



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Stoke Social Services Fostering Service

**Heron Cross House
Grove Road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 3AY**

Lead Inspector
Elizabeth Taylor

Announced Inspection
17 October 2005 9:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Stoke Social Services Fostering Service

Address Heron Cross House
Grove Road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST4 3AY

Telephone number 01782 234555

Fax number 01782 234556

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Stoke on Trent City Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 21/02/05

Brief Description of the Service:

Stoke-on-Trent was established as a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. In a previous Joint Review undertaken by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Audit Commission the authority is described as having a 'significant level of deprivation, with high levels of disability and limiting long-term illness, below average life expectancy, lower earning levels and higher unemployment than the average for the West Midlands and England.' In this context the authority provides a Fostering Service as part of its provision of social services for the communities it serves.

The family placement service provides substitute family care for children and young people between the ages of 0 – 17 years. The service recruits, trains, assesses and approves all foster carers. The service has developed to include family and friends as carers for specific children known to them. The service provides carers who offer a full range of care; emergency placements, respite, task-centred, long-term, Family Link Respite and Remand Care. The main fostering team is based at Heron Cross House, offering assessments, support and training to foster carers. A Central Placement Team is based at the Civic Centre. Two further teams based in other parts of the city support the Family Link and Remand Carers.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was undertaken over a period of 9 days by 2 inspectors. 6 foster carers were visited in their homes by inspectors, when the inspectors had the opportunity to meet with the young people in placement. In addition to these visits, carer's files were viewed and the supervising social workers interviewed. The files of eight young people placed with the foster carers were examined and inspectors met with a group of placing social workers. In addition inspectors met with a group of foster carers, a group of supervising social workers, the Central Placement Team, other relevant staff and managers within the Fostering Service and the Assistant Director. Questionnaires were also sent to all foster carers and young people's placing social workers. Inspectors also observed the Fostering Panel, met with the advisory foster carers, met with the project manager for Stoke Outcomes and examined personnel files.

The inspection concentrated on those standards not met at the last inspection and areas of concern identified during the inspection.

What the service does well:

Inspectors acknowledge that there are pockets of good practice. The delegation of specific responsibilities within the team has proved effective. The team has also benefited from the knowledge and experience of the interim Head of Fostering and Adoption, who has commenced the task of managing the operation of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Improvements were observed in the operational management of the service. Members of the fostering team had been designated specific responsibility for developing areas of the service and this was beginning to effect change, particularly in the areas of shared care and development of support to kinship foster carers. The development of an advice and support service for workers, carers and young people, known as Yellow House, was seen to be a valuable resource. Changes in the administrative support system were meeting the teams needs more effectively. An independent

consultancy was being funded to recruit additional foster carers. However, there remained a need for caution to ensure that inequalities of support and financial reward do not undermine the authorities own foster carers.

What they could do better:

Serious concerns were identified in respect of the shortfalls in standards of fostering arrangements which in some instances ranged between being unsafe to barely adequate. The Inspectors remain concerned regarding the high level of reliance on agency staff and independent assessors to undertake routine work within the service. There remained a lack of permanency in respect of members of the management team; the Head of Service and one Team Manager were on temporary contracts. Work to develop the Fostering Service continued to be at an early stage and was dependent on a permanent Head of Service and Team Manager being appointed who have substantial knowledge and experience of fostering service. There remained a need to develop effective communication and working relationships between the fostering service and area office teams.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The basic health needs of young people were being adequately promoted by Carers though there remained a need for the Fostering Service to ensure all Carers received sufficient medical/health information to enable them to effectively address the whole needs of young people.

EVIDENCE:

Carers reported on-going concerns about the lack of, or incomplete, medical/health information provided to them on young people at the start of a placement. This was supported by paperwork held in young people's files and by carers in their own homes. There were also instances where carers were still waiting for basic information some weeks or even months after a placement had commenced.

Despite the lack of basic information available to them, records showed carers were taking action to ensure all young people received basic health care checks. All young people had been re-registered with a local Doctors practice and some had received an annual medical check. (A number of older, young people were choosing not to have a routine check). Plans for a named Doctor to do all initial medical assessments on young people were reported though there was a delay in these taking place due to the Doctor awaiting information from other health professionals previously involved with each child.

