



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Fostering Services Rotherham (NOT REGISTERED)

Crinoline House
Effingham Square
Rotherham
S65 1AW

2nd February 2004

9th
February 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

Fostering Services Rotherham

Address

Crinoline House, Effingham Square, Rotherham, S65
1AW

Local Authority Manager

Gill Black

Tel No:

01709 382121

Address

Crinoline House, Effingham Square, Rotherham, S65
1AW

Fax No:

Email Address

Gill.black@rotherham.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 ?

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Date of last inspection

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Date of Inspection Visit		2nd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Helen Norry	074180
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Fostering Services **Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council - From the 2nd February to the 9th February 2004.** 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.

The Care Standards Act 2000 established the NCSC as an independent, non-government public body. It's purpose being to regulate social and health care services and provide for the inspection of Local Authority Fostering Services by the NCSC.

The Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and The National Minimum Standards form the basis of the new regulatory framework for the conduct of Fostering Services. The Fostering Service is also subject to the policies and procedures laid down by of the Local Authority.

The Rotherham Fostering Service is based in the Family Care Unit on the 4th floor of Crinoline House, the main Social Services offices in Rotherham. The service provides foster care for children and young people who are being looked after by the Local Authority. They can be subject to care orders or may be voluntarily accommodated under the terms of The Children Act 1989.

The fostering team is responsible for meeting the placement needs of the children referred to the service. In order to meet these needs the fostering service recruits, assess and trains foster carers. The service also supports and trains existing carers.

Alongside family based care the department operates a "Families Together" Scheme, which specifically links families to carers for children with disabilities for respite care.

The department are also in the early stages of setting up a Specialist /Crisis /Remand, a fee paying scheme that aims to provide family based care for young people with specific needs.

The fostering service and foster carers have access to a range of multi -agency projects to assist foster carers in meeting the individual needs of the children in their care.

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 first announced inspection of Rotherham fostering services was undertaken in February 2003. All carers were informed in writing about the outcomes of the last inspection and some carers and young people who had been directly involved in the inspection process had an opportunity to attend a presentation by the NCSC of its findings.

An action plan was presented to the NCSC by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the commission is satisfied the department have taken the recommendations made in the inspection report seriously and are continuing to implement the new legislation. It is acknowledged that it is a continual process.

This is the second announced inspection by the National Care Standards Commission of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Councils Fostering Service.

There was pre-planning meeting on the 7th January 2004 to discuss the inspection and the methodology to be used during the inspection. The managers of the fostering service completed the Pre Inspection questionnaire in detail, in a very clear and concise way. Evidence was provided in the form of policies and procedures, leaflets and other related documentation about Rotherham's fostering service. The purpose being to demonstrate how the department meet each of the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

The housekeeping arrangements were very good throughout the inspection including, office and interviewing facilities, punctuality of personnel attending interviews and the willingness of people to join in discussions about the fostering service.

There is a considerable amount of information gathered throughout an inspection and the inspection of a specific service within a department means the inspection crosses many areas of a social services department. A full feedback was presented to the senior managers and whilst there were many "themes" throughout the inspection, these were discussed at the feedback and an agreement reached that where they were not relevant or directly affected the fostering service these would be dealt with separately to the report.

The complex and often demanding needs of the children and young people who are "Looked After" by the department set against a limited source of foster carers present the department with one of its greatest challenges, in matching children to appropriate foster placements. The department have recognised this and know they have to establish a robust and sustained recruitment campaign to develop a competent pool of carers to meet the challenges faced by the council in meeting the needs of Looked After Children. The fostering team have a number of strategies and policies in place, but the difficulty in recruiting competent carers means there remains a continued conflict between what they want to do and what is actually achievable.

The recruitment centre, a shop in the centre of Rotherham has been a major development since the last inspection and demonstrates how seriously the department have recognised the need for a wide-ranging and innovative approach to recruiting foster carers. The development of a specialist fee paying scheme for children and young people with specific needs is further evidence that the department is trying to address the problems they have in finding suitable family based placements for children.

Senior managers within the department have also recognised it is not simply enough to develop a recruitment strategy that will see an increase in carers but that the department also has to consider its overall approach to receiving children into a looked after system that at times is not equipped to deal with their needs and places children and young people in equally vulnerable situations.

The department are in the process through training opportunities of tackling a number of practice issues which includes looking at the thresholds placing social workers are using in assessing the need for children to be received into the looked after system and looking to use a risk management assessment approach in trying to enable children to remain at home with family based resources and support. The department are also aware that looked after children struggle with the number of placements they experience and the number of social workers they have to get to know throughout their time in the looked after system.

The department should be encouraged that foster carers were generally enthusiastic for the care task despite some frustrations and made comments such as "It's a privilege to look after the children" "to be trusted".

Some children were equally honest in their accounts and again despite some difficulties they were positive about some care situations "I have my own big bedroom" "I can have my friends around".

Some foster carer's also felt that the department had taken seriously the criticisms made by the SSI and the NCSC at the last inspection and felt they were trying to respond in a positive way, and "had turned a corner". When asked how, the carers felt they were getting access to policy documents and some information and there was a real effort to recruit more carers.

Statement Of Purpose.

1 of 1 standard assessed was met.

The fostering service has a statement of purpose which is approved annually by the Elected Members and a children's guide that helps children to understand about the fostering service.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service.

2 of 2 standards assessed were met.

The fostering service is being managed efficiently and effectively by suitably qualified people with the experience and skills to do so.

Management of the fostering service.

1 of 2 standards assessed were met

There is a clear management structure in place, each member of staff has a job description setting out their duties and responsibilities, and there are clear lines of accountability. Foster carers raised concerns at the confusion over the payment system and the changes that are to take place in April 2004.

Securing and promoting welfare

6 of the 9 standards assessed were met.

The challenging needs of the children and young people and the demand for complex placements set against a limited source of foster carers mean that it is difficult for the fostering service to make appropriate placements, and it is clear there are a number of children placed in foster care where numbers of children in placement exceed that which would be considered appropriate and desirable and at times safe. The foster carers have access to a wealth of information on the Protection of Children. The department follow the South Yorkshire ACPC guidelines. The department continue to be actively involved in a number of initiatives to promote the rights of children and young people in care.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.
8 of the 9 standards assessed were met.

