



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services

Progress House

Clifton Road

Blackpool

Lancashire

FY4 4US

11th 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

Blackpool Borough Council - Childrens Services

Address

Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool, Lancashire,
FY4 4US

Local Authority Manager

Claire Samuels

Tel No:

01253 477526

Address

Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool, Lancashire,
FY4 4US

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		11th February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jayne Ivory	098916
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 CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

Introduction to Report and Inspection
Inspection visits
Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings
Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings
(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Blackpool Borough Council is a unitary authority, which provides the full range of fostering services to Looked After Children. These include:

- Long Term Placements
- Short Term placements
- Emergency placements
- Bridging placements
- Crisis Intervention for Teenagers
- Short break placements
- Preparation for Independence
- Parent and child

The aim of the service is to provide safe and secure foster care for children.

The service had 98 carers at the time of the inspection, with 170 children in placement. This is a 20% increase in the number of Looked After Children over the year from February 2003 to February 2004.

Foster carers are located mainly in the Blackpool area, however some carers live on the outskirts of Blackpool.

The service places a high percentage of Looked After Children in foster placements.

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.)

Blackpool Borough Council is a unitary authority, which provides the full range of fostering services to looked after children.

This inspection is the second by the National Care Standards Commission under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The focus of the inspection, which took place between February and March 2004, was to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements and good practice recommendations from the last inspection.

The service had received a compliance visit in September 2003 to check on the progress of the Action Plan. Overall this Inspection found that the service had made positive steps to address the issues raised in the 2003 Action Plan and that therefore a number of statutory requirements could be removed.

The Inspector was pleased to see the new policies and procedures, which had been implemented to enhance the service concerning the matching of children with foster carers. The first inspection had identified a lack of strategic management and ownership of the service.

Blackpool Borough Council had responded to these concerns with the appointment of a permanent service manager and had created the middle management post of an adoption and fostering group manager. However these positive developments were set against a context of a service that was increasingly under pressure due to an increase in numbers of looked after children.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard was assessed as being nearly met, however the review of the Statement of Purpose was not met.

The service had a comprehensive Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide which meets National Minimum Standards. The service was in the process of reviewing and enhancing the Children's Guide, however the service should make arrangements for the Statement of Purpose to be reviewed by the Council on an annual basis.

Management of The Fostering Service (Standard 2-5)

There were four standards assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the four standards, all four were assessed as met.

The Inspector found that the Family Placement Team Manager was well regarded by her staff and by carers, who considered that she offered a responsive style of management. The Family Placement Team manager felt supported by her line manager who had recently been appointed as the Service Manager. The Inspector was pleased to note that Blackpool Borough Council had responded positively to the recommendations in the last report and had implemented a permanent management structure, which had the capacity to properly support and monitor the functioning of the Fostering Service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standard 6-14)

There were nine standards assessed as part of this inspection. Of the nine standards

six were met and three were not met.

The Family Placement Team offered supervision of carers, who unanimously confirmed that they preferred this way of working.

The service should be commended for this, however there were concerns from staff, carers and children about the capacity of the service to offer meaningful placement choice particularly for older children, children from an ethnic minority background and children with a disability.

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

All nine standards were assessed as part of this inspection. Out of the nine standards two were met and seven were not met.

The service had good assessment practices for carers, and had developed a CRB renewal tracking system in line with National Minimum Standards. Staff within the service also require CRB checks if their last checks were over three years ago.

The Foster Care Agreement had been amended to meet National Minimum Standards and Fostering Service Regulations 2002. The Recruitment and Training Officer had been in post for over a year and had developed training provision for carers. The Team should develop a training strategy after consultation and evaluation of existing training provision with carers.

The Team offered Out of Hours support services for carers and also operated a duty system. The service should still develop more formal consultation with children about the service that it offers. This is an issue that is still outstanding from the first inspection.

The service should also develop services for the children of foster carers, if foster carers own children require some level of support in their own right.