Records kept by carers showed most young people had received basic eye and dental checks whilst in their care. However, a small number of carers said they were experiencing some difficulty in gaining a dental service for young people in their area.

It is recommended the difficulty in accessing a dental service in some areas of the city is brought to the attention of the Primary (health) Care Trust.

On a number of files looked at, the delegation of consent to carers to authorise routine medical treatment and immunisations for young people had not been completed. This continued to pose difficulties for carers.

In one instance, a carer said although they had written evidence of delegated responsibility they had still experienced a problem when taking a young person to hospital for treatment. This was due to the Consultant stating that treatment could not commence until authorisation was given by a senior manager from the Social Services Department on the day.

It is advised that this matter is raised with the appropriate authority to ensure there is no unnecessary delay in young people receiving treatment.

A newly established support service known as 'Yellow House', was commented on positively by both Link Workers and carers. The service offers psychological support and advice to workers and carers as well as undertaking direct work with a number of young people. The service had been given a remit to reduce the number of multiple breakdowns experienced by a number of young people in foster placements. Whilst this initiative is to be commended, it is advised that consideration be given to extending the remit to include earlier intervention, ie. when the first placement looks to be at risk of breaking down.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Due to there being insufficient numbers of carers, the matching process was limited.

Foster carers work hard to keep young people safe, but are not fully supported in this by the department due to a lack of policies and information regarding the young people placed with them.

Recruitment checks have not always been undertaken in respect of staff which potentially affect the safety of children.

EVIDENCE:

It remained a cause for concern that the authority continued to have an insufficient number of Carers to adequately meet the demand for foster placements for young people. The overall number of carers approved by the authority remained the same as reported six months previously. Due to insufficient staff in the foster care team to be able to assess, train and supervise carers, a new project group had been brought into the service with a remit to gain an additional ten carers by April, 2006. The first of the carers recruited by the project group was approved during this inspection.

The Head of Service and Team Manager said a range of approaches continued to be used to raise the profile of the need for more carers including advertisements in local papers and on radio, promotions in shopping centres and so on. The foster care team had held an 'Introduction Day' for people

interested in becoming carers the week prior to the inspection; this was said to have been well attended. Nevertheless, the lack of sufficient carers meant there continued to be a high number of extensions and exemptions to allow some carers to go over their approved range of, or number of, placements.

There was a lack of Carers from differing ethnic and racial groups. Only two black carers had been approved; both were recent recruitments.

It is required a sufficient number of carers are approved to be able to meet the demands of the service and needs of the young people. Particular attention was required to gain carers from differing ethnic and racial groups to reflect the diversity of need of young people in Stoke on Trent.

Responsibility for 'matching' young people to carers rested with a team based in the main Social Services Office. The Central Placement Team (CPT) had revised their referral documentation to try to ensure carers were able to meet the needs of individual young people. Statistics provided by the team showed there had been a 33% reduction in the number of multiple placements made in the last year compared to the previous year. However, the reality was that some young people continued to be placed where there was either an empty bed or where the Carer was known to be willing to go over their approved number. One young person said they had had four foster placements in the last year. They said their views had not been sought prior to any of the placements and no Introductory visit had been carried out other than one to their most recent Carer. Placing social workers do not receive copy of foster carers profile. The Inspectors considered the sharing of this information would be beneficial in improving matching and would enable social workers to share this with a young person prior to their being placed.

Inspectors remain concerned about the role of the Human Resources section in ensuring that staff are suitable to work with young people as the staff appear to have little understanding of what is required by the Standards or the reason this information is required.

The authority has not undertaken CRB checks in respect of the Interim Head of Fostering and Adoption or the social work assistants who have been redeployed to the fostering team. A number of administrative staff have also commenced employment without CRB checks even though they have access to sensitive information. In addition personnel records in respect of staff do not comply with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Whilst there has been an improvement in following up references with telephone calls, there was no evidence of staff qualifications and photographs on file.

Appropriate checks have been undertaken in respect of foster carers and there is evidence that they are being renewed every 3 years as required.

Foster carers commented that they did not always receive all appropriate information regarding a young person placed with them at the time of placement. In respect of one foster carer information regarding the abuse suffered by the young people had not been given, therefore the foster carer lacked understanding of the young people's behaviour, which resulted in the use of inappropriate sanctions. This lack of information puts young people at risk as well as the foster carers and their families.