The majority of the staff in the fostering team are qualified social workers, with considerable childcare and family placement experience. The team are available to support student social worker placements. The development of the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Centre for recruiting carers has been a significant step forward since the last inspection. It is however clear the department have been unable to meet their commitment to support carers because of the staffing difficulties being experienced in the team during the past twelve months.

Records.

1 of the 2 standards assessed were met.

The department maintain separate records for staff, carers and children.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering service.

1 of 1 standard assessed was met.

The main social services building is typical of most modern day office accommodation. Space and the availability of computers and telephones are at a premium and concerns raised by the team suggest their working conditions are far from ideal. The office accommodation does meet its stated purpose and is appropriate for its use.

Financial requirements.

3 of 3 standards assessed were met

The social services department is expected to meet its forecast budget. The department have a three-year programme to significantly raise fostering allowances. The foster carers spoke of being unclear and unhappy about the payment scheme and believe it to be subjective. The department must continue to address this issue.

Fostering panels.

1 of 1 standard assessed was not met.

The fostering panel is responsible for the approval of foster carers on behalf of Rotherham Social Services. There is a constitution for the arrangements of the fostering panel in line with the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations. The chair of panel and the councillor were interviewed as part of this inspection. Both commented in their belief that the panel is fair and thorough in carrying out its responsibility. Unfortunately that is not the perception of those who attend the panel and believe their professionalism and skills are seriously questioned

Short-term breaks.

1 of 1 standard assessed was met.

The department have a respite care scheme known as "Families Together" for families with children who have a disability. The parents are matched to a family for respite care but remain central to the child's care needs, health and education.

Family and friends as carers.

1 of 1 standard assessed was met

The department has a policy and procedure for the assessment and approval of Relatives and Friends. Family and Friends as carers are approved through the fostering team and subject to an assessment process and approval by the fostering panel.

Questionnaires.

Children's

Two hundred questionnaires were sent to Looked after Children aged over 8 living with foster carers 34 were returned.

Children and Young People commented on:

Lack of planning.

Not knowing what's happening to them.

Regarding punishments, the children and young people said they missed activities, use of the computer and game boy and thought these were fair.

They spoke of missing home and not being with family.

With regard to living with carers they said they were encouraged to eat fresh vegetables and fruit, and that foster carers talked to them.

Children said they felt safe and that carers are brilliant.

All the children and young people were unaware of the NCSC.

Foster Carers.

One hundred and forty four questionnaires were sent out to foster carers and 35 returned.

The main criticisms were with regard to placing social workers whom they felt did not return telephone calls, give sufficient information about the children being placed, a lack of trust in sharing information, no continuity of social workers for the children, being late for visits, and generally making carers feel undervalued.

Foster carers did express some concern about the inconsistencies in the financial assistance given to carers and the inconsistencies amongst placing social workers in their practice.

They felt social workers did not respect and listen to the views of "unprofessionals" like foster carers.

The main concern with regard to the fostering service was that carers said they were offered placements that bore no resemblance to the age, category and sex they were approved for.

They also felt that the lack of support available to carers was "driving carers to private agencies". In discussion with senior managers they acknowledged that this might be the perception of some carers but that as a department they had in fact lost only one carer to an Independent Fostering Agency.

Foster carers also said that despite the immense pressure they must be under they (the department) do a splendid job and that staff were dedicated to their job.

Placing Social Workers

Twenty questionnaires were sent out and 7 returned.

Social workers spoke of the stability carers offered to the children,

"I cannot identify any negatives about the placement".

"This is a very stable placement".

**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:

YES

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Not applicable.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
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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	Helen Norry	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Janet Wilkinson	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	Reg33	FS6	<p>Risk assessment must be undertaken to demonstrate why a placement is considered appropriate and what alternatives were thought about.</p> <p>Where it is known that a child has been abused or has abused another child then the child's needs and the needs of all other children in the household must be assessed prior to placement particularly when bedrooms are shared</p> <p>The department must ensure carers are not put in a difficult position when asked to consider a placement.</p>	Immediately
2	Reg33	FS7	<p>There is no evidence on the children's or foster carers files to show consideration is being given to finding a more suitable placement after the first six weeks of placement.</p> <p>Exemptions to current fostering limits are short-term solutions must be considered a risky solution in view of the comments made by carers and children in receipt of the service.</p>	Immediately

3	Reg33	FS8	The need for emergency placement means children are not always introduced to their new carers prior to placement. The department must consider the implications of this practice.	Immediately
4	Reg17	FS22	The fostering service must ensure all foster cares have an allocated support worker.	Immediately
5	Reg23	FS24	All foster carers must be issued with a lockable metal case in which to secure a child's personal information.	Immediately
6	Reg26	FS30	The work undertaken by the fostering panel must be reviewed in light of the comments made by professionals attending the panel.	Immediately

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	It is recommended that a copy of the department's organisational structure should be included in the statement of purpose.
2	FS7	Social workers did complain that the fostering team do not consult them if a placement is being made in a foster home where a child they are responsible for is already in placement.
3	FS10	Foster carers with out exception asked for social workers to be a little more considerate when committing them to contact arrangements.
4	FS22	Foster carers have been issued with a logbook, there is some confusion over how it should be used and it is advised carers receive some training on this issue.
5	FS31	The Families Together scheme carers have their own handbook, it is out of date.

* 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	6
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	2/2/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	54.30

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?

3

Statement Of Purpose.

The fostering service has a written statement of purpose, which meets the requirements of the legislation. It was last reviewed in May 2003 and will be placed before cabinet members (Elected Councillors) in early 2004.

It is the fostering services first statement of purpose. It is recommended that a copy of the department's organisational structure should be included in the document.

Children's guide

The fostering service has developed a children's guide. It explains the running of the fostering service in terms of how a football club is run with a Board of Directors (Elected Councillors), a Chairman (Director/Head of Children's Service and a manager who does all the day to day business, and working for the manager is a range of coaches and support staff (Social Workers) who ensure the team is fit and ready to play. Its description is simple to follow and will enable Looked after Children to have some understanding of how a large Metropolitan Borough Council works and how they carry out their cooperate parenting responsibilities.

The guide, which is a double-sided single sheet of paper, is a simple document and gives children some useful telephone numbers and the names of key personnel who they can contact. The guide also assures children that the fostering service aims "to get the best foster carers they can"

Policies and Procedures

Carers and family placement workers in the fostering team have access to policies and procedures, which specifically related to their role within the organisation.