Carers and staff were generally positive about the training they received. However some foster carers continued to ask that training events should be scheduled at different times of the day, evening and at weekends to facilitate their attendance.

Records (Standards 24-25)

There were two standards assessed as part of this inspection. One standard was assessed as nearly met the other standard was assessed as met.

The fostering service's administrative records contained all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service.

Fitness of Premises (Standard 26)

One standard was assessed as part of this inspection, and was met.

The Fostering Service is located in the large open plan office of Blackpool Borough Council and is fit for purpose.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

Two standards out of the three were assessed as part of this inspection. Standard 27 was not assessed. The two standards assessed were met.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

One standard was assessed as part of this inspection. The standard was not met.

The Fostering Panel has been developing to ensure compliance with National Minimum Standards but all panel members should have a CRB, and management information should be shared with the panel to support its effectiveness.

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was assessed as being met.

The difficulty in recruiting carers for the Family Link scheme was a continuing cause for concern during the Inspection. Specific comments about the scheme are to be found in the main body of the report.

Family and Friends Carers (Standard 32)

This standard was assessed as being met.

The Family Placement Team had amended existing policies and procedures and implemented working practices, which ensured that emergency placements of children with friends or relatives met Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

See the main body of the report.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	4 (c)	FS1	The revised Children's Guide must be supplied to each foster parent and to each child (subject to their age and understanding) placed by Blackpool Borough Council.	1.9.04
2	33 (b)	FS7	The fostering service must not place a child unless it is satisfied that a placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.	1.9.04
3	20.3 (d)	FS15	The fostering service must not employ a person to work for the service without ensuring that full and satisfactory information is available on them with regard to Schedule 1 of Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	1.9.04

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Jayne Ivory **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager Debbie Westhead **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 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	4 (a), (b),	FS1	The fostering service must review the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide and notify the commission of any revisions within 28 days.	1.9.04
2	4 (c)	FS1	The revised Children's Guide must be supplied to each foster parent and to each child (subject to their age and understanding) placed by Blackpool Borough Council.	1.9.04
3	33 (b)	FS7	The fostering service must not place a child unless it is satisfied that a placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.	1.9.04
4	20.3 (d)	FS15	The fostering service must not employ a person to work for the service without ensuring that full and satisfactory information is available on them with regard to Schedule 1 of Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	1.9.04
5	24.3(a)	FS30	The service must ensure that the vacancy for the fostering service social worker on the panel is filled.	1.9.04

6	28.4	FS30	The Chairperson of the panel must be clear that the panel makes recommendations on the approval of foster carers, and not decisions.	1.7.04
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GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The fostering service should involve consulting children and their carers in the regular review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.
2	FS7	The fostering service should ensure that each child and their family have access to foster care services which recognise the child's needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.
3	FS11	The Fostering Service should ensure that the opinions and views of children and their families on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted.
4	FS11	The service should develop formal and informal consultation with children either directly or with the assistance of a local Child Advocacy/Children's Rights organisation.
5	FS13	The service should continue to develop, implement and review educational resources which support the educational attainment of each child and young person in foster care.
6	FS16	The service should ensure that all staff, including sessional and agency staff have written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.
7	FS17	The service should ensure that there is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to recruit a sufficient range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people in Blackpool.

8	FS18	The service should offer equitable salaries and career opportunities across children's services according to the training, experience and competence of staff, if they are to be regarded as a fair and competent employer.
9	FS22	The service should develop further support services for foster carers.
10	FS23	The Fostering Service should develop services, which give specific consideration to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers. This is a recommendation that is outstanding from the last inspection.
11	FS23	The service should continue to facilitate access to training for foster carers.
12	FS24	The service should ensure that all foster carers have access to training in direct work and life story work with children and young people.
13	FS30	The service should ensure that one of the independent members of the panel includes a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers.
14	FS30	The service should ensure that the fostering panel policies and procedures are amended to meet National Minimum Standards.