Foster Placement Agreements are still not evident on files, with the authority relying mainly on LAC placement plans, those that are on file rarely include all information required by Schedule 6. If Foster Placement Agreements were fully completed, this would ensure that the foster carer received all appropriate information.

The Fostering Service has developed a safe caring pro-forma to be completed by foster carers. However, these are not being used consistently with only one file containing the pro-forma and this had not been discussed or signed by the placing social worker. Foster carers are provided with a copy of Fostering Network's Safer Caring booklet. This provides a good basis for carers to develop their own guidelines but the authority must develop their own policy, which should be made known to all staff and foster carers. Risk assessments in respect of young people sharing a bedroom had been completed but they tend to be a 'paper exercise' as they did not accurately reflect a child's previous history or take account of the views of young people.

The Fostering Service has provided child protection training for its foster carers including newly approved kinship foster carers as part of the approval process. Kinship foster carers who have been approved prior to this programme should be encouraged to attend appropriate child protection training. However, the authority has not provided foster carers with guidance as to permitted measures of control as required by the last inspection. The foster carers spoken to state that they would not use restraint, as they had not been trained, however, one foster carer suffered considerable damage to their home as a result of a violent outburst of one young person and their own safety was endangered.

Inspectors are aware that the Area Child Protection Committee has developed a policy in respect of young people who go missing from care, however, there is a need to ensure that all foster carers receive a copy of this or a copy of the Fostering Service's guidance based on this policy.

The composition of the Foster Panel was observed to concur with the Fostering Regulations. Minutes of Panel meetings held since the last inspection showed all had been quorate in membership. A Panel meeting was attended by one of the Inspectors during the inspection. Observation of the Panel elicited that members were robust in checking out information provided in assessment reports on proposed carers and in questioning Link Workers about their

conclusions. Particular attention was given by Panel members to checking arrangements for meeting the health and educational needs of young people and to promoting their safety within the home environment.

However, there remained a need for training for Panel members to facilitate informed decision making. It is required this is actioned.

It was a cause for concern that appropriate references had not been undertaken for all Panel members. Also, members were sitting on the Panel before CRB checks had been completed or updated. (A requirement in respect of this matter is made elsewhere in the report).

It was pleasing to note a system for providing the Panel with basic data about the fostering service, for monitoring purposes, had been implemented. However, this was still in its 'infancy'. There remained a need to collate wider data to better inform the Panel about the operation of the service and, ultimately, to enable them to assess whether the needs of the carers and young people are adequately met by the service.

Discussion with the Chair of the Panel elicited that there were plans to revise the composition of the Panel to reflect a wider range of interested persons including, hopefully, a young adult who had had experience of being fostered.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Additional input and training is required to support carers in meeting the educational and heritage needs of young people. The shared care service offered to young people with disabilities was well organised and effectively met their needs.

EVIDENCE:

The lack of Carers from differing ethnic and racial groups meant a number of young people were being looked after in transracial placements.

There was no system operating either within the Fostering Service or the Central Placement Team which identified specific Carers who had either received training in cultural diversity and/or who had expressed a wish to care for children from a different ethnic background.

One Carer who had had three transracial placements said she had not received any training in caring for young people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, there was evidence to show the Carer was taking steps to broaden her own understanding of relevant racial, ethnic and cultural issues to enable her to provide the best possible care and promote a positive awareness of the child's heritage. The Carer was complimentary about the support she was receiving from her Link Worker in this matter.

There was a need for the Fostering Service to ensure Carers receive training in cultural diversity to ensure transracial or transcommunity placements offer the

best possible care and promote a positive understanding of the children's heritage.

There was written evidence to show Link Workers were supporting Carers in promoting education for young people. However, carers felt they did not receive adequate support from the young people's Social Workers when difficulties arose in the school placement. They spoke about children's Social Workers being slow to respond to their calls.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were in place in most of the young people's files. However, many of them simply indicated the Key stage the young person was working toward. The PEP's did not contain any information about how the school would support young people who were living away from home or who were experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Some concerns were identified in respect of travel arrangements for young people attending school. In one instance, a four year old child was travelling unaccompanied in a taxi to and from school. Carers expressed the opinion that voluntary drivers were more reliable both in terms of timekeeping and upholding confidentiality.