A number of documents are still at the draft stage and open for consultation.

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?

3

The local authorities nominated manager is Gill Black, Service Manager; she attended a fit person interview in August 2003 and was formally approved by the NCSC as the department's nominated manager for the fostering service.

All the fostering services including specialist provision such as "Families Together" and Specialist Scheme's fall within the scope of her managerial responsibilities.

Gill Black has a Degree in Psychology and is a qualified social worker (CQSW); she also has a Diploma in Management Studies. She is directly responsible to the Head Of Children Services. Gill Black has considerable social work experience in both childcare and as a policy officer.

Margaret Davies, formally a principal social worker in the fostering team has recently been appointed as acting team manager. She has been in post since October 2003. She is a qualified social worker with a recognised social work qualification (CQSW) and a Certificate in Management. She has considerable childcare experience.

The management of the fostering service is now becoming established. Both managers are keen to develop the service and have spent considerable time following through the requirements of the last inspection and implementing an action plan that addresses all the issues raised in the report (February 2003). They have also prepared detailed pre inspection information for the purpose of this announced inspection.

The fostering service is being managed by suitably qualified people with the experience and skills to do so efficiently and effectively.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

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

The employment files of those working in the fostering service were examined as part of this inspection and found to be satisfactory.

Police checks have been undertaken on all staff employed within the service and a programme is in place to ensure these are renewed every three years as required by the regulations.

Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There are systems and procedures in place to monitor the activities of the fostering services. There is a clear management structure in place, the senior managers of the department reporting directly to the Members of the Council.

The Executive Director of Social Services Mr J Gomersall has overall responsibility for the provision of social services, including the fostering service.

There has been no evidence on this inspection to suggest the department cannot meet their financial commitment to the fostering service.

A number of foster carers spoken to did raise some concerns at the confusion over the payment system and the changes that are to take place in April 2004 which they perceive as: "including the withdrawal of the enhanced element to the weekly payment fee". All carers have been advised of the department's three-year programme to significantly raise and streamline fostering allowances.

This report is raising the department's awareness to the dissatisfaction felt by some carers over weekly payments and suggests that the department help foster carers to understand how the weekly fee is paid and what plans the department have to adjust it. (See standards 21 and 29).

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

10

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.

1

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

1

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

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

3

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

3

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

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Each member of staff has a job description setting out their duties and responsibilities, and there are clear lines of accountability.

The managers job description sets out their duties and responsibilities and they do not hold a similar position in another organisation.

Levels of delegations are identified, and information as to who deputises in the absence of the manager was provided in the pre-inspection questionnaire.

RMBC carried out a formal tendering process to appoint a sole supplier of temporary social care staff. The contract came in to effect from November 2003.

The contract requires that CRB are completed, references taken up and that the employment history and qualifications are checked. In addition, it is practice that staff are formally interviewed to ensure they are the best candidates.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The home and family assessment (Form F) are the first opportunity for the fostering team to make an assessment that the carers are able to provide a safe and caring environment for a child or young person to live in. Support visits and the foster carers annual review are formats for monitoring the continuation of this process and the quality of care being provided. The review of the foster carers and the home is undertaken by the supervising social worker and a manager of the service. It remains of concern that some carers are unclear as to who their support worker is and were critical that allocation of a support worker had taken place just prior to the inspection.

All first reviews are presented to panel as required by the regulations. Foster carers have an opportunity to attend panel if they wish to. Following the presentation of the first annual review at panel, a policy decision has been taken in the department that after that every third year review will then be brought before for panel for the carers to be re-approved. In the intervening year the service manager will read the annual review formally re-approve the carers.

The challenging needs of the children and young people and the demand for complex placements set against a limited source of foster carers mean that it is difficult for the fostering service to make appropriate placements, and it clear there are a number of children placed in foster care where numbers of children in placement exceed that which would be considered appropriate and desirable and at times safe. It is important where decisions are made in such circumstances risk assessments are undertaken that demonstrate why the placement was considered appropriate and what alternatives were thought about.

Where it is known that a child has been abused or has abused another child then the child's needs and the needs of all other children in the household must be assessed prior to placement, particularly when bedrooms are shared. The outcome of the assessment must be recorded. There is a guidance statement on risk management strategies where it states that risk management discussion should be held if it is known a child has been sexually abused. There is no evidence of this being done.

In discussion with some children who are in receipt of the service, they spoke of the need for fewer children in placement, to ensure they received the attention they deserved and needed. It is a powerful observation and request made by the young people using the service.

Foster carers themselves in discussion groups spoke of what they felt as "high risk placements" being made, and that any disruptions that occur are seen in a negative light with little acknowledgment that the department may have contributed to the possibility of a placement breakdown in placing children in inappropriate placements. Foster carers spoke

of caring for Looked after Children as being very emotive and that when presented with a scenario it was difficult to refuse to take a placement. They felt the department should not be putting them in that position.

There is clear evidence that under pressure to find and make suitable placements the department have acted on one occasion in an inappropriate way. The professional expertise, knowledge and skills that senior managers and members of staff in the fostering service have should not have left them responding to a complaint in the way they did. The department have been criticised for taking the decision they did. This matter was discussed fully at the formal feedback meeting.

The family assessment (Form F) and the carer's annual review ensure a Health and a Safety check of the foster home is completed.

The Foster Care agreement states that carers may be interviewed or visited as part of the commission's inspection process.

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?

1

The continual demand for placements and the complexity of the children's needs mean that the fostering service have a very difficult task to ensure children are placed appropriately and that their needs in terms of religion, gender, disability, language and culture are adequately addressed at the time a placement is required.

The department has written guidelines on the placement for a Black or Racially mixed child. It states that until the fostering service is able to increase its numbers of black families, it may, in exceptional circumstances, be necessary to place children transracially in an emergency or in a short-term placement for up to eight weeks. The document states that the unit manager and the assistant director must approve any proposed transracial placement. The document goes on to discuss the assessment process for carers who would be considered the most appropriate to undertake transracial placement assessments. A positive piece of work that clearly sets out the department expectations that the fostering service will value diversity and promote equality.

The shortage of placements means children can be placed in an emergency. When there are no other suitable placements available, children should have their placement needs reassessed within 6 weeks and steps taken to achieve a more suitable placement to address their specific requirements. The lack of suitable placements mean this is not always achievable. There is no evidence on the children's or foster carers files to show consideration is being given to finding a more suitable placement after the first six weeks of placement.

