of the Fostering Network and appropriate advice is given regarding insurance cover.

The service has an appropriate complaints procedure and provides detailed information to both carers and children about how to make a complaint; this was confirmed by the pre-inspection questionnaires. The policy guidance sets out the way in which a complaint will be investigated and sets appropriate timescales. The Children's Rights Officer may take a lead in investigating complaints from children and advocates for a child can be used where required.

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
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All new foster carers receive induction training, where there will be two carers in a household the service expects both to attend. The initial training is co-led by an experienced foster carer and includes guest speakers who have a special interest and knowledge of specific subjects. An inspector was impressed by the way in which equality and anti-discriminatory practice was explored during a session on a preparation course that was observed.

The extent to which caring for a disabled child is met by the initial preparation course is limited and therefore its appropriateness for Home-from-Home carers is questionable. The manager of the Home-from-Home service believes that preparation training should be delivered via a modular program, with core modules attended by all and then extra modules developed to meet more specific need. In this way greater consideration could be given to the impact of, and skills required to caring for a disabled child.

Carer training needs are explored at annual review, however on the reviews sampled training action plans were not always clearly set out and it was evident that some carers had attended little training for significant periods. Whilst Inspectors appreciate that this is to some extent inevitable, Inspectors did not find evidence of this being challenged in some of the cases tracked.

The fostering service has worked in partnership with the Council's training department to plan a package of training on a rolling basis for foster carers, this training will be facilitated by family placement social workers and staff from the training department. This appeared to

be a significant positive development.

The initial training programme introduces the concept of safer care and as reported each foster care household is expected to have a safer care policy, however this is not the case. Inspectors were concerned that a program of safer care training had been indefinitely postponed in one area.

The recent SSI Inspection found that NVQ progress for foster carers was going well with 28% of carers qualified and others still completing or going for higher levels.

Individual support workers are expected to have contact with carers' own children and to respond to support issues for the whole family. The service does not facilitate a support group for carers' own children and during case tracking some foster carers stated that they felt that the support needs of their own children were often overlooked.

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 that 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?
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Standard met?

Standard met?
2

Whilst the National Standards do not expect two separate, duplicate, children's records to be maintained by a local authority, where the fostering service does maintain children's records these should comply with the National Standards and the department's own written policy. This policy should establish the purpose, format and content of files and should clarify what is kept on carer's and children's files.

The department's policy allows for limited information on the child to be stored in Module 6 of the carer's file. Differences in practice emerged between the fostering teams, in some cases detailed information on children placed was kept in a separate file, in others limited records maintained on the carers file in Module 6. Where more significant information was kept there appeared to be little order to this and it was difficult to establish whether there was an expectation that an identified minimum should be on file. Whilst inspectors appreciated that the teams differed in the amount of information that they needed to retain, this was largely linked to the ease of access that they had to the child care case records, Inspectors felt that where significant information is kept this should be in the form of separate case files for the children, which should be maintained in a uniform fashion with key information highlighted and information divided into relevant sections.

All the carers spoken to appeared to have a clear understanding of the child's legal status, the intended duration and the purpose of the placement. Carers appreciated that they had a crucial role to play in encouraging children to reflect upon and understand his/her history. Inspectors found that carers were maintaining ongoing life story information for children.

A significant majority of carers felt that they had sufficient, or all the known, background history of children placed. The quality and extent of the records carers maintained differed but the service recognises this and considers this a developmental issue for support workers to continue to monitor.

The fostering service takes steps to ensure that confidential information held by foster carers is maintained in a suitably secure fashion, this has included providing lockable cabinets for some carers.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

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

The service has written procedures for staff on keeping and maintaining foster carer and other records, this was last updated in 2003. There is an expectation that files will be audited as part of the annual review process. The effectiveness of this audit is difficult to establish. Inspectors found that many foster carer files were professionally maintained, information was clearly recorded and stored, and tracking specific issues possible. On other files information was incomplete and poorly recorded. Records were unsigned and undated and specific issues difficult to track. It is possible that the latter files had not been audited recently as carer annual reviews were sometimes found to be out-of-date.

Records were stored appropriately within the area teams. Records and evidence of the checks that have been obtained for carers were recorded on files, extra admin support would enable systems to be developed to remind social workers when these checks need updating.

Foster carers understood that they have a right of access to their files and this is appropriately set out in the Foster Carer Handbook.

Records of complaints and allegations made against foster carers were not always found to be clearly set out in carer's files. The service should ensure that greater care is taken to record the details of every allegation and investigation, the conclusions reached and the action taken. When tracking such incidents Inspectors found one example of an allegation being investigated and an appropriate action plan drawn up but no evidence that this action was completed. The service should also ensure that separate records are kept which bring together data on allegations and complaints so that an appropriate strategic response can be considered.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