The operation of a respite service for parents of young people with disabilities remained sited in different premises from the main Fostering Service. However, clearer links between the respite carers service and mainstream carers service had been established and there was improved communication between the two teams. A change had been effected following the last inspection with the Team Manager responsible for managing the respite service reporting directly to the Head of the Fostering Service. The Team Managers responsible for both the respite and mainstream foster care service were said to meet on a regular basis and a member of the respite team usually attended mainstream foster team meetings.

The respite service was comprised of two elements, carers who offered short term breaks of respite and 'contract' carers who offered more frequent breaks for young people with complex needs. The Team Manager said a number of staff in the respite team had resigned and had not been replaced; the manager considered there was a shortfall of the equivalent of one full-time worker. The lack of sufficient staff since the last inspection was said to have impacted on the team being able to expand the service offered to respite carers. An example given was in the area of training. Respite and contract carers were said to receive the same Induction training as other foster carers. However, the manager said that although carers were invited to attend mainstream training held by the Fostering Service, the attendance of contract carers tended to be higher than that of respite carers due to the latter usually being at work in their main job. The Manager said the respite team hoped to offer additional training for respite and contract carers in areas related to the special

needs of the young people such as 'moving and handling'. This form of training was said to currently only be undertaken with individual carers, as necessary.

The Manager said the focus of work for the team remained on ensuring carers received adequate supervision and support; the number of assessments of new carers remained low. Eight respite/contract carers returned the questionnaire sent to them by the Commission. All expressed satisfaction with the service offered to them and considered the arrangements for 'matching' them with young people were well thought out. (The team manager said a high percentage of short-term breaks, 95%, were planned admissions). A number of carers acknowledged difficulties associated with attending on-going training during weekdays and said they would like the opportunity to attend a session at a weekend.

Inspectors visited foster carers who had been newly approved to provide short break placements for children with disabilities. Although no placement had been identified up to the time of the inspection, the carers were well prepared for a young person to live with them for short-term breaks; the couple had extensive experience of adoption and fostering of young people with a learning disability. The carers said they had attended Induction training and considered the assessment and approval process had been thorough and fair. The carers were clear about their role in supporting parents and were aware that the parents remained the child's main carer.

The Foster Care Agreement document devised for use for carers undertaking respite and contract care of young people was seen to be comprehensive. The document covered all required areas of service specification and included principles of good practice which underpinned the service.

The Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service did not contain specific information about the respite/contract service. The provision of the respite service within the overall fostering service continued to be a valuable resource. It is recommended the Statement of Purpose is revised to reflect the various options open to persons interested in being foster carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The fostering service promoted contact for young people, where appropriate, though systems for gaining young people's opinions and views were inadequate.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements for young people with their family or friends were generally clearly defined in the foster placement agreement. Carers demonstrated a desire to support and facilitate contact between young people and their families whenever possible. However, a number of carers said the arrangements could be changed at the last minute without consultation with themselves or the young person. This resulted in carers and young people having to change their usual daily routines or even cancel planned events at times.

A number of carers expressed concern about arrangements for transport for young people. Taxi drivers were not always known to Carers or the young person and, on a few occasions, drivers were said to have been reluctant to produce their ID. Instances of drivers divulging confidential information to the wrong party were also cited.

Risk assessments for individual young people were being carried out but often did not reflect changes in transport arrangements. There was a need to ensure the assessments were regularly reviewed and reflected the level of vulnerability of individual young people.

The Head of Service said the arrangements for consultation with young people about the fostering service offered to them were being re-evaluated. A group known as the Bumblebee group were said to continue to meet on a monthly basis; the group was comprised of young people in foster placements only. The agenda for the monthly meetings included looking at a specific issue related to fostering. However, a Children's Services Action group which had been operating at the time of the last inspection, and included representatives from all Looked After Children services, was said to have been suspended pending a review of its purpose and function. There was little evidence to show the views of young people receiving a fostering service actually influenced decision making or the development of the service.

One young person spoke about having had four foster placements in the last twelve months. They said they had been told of the reason for one of the moves but were unaware of the reason for the remaining moves. The young person said their view had not been sought about their preference in terms of the area or type of family unit they wished to live with. The young person said three of the four placements had been unplanned but they had appreciated being able to make an introductory visit prior to going to their latest placement.