Social workers did complain that the fostering team does not consult them if a placement is being made in a foster home where a child they are responsible for is already in placement

It is difficult not to consider any alternative other than at this moment in time placements are resource led rather than needs led. A number of carers are providing care for over 4/5/6 children. Exemptions to current fostering limits are short-term solutions but it must be considered a risky strategy in the long term, with a high risk of placement breakdowns. One

foster carer commented, “why bring children in to care if you cannot offer a realistic alternative to home”.

Overloading carers is not just about numbers, but also the types of placements being made, and when good will is stretched to the limit it is important foster carers feel cared for and valued.

The service continues to be stretched and there are no realistic options for some children to ensure their individual needs are met. It is hoped the recruitment centre will start to address this difficulty and ensure there is a consistent pool of carers available for placement.

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 discussions with foster carers continue to suggest that most placements are made on an emergency basis, with very little information available to support the placement including the Looked After Children's documentation. The need for emergency placement means children are not always introduced to their new carers prior to placement. This theme ran through out most conversations with agency staff and carers. (See standard 6 and 7).

In discussion with senior managers at the feedback whilst they acknowledge this may be the perception of some carers, they feel they have built in a gate keeping process to consider the majority of admissions to care (Placement Panels) and the only placements made outside of this process are those made out of hours or when the child's welfare needs require emergency action.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The foster carers have access to a wealth of information on the Protection of Children. The department follow the South Yorkshire ACPC guidelines.

Foster carers have access to policy document on Safe Caring Strategies for Foster Carers. It acknowledges that fostering is a stressful activity and the policy offers guidance to foster carers as to how to keep safe and reduce the risk of complaints and allegations being made against them. It includes advice on appropriate touch, play, bedtime routines, and record keeping. The training of foster carers is underpinned by the protection of children, recognising signs of abuse and on managing challenging and complex behaviours.

It is advised that foster carers continue to receive regular training on safe care strategies to ensure they understand and have interpreted the policy in an accurate way.

All family placement social workers have been reminded to ensure they have attended child protection training and each received a copy of “speaking to children alone”, outcomes from the Victoria Climbié enquiry.

There is a draft pro forma report for the foster panel on “Allegations about foster carers”, it

ensures all aspect of the allegation, the investigation, chronology, and the people seen and interviewed is covered in the report. It is advised this report format should become practice. There is guidance available on managing general concerns about foster carers and how panel will consider the circumstances in which foster carers may be de-registered. It is advised that strategy meeting minutes relating to foster carers are kept on foster care files.

Foster carers have been consulted on the policy document “allegations against carers”. They spoke of it being a “very cold process” but accepted the department had procedures to follow in the event of an allegation being made against a carer. They valued the fact that the department has consulted them on the document and felt to some degree comforted that the department would ensure there was a pool of trained carers available to support any carer through an allegation.

The service manager is currently up dating the fostering services policies and procedures to reflect the changes in practice and the new regulations. Foster carers receive up to date information through the post and they acknowledge that since the last inspection the department have been trying very hard to make sure as new policies are written they are sent to the carers. The department have a Multi Agency Child Protection training programme.

The Local Authority has a joint protocol For Children Missing from Care in South Yorkshire. They work along side other Local Authorities and statutory agencies, the protocol sets in place engaging each agency in sharing the responsibility for managing the process.

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

100

%

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

The assessment process (Form F) addresses the foster carers views on working with and maintaining contact with a child’s natural family. Foster carers are expected to make a commitment to enable children to maintain contact with their families where it is considered appropriate for that child. It is part of the initial training and there is an expectation placed on carers that they would do all that is asked of them to enable contact to be maintained. The foster carers spoken to as part of this inspection commented that contact with family’s remains the hardest part of fostering. The unpredictability of some contacts meant foster carers often had to deal with displays of complex behaviours from the children when plans go astray or natural parents that for what ever reason take their frustrations out against carers.

The carers have access to a written document on “Contact” which sets out the department and carer’s duty to promote contact.

Decisions about contact are made by placing social workers and the main complaint from carers was that social workers did not always view the needs of the foster home in accommodating access, only the needs of the Looked after Child. They felt that this sometimes created unnecessary problems when trying to juggle their own family commitments and the contact arrangements for the foster child in placement. Foster carers without exception asked for social workers to be a little more considerate when committing

them to contact arrangements.

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?

4

The department continue to be actively involved in a number of initiatives to promote the rights of children and young people in care.

The Children's Rights Officer has established a group of young people who meet on a regular basis so that issues can be raised and discussed in a safe and caring way. The group met for the inspection and were able to contribute to the inspection process. The service aims to inform children and young people and to help them to contribute to strategic development.

The children's right group have been actively involved in a national consultation project and have met the Children's Right Director Mr R Morgan. They have also attended the National Advocacy conference.

The have represented the borough in Parliament, and travelled across the country expressing their views on a looked after system that they are fully aware of and how it affects their lives.

The Inspector joined some of the young people for a very enjoyable evening. We shared a meal and sat around the kitchen table for three hours discussing their experiences in care, the activities they have been involved in as part of the children's rights group and my role as an inspector. The children's comments have been incorporated in to this standard.

The young people who attend the group act as representatives for all the children across the services and receive a nominal payment in the form of a gift voucher to acknowledge their valuable contribution to the group.

Children and young people from the children's rights group have presented some of the foster carers training. It has been a well thought out process and the young people concerned feel they have made a valuable contribution to raising the awareness of carers to what its like to be in care and away from family and friends. The children spoke about wanting people to "stop pitying us" "we are normal".

The children and young people spoke of "don't even know if I have a social worker", "too many placements and social workers to remember them all". They have also been involved in interviewing social workers and residential care workers.

With the help of the children's rights officer and the independent reviewing officers, children in placement are now consulted about the standard of care they receive and are able to contribute to the foster carers annual review.

The children's rights group have also been actively involved in writing the Anti bullying policy

and how it relates to them. It will sit along side the department's countering bullying policy. Achievements are always celebrated by a party, and supported by cabinet members who take a keen interest in their corporate parenting responsibilities.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Looked After Children's nurse was interviewed as part of this inspection. She is based in Swinton.

The post of the community nurse for Looked after Children has been funded with money from the Health Action Zone. The role is to ensure that young people who are looked after by the council are offered health care services and help in being able to access the services available to them. The aim is also to support the carers.