146

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

309

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

243

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

22

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

36

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

105.77

Maximum £

349.14

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?
<p>All premises used by the fostering service are accessible to all workers during normal office hours. Facilities are available outside of office hours that enable groups and courses to be run. The premises used by the service do have an equipped base from which staff can work though in the opinion of the Inspectors the available space in the Trowbridge office appeared particularly limited. Staff confirmed this observation during discussion</p> <p>IT facilities are provided but are limited. In some cases up to four social workers shared the same terminal. Inspectors concluded that if there were greater access to computers the efficiency and quality of records and reports could be improved. An IT system linking the fostering duty system across teams would also be beneficial.</p> <p>There are facilities for the secure retention of records. Arrangements are in place to safeguard IT systems, workers have individual log on details. The County Council arranges insurance cover for all its premises.</p>	2

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

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

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**

Every foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses covering the cost of caring for children. These allowances have recently been revised and are now in line with The Fostering Network's recommended minimum. Fee paid schemes have also been established. These payments are made in recognition of carers' skills. Policy guidance is issued which details the rates payable, what allowances cover and the arrangements for discretionary payments that may be made by managers. In general carers reported to Inspectors that fees and allowances were paid on time.

The only problem that emerged through discussion with staff and carers related to overpayments. Child care social workers or their managers are the only people who can arrange for payments to cease at the end of a placement, if they do not fill-in the required paperwork allowances continue to be paid. Eventually this leads to carers being billed for the over payment. A number found this a considerable inconvenience and source of anxiety. Inspectors were told that family placement staff, including managers, have tried to stop these over payments in the past but have found that they do not have the authority. This is surprising as it would appear a simple solution to a reported problem.

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?

1

Inspectors were told that in the past the service had a well established fostering panel but that this had been disbanded around 1997. For the next three years family placement managers and the service manager made decisions about approvals. The fostering service now has two Foster Panels, one in the North of the County and one in the South. The Head of Service chairs both panels. An Inspector was able to observe the operation of the North panel, interview the Chair and read minutes of previous panel meetings.

Neither of the two panels had been appropriately established, they have not been quorate and therefore have acted illegally. Neither had sufficient independent members. One panel has just managed to recruit a councillor the other has not. The panel's each have foster carer representatives drawn from the other's area, but as these carers are registered with the fostering service they cannot be considered independent. Neither panel has a birth parent of a child who has been in care, or an adult who as a child was in care; although inspectors were told that the agency had potentially identified people who would fulfil these criteria.

Inadequate information is maintained in respect of the current panel members so that inspectors were unable to establish whether the appropriate checks had been completed in respect of every member.

Panels do not currently have the appropriate policies and procedures that are required for panel member's reference. There is no formal constitution, which details the term of office for panel members. Whilst the Chair informed Inspectors that she interviews all potential panel members there was no record of this process. Panel members have received no written guidance as to their role, despite the fact that a number of members were new and had no prior experience of panel, and that such information is readily available via BAAF. There was no identified programme of training for panel members and no evidence that the two panels had spent time together to explore their expectations and ways in which to enhance consistency across the service.

Foster panel should provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process. In particular to monitor and review the work of the assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems; and to ensure consistency of approach in assessment across the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that it has been completed in a thorough and rigorous way. In the view of the Inspectors the panels do not adequately perform these functions. Inspectors noted inconsistencies in approaches to assessment and annual reviews during the inspection, which they would reasonably have expected panel to have

recognised and reported.

Inspectors were concerned that the current system of annual reviews was inadequate as the first annual review is not always completed and reported to panel on time. Following the first annual review, subsequent reviews are only taken to panel where there is something significant to report. Inspectors felt that practice could be improved by devising a system for panel to further sample carer reviews so that they can fulfil their quality assurance function.

The chair of the foster panel said that she felt the panel would benefit from additional medical expertise particularly where carers have complex medical histories.

There is no evidence of any formal monitoring of the range and type of carers available being routinely undertaken by panel.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Inspectors were able to track one carer from the Home-from-Home scheme, which provides short-breaks for children with disabilities. This service was found to be on the fringes of the fostering service and appeared to be at risk of being marginalized. For example staff reported that they and carers were not always informed of relevant training that was provided by or organised for the mainstream services. The Home-from-Home service has separate senior line management from the mainstream fostering services and whilst in many ways this is appropriate it may contribute to its relative isolation.

Particular problems have already been reported in relation to carer recruitment and concerns raised about the extent to which carers are supervised. The Home-from-Home service provides a valuable resource and Inspectors were particularly impressed with the commitment and resilience of these carers who had managed to maintain placements over long periods of time.

This service emphasises the need to work in particularly close co-operation with birth parents, it has supported direct payment initiatives, which have enabled carers to continue to provide placements for young people through to adulthood.

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
<p>The Fostering Service is sensitive to the pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers. Systems in place appear to encourage consideration of family and friends as carers, with emphasis also placed upon residence orders and adoption.</p> <p>The fostering teams, rather than field social workers, undertake assessments of family and friends. Family and friends carers were seen as being well integrated into the general support systems provided by the service. Whilst none of these placements were tracked Inspectors were able to speak to a number of these carers during the inspection. The carers acknowledged that the service had treated them with respect and consideration. They appeared to welcome the personal support that had been offered via family placement social workers whom they felt understood the particular intricacies of the care they provided.</p>		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D**PROVIDER'S RESPONSE****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 19 January 2004 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

NO

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

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 5 April 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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

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.

WCC FOSTERING SERVICE – 19 JANUARY 2004

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Or

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

--

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

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