Young people recalled being asked their views both prior to and during their Review meetings. However, the annual Carers' Review did not encompass gathering the views of the young people placed with them. This is an area which should be developed.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Foster carers provide good support to young people moving into adulthood with limited support from the authority.

The Fostering Service is out of step with other authorities and agencies regarding payment of foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers seen by inspectors were seen to be providing good support to young people in developing independence skills to assist them in moving into adulthood. Nonetheless, foster carers commented that the young people would benefit from a more structured input from the Leaving Care Team. Both foster carers and young people acknowledged the importance of this time in the young person's life and the need for practical support to develop skills and move successfully into employment or further education. Young people informed inspectors that they did not see workers from the Leaving Care team as much as they would wish.

Pathway plans were seen on file for those young people where this was relevant, however, these need to be further developed to be a meaningful document, giving clear detail as to how a young person's needs are to be met and who is responsible for supporting the young person in each area.

Whilst a brief section is including in the Fostering Service's "Guidance for Foster Carers about Placements and Meetings" regarding supporting young people who have reached the age of 15, this needs to be supported by clear Pathway Plans in addition to appropriate training. Inspectors were given a copy of a resource pack prepared by the Leaving Care Team, containing useful

information, however, foster carers spoken to stated they had not received this and there was no evidence that it had been widely distributed. Inspectors were informed that a request has been made to the Leaving Care team to provide this training.

Foster carers receive allowances that are in line with the Fostering Networks recommended rate. However, as highlighted in the previous inspection report there are still a large proportion of foster carers who do not receive any financial reward or payment for the work they undertake. This clearly puts the City of Stoke on Trent out of step in relation to other authorities and agencies in the area. This is likely to seriously impact on the authority's ability to recruit new foster carers. These inequalities will be brought into even sharper focus with the approval of foster carers from the Stoke Outcomes Project. Inspectors were informed some work has been undertaken to look at the payment structure but no decisions have been made as to what action should be taken to develop an equitable payment system for foster carers which appropriately reflects the professional service which the young people of Stoke on Trent require.

In discussion with foster carers and from viewing files it is apparent that there are frequent difficulties in foster carers receiving payments on time. This is a deterioration in the service since the last inspection when most foster carers commented that they received payment in a timely fashion. Whilst foster carers commented that the finance department were always helpful when this arose, the problems were usually created by the young person's social worker not completing the relevant paperwork in a timely fashion.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The Fostering Service requires strategic and operational direction from experienced and knowledgeable managers to ensure that the Fostering Service can develop to be able to meet the needs of the young people needing to be placed with foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The Statement of Purpose was updated in October 2005 and is a useful document containing all information required by the National Minimum Standards. At the time of the inspection elected members had not approved the Statement of Purpose. As reported in the last inspection a Children's Guide had been produced; this has now been distributed to the young people placed by the Fostering Service.

Whilst some work has been undertaken regarding providing all staff and foster carers with appropriate policies and procedures, there are still many areas where this work has not been undertaken. It is imperative that staff and carers have appropriate guidance to ensure that they undertake their roles and duties as required.

The Fostering Service has over a long period of time suffered from managers not having sufficient knowledge and experience of fostering. This has been rectified in recent months by the interim appointment of a part time Head of Fostering and Adoption, who has substantial experience of fostering. This has provided much needed operational guidance to the team, however, as this is only an interim arrangement, the management of the service remains fragile. It is imperative for the development of the Fostering Service that the new departmental management structure is implemented swiftly.

The authority must identify a nominated manager for the Fostering Service and inform the Commission for Social Care Inspection of the appointment as a matter of urgency.

A system of monitoring has been introduced and notifications are being made to the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Inspectors were pleased to note that the monitoring had enabled social workers to take appropriate action regarding one young person who had established a pattern of absconding. Nonetheless, inspectors found that the recording of complaints and their outcomes was not sufficiently robust to allow for adequate quality monitoring. The manager must ensure that records identify what action has been taken and whether the complaint has been substantiated or not.

It remains a concern that all aspects of the Fostering Service are still not the responsibility of the same line manager. The Fostering Service presently has 3 distinct teams. The largest team is based at Heron Cross House, where staff recruit, train, supervise and support the majority of foster carers. There is a small team based within the resources team who undertake the same task for family link foster carers. The third team is the Central Placement Team based at the Civic offices, which receive referrals from children's social workers and identify placements for young people. However, this team is not managed by

the Head of Fostering and Adoption, even though the team undertakes key tasks within the Fostering Service remit.