* 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	10
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)	YES
• 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	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	NA
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	11/02/04
Time of Inspection	9:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	60

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	1
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Blackpool Borough Council had a Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide, which met National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The Service must ensure that the members of the council are aware of their responsibility to review the Statement of Purpose on an annual basis in line with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The service should notify CSCI of any amendments made to the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide within 28 days and must ensure that the revised Children's Guide is supplied to each foster carer and child (subject to their age and understanding)

As a good practice development the fostering service should involve consulting children and their carers in the regular review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.

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 Family Placement Team Manager had a social work qualification and had successfully completed an NVQ level 4 in management. The manager has 16 years experience of working with children as a childcare social worker. She had been employed as a Team Manager for 4 years.

Staff in the team confirmed in their individual interviews that the Family Placement Team manager provided effective leadership of the staff and operations. This was a view that was shared by many foster carers who advised us that the manager could be relied upon to do her best and respond to any of their questions or problems as quickly as possible.

The inspection found that the fostering service had appointed a permanent Service Manager who had taken up the role of strategic management and service development. The Service Manager had created the post of Group Manager for Fostering and Adoption Services to increase the management capacity, and was in the process of recruiting to this post at the time of the inspection.

The inspector found evidence that the service had been afforded a higher profile within children's services as a whole and that the Service Manager was implementing a strategy that may deliver the best possible child care. The developments in the fostering service and the additional resources that have been identified will be kept under review by CSCI.

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

Examination of staff files confirmed that the managers of the service were suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Criminal Records Bureau checks had been sought and the Fostering Team had developed a system to renew all Criminal Records Bureau checks every three years in line with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

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 was evidence that the Manager of the Family Placement Team had clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the Fostering Service and ensuring quality performance. The Manager had introduced a number of monitoring mechanisms, including the development of a pro forma visit form which was completed by the Family Placement Social Worker and counter signed by the Manager in supervision. The Manager and Social Workers advised that they found this tool helpful. The case files of carers also demonstrated that the forms were used to track support provided and any changes in placements and Foster Parents circumstances.

The Team Manager also made use of monthly management information.

The Service and Team Manager when interviewed confirmed that there were clear roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability within the service as a whole.

The service had a budget of £1,609,000 with a projected spend to the end of the current financial year of £1,301,516.14. The budget for the service was reviewed by the Senior Management of Children's Services.

The service had developed a more specific conflict of interest policy for carers in line with National Minimum Standards.

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

5

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

1

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.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

3

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

3

Number of complaints made to CSCI 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**

There was evidence that the Fostering Service was managed effectively and efficiently. The Service Manager and Family Placement Team Manager were clear about their duties and responsibilities within the service. Group discussions with social workers from the Family Placement Team confirmed that the service was being managed effectively.

The Team Manager delegates to the Team Manager for Adoption. This reciprocal arrangement may also be supported if the service were to consider the development of a Senior Family Placement Social Worker who could offer specific guidance to carers and colleagues in the Family Placement Team Manager's absence.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The Fostering Service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment in the majority of cases.

Case Tracking interviews with staff and carers and case records confirmed that foster homes were inspected annually against a standard Health and Safety Checklist. All the homes visited as part of case tracking were warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The standard Health and Safety Checklist was also used as a tool by the supervising social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer to ensure that the home and immediate environment were free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm. The checklist also itemised the need for safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age and understanding.

There was also evidence from the records that the service had taken action in the past when standards within a foster parents home had become unacceptable.

Each child placed had their own bed and wherever possible the accommodation arrangements reflected the child's assessed needs for privacy and space.

Issues concerning the provision of minor aids and adaptations for children with a disability to access the short break scheme had been resolved.

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 Fostering Service must ensure that children and young people and their families are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

There was evidence during the inspection that the ability of the fostering service to provide placements for children with specific needs had deteriorated over the past year. There was evidence of an increased limitation on placement choice. The inspector formed the view that the fostering service in Blackpool, was beginning to operate at the outer limits of their capacity.

Children with a disability, especially those requiring Family Link and carers who could meet the needs of older children were lacking in the service. The evidence for these findings came from case tracking interviews with carers, children and staff.