The community nurse is a point of contact for foster carers, residential staff and social workers. The nurse is able to liaise with other health professionals to ensure health and health information needs are met. She has provided training for school nurses to enable them to appreciate some of the difficulties young people in care face.

The community nurse explained that part of her role was to collate information regarding the immunisation status of young people and to try to ensure they get health care and information they need such as health assessments and keeping up to date with vaccinations. She said that there was a 94% take-up rate for immunisations, which exceeds that of the children's peer group who are not in the Looked after System.

She reminds the young people of appointments and contacts them by sending text messages, a modern form of communicating that children and young people appear to enjoy and may respond to.

The department have a "Personal Relationships and Sexual Health policy for young people Looked After".

The Looked after Nurse also runs accredited First Aid training for foster carers.

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 department works to a Multi Agency Approach to Education of children and Young People in Public Care. It is a manual of procedures to assist schools, social workers, carers and the Local Education Authority and the Social Service to work more effectively together to improve the educational attainment of children and young people in public care. The guidance has been developed by the Get Real Team.

The multi agency "Get Real Team" was established to develop the work to support the education of children and young people in public care. The team have, as part of their remit, introduced Personal Education Plans for all children looked after by the department. The Get Real Team have teaching mentors (Primary) and learning mentors year (10/11) who work with children and with carers. The aim being to help and encourage children to achieve well in their GCSE's.

There is a 2 hour homework club held each week in Dalton to further assist children in their education.

Each school has a nominated Looked after Children's teacher and most schools now have a nominated Looked after Children's Governors.

The "Active Project" for children and young people being looked after has been funded through the SRB 3 scheme. The funding ends in March 2004, the co-ordinators role has been mainstreamed into revenue funding and a further allocation has been made from revenue to fund activity costs.

The team spoke of their pride in 50 young people taking driving lessons funded through the scheme and a range of activities designed to help them raise their confidence and self-esteem. They did comment that foster carers did not always support the projects and activities on offer with such comments as "we do things as a family". The fostering service will need to enable foster carers to understand that children in a looked after system have different needs to those children raised in families and therefore should be encouraging them to participate in the activities.

Training for carers has been available but is disappointing that carers have not always taken up the opportunities. The Looked after Nurse spoke of a course having been arranged for a month and no carers turned up, she said it is frustrating when you are trying to support and help educate people.

It is advised that all foster carers training includes contact with the Get Real Team, the active project and the looked after nurse and that this is ongoing and not just at the initial foundation-training day.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The NCH Rotherham Bridges Project is a service for young people in the town who have been or who are being looked after by the local authority. The project staff work with young people from the ages of 16 to give them support during the changes in their life and supporting them in their residential placement or foster care placement. The project provides a drop-in service, social activities, evening groups, education and training advice, parent and toddler group, tenancy support and welfare rights advice. The aim is to support the young people as they move towards independence.

The project works in conjunction with the Youth Service and Connexions. The Bridges project was not visited during this inspection.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The majority of the staff in the fostering team are qualified social workers, with considerable childcare and family placement experience. The team are available to support student social worker placements. The students provide a supervisory role with foster carers undertaking support visits and any assessment of foster carers is under the direct supervision of their mentor who remains accountable for their work.

The employment files of those working in the fostering service were examined as part of this inspection and found to be satisfactory.

Police checks have been undertaken on all staff employed within the service and a programme is in place to ensure these are renewed every three years as required by the regulations.

Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes.

There are 10 staff employed in the fostering service with 2 vacancies, one in the Families Together scheme, and the Ethnic Minority Recruitment Officer.

Total number of staff of the agency:

11

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a clear organisational management structure within the department. The appointment of a service manager and a team leader has been crucial to the development of the service.

There is a staff supervision structure in place with regular supervision taking place and the team commented "It's the best it had ever been".

Clerical and administrative staff supports the fostering service but it is limited and generally acknowledged by the fostering team that it does not meet the needs of the team. The council have a strategic partnership with BT and levels of support have been reviewed as part of this partnership and it is considered that administrative support is higher than in many other areas of 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?****4**

The development of the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Centre for recruiting carers has been a significant step forward since the last inspection. The new centre provides for a user-friendly focal point for information on fostering and adoption. People can pop in and talk to trained staff and carers about what it is really like to foster a child in your own home. The centre is also used as a base for meetings and training.

Foster carers, adopters, social services staff and local councillors helped to launch the new centre.

It is an excellent resource.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

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

The senior managers within the department have been aware the Fostering Service has struggled to meet the demands of the area based teams and have recognised this. They are looking at ways they can develop the service, and the general availability of placements to offer more scope and options when placing children with very difficult needs.

The development of the fostering and adoption recruitment centre and the new specialist schemes are a positive aspect of this inspection and the inspector is confident the issues around appropriate placement matches, numbers of children in placement and what are considered high risk placements by some carers will be dealt with, as the department begin to feel the benefit of these two new initiatives.

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?****3**

There is a department training programme, which is available to all departmental staff, but staff still spoke of the difficulty in attending training and the taking up of the opportunity to go on training courses because of the demands of the work schedules of individual staff. The staff within the fostering service has access to external course which specifically look at their specialist service.

In response to comments made by social service staff and inspectors in 2003, a series of workplace-based Action Learning sets have been delivered by senior managers covering a range of key practice areas. They are held within the team base over a 2-hour period, thereby reducing the inconvenience of having time away from day to day working. Attendance at action learning set has been mandatory.

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

All the Fostering Service staff have job descriptions which are held on their employment / recruitment file.

There is an annual appraisal scheme in place to monitor the care practices and professional development of staff.

There is a clear disciplinary procedure in place and senior managers have demonstrated a robust way of dealing with unacceptable professional practice. They were also interested in the observation of the inspectorate to determine where it was considered social work practice fell short of that which is required to provide a good service to look after children.

One locality manager equipped himself very well during an interview and was able to discuss the departments overall ethos and the need for risk assessments to enable children to remain at home with family based resources, as opposed to seeking a placement in the Looked after system as a first option. He spoke of managers supporting area based social workers, to make some very difficult decisions and that supervision is about a clear decision making process taking place when discussing the needs of children in public care and that it should remain a cooperate responsibility.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The department have initiated a number of consultation opportunities between carers and senior managers of the department and elected members.

In June 2003 at one meeting a number of issues were identified and foster carers felt it would be useful to have regular development sessions jointly with social workers from the fostering service. Some issues were around confidentiality, dealing with aggressive behaviours, contact, finance and bereavement. The consultation sessions looked at the issues, the solutions and the action to be taken.

The Fostering Service have also sent out questionnaires to all foster carers and received 20 replies, a 17% response. The questionnaire was based on the fostering service refocusing some of its work and planning some important changes and said they were keen to have the carer's views on the service. The questionnaire explored how satisfied/unsatisfied carers were with the service, and asked to rate various aspects of the service.

The statistical evidence suggests that 16 foster carers expressed satisfaction and 11 thought the support from the fostering service was very good.

There have been two meetings between representatives from the foster care association, senior managers and cabinet members where the complaints process, finance, lack of support available for carers and foster carers leaving the scheme were discussed.

The fostering service undertakes office duty during the day so that foster carers have access to a support worker at all times during office hours. It is the responsibility of the duty officer to organise and arrange placement requests from fieldwork staff.

The Emergency duty team provided emergency cover after 5pm and at weekends. A number of foster carers spoke of the difficulty in accessing this service once the office had closed.

The demands made on the team are at times unrealistic and consequently they are not all able to provide a meaningful support service to a large number of foster carers. One carer did speak of her appreciation for the support provided during a very difficult time, and felt the department took their parenting responsibilities very seriously. She said the support, care and sympathy during a bereavement was immensely caring and kind and that as a foster carer she felt she and her family's feelings were respected and that they were involved in all the decisions made and through that they felt able to support the natural family.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service's statement of purpose states that all foster carers are allocated a named support /link worker from the fostering team whose responsibility it is, is to act as a link between the carer and the department. The nominated worker is responsible for supporting the carer, reviewing the placement and identifying and facilitating the training needs of the carer.

All foster carers are assessed by the fostering service. A training programme is available and covers all aspects of the role of foster carer and the demands of caring for vulnerable children living away from home. Once the assessment process and training programme are completed the link worker completes a detailed report (Form F1) on the foster carer/s and their family, which is presented to the fostering panel for consideration.

The fostering service are writing a "Foster Carer Support Charter. It is in its draft stage and foster carers will be consulted on the document. The charter outlines the level and kind of support the fostering team wish to give people who foster for Rotherham. The document should only reflect what can be realistically offered and not raise any expectations that the service can do more than its resources allow. This should not deter the department in producing the charter.

The department have introduced a supervisory visit format to foster carers. It addresses the actions taken since the last support visit, issues arising from the needs of the children in placement, practical support, accommodation, and training needs. It is a good initiative and is designed to focus support work to look specifically at the needs of the foster carers during support visits.

Foster carers have been issued with a logbook for the day-to-day recording of caring for the children and young people in placement. There is some confusion over how it should be used and it is advised carers receive some training on this issue.

It is clear the department have been unable to meet their commitment to support carers because of the staffing difficulties being experienced in the team during the past twelve months. The minutes of one disruption meeting states that the carer did not have an allocated worker from the fostering service for over 2 years. It is hoped this situation will be resolved now that the team is becoming more established, and a series of documents are in place that specifically address the need for support for carers.

Without exception, all carers spoke of the excellent support that was available from the fostering service when it was required.

The department must also ensure they are undertaking unannounced visits to the carers

home at least annually.

On approval foster carers are given a foster carer manual. The information in this document is being updated including the complaints procedure which was written in 1993. The department have now ensured all complaints and allegations against foster carers are recorded centrally on the carer's file.

It is not a requirement to notify the NCSC of any serious incident, complaint or allegation involving a foster carer but it is considered good practice to keep the NCSC informed. The department have taken this recommendation very seriously and keep the commission informed of all allegations, strategy meetings and complaints against foster carers. There have been 3 foster carers de-registered since the last inspection following allegations. The department has commissioned a Section 8 review under APCP procedures regarding a serious case involving injuries sustained by a foster child. This will be monitored by the NCSC.

All foster carers enter into a Foster Care Agreement (Reg 28(5)(b)) with the department which are placed on each foster carers file. The agreement has been updated in recognition of the changes to the legislation and states that foster carers have an obligation to cooperate with any person authorised by the commission to visit their home at any reasonable time and to be able to interview the carer.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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All foster carers are expected to attend an initial training/information day prior to their application to foster being processed. During their assessment foster carers are invited to attend a three day training course, which looks at child development, caring for children, attachments, loss, child protection, racial, cultural and linguistic issues, disability and parenting skills.

Children and young people from the children's rights group have presented some of the foster carers training. It has been a well thought out process and the young people concerned feel they have made to a valuable contribution to raising the awareness of carers to what it's like to be in care and away from family and friends.

Additional training is run throughout the year, including a recent foundation-training day which has been attended by 7 sets of new carers. The training looked at LAC documentation, foster carer recording, children's complaints and the rights of children. Foster carers have also had an opportunity to develop their I.T skills. Crèche facilities were provided on this course but carers did say one of the reasons they were often unable to attend training is that the department did not always give them enough notice and basic arrangements such as crèche facilities and meeting the cost of transport and mileage was not always available.

The fostering service have provided one day training on preparing foster carers own children for the fostering task. It was successful day and is another initiative by the department to ensure all family members are equipped to deal with the fostering task.

The department has also provided training in Child Protection, Child Development, Rights and Culture Development, Safe Caring and Managing Behaviour in the past twelve months. The foster carers spoken to said the quality and delivery of training is good. S.T.E.P.S. (Children's Community Mental Health Team) ran a 12 week course on Challenging Behaviour and Building Self- esteem, but the course ended before it was due to. The reasons cited were that foster carers were not able to take on the demands of a full twelve week course and that the foundations to assist them were not in place at the beginning of the course such as transport and crèche facilities. The Get Real Team also made the same comments about training for carers.

The department should consider training to take place at weekends so that all foster carers have an opportunity to take part.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Looked After Children have a main care file, which is held within the childcare team. The fostering service has access to this file. The information remains confidential but certain aspects are shared with the foster carer to enable them to provide appropriate care.

Children may inadvertently develop reputations and histories because of such breaches of confidentiality that bear no resemblance to their backgrounds or current difficulties. Once a reputation is gained children become labelled and foster carers may be reluctant to offer the child a home simply because of rumours. The issue of respecting children and retaining confidential information was a serious concern raised at the last inspection and it has been dealt with in a very robust manner by the department. New confidentiality statements have been issued for carers to sign and it formed the focus of some discussions in the carers support groups who met as part of the inspection process.

The senior managers and the fostering team are aware this has been a problem in the past and are looking to make significant changes to carers attitudes should they wish to continue to foster.

Not all foster carers interviewed have been issued with a lockable metal case in which to secure a child's personal information. It is expected that once a placement ends information be returned to the department.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The department maintain separate records for staff, carers, children, allegations and complaints as required by the legislation and the national minimum standards. All documentation is secured safely in the department .

The foster carer files are well organised and demonstrate a clear process from initial referral, application, assessment, training and through to approval at panel.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

252

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

0

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

0

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

18

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

6

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

67.93

Maximum £

350

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The main social services building is typical of most modern day office accommodation. There are interview rooms available should foster carers call into the office to see their link worker or to collect equipment.</p> <p>Space and the availability of computers and telephones are at a premium and concerns raised by the team suggest their working conditions are far from ideal. There is one computer and one telephone between four members of staff.</p> <p>The office accommodation does meet its stated purpose and is appropriate for its use.</p> <p>Reports are handwritten and then typed up by administrative staff in the typing pool. Writing detailed family assessments (Form F) requires concentration and during the day staff were constantly interrupted to answer the telephone or to be consulted on placements. It is suggested that consideration be given to the use of laptops, so that staff can be more flexible in their working environment.</p> <p>The Recruitment Centre a short walk from the main office building has additional office space available for staff to work in.</p>		

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?

3

The social services department is expected to meet its forecast budget.

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?

3

The financial records of the department were seen to be robust and subject to effective monitoring and reporting systems.

The Best Value Review programme has included a number of children's services aimed at improving service development and the reconfiguration of part of the children's services has had a direct and positive impact on the Fostering Service.

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**

The current weekly payments made to foster carers vary depending upon the age of the child, the number of placements (Multiple Placement Premiums) and the skills of foster carers (Skill Premiums). The weekly fee is inclusive of pocket money allowances and a clothing allowance.

All carers have been advised of the department's three-year programme to significantly raise and to streamline allowances and this has been discussed in liaison meetings with both officers and members.

The department have confirmed that all foster carers have been given 12 months written notice of the withdrawal of multiple placements allowances which take effect from the April 2004

The foster carers spoken to remain very unclear and unhappy about the payment scheme and believe it to be subjective. The department must continue to address this issue. One comment was "that you lose your dignity when you have to keep asking".

A number of foster carers did raise some concerns at the confusion over the payment system and the changes that are to take place in April 2004 which they perceive as: including the withdrawal of the enhanced element to the weekly payment fee and the multi placement element.

This report is raising the department's awareness to the dissatisfaction/concerns felt by some carers over weekly payments and suggests that the department help foster carers to understand how the weekly fee is paid and what plans the department have to adjust it. (See standard 4, 21)

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering panel is responsible for the approval of foster carers on behalf of Rotherham Social Services. There is a constitution for the arrangements of the fostering panel in line with the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations.

The panel meets its statutory requirement with 10 panel members identified and no business is conducted unless a minimum of 5 is available to sit. The panel receive assessment reports, consider all new applications on prospective carers and consider approval or refusal to approve. The panel consider all first annual foster carer reviews and then every third annual review of the foster carer and decide on re-approval or de-registration. It is the panel's responsibility to consider and decide upon approval in respect of specific children and foster carers where long term / permanent foster care placements are being recommended.

The chair of panel and the councillor were interviewed as part of this inspection both commented on their belief that the panel is fair and thorough in carrying out its responsibility. Unfortunately that is not the perception of those who attend the panel and believe their professionalism and skills are seriously questioned. This in direct conflict to observations made about panel at the last inspection and it now presents the department with a serious issue of how panel can be seen to be thorough without damaging and demoralising those who present work.

Comments made from one professional were about the "way I was treated". Professionals presenting work to the panel feel panel members are reluctant to make decisions and often start to re-examine the work being presented to panel and conduct their own investigations. Professionals spoke of "being defensive about our work as it is unpicked in front of us rather than being open".

One particular piece of work was discussed with senior managers at the feedback. It was a frank discussion, which also included some concerns at the agency's decision maker's written response to the foster carers and the delay in making decisions. Old panel papers relating to the case were seen and in the opinion of the inspector, the panel had been voyeuristic in their discussions about an issue and that it had not helped the process. It also supported the views of professional presenting work that assessment and investigations are unpicked and re-examined rather than a clarification of the matter.

Senior managers in the formal feedback discussed their views on the fostering panel and feel they have responded to serious criticisms made by the SSI and the NCSC over the quality of work around assessments and safeguards and have worked hard to implement a

programme of raising standards through a number of methods. They explained that members of any panel have been encouraged to challenge work where they feel there are gaps in information or the quality of the assessment. They believe this practice has improved the quality of work being presented to all panels. There are plans to strengthen the fostering panel and this has included an external panel chair and the process of decision-making.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The department have a respite care scheme known as "Families Together" for families with children who have a disability. The parents are matched to a family for respite care but remain central to the child's care needs, health and education.

The scheme started 12 years ago and now has over 40 carers approved, matched to 43 children. The carers have their own handbook. It is a colourful easy to read document, unfortunately it is out of date. The list of useful telephone numbers show key personnel as being available for contact but have now left the department.

A number of carers attended the support groups as part of the inspection process and raised no concerns about the service they received. The Best Value review described it as a service that represents value for money.

There is a requirement that all fostering services including respite and remand fostering are managed by the fostering service and line managed in conjunction with other fostering provision. The department have taken this requirement seriously and have brought the Families together scheme under the management of the fostering service

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
The department has a policy and procedure for the assessment and approval of Relatives and Friends.		
Family and Friends as carers are approved through the fostering team and subject to an assessment process and approval by the fostering panel. The carers are encouraged to attend training and have access to all the support groups, functions and a link worker for direct family support.		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2nd to 9th February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Thank you for sending the draft report dated 12th March 2004, of the above inspection. Whilst we do have a number of comments and clarifications to make, I would like to begin by thanking you for the very professional manner in which the inspection was carried out. Both staff and carers alike commented how they felt enabled and encouraged to make their views known, and that although the inspections by their very nature can be anxiety provoking, all felt reassured by the manner in which you undertook your enquiries. We would like to thank you very much indeed for positively recognising the welfare needs of you respondents throughout the inspection.

In order to appropriately cross reference the following comments, I will summarise them by reference to the relevant page number and draft report.

Page 2

Gill Blacks e-mail address is gill.black@rotherham.gov.uk

Pages 8 and 9

I would be grateful if you would review these summaries in light of any amendments you may wish to make in the detailed corresponding sections later in the report.

Page 10

It would be helpful if you could acknowledge that although some carers 'own' perceptions may be of a lack of support "driving carers to private agencies", we have in fact, lost only one carer to an I.F.A, in the past 12 months, which is significantly against the national trend of loss of Local Authority carers to I.F.A's.

Page 22 (and Page 41)

There may have been a word or sentence omitted in the final paragraph regarding Standard 4, after "which they perceive as"

We were surprised to learn of a continued confusion over the streamlining of allowances.

All carers were advised of the 3 year programme to significantly raise and to streamline

allowances, and this has been discussed at some considerable length in a liaison meetings with both officers and members. All foster carers were given 12 months written notice of the withdrawal of the of multiple placement allowances, which take effect from April 2004. The significant enhancement to the 2004/5 rates mean that no carer will be out of pocket as a result of the discontinuation of the multiple placement allowance. We do recognise that a small but vocal minority of carers are dissatisfied about the changes and whilst, of course, they are entitled to their view, we would wish to suggest that “dissatisfaction” is a different matter from confusion.

In the light of the above we would consider the assessment of standard 29 as “not met” to be rather harsh.

Page 24

We are concerned about the statement in paragraph 3. Whilst we accept that files do not show sufficient evidence of risk assessments – and will address this in the Action Plan- we would respectfully suggest that the statement that “the number of emergency placements that happen and the number of children in some foster homes **suggest** (my emphasis). Looked After Children are sharing bedrooms with other Looked After Children and the foster carers own children gives the impression that this, in the context of the preceding paragraph is a matter of concern regarding sexual abuse. Whilst it is the case that children do share, sometimes this is from their own choice, or they may be sharing with their own siblings. We would strongly refute that children who have abused other children, share bedrooms in this manner, as we take strenuous steps to ensure that this is not the case. Indeed, as you are aware, our use of I.F.A’s is very low, but our one current placement is of a young person who had sexually abused other children, and required single placement where no other children were present.

Page 26

In Standard 8, whilst it may indeed be the perception of those carers who responded that “most placements are made on an emergency basis”, it is fair to say that less than 25% of carers responded to the questionnaire. We hold weekly Placement Panels which consider the great majority of admissions to care and the only placements made outside of this strengthened gate-keeping process are those made out of hours or when the child’s welfare needs require emergency action, for example, through an emergency Protection Order.

Page 27

It would assist us greatly if you could give us the detailed responses of the young people who were unable to comment that they were never or rarely bullied. It would be helpful for us to note whether they simply did not complete this section, or whether they expressly stated that they were sometimes or often bullied, by whom and in what setting. As you know, we take the issuing of bullying very seriously, and if suggested, there may be a bigger problem than we had perceived, then we will need to take urgent action to address this.

Page 28

In the penultimate paragraph it would be helpful if it were established that these comments

were made by individual children rather than being a general view

Page 30

A point of clarification in respect of the "Active" project is that whilst the S.R.B. funding ends in March 2004, the Co-ordinator role has been mainstreamed into the revenue funding and a further allocation has been made from the revenue to fund activity costs.

Page 31

It is not accurate to say that it is "generally acknowledged" that the clerical support does not meet the needs of the team. There may be an expressed wish from the staff for more support, but the ratio of admin support is higher than in many other areas of the service. All admin support areas have been reviewed for adequacy as part of the Council's strategic partnership with B.T.

Page 32

It may give more balance in standard 19 to note that in response to staffs and inspectors' comments in 2003, a series of workplace-based Action Learning Sets have been delivered covering a range of key practice areas. These have been very popular with staff, as they are held within team bases over two hour sessions, this reducing the inconvenience factor of having to take time away from day to day working. Attendance at Action Learning Sets has been mandatory.

Page 39

The office space provision has been assessed as being well within statutory requirements in terms of physical space. At the time of the inspection, a planned programme of refurbishment had commenced through provision of new floor covering. The programme has since been completed to include repainting, new toilets and the purchase of additional furniture.

Whilst staff may express a wish for additional telephones and computers, the lack of such may indeed be felt to be "far from ideal". We would argue strongly that the office provision is appropriate in terms of physical surroundings.

We were surprised to see that staff complained of a lack of quiet space to work, since the Recruitment Centre, which is some 100 yards from the office is only open for 4 hours per day, and is available for staff to use at all other times. In terms of I.T. provision, the Council does have a 'refresh' programme through its strategic partnership with BT, and the Fostering Team are included within the programme along with all other services areas, and priority for provision is needs based.

Page 42

We had some considerable discussion at our verbal feedback over Standard 30, and so you will not be surprised to learn that we would wish to reiterate our views on the matter of the functioning of the Fostering Panel. Over the past year, since the S.S.I. inspection raised

serious criticisms over the quality of work around assessments and safeguards, we have

worked hard to implement a programme of raising standards through a number of methods. These have included reconfiguration of the social work service, additional resources, additional training and learning, and a strengthened approach to quality assurance through an ethos of support and challenge. It has been our very firm view that no gate-keeping arena should be a 'rubber stamping' exercise, and the Fostering Panel along with other fora such as Adoption Panel, Placement Panels and Child Protection Conferences have been encouraged to challenge work which has gaps in information or the quality of assessment. Whilst the individual Practitioners and Managers this has been uncomfortable at times, it has resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of work ultimately produced, and crucially, the outcomes for the youngsters at the heart of the process. A plan to strengthen this aspect of external challenge through independent chairing arrangements was in place at the time of the inspection, and has since been implemented. We would wish to challenge most strongly the statement that it is "voyeuristic" or inappropriate to challenge poor quality work at the Panel, and indeed that the role of the Panel is one of "clarification" rather than one of robustly ensuring the safeguards and welfare of vulnerable youngsters – even though that may, at times, be challenging to those who present work to the panel.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

Note:

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

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

Action plan was required

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Jackie Jenkinson of R.M.B.C. Fostering Service 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 Jackie Jenkinson of R.M.B.C. Fostering Service 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.