Team meetings take place on a frequent basis. Such meetings are attended by staff from the two fostering team, however, staff from the Central Placement Team do not attend, thus losing an important avenue of communication.

Staff commented that they are well supported by the team manager and supervision takes place on a regular basis.

Inspectors were informed that specific tasks had been identified within the Service and a team member has taken on the responsibility for developing the different areas of work, for example training, kinship care and permanent foster care. This appears to be a much-improved structure to the Service. Nonetheless, the last inspection stated that "In discussion with staff and managers, inspectors found differing views as to the workload of the Family Placement team. Inspectors recommend that an assessment of workloads is undertaken, so that there is a clear expectation of the work undertaken by The Fostering Service. This would then inform managers as to the number of staff required for the service to undertake required tasks." Similar comments were made during this inspection and managers were unable to provide information as to how many staff should be employed by the Service. Inspectors were therefore disappointed that no work has yet been undertaken to identify how many staff are required to operate an effective fostering service. Inspectors believe that in comparison with other authorities inspected in the last year, the City of Stoke on Trent Fostering Service does not have sufficient staff to provide an effective service.

There have been improvements in the administrative support provided to the Fostering Service and this has enabled an improvement in recording, management systems and responding to applications from prospective foster carers.

It is apparent that the authority does not have sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of young people from Stoke on Trent, with 65 young people having to be placed outside the city with independent fostering agencies. Whilst inspectors are aware that the authority has contracted Stoke Outcomes to provide 10 new foster carers, this will not meet the needs of the young people in Stoke on Trent who require a placement. As highlighted elsewhere in this report the authority still relies on a high number of exemptions and extensions to foster carers approval, thus limiting the opportunity for appropriate matching of young people's needs to the skills of foster carers. It is disappointing to note that there have only been 4 mainstream foster carers recruited since the last inspection 8 months ago. There have been 5 kinship carers approved since the last inspection. Inspectors were unable to ascertain from the register of foster carers how many family link carers had been approved, as the register did not contain this information.

The Fostering Service has relied heavily on agency social workers to enable it to function, this has been especially prevalent regarding the assessment of prospective foster carers. This has led to an inconsistency in assessments, with a number of reports not containing crucial information to enable Panel to make appropriate decisions. Inspectors noted that in the majority of assessments seen, there was no robust analysis of foster carers skills. This situation is exacerbated by a number of staff not having undertaken appropriate training in respect of assessing foster carers.

Staff reported that there was a lack of training opportunities, but felt that managers would support them if they identified appropriate training. However, all staff stated that it was difficult to priorities training over other commitments. Both agency staff and staff redeployed from other areas within the authority had not received a planned period of induction and no programme has been devised to meet this need.

The Fostering Service has developed a comprehensive policy in respect of support to foster carers, however, at the time of the inspection this was still an aspirational document, but is a good basis on which to develop the Service and support foster carers.

At the time of the inspection all foster carers had a named supervising social worker, however, this was not the case when inspectors received the foster carers register prior to the inspection. Inspectors were pleased to note that foster carers report improved communication with supervising social workers with an increase in visits. Inspection of files and in discussion with foster carers and staff it is apparent that the supervision of foster carers is not undertaken in a consistent way or at consistent intervals, with some foster carers receiving supervision bi-monthly as expected by the policy but another foster carer had only had 3 supervision visits over a period of 19 months, even though there had been difficulties within the placements and the carer had 4 young people placed for a number of months. Inspectors also believe that amongst foster carers there is a lack of understanding as to the difference between supervision and a support visit. Unannounced visits had been undertaken to some foster carers but this was not a consistent practice within the Fostering Service.

The authority's expectation of foster carers and staff is included in the Foster Care Agreement. This was revised in September 2005, however, the agreement was not seen on any of the files examined by inspectors. Whilst the Agreement covers all areas required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, it is heavily reliant on the provision of information contained in the Foster Care Handbook. This has not yet been developed and therefore foster carers lack considerable information regarding the Fostering Services policies and procedures. Inspectors were informed that an agency member of staff

had been contracted to develop the handbook, and it was hoped that it would be available by the beginning of 2006.

Foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis, however, as identified at the last inspection this is not a robust process with reviews being undertaken by the supervising social worker, which are then read and agreed by the team manager. The team accept this is not a robust system and that the views of all relevant parties are not always sought as part of the review. Inspectors were informed that work is planned to ensure that there is an independent element built into reviews and to ensure that all relevant parties views are sought, including those of the young people placed with the foster carers.

Foster carers and staff have seen the development of the support provided by the Advisory Foster Carers positively. Support meetings are held on a regular basis in different localities and often include a training element. The work undertaken by the two foster carers undertaking this role should be commended.

Whilst the manager keeps a record for monitoring purposes of allegations against foster carers, the Fostering Service does not have a policy, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

Issues about the lack of support from case managers featured highly in the responses received from foster carers, with foster carers stating that they did not receive adequate information regarding the needs of the young person they were being asked to care for. This situation is exacerbated by Foster Placement Agreements not being completed to a sufficiently high standard and as the authority only used LAC Placement Plans which does not cover all required areas by Schedule 6. In addition there is a lack of guidance as to who is responsible for completing such plans. Foster carers were aware of the need to keep all information in lockable boxes to maintain confidentiality.

There has been an improvement in the training provided to foster carers since this task has been delegated to one member of staff, however, training does still not cover all areas required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Examination of registers kept by the Fostering Service indicated that they did not meet with regulations and were not accurate. It is a concern that the Fostering Service still does not have an accurate and up to date Foster Care Register. There were a number of different registers in place but none of them contain all information required. The register of young people placed also did not contain all required information.

Good progress has been achieved since the last inspection in identifying and working with Kinship Carers. Kinship Carers spoke positively about regular contact between them and their Link Worker. However, this improvement is

somewhat fragile due to imminent changes in staffing. There is a need for continuing development of the service in respect of support networks for Kinship foster carers in addition to appropriate training. Inspectors were pleased to find that an increasing number of Kinship foster carers are accessing training.

Inspectors were concerned that some Kinship Carers felt pressurised by placing Social Workers into agreeing to apply for a Residence Order on young people. One foster carer stated that they had been threatened that the young person would be moved and they would have little or no contact if they failed to comply. It is apparent that there is insufficient information provided to Kinship Carers regarding the court proceedings, legal and financial implications of a Residence Order. Both placing social workers and supervising social workers were not aware of all the implications and were therefore unable to properly advise foster carers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	1
6	1
8	1
9	1
15	1
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	1
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	2
11	1

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	2

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	2
2	2
4	2
5	1
16	1
17	1
18	X
19	1
20	X
21	3
22	1
23	2
24	2
25	1
26	X
27	N/A
28	N/A
32	2

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? YES

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS12	34(3) Sch 6	Carers are provided with information about the child's state of health and health needs on admission.	01/01/06
2	FS3	7 Sch 1	A CRB check must be undertaken by the Authority in respect of the Interim Head of Fostering and Adoption	19/12/05
3	FS3and FS15	20 Sch1	The Fostering Service must ensure that appropriate records are kept of the matters relating to the appointment of staff identified in Schedule 1. Timescale of 30.04.04 not met.	01/01/06
4	FS8	11	Due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings when matching with a carer.	19/12/05
5	FS15	20 Sch1	A CRB check must be undertaken in respect of all staff employed within the Fostering Service. Staff must not commence employment until the results of the check are received.	19/12/05
6	FS8and FS24	34(3) Sch 6	The Fostering Service must ensure Foster Placement Agreements, which are compliant with Schedule 6 are in place in respect of all children in	01/02/06

			foster placements. Timescale of 30.4.04 not met	
7	FS9	17(3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	01/01/06
8	FS9	13(1)	The Fostering Service must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of young people placed with foster carers. Timescale of 01.07.05 not met	01/02/06
9	FS7 & FS17	33(a)	The Fostering Service must ensure that it has sufficient diversity of foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	01/02/06
10	FS14	17(1)	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive written guidance and training regarding the role of foster carers in preparing young people for independence. Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	01/02/06
11		Leaving Care Act...	...2000. The Authority must ensure that Pathway Plans contain sufficient detail to enable a young person to know who is to provide support in any given area.	01/02/06
12	FS14	Leaving Care Act...	...2000. The Authority must ensure that young people receive sufficient support from the Leaving Care Team to ensure	01/02/06