Blackpool Borough Council's difficulties in ensuring placement choice may reflect the wider national issues in fostering. However the depleted staff team and the impact of Friends and Family foster carer assessments on the recruitment and assessment of mainstream carers were also contributing factors to the lack of foster placement choice in the service. The issue of sufficient staff and carers for the service will be addressed in standard 17.

The need to recruit carers for older children, and children with a disability must form one of the main challenges for the service over the next twelve months.

There was evidence that social workers within the Family Placement Team and carers did work co-operatively to enhance the child's confidence and feeling of self-worth.

Carers and staff continued to be able to access the same post qualifying/ post approval training which covered some of the following areas:

- Confident communication
- Ethnicity awareness
- Domestic violence and it's impact on children and families
- Direct work
- Human development.

The manager confirmed that a child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs were addressed in preparation and training for all carers.

Foster carers confirmed in case tracking and during group discussions that they were advised about anti-discriminatory practice and how to support a child to deal with discrimination.

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?

3

The fostering services ensured that each child or young person placed in foster care was carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting their assessed needs. There was evidence that the Family Placement Team had made considerable efforts to ensure effective matching within the services existing resources. The service had developed a matching form that required the family placement social worker to get all the necessary information about the child for the foster carers before the child was placed. The family placement social worker then checks that the child care social worker has provided all the necessary information for the carers by making a telephone call later that day or the next day. The family placement duty worker then takes responsibility for ensuring that the carers had been provided with all the necessary Looked After Child documentation, and any other relevant information to safeguard the welfare of the child. Outstanding information is then "chased-up" with the relevant childcare social worker or team manager. This simple system was developed last year and had been implemented throughout the service. There was substantial evidence that although there can still be difficulties getting information for carers about children who were placed in an emergency or by the out of hours team, that the family placement teams matching policy and procedure was having a positive impact on carers and children placed in foster care. The service and staff should be commended for implementing this policy and procedure so comprehensively.

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?**

9

Training for Foster Carers included training in caring for a child who had been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse and ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem.

Safe caring guidelines are provided, based on a written policy contained within the Foster Care Procedures. These guidelines need to be produced for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. The guidelines should be cleared with the child's social worker and files should record when and by who the guidelines have been explained clearly and appropriately to the child.

The Foster Care Agreement and procedures makes clear that corporal punishment was not allowed. The Foster Care Agreement and Foster Care Procedures have now been amended to define corporal punishment and to include slapping, shaking and other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment as unacceptable.

Management Information systems were in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in the service. The information was scrutinised monthly by the Family Placement Team Manager.

The Fostering Service had provided foster carers with information about bullying in the form of a letter. Foster carers reported in case tracking and group discussions that they were aware of the issues of bullying, although further training was planned and would be reviewed by the inspector as part of the services compliance with the Action Plan.

The service had developed a procedure for responding, recording and monitoring any incidents of bullying for a Looked After Child.

The figure below should be considered in light of the number of returns of questionnaires to the National Care Standards Commission. 95 questionnaires were sent out to children, with 46 questionnaires being returned. Out of those 46 two young person raised bullying within the foster home as an issue.

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

90

%

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

There were clear procedures in place setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care were to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

All children are subject to the Looked After Child review system, which ensured that contact issues are considered and reviewed on a regular basis.

The Fostering Service does consider the need for and benefits of appropriate contact for the child when identifying a placement. However the limits of placement choice/type can sometimes mean that children are placed further away from family and friends than the service would ideally like. If this is the case attention is paid to supporting contact where the child is placed out of the area.

There was evidence in some case files to support that the views of the child or young person were sought regarding their contact and given some weight in Statutory Reviews when determining contact arrangements.

There was evidence in the assessment of foster carers that the significance of maintaining

appropriate contact was addressed. The inspector team had the opportunity to observe foster carer training. Staff who delivered the training and foster carers interviewed as part of the inspection confirmed that the significance of contact with a child's family had been addressed.

The service ensured that the issue of contact was risk assessed by the child's social worker as part of the emergency placement form, and that any arrangements for supervision had been planned as part of the placement.

It was very clear from interviews with staff within the Team that they considered that it was a priority to help and support carers in dealing with difficult contact issues. The Foster Care Procedures and Foster Placement Agreements when complete clearly outlined the expectations of the foster carer with regard to contact.

Financial support was provided to carers for transport or other costs but could sometimes get delayed in the system. Some foster carers had concerns that some child care Social Workers may still be too busy to complete the necessary forms for reimbursement.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The Fostering Service ensured that all foster carers understand the importance of listening to the views of children in their care. Foster Carers had been offered specific training in confident communication and advocacy, and a number of children expressed the view that their carers listened to them and made changes to their meals or activities, where appropriate.

The Fostering Service needs to ensure that the opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day to day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted. The issue of the lack of consultation and involvement in the development of the fostering service was also expressed by a number of children in their questionnaires.

The service should develop formal and informal consultation with children and their families either directly or with the assistance of a local Child Advocacy/Children's Rights organisation. This form of consultation is in addition to the consultation that takes place as part of the reviewing process and as part of the services annual inspection.

The service should also develop suitable means for any child with communication difficulties to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment.

The Children's Guide ensured that children in foster care knew how to raise any concerns or complaints and that their complaints would receive prompt feedback.

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 Fostering Service was aware of and informed about health services, including specialist services, available in the area.

The Fostering Service had developed a system, which ensured wherever possible that before a placement begins, the carer would be provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of the child and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment.

If full details of the health needs were not available before placement, the matching and chasing up policy and procedure implemented by the team ensured that information was provided as quickly as possible.

Despite the best efforts of the fostering service the inspector found evidence that not all foster carers were provided with essential information about the child at the point of placement. All foster carers acknowledged the efforts of the family placement team, but indicated that some child care teams within the service were clearly under a great deal of pressure at the time of the inspection, due to staffing changes or shortages.

Foster Carers were provided with written health records when Looked After Child documentation had been completed by the child's social worker. The foster carers advised that their experience of receiving the necessary information was mixed. Some social workers were very good at forwarding the information whilst some were poor. The Inspectors found that this view could be supported by examining case records and through discussions with some Fostering Services staff.

Blackpool Borough Council had a general access to files policy, which met the Standard and Regulations.

The service provided basic training on health and hygiene issues and first aid.

The Fostering Service made clear to the carer their role in promoting the health needs of any child in their care. Evidence for this could be found in case tracking. All children involved in case tracking were registered with a GP and Dentist. All statutory and health promotion appointments were monitored by the Looked After Child Reviewing Officers and by the Children's Commissioning Officer. Some Foster Carers were very clearly acting as advocates for the children that were placed with them.

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?**

2

The Fostering Service does give high priority to helping their foster carers to meet a child's educational needs. The Fostering Service had developed a jointly funded team with the education department to ensure that the fostering service could support carers to meet the educational needs of children.

The Fostering Service specifically required foster carers to contribute to the assessment of a child's educational needs through the planning and review process. Foster Care Procedures required the foster carer to keep a diary for each child placed.

Case tracking provided evidence of how foster carers were facilitated to contribute to the delivery of any personal education plan. Interviews with children in foster care gave examples of the efforts most foster carers went to, to support each child's educational achievement. A large number of children told us in their questionnaires that they were very proud of their educational attainment and received a lot of help to do their school work from their carers.

The Fostering Service had developed a system in partnership with education to gather information that demonstrated the educational attainment of the children and young people in foster care.

The Fostering Service had developed services in response to the National Care Standards Commission's inspection, which promoted the educational achievement of all children. The appointment of a designated teacher for looked after children, the increasingly close working relationships between the Child in Public Care Co-ordinator and the fostering service were all positive developments. The jointly funded posts had only been recently filled and the service had only recently been implemented. The development of a virtual school and other resources targeted at supporting foster carers to promote educational achievement, particularly for children excluded from school, will be kept under review by the commission.

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 Fostering Service had close working relationships with the After Care Team.

Children placed in foster care were supported by their After Care Worker who helped them to complete a Pathway Plan and Blackpool Independent Training Pack.

Case Tracking provided positive examples of where a young person had been consulted about moving on to independent or semi-independent living.

The Fostering Service also provides training and support to enable foster carers to help a young person to move into semi-independent or independent living.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

There were written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff. The Fostering Service did not employ unqualified staff. All staff had access to post qualifying training and had experience of family placement work and were trained in assessments. The commission requires the Fostering Service to develop an Action Plan that addresses the following Standards;

- All staff, including agency and sessional workers, working in or for the service are CRB checked every three years

Total number of staff of the agency:

6

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

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

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

The service had a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. At the time of the inspection it was clear that staff within the service were managed and monitored by people who have the appropriate skills and qualifications.

Staff confirmed that the service and their manager had systems in place to ensure an equitable and increasingly challenging workload. The Family Placement Team had a weekly allocations meeting, staff were also supported and their work monitored by monthly individual supervision sessions. The records of all supervision notes were viewed as part of the inspection.

The service had a limited, but increased use of agency placements. (At the time of the inspection there were four children placed with agency foster carers) The quality of the care provided to the child in these placements was monitored by the Looked After Child Reviewing Officers. The Children's Commissioning Officer also monitored agency placements more specifically with regard to contracts.

Staff and carers undertake ongoing training and appropriate professional and skills development. The Fostering Service had adequate administrative back up, and office equipment.

The service should ensure that all staff, including sessional and agency staff have written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.

It was clear that the social workers within the Family Placement Team had an understanding about how the Fostering Service social workers and the children's social workers work effectively together.

Staff confirmed that they had access to all policies and procedures including policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The fostering service had recognised that the full time equivalent staffing complement in terms of numbers, grades and experience was no longer adequate to meet the needs of the service in Blackpool.</p> <p>The team was still carrying one full time vacancy and had two members of staff on maternity leave.</p> <p>The service had developed contingency plans to resolve the short fall in staffing, by employing one agency member of staff and one sessional worker. The Service Manager had put in a successful growth bid for more staff to enhance the service capacity to recruit and train carers and to offer additional support to foster carers. The Service Manager's proposals to increase the capacity of the service were welcomed by the inspector. However the implementation of the strategy to increase the capacity of the service will be kept under review by the commission, to ensure that the proposed expansion in the service takes place within a specified timetable.</p> <p>Staffing policies did encourage retention of staff, including training, supervision, study leave and clear but increasing workloads. The Fostering Service also provided support, training and services to carers.</p> <p>The Fostering Service had a recruitment policy and strategy for carers, which had been developed by the Service Manager, and which focused on areas of the fostering service that needed to be enhanced to ensure that the service recruited a range of carers for children needing placement. Although the strategy had been developed it had not been implemented at the time of the inspection. This is an area that will be kept under review by the inspector and the commission.</p> <p>The Fostering Service uses the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guidelines contained in the standard Form F to define the assessment process.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Staff confirmed in case tracking and group interviews that they had become increasingly concerned about the lack of equality with regards to pay and career structures that existed between the child care social work teams and themselves.</p> <p>The service should offer equitable salaries and career opportunities across children's services according to the training, experience and competence of staff if they are to be regarded as a fair and competent employer.</p> <p>An out of hour's service to support foster carers was operational.</p> <p>There were very clear management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support.</p> <p>There was a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff.</p> <p>The Fostering Service had corporate membership of the fostering network, but the need for independent support when a carer has had allegations made against them would benefit from further consideration by the service.</p>		

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
<p>The Fostering Service had a clear plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work through induction, post-qualifying and in-service training. Staff had individual induction programmes and could access post-qualifying and in-service training. Employees were kept informed of changes in any legislation through Team Development Days and monthly Team Meetings.</p> <p>Blackpool Borough Council had developed and was in the process of implementing a staff appraisal scheme as part of supervision.</p> <p>Training needs of individual workers were addressed in monthly supervision.</p> <p>Training programmes for carers reflect the policies of the Fostering Service</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Staff confirmed in group discussions that they were well supported and properly accountable to the Family Placement Team Manager. The Manager confirmed that she had monthly supervision with the Service Manager who also operated an open door policy. The Family Placement Team Manager also felt supported by the Assistant Director of Children's Services and the Director of the department. This view was shared by other social workers within the team.</p> <p>The Manager offered regular supervision and a record of the content of the supervision was made. The supervision format did not specifically refer to progress made and should be amended to meet National Minimum Standards.</p> <p>The Manager and the team as a whole should be commended for their joint commitment to attending and contributing to weekly allocation meetings and a monthly general business meeting. In addition to this the Team had two development days each year.</p> <p>The Family Placement administrator was now included in the monthly general business meetings and Team Development days.</p>		

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?	2
<p>The Fostering Service had a clear strategy for working with carers, that was documented in the Foster Care Agreement, Foster Care Procedures, Statement of Purpose and Staff and Foster Carer Guidance Handbook.</p> <p>The service should be commended for ensuring that staff and carers were very clear about the role of the supervising social worker.</p> <p>Social workers in the child care teams and family placement team confirmed that there was a good system of communication between them, which was facilitated in part by the daily Duty Officer in the Family Placement Team.</p> <p>However there was evidence in the inspection that the pressure on staff due to the increased workload of Family and Friends Assessments and the temporary absence of two social workers had compromised the quality of support previously offered to carers.</p>		

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

As has been previously stated this Fostering Service was a managed one that provided supervision for foster carers and helped them to develop their skills.

Foster Care Agreements had been amended to meet National Minimum Standards, and include all the information listed in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. However the agreement should refer more specifically to the training that the foster carer has to and can attend.

Foster carer records demonstrated that social workers visited regularly and had a clear supervisory purpose to their visit. This practice had also been supported by the development of the pro-forma visit tool. Staff, foster carers and the manager confirmed that occasional unannounced visits took place. One foster carer thought that this practice should be further developed as they felt it was a valuable way to monitor the care provided and safeguard the well being of the child.

There was a system of practical support for carers, but the service had recognised the need to improve support services to carers. The issue of support of foster carers by the service will be kept under review by the commission.

All Foster Carers were pleased with the way they were provided with essential child care equipment, for example, child car seats, cots and new mattresses.

All Foster Carers were positive about the service they received from the Boarding Out Section.

Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and representations was widely available. Complaints were recorded and monitored by the Manager and the outcome evaluated to inform future provision of services.

The Team had also developed contact cards for children to provide them with other opportunities to get help or advice from the team and other independent organisations, including Childline and Blackpool Advocacy.

The Foster Care Procedures contained information about how to deal with investigations into allegations.

Blackpool Borough Council had corporate membership of the Fostering Network, which can provide support to foster carers associations, access to legal advice and insurance cover.

The Manager was exploring the possibility of purchasing individual membership of the Fostering Network for each foster carer in order to enhance the level of support available.

The Manager kept records about allegations of abuse and there was a clear policy framework contained within Blackpool Area Child Protection Committee's Child Protection Policies and Procedures and Foster Care Procedures, which outlined the circumstances in which carers should be removed from the foster carer register.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Pre-approval and induction training for each carer involved opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers.

All training fits within the wider framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Training had been offered at different times and venues, however the inspector would advise that further efforts should be made to facilitate access to training for foster carers.

Foster carers training addressed the need for safe caring. Applicants are asked to develop their own safe caring plan for the family. In addition to this the Team advised the inspector that they had attended specialist training in September 2003 concerning good practice in safe caring.

The Fostering Service should develop services, which give specific consideration to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers. This recommendation is outstanding from the last inspection.

The service had completed an annual audit of the effectiveness of training received by both staff and carers.

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

The Fostering Service had access to Blackpool Borough Council's general written policy on case recording. The Family Placement Team Manager had developed a contents checklist for foster carer files.

Looked After Child consultation and reviews ensured that foster carers knew why the child was in foster care. The need for completed and up to date Looked After Child documentation is paramount for the foster carer and the welfare of the child. As has been referred to in earlier sections of this report the Family Placement Team had developed a robust system for ensuring that essential information is provided promptly by the child care social worker. Foster carers had access to some training in direct work with children however the service had recognised the need to offer more training in life story work. Foster carers were also encouraged to take photographs of the child and to keep other appropriate memorabilia. The Fostering Service ensured that carers store information in a secure manner and understand what information they are expected to keep and to pass on.

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 Fostering Service had effective administrative systems and records which contained all significant information and which meet National Minimum Standards.

Separate records were kept by the Manager and were supplied to the Inspector for the following;

- All staff
- Carers
- Children
- Complaints
- Allegations

The Manager samples case files as part of her supervision.

Confidential records were stored securely at all times and there was a clear policy on access.

There was a permanent, private and secure record for each child and foster carer referred to or appointed by the organisation, which can be seen by the child or their parents or foster carers.

There was a clear policy and procedural guidance for staff on keeping and retention of files.

Foster carers, fostered children and their parents had access to their files through the Access to Files policy and procedure.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	98
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	163
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	131
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	13
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	3
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	84.53
Maximum £	271.82

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises used as offices by the Fostering Service are appropriate for the purpose
There were efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. The office had:

- Facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room within the large open plan layout of Progress House
- Appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems
- An appropriate security system

The premises provided an equipped base from which staff work.

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?

0

This standard was not assessed as part of this inspection.

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

Blackpool Borough Council makes available sufficient funds to support the existing fostering service.

Financial processes and systems were subject to internal audits and oversight by the Chief Executive, Senior Officers and Council Members.

Budgets were reviewed regularly and as such were assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards.

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

Foster carers advised that in the majority of cases they received prompt payment. Foster carers confirmed that they received clear guidelines about the allowances and expenses payable from the service.

The Manager and foster carers confirmed that allowances were reviewed annually.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The Fostering Panel had written policies and procedures, which must be reviewed and amended to meet National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Many of the requirements and recommendations concerning the fostering panel remain outstanding from the last inspection.

The Fostering Panel takes place once per month and was supported by Panel Members. The panel was observed to be very democratic in style.

The new Chairperson supported contributions from all panel members. The Chairperson of the panel must be clear that the panel makes recommendations on the approval of foster carers, and not decisions.

The Fostering Service should address the need to ensure that Blackpool Borough Council Fostering Panel meets National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002 as part of the action plan.

The service must ensure that the vacancy for the fostering service social worker is filled within the given timescale and should also ensure that one of the independent members of the panel includes a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers.

- There should be a written procedure to cover decision making when all members of the panel are not in agreement.
- The panel should receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews.
- The panel should monitor the range and type of carers available in the authority in comparison with the needs of children in the Borough.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The Fostering Service provided short term breaks for all children in need. The service had a written policy concerning the Family Link Scheme which was a service provided to children with a disability and their family.

The Family Link scheme had been reviewed and the service had developed specific and targeted recruitment of carers, although the service experiences difficulties in recruiting sufficient carers, the scheme can now be assessed as meeting National Minimum Standards.

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 Fostering Service was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers.

Support and training needs for family and friends carers were assessed and met in the same way as other carers.

There was a policy and procedure within the service, which ensured that family and friend's carers were given priority for assessments in the general workload of the Team. These assessments had a clear time scale.

The service had developed policy and practice to ensure that all placements, including those, which were emergency or unplanned, met the regulations and that checks and essential information about the safety and well being of the child were now completed as required.

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 11th February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

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

NO

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

NO

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 22nd July 2004 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

NO

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

YES

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I Mr W Grace of Blackpool Fostering Services 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.