			that they develop skills to move into adulthood.	
13	FS29	19	The Fostering Service must review the payment structure for all its foster carers and analyse the effect this will have on recruitment. The Fostering Service should provide the Commission with a programme of implementation. Timescale of 01.07.05 not met	01/02/06
14	FS1	3 (5)	The Fostering Service must ensure it has a comprehensive set of Policies&Procedures,service is conducted in a manner,which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose. Timescale of 01.07.05 not met	01/02/06
15	FS2	10 (1)	The Fostering Service must inform CSCI the person appointed as the Nominated Manager of The Fostering Service. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	01/01/06
16	FS4	42 Sch 7	The Fostering Service must ensure that the record of complaints record what action has been taken and whether the complaint is substantiated.	01/01/06
17	FS5and FS16	10 (1) (2) (3)	The structure of the Fostering Service must be reviewed to ensure it is managed effectively and efficiently. Timescale of 30.07.04 not met	01/01/06
18	FS17	19	The Fostering Service must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the Fostering Service.	01/02/06

			Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	
19	FS17	27(2)(a)	The Fostering Service must ensure that, a consistent and thorough approach to foster care assessment is undertaken and that such assessments consider all aspects identified in Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	01/01/06
20	FS19	21(4) (a)	The Fostering Service must provide appropriate and relevant training for its staff Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	01/02/06
21	FS19	21(4) (a)	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff receive induction training. Timescale of 01.06.05	01/01/06
22	FS22	17(1)	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive supervision on a regular basis and in line with the Service's policies and procedures.	01/01/06
23	FS22	28(5)(b)	The Fostering Service must ensure that Foster Carer Agreements complying with Schedule 5 are in place on all foster carer's files. Timescale of 30.7.04 not met.	01/02/06
24	FS22	29 (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Agency has a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register. Timescale of 01.07.05 not met	01/02/06
25	FS22	17(1)	The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers receive information regarding the Service's policies and	01/02/06

			procedures. Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	
26	FS23	17(1)	The Fostering Service must develop, implement and evaluate a training programme for foster carers, which covers all elements required by the National Minimum Standards. Timescale of 01.08.05 not met	01/02/06
27	FS25	22	The Fostering Service must record in the form of a register the information specified in Schedule 2. Timescale of 30.04.04 not met.	01/01/06
28	FS25	31(2)	A register of foster carers must be maintained which complies with all the requirements of this regulation. Timescale of 01.06.05 not met	01/01/06
29	FS32	CA 1989 s8	The Authority must ensure that staff and foster carers are fully aware of the implications of making a Residence Order.	01/02/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS1	The Statement of Purpose should be revised to reflect how the service aims to meet the needs of different groups of children, ie. short-term breaks.
2	FS1	The Statement of Purpose should be adopted by the elected members.
3	FS9	The Fostering Service should prepare written guidance for foster carers to follow if a child is absent from a foster home without permission, based on the ACPC's policy.

4	FS9	A policy should be written, and safe caring guidelines drawn up for each foster home, agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child.
5	FS9	The Fostering Service should encourage all kinship foster carers to undertake child protection training.
6	FS10	Risk assessments on young people should be regularly reviewed and reflect their age and level of vulnerability.
7	FS11	The views of young people placed in the home should be included in the annual Carers' Review.
8	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff undertaking assessments of foster carers have received appropriate training in this area.
9	FS16	The Fostering Service should establish a system of evaluating and monitoring workloads, to establish the number of staff required to undertake the tasks required.
10	FS16	The Fostering Service should ensure that they have a system to ensure that the quality of care of out of city placements is appropriately monitored.
11	FS16	The Fostering Service should ensure that they have a system to ensure that the quality of care of out of city placements is appropriately monitored.
12	FS16	The Fostering Service should establish a training portfolio for all its foster carers, which is appraised as part of the annual review.
13	FS22	The Fostering Service should provide guidance to staff and foster carers regarding the difference between foster carer supervision and support
14	FS22	Fostering Service should ensure that unannounced visits take place at least annually that written records are kept of these visits.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Stafford Office

Dyson Court

Staffordshire Technology Park

Beaconside

Stafford

ST18 0ES

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI