



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk

St Paul House

Rope Walk

Ipswich

Suffolk

IP4 1LH

25th October 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

Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk

Address

Endeavour House

Russell Road

Ipswich IPI 2BX

Local Authority Manager

Ms Hayley Phillips- new appointment
Start date 4th January 2005

Tel No:

01473 264785

Fax No: 01473 216853

Address

Endeavour House

Russell Road

Ipswich IPI 2BX

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

06/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		25th October 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		9: 00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Anna Rogers	075145
Name of Inspector	2	Bridget Forrest	
Name of Inspector	3	Jan Davies	
Name of Inspector	4	N/A	
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.		N/A	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr John Gregg Assistant Director	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
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- 6. Records**
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- 9. Fostering panels**
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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the 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 Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The fostering service comes under the umbrella of Children's Services of Suffolk Social Care Services. Since the last inspection a new Head of Fostering Services has been appointed and will take up their post in January 2005. The Assistant Director for Children's Services directly supervises the Head of Fostering Services. The Head of Fostering Services is responsible for the fostering teams of which there are three distributed across the county. A Team Manager manages each team on a day-to-day basis. The Team Managers are responsible for the supervision of the fostering social workers teams. The Head of Fostering Services supervises the Team Managers and they meet together as a group monthly.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This Report covers the findings and outcomes from the third inspection of the Local Authority since the implementation of the Care Standards Act 2000, NMS for Fostering Services, and The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The main focus of this inspection was to explore the development of the fostering service from 2002. The fostering service was inspected against 32 NMS. The service achieved full compliance with 20 of these. 11 of the standards had minor deficits and one relating to recruitment of staff had a major deficit. The minor deficits identified related to ensuring that existing processes were completed in line with the NMS. Decision-making processes, additional information to confirm practice and review of resources were also areas identified as requiring action.

With the exception of staff recruitment the service had responded positively to the requirements and recommendations made following the last inspection.

Since the last inspection the Head of Fostering Service had left and a new appointment had been made with a starting date of January 2005. It was evident that this vacancy had impacted on other staff who clearly missed the leadership provided. However The Head of Special Needs provided a wealth of written information prior to the inspection and was instrumental in ensuring the programme for visits was arranged and venues available. Thanks were extended for this. Inspectors would also like express their thanks to all the staff, foster carers and children who they met with during this inspection, for their time.

The inspection included seeking the views of Placing Social Workers, Foster Carers and Foster Children. 29 Questionnaires were received from placing social workers, 28 Questionnaires from Foster Carers, and 25 Questionnaires from foster children. Feedback from Questionnaires had, where appropriate, been included under the numbered Standards appearing later in the main body of this Report. Generally many positive comments were received from the three groups.

The inspection included 15 individual visits to Foster Carers all of whom had been recruited since 2002. These included carers that provided short to long term care, Kinship carers (family), remand carers, contract carers and those that provided a respite service (Link). During these visits, the Inspectors had the opportunity of talking with Foster Carers, and also with some of the children who had been placed.

Meetings also held included Senior Managers, Fostering Social Worker Teams, Social Care Fostering Managers, Trainers, Placing Social Workers, Health Team, Education, Fostering Panel Chair Person and a panel meeting observed and Children's Rights Officers. Two support meetings for foster carers were attended and observation of The Suffolk Foster Carers Association meeting.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**This standard had a minor deficit.**

There was evidence that the service's Statement of Purpose had been updated in June 2004 to reflect the vacancy of Head of Fostering Services. The copy of the Children's Guide provided titled 'Staying with a Foster Carer' needed to include in the complaints section the contact numbers for CSCI with telephone number and the Local Authority's Children's Rights Officer with telephone numbers. Placing social workers were responsible for ensuring the child received a copy although findings from the children's questionnaire indicated this was not happening in all cases and there was no clear evidence that placing social workers were consistently going through the Guide with the children. It was noted at the last inspection that the Guide needed to be developed to ensure that children and young people with communication and learning difficulties could access the information. No evidence was provided to show that this had been developed.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)**Two standards in this section were inspected. One was met and one relating to recruitment practices had a major deficit.**

Since the last inspection the Head of Family Placement Services had left and a new Head of Fostering Services had been appointed and was due to take up post in January 2005. CSCI will assess the fitness of the Head of Fostering Service as set out in Regulations 7, 8, and 9 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

There was a clear policy and procedure in relation to the recruitment of staff. However there was a need to develop a checking system to ensure documentation sent for was returned. CRB checks should relate to the post applied for. There was a need to record where deviations from the recruitment procedure had been agreed. A requirement was made that files relating to employees of the Fostering service were reviewed and the contents checked against Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5) The two standards in this section both had a minor deficit.

Since the last inspection the previous post of Head of Fostering and Adoption had been split. The local authority had appointed a new Head of Fostering Services and they were due to take up the post in January 2005. Social Care Fostering Team Managers undertook the day-to-day management of the three teams. It was acknowledged that the role of Social Care Fostering Team Managers needed to be developed to include a stronger focus on locality based decisions and opportunities for management training. Job descriptions for the Social Care Fostering Team Managers and Fostering social workers should be updated to reflect the additional responsibilities undertaken.

The communication between the teams, line managers and foster carers were very good. A robust system needs to be developed to ensure notifications as per Schedule 8 were forwarded to CSCI and this was subject to a requirement. Foster Carers spoken with were generally satisfied with the routine financial arrangements although there still appeared to be some problems when children were moved quickly or additional payments had been agreed but not received.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14).**The nine standards were assessed. Five were met and four had minor deficits.**

There was a clear system in place for assessing foster carers environment as part of the initial assessment but the format used for health and safety checks would benefit from being developed to ensure the full range of risks were identified for example where foster carers have pets or firearms. Health and safety training for fostering social workers and fostering support workers needs to be undertaken or updated. During visits to foster carers homes inspectors noted some very good standards of provision in terms of a child-focused environment that clearly gave the message that the child was part of the family.

The authority had developed in conjunction with SC Management Consultants an equality impact assessment tool that will enable services to assess the impact of equality issues by looking at new and existing policies, procedures and practices. This was a very positive initiative, however evidence from discussion with foster carers, fostering social workers and observation of a locality panel indicated that there remained a shortage of placements for ethnic minority children within their cultural backgrounds. This needs to be addressed to support the initiative of the assessment tool.

Decisions were made at fostering panels about appropriate matching for foster carers and the foster carers placement agreements specified the category of match. However there were situations where foster carers felt that they were being *too picky* about the category and also once approved *persuaded* to take over and above the category of match that conflicted with the mix of child approved. Both foster carers and fostering social workers expressed feeling “of being bullied” into supporting placements made in this way. These perceptions clearly need to be explored.

Very positive views were received about the care of children in foster care. It was evident that the fostering service had developed a range of choices for children and young people including the Link Scheme for children with disabilities, remand carers and supporting Kinship carers to enable children to remain within the family network. The local authority was also planning to develop “The Martlesham Project” for working with more challenging young people. It was recommended that the purpose and function of the new service was cascaded to all relevant people.

There was a clear system for approving exemptions, which sometimes meant that foster carers were taking over the number of children they were approved for and there were also instances of children being placed outside of the category of approval. There was no evidence that additional support including training were taken into consideration to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. A recommendation was made in respect of this. Foster carers again commented about the lack of information provided by placing social workers to enable them to care for the children.

There was a commitment to ensuring children in foster care maintained appropriate contact with their families but situations were reported where difficult contact arrangements had arisen and the foster carers felt the arrangements had not been reviewed. A recommendation was made to ensure an effective communication system was developed to ensure relevant information was passed to placing social workers.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people during visits to foster homes and bullying was not seen as a problem and this was confirmed in the questionnaires received.

A very positive development from last year was the full establishment of the (Looked After Children) LAC Health Team. Which ensured that all children entering the looked after system were registered for health assessment and review. The LAC Health team had

developed a good communication system to raise awareness through discussions and circulation of a newsletter.

Foster carers were clear about their role in supporting children with education, which included liaison with schools, attendance at parents' evenings and other events, and supporting children with homework and after school activities. The Education Adviser continued to produce a newsletter to update foster carers on what was happening in schools. A development for the service in the next year was to develop a dedicated LAC Education Team to provide a similar service to that of the LAC Health Team.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers. (Standards 15-23). The nine standards were inspected and seven were met and two had minor deficits.

There was a clear recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. Files relating to foster carers were detailed and contained the relevant documentation. As already noted recruitment checks for fostering social workers needs to be reviewed.

The fostering service had developed a number of positive areas since the last inspection including a clear commitment to recruiting foster carers with a dedicated administrative worker identified to respond to all initial enquiries from prospective foster carers. Information provided confirmed that 102 additional foster carers were recruited from April 2002 –2004.

The infrastructure to support this additional work needs to be strengthened. Fostering teams were clearly working to deadlines for assessments, but pressures of work, shortages of staff, and availability of administrative hours within the teams had made targets difficult to achieve. Foster carers expressed concerns about the timescales to complete the assessment and training process.

Three new posts had been developed since the last inspection. They clearly provided an additional support network for foster carers but also were able to undertake some duties to relieve the pressure on fostering social workers. Inspectors understand that further posts were to be funded. It was recommended that the service would benefit from having a strategic overview of staffing levels across the three teams to ensure sufficient staff were available to meet workload demands.

Concerns were also expressed that once the assessment and approval of foster carers had been completed, that on occasion's professional judgements had been overridden at a more senior management level in respect of placements needing to be made. The decision-making processes in relation to placement of children should be reviewed.

The Suffolk Foster Carers Association, which was a self-support group organisation for foster carers in Suffolk and run by foster carers themselves. This provided a forum for foster carers to share their experiences and on this occasion the group were finalising the arrangements for the forthcoming conference. A Team Manager usually supported this meeting but in their absence a senior practitioner attended and clearly supported the group.

The Local Authority had a number of corporate policies and procedures including employment practices and whistle blowing policy. The latter continued not to be known by carers as required. The relevance and status of the existing policy, which referred to employees, was to be clarified, as foster carers were not seen as employees. It was

recommended that a whistle blowing policy for foster carers was made available.

In terms of support for 'children who foster' the Inspectors received mixed responses about whether their views were heard and listened to especially in relation to placements made with respect to age and gender. Comments from questionnaires included "I would like to see a lot more support for our 'birth' children and some reward – they put up with a lot". It was clearly an area identified by trainers and fostering social workers and an area for development.

There was a wide range training programme in place for foster carers. Twelve foster carers were currently completing NVQ level III training. A development since the last inspection was the availability of the trainers to foster carers prior to attending panel for approval and meeting once the approval was given to identify the training courses to be attended during the first year. There continued to be a need to ensure training attendance was maintained after the first year and this would include attending updates on training e.g. child protection, first aid, health and safety. The fostering service should also be clear about its expectations on both members of a joint fostering household for training requirements, the fostering service had identified the need to provide specific training for Kinship Carers and there was evidence that this process had begun.

Foster carers had in some parts of the county developed their own support groups, which were supported by fostering social workers and clearly provided a forum for foster carers to discuss issues as well as enjoy the social support. A comment was included in the foster carers questionnaires about the need for more support groups especially for single carers

Records (Standards 24-25)

The two standards both had a minor deficit.

Inspectors found that the register provided about where children were placed was not always up to date. It was a requirement of this inspection that the register showing where children were placed was kept entirely up to date.

There was evidence of foster carers keeping appropriate records regarding children's life events, for examples, birthdays, holidays, photo albums, and life story work, and certificates of achievement but the use of the duplicate books for foster carers to record daily events was variable. It was recommended that the fostering service agreed their expectations with foster carers about recording.

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

This Standard was met.

There were three area offices located in Ipswich, Woodbridge and Bury St Edmunds. Each office has appropriate security arrangements in place.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

The three standards in this section were met.

The Fostering Service was linked to The Local Authority financial systems. The financial processes were not inspected (standard 28) but inspectors were informed that the financial systems were compliant with the local authority's requirements for financial regulation and auditing.

Fostering panels. (Standard 30)**Standard 30 was met.**

Since the last inspection the panel had developed a leaflet to explain the purpose and process of panel, designed to help applicants and social workers understand their role and responsibilities in that respect. Panel members had also been provided with their own training opportunities, and were due to receive training regarding the competency assessment framework used by social workers undertaking the assessment of foster carers.

The panel membership fulfilled the requirements of Regulation 24 although a recommendation was made to include an education representative.. The panel was well chaired, and organised. And the Panel Chair ensured that the Panel were clear about what areas needed to be discussed with the assessing social workers, and prospective foster carers. The process was observed to be business like and efficient, without being overwhelming or intimidating for those attending.

Anomalies about informing applicants about whether they had been approved or not were discussed with the Panel Chair who agreed to ensure there was consistent practice and even-handedness in that regard. It was positive that a 'child who fostered' attended the Panel to give their view, and the Inspectors also heard of other instances where this had occurred.

Short –term breaks. (Standard 31)**This standard was met.**

The Link System continued to provide an excellent service to birth families. It was evident that the fostering service was committed to increasing the availability of Link Plus carers who provided respite for children with complex disability needs. Link social workers were seen to be part of the fostering team and some link workers confirmed that it was good to be part of a wider team but caution was also expressed about ensuring resources and budgets continued to be available. The Link Foster Carers who were visited gave positive feedback about receiving support and training.

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

Where family were identified as carers this was known as Kinship Care. It was evident that the fostering service was encouraging members of the family to be assessed as carers where appropriate. The inspection included visits to two Kinship Care placements, In both cases the arrangements were reported as working well. The Kinship Carers felt well supported by members of staff working in the fostering team, and knew that they could access training opportunities, if they chose to do so.

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:

N/A

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	20	FS3	The Local Authority was required to ensure that the recruitment process was reviewed to ensure CRB checks were undertaken promptly and that written evidence was available for inspection.	By May 31 st 2004
2	20	FS3	The Local Authority was required to ensure that files relating to employees of the Fostering Service were reviewed and the contents checked against Schedule 1 of the Regulations.	By May 31 st 2004

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	
N/A		
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Anna Rogers	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Bridget Forrest	Signature	_____
Third Inspector	Jan Davies	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Jayne Stevens	Signature	_____
Date	3 rd December 2004		

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	20	FS3	The Local Authority must ensure that the recruitment process is reviewed to ensure CRB checks were undertaken promptly and that written evidence was available for inspection.	By March 31 st 2005
2	20	FS3	The Local Authority must ensure that files relating to employees of the Fostering Service are reviewed and the contents checked against Schedule 1 of the Regulations.	By March 31 st 2005
3	43(1)	FS4	The Local Authority must notify CSCI of events and notifications as per Schedule 8	Immediate
4	33(b)	FS7	The Local Authority must review the recruitment process of foster carers, as part of the equality assessment to ensure a wide range of Foster carers to meet diverse needs was available.	By March 31 st 2005
5	17 (3)	FS9	The Local Authority must ensure that foster carers are provided with sufficient information from placing social workers to enable them to care for the children placed with them.	By March 31 st 2005
6	22 Schedule 2 (1)	FS24	The Local Authority must ensure that the register showing where children are placed is kept up to date.	Immediate

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	FS5	Job descriptions for the team managers and fostering social workers should be reviewed and updated to take into account the additional responsibilities.
2	FS6	The health and safety checklist used should be developed to include all potential hazards.
3	FS6	Health and safety training for foster carers and fostering social workers should be undertaken.
4	FS7	The purpose and function of the new service should be cascaded to all relevant people.
5	FS8	That foster placement agreements should be reviewed to ensure the information set down in 8.4 of this standard was included.
6	FS10	The process for feeding back outcomes of family contact should be reviewed to ensure relevant information is passed to placing social workers.
7	FS16	The arrangements for administrative support should be reviewed to ensure there are adequate hours available.
8	FS16	The decision-making processes in relation to placement of children should be reviewed.
9	FS17	The Local Authority should undertake a strategic overview of staffing levels across the three fostering teams to ensure sufficient staff were available to meet workload demands.
10	FS18	A whistle blowing policy for foster carers should be made available.
11	FS24	The fostering service should agree their expectations about foster carers providing recorded information.
12	FS30	That an Education representative sits on both panels.

* 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	25
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	25/10/04
Time of Inspection	09:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	188

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?

2

The service 's Statement of Purpose had been updated in June 2004 to reflect the vacancy of Head of Fostering Services. Inspectors were informed that the process included a report to elected council members and discussion at fostering panel. With regard to 1.5 of this Standard the Local Authority had produced a Children's Guide titled 'Staying with a Foster Carer', which was written using appropriate language for children and young people. Younger children were provided with a colourful laminated poster. The copy of 'Staying with a Foster Carer', provided to children did not include the CSCI with telephone number or the Local Authority's Children's Rights Officer with telephone number in the details should the child/young person wish to complain.

Discussion with placing social workers indicated that they were responsible for ensuring the Guide was given to all children and young people entering the fostering service and they would go through the content with them. Comments from children's questionnaires indicated that of the 26 who answered 14 said they had received a Children's Guide while 11 said they had not. There was no clear evidence that placing social workers were consistently going through the Guide with the children. It was also unclear as to who would be responsible for updating and reviewing the Guide. It was noted at the last inspection that the Guide needed to be developed to ensure that children and young people with communication and learning difficulties could access the information. No evidence was provided to show that this had been developed.

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

Since the last inspection The Head of Family Placement Services had left and a new Head of Fostering Services had been appointed and was due to take up post in January 2005. From discussion with staff during this inspection it was evident that the leadership and support provided by the Head of Family Placement Services had been missed and staff were looking forward to the new person taking up their post. Following discussions with Head of Children and Additional Needs and Head of Commissioning it was acknowledged that the role of Social Care Fostering team Managers needed to be developed to include a stronger focus on locality based decisions and opportunities for management training. Inspectors understand that this will be part of the modernisation of fostering services.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) will access the fitness of the Head of Fostering Service as set out in Regulations 7,8, and 9 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

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?

1

Since the last inspection personnel files of staff employed had been scanned and computerised. Samples of files relating to Fostering Social Workers were examined against Schedule 1 of the Regulations. All files examined contained an application form. Five files had two references available, on one file no references were available and no evidence that they had been requested and on two files only had one reference available. The two individuals were already working for the Local Authority. A member of personnel said that a senior manager could authorise the start date without the second reference for staff already employed. This practice did not correspond to the recruitment policy. There was no written evidence of references being followed up by telephone. There was evidence from interview notes that gaps in employment were explored. Evidence of qualifications were not in every file.

Five of the files contained evidence that a CRB had been checked. There were deficits in the remaining three files, one did not have an up to date CRB, one was not for the post, and one was from a previous employer and for a different post. Discussion with personnel staff indicated that personnel might not see the returned certificate as these were returned to the

Manager who signed the original application. Personnel also said that some of the information could be under a different heading for example references under correspondence, as it would depend on who inputted the data. Recruitment and CRB checks were subject to a requirement following the last two inspections.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Since the last inspection a new structure had been introduced. There was now a Head of Fostering and a Head of Adoption. Both positions had been filled, and until the Head of Fostering Services took up their post, the Assistant Director of Children's Services was covering, assisted by The Head of Children and Additional Needs and Head of Commissioning Head of Children and Additional Needs and CC. Day to day management was the responsibility of Social Care Managers for Fostering who were based in three localities. Inspectors found the communication between the teams, line managers and foster carers were very good.

The regulatory requirement to notify CSCI as per Schedule 8 was not being followed in all cases and there does not seem to be a robust system for this to happen from foster carers to department and from department to CSCI and was subject to a requirement. It would be necessary to include in notifications where strategy meetings were being arranged.

As noted at the last inspection Suffolk rates have been brought into line with national payments. Foster Carers spoken with were generally satisfied with the routine financial arrangements although there still appeared to be some problems when children were moved quickly or additional payments had been agreed but not received. Another example given by a Link Foster care was about payments should be received fortnightly but sometimes took longer.

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

9

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

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

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

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

2

The post of Head of Fostering Services had an up to date job description. The effectiveness of this will be measured at the next inspection by which time the new Head of Service will have taken up post. Job descriptions for the Team Managers need to be reviewed and updated to take into account the responsibility for the link social workers who, as noted at the last inspection, were integrated into the fostering teams. The job descriptions for fostering social workers also required updating to include the element of training that fostering social workers were expected to be involved in.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was a clear system in place for assessing foster carers environment as part of the initial assessment and annual review. However inspectors noted that the format used for health and safety checks did not take into account the full range of risks identified for example where foster carers have pets or firearms. It was recommended that the format used was developed to include all potential hazards.

Discussion with staff indicated that health and safety was assessed by either fostering social workers or fostering support workers but the latter confirmed that they had not undertaken the training and some fostering social workers training was not up to date. It was recommended that this training be undertaken. See also standard 32 re kinship care.

During visits to foster carers homes inspectors noted some very good standards of provision in terms of a child-focused environment that clearly gave the message that the child was part of the family.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The authority had developed in conjunction with SC Management Consultants an equality impact assessment tool which will enable services to assess the impact of equality issues by looking at new and existing policies, procedures and practices. Inspectors were provided with the written plan of how this was to be used in the recruitment of foster carers, which will be reported on by December 2004. Training was available for social workers and foster carers on anti-discriminatory practice and working with diversity. The assessment process encouraged the recruitment of foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds and this was confirmed in discussion with the 15 Foster/Link Carers/Contract Carers and Remand Carers who were used in the Inspectors 'tracking' process during this inspection. However there was evidence that placement of children particularly the younger age range were not always placed appropriate to their background and culture. Questionnaire findings and discussion with foster carers identified instances where foster carers felt that having placed black children with white families the decisions made about on going placements were not based on need.

Locality Panels were in place to discuss planned admission to social care provision including fostering. This was seen as a positive development to ensure planned placements. The panel observed was made up of inter-agencies but there was a health representative gap that needed to be filled. The inspector felt that the panel decisions made were, in some

instances, based on resources available rather than need. The inspectors were aware of the pressures in Suffolk, which has a mixture of urban and rural communities and diverse range of needs. However in the Ipswich areas, placing social workers were trying to match children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds but felt options were often limited and therefore most appropriate placements were not always possible. Inspectors were told this caused workers dissatisfaction and frustration. Review the recruitment process as part of the equality assessment to ensure wide diverse range of Foster carers to meet need were available. 29 returned questionnaires from placing social workers expressed very positive views about the care of children in foster care for example “excellent support from the fostering team led to an extremely positive outcome for the child” “tenacity and determination to provide best care” “managed challenging behaviour with minimal support” and “very dedicated to foster care”. Six placing social workers expressed reservations about using particular foster homes again but the reasons provided were not related to inappropriate care.

There was evidence that children with disabilities were able to access the link scheme, which provided respite carers who were knowledgeable and skilled and had the facilities and equipment to meet a wide range of disability. Views expressed by placing social workers were all positive and included; “They offered stability and consistency and met his needs at a potentially very difficult time for the child”. “The Link Social worker showed skill and knowledge in identifying this placement”.

As noted at the last inspection the local authority had resumed the responsibility of remand fostering which had been contracted out to NCH. An inspector met with two remand carers. One carer had a placement and the other was waiting for a phone call from the court to see if they were going to take a young person. The young person spoken with said “it was a good place to be”, and felt “they were given clear boundaries” which was not a problem.

The local authority was also planning to develop “The Martlesham Project” which would include a group of contract foster carers to care for more challenging young persons. Inspectors were not able to comment upon the new service during this inspection as this development was in its infancy. Foster carers expressed mixed views about the new project, comments for example were received about the potential for contract carers to be paid more money than other foster carers who also felt they cared for challenging young people without the additional fees. It was evident that individuals including fostering social workers, placing social workers and foster carers, were unclear about the purpose of the new project and expressed concern about the service being portrayed as the panacea for all problems. It was recommended that the purpose and function of the new service was cascaded to all relevant people.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Decisions were made at fostering panels about appropriate matching for foster carers and the foster carers placement agreements specify the category of match. There was evidence from discussion with foster carers and this was further confirmed in minutes of panel meetings of situations where foster carers were left feeling they were being too picky about the category of match that they would accept. This seemed to relate more to foster carers who wanted to be considered for contract caring. There were also instances of where foster carers had been approved to take specific categories but persuaded at a later date to take over and above the category of match that conflicted with the mix of child approved. Both foster carers and fostering social workers expressed feeling “of being bullied” into supporting placements made in this way.

With regard to seeking exemptions for terms of approval, the Inspectors were told that these decisions were currently being made at Locality Manager level. In future, this will be the decision of the Head of Fostering. The Head of Special Needs who completed the Pre Inspection Questionnaire noted that the service had needed to continue placing young babies in foster care, which had resulted in some carers having too many babies and older children to look after. The service was aware of the need to monitor these arrangements.

From the sample of foster placement agreements there was no evidence that placements described above were taken into consideration for additional support including training to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. It was recommended that foster placement agreements were reviewed to ensure the information set down in 8.4 of this standard were included.

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?**

2

There was a detailed programme for training. The Choosing to Foster included training in relation to child protection and safe caring skills. The foster carers handbook contained a range of policies including child protection, missing from home, restraint, anti bullying and discipline. There were also separate booklets titled Managing Behaviour and Safer Caring. There did need to be a system introduced for ensuring foster carers were required to attend updates in the arena of child protection and safer caring.

As noted in the last inspection there continued to be a gap in the relevant information provided to foster carers about the foster child, their background and history to ensure they and the foster carers own children were protected. Discussions with foster carers and fostering social workers indicated that this lack of essential information had created real difficulties that on occasion’s jeopardised the continuation of the placements. This was also confirmed in questionnaires completed by foster carers. One carer said they had received full information received prior to placement. However, the majority of comments were

negative and included “I did not get enough information about child”, “I was not informed that they were statemented”, “or about the background to previous placements” “ information should have been provided by the child’s social worker who instructed me to contact the child’s adoptive mother”. It was a requirement of this inspection that foster carers were provided with sufficient information from placing social workers to enable them to care for the children.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people during visits to foster homes and bullying was not seen as a problem and this was confirmed in the questionnaires received.

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

0

%

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

Foster carers were provided with guidance in the form of leaflets covering contact and working with parents. The responsibility for agreeing contact lay with the placing social worker who should co-ordinate the arrangements to make it work. Discussions with foster carers highlighted in some instances that this worked well and that placing social workers have arranged contact and provided support when appropriate. There was evidence in questionnaires and in discussion with foster carers and foster children of where the contact had taken place at the foster carers own homes. However in other situations where difficult contact arrangements had arisen the foster carers felt the situation was not reviewed. It was recommended that the process for feeding back outcomes of family contact was reviewed to ensure relevant information was passed to placing social workers. It was also noted that foster carers agreements did not on all occasions contain details or refer to other documentation about 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?

3

None of the children and young people spoken with made any specific comments about their reviews. Results from foster carers views indicated that of the 20 who attended reviews 17 felt their views were listened to and felt the process was helpful. 3 felt their views were not listened to. Comment was made about the number of people involved in the review, many of whom were not known by the child. Foster carers felt placing social workers should find time to talk and complete the LAC review booklet with the children and not assume they will contact the social worker if needed. As noted in standard 1 access to documents for children with communication difficulties needed to improve. Discussion with Children’s Rights Officers confirmed their understanding and role to support children. They were aware of the need to develop their service to foster children. They confirmed that they would attend a review with a child but because the local authority employed them, challenging decisions could sometimes be difficult. The Children’s Guide “Staying with a Foster Carer” identified how to make a complaint and the importance of talking with someone but as noted in standard 1 there were deficits. There was also no mention of NYAS (Independent Advocacy

Service) in the Children's Guide. Results from the foster children questionnaire indicated that from the 29 responses 11 said they were aware of how to make a complaint although only 5 said this included how to complain to CSCI. Foster carers questionnaires indicated that 15 of the 29 respondents' knew how to make a complaint and 3 had made a complaint on behalf of the foster child. Foster carers indicated that if they got to the stage of complaining it was best to send it to the Director, as the response was instant. One carer reported that they had sent a complaint form on the 2nd October and had received " No Response at all approximately two weeks later".

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
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A very positive development from last year was the full establishment of the (Looked After Children) LAC Health Team. Inspectors were able to meet with the designated doctor and nurse for LAC. A monitoring database had been developed to include information about dental, health and child health. There was a clear system for ensuring that all children entering the looked after system were registered for health assessment and review. This was the responsibility of the placing social workers within 24 hours, and assessment would take place within 2 weeks. The doctor highlighted the fact that sometimes referrals were not triggered by the placing social worker. The LAC team had tried to reduce this anomaly by raising awareness through discussions and circulation of a newsletter. There had also been training provided to the LAC managers to explain the new arrangements. Children were provided with choices about where the medical assessment took place. Individual support was available by the LAC nurses on specific health care issues. Once a child or young person has been seen they were asked to complete a questionnaire about the service.

The designated doctor highlighted a potential problem when children move in and out of county provision, and the importance of being kept informed, as they would then be able to make a referral to the appropriate health authority that a child had moved into their area.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Manual for Foster Carers included a section on Education. Both the Fostering Panel and the Locality Panel attended included representatives from Education.

Foster Carers who were interviewed were clear about their role in supporting children with education. This included liaison with schools, attendance at parents' evenings and other events, and supporting children with homework and after school activities. If there were additional expenses such as school trips or activities, they were provided with extra payments in that regard. Foster Carers also kept copies of School Reports and Certificates of Achievement. Visits to Foster Carers households also evidenced that children were provided with facilities to study including, in some cases, use of a computer.

Newsletters titled 'The School Report' produced by the Education Adviser continued to be sent to foster carers to update them on what was happening in schools. There was also very informative information and guidance in the Foster Carer's Manual produced by the LAC adviser including a Carer's Checklist to help foster carers support children's education.

School attendance did not seem to be a major problem for children and young people in foster care. The LAC Adviser provided the following details 1 child had been permanently excluded this school year and 2 children were on fixed term exclusion.

Inspectors were informed that a development for the service in the next year, was to introduce a dedicated LAC Education Team, with a co-ordinator and three vocational workers, and a Senior Psychologist. It was understood that the team would provide a similar service to that of the LAC health Team, but for education.

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 Manual for Foster Carers included a section on When a Child Leaves. There was a clear system in place for supporting young people who were preparing to leave care. Young people who reached 15 years in the fostering service were identified through the LAC review system to the Leaving Care Services. From an educational perspective, the Personal Educational Plans were reviewed. Evidence of these processes was provided at the Locality Panel. There was information from one fostered child who confirmed being introduced to this system, with a choice about whether or not to take the option up.

As part of the Foster Caring arrangement, there were Remand Carers who support older children. Discussion with one older child confirmed his involvement with the Youth Offending Team.

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

There was a clear recruitment and selection procedure for the appointment of staff. Inspectors sampled files of fostering social workers and foster carers. Files relating to foster carers were detailed and contained the relevant assessment form F, references and CRB checks. However, there continued to be deficits in the files of fostering social workers. See Standard 3 for details and the required action needed to remedy the deficits.

As noted at the last inspection, the fostering social workers and managers were experienced and qualified social workers, many of whom worked in children's services prior to moving to the fostering teams. Inspectors met with each of the three teams and it was evident that there was a wealth of knowledge and experience of working with foster carers. All members of the teams had experience of undertaking assessments. Additional training on undertaking assessments had been arranged and was seen as useful.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Apart from a change in the Head of Service, the management structure remained the same. Positive comments were received about the management and support to fostering social workers. During interviews with fostering teams, the inspectors noted that staff were clearly working to deadlines for assessments, but pressures of work, shortages of staff, and availability of administrative hours, made targets difficult to achieve. In order to meet the Criteria in 16.11 of this Standard, it was recommended that the arrangements were reviewed to ensure there were adequate hours for administrative support.

The service had invested in marketing the fostering service and a positive development since the last inspection was that there now a dedicated administrative worker to respond to all initial enquiries from prospective Foster Carers. In the year April 2002 – 2003, 46 Foster Carers were approved and this increased to 56 in 2003-2004 (to date).

The development of the fostering service had brought additional management pressures, for example as noted above there was a clear commitment to recruiting Foster Carers. However, after the service's response to the initial enquiry, there were concerns expressed by Foster Carers and by fostering social workers about the timescales to complete the assessment and training process. Comments from foster carers included, "lack of interest/encouragement, almost gave up becoming a FC", "Process too long", "Insufficient staff" and "process needs to be quicker".

Concerns were also expressed that once the assessment and approval of Foster Carers had been completed, that on occasion's professional judgements had been overridden in respect of placements needing to be made. These decisions were made at a more senior management level. It was recommended that the decision-making processes in relation to placement of children were reviewed. This to ensure that the placements of children made were matched with assessed need, and to *take better account* of the professional judgements made by fostering social workers as part of the assessment process.

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

The Inspectors found that although on paper staffing levels of fostering social work teams seemed adequate, actual practice was that there were vacancies for a number of reasons including secondment, sickness and maternity cover. Clearly these gaps did require to be covered for the service to operate effectively. There were also concerns about staff working additional hours, sometimes outside of the working week, to provide training, assessments, and home visits, with little opportunity to take this time back. It was also clear that the majority of annual reviews of foster carers had taken place although not always within timescales. While the fostering managers' had tried to address this locally. Inspectors recommended that this would benefit from having a strategic overview of staffing levels across the three teams to ensure sufficient staff were available to meet workload demands. Responses from foster carers were generally positive about the support they were given, and included "staff forthcoming with information and very helpful and supportive", "quickly provide help to children and parents", "staff very friendly and approachable", but there were concerns expressed which included, "no end of placement or after care support", "lack of communication, information, listening causes confusion". The development of a stand-alone web site had being developed and was positively commented upon by foster carers.

Support continued to be given to The Suffolk Foster Carers Association, which was a self support group organisation for foster carers in Suffolk, run by foster carers themselves and who met at Kerrison monthly. An inspector attended one of the meetings. The association was finalising the arrangements for the forthcoming conference. The inspector was impressed by the commitment and time given by the carers to ensure the conference went smoothly. It also provided a forum for foster carers to share their experiences and was clearly a support group.

Foster carers were also encouraged to develop their own support groups within the area that they live. (See comment in standard 21) Three new posts had been developed since the last inspection. A Fostering Support Worker was attached to each of the three teams and two had had direct experience of being a foster carer. They clearly provided an additional support network for foster carers but also were able to undertake some duties to relieve the

pressure on fostering social workers. Inspectors understand that further posts were to be funded.

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 local authority had a number of corporate policies and procedures including employment practices and whistle blowing policy. The latter continued not to be known by carers as required by 18.7 of this standard. The relevance and status of the existing policy, which referred to employees, was to be clarified, as foster carers were not seen as employees. It was recommended that a whistle blowing policy for foster carers was made available.

The duty system, available in all three offices continued to operate. An out-of-hour's duty system was available evenings and weekends, across all parts of the county and continued to have social workers who had a child care background. Foster carers commented on this favourably.

In terms of direct support to Foster Carers, this continued to be of a good quality. Foster Carers interviewed confirmed being able to make contact and be responded to, and that they received regular visits. Comments from questionnaires included, "my support worker is a saint". "I have always been able to get hold of my support worker", "More support early on for inexperienced carer", "regular visits/support" "verbal encouragement" "day and night telephone support". There were a few less favourable comments received through questionnaires about "no social worker for myself for nearly 2 years in spite of requests" "I have had three support workers in a year" "very little contact/support ". However, overall from the 23 responses about support in questionnaires, 17 were very satisfied/quite well satisfied with 5 feeling they did not receive enough support. There were also negative comments that poor support from placing social workers was a factor in foster carers deciding whether to leave the service. As noted in the previous standard fostering social workers also supported the foster carers own Support Groups.

With regard to 18.4 of this Standard, there was a very clear system for approval and re-approval of Foster Carers. The initial approval is via Fostering Panel; the second approval is undertaken in the Foster Carers own home and is attended by the Fostering Team Manager and the third re-approval involved returning to Panel, and ensured an updated Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure had been applied for.

In terms of support for 'children who foster' the Inspectors received mixed responses about whether their views were heard and listened to especially in relation to placements made with respect to age and gender. Comments from questionnaires included "I would like to see a lot more support for our 'birth' children and some reward – they put up with a lot". It was clearly an area identified by trainers and fostering social workers and an area for development.

There was a comprehensive health and safety policy for the fostering service. However, as noted in Standard 6 health and safety training was required for both fostering social workers and family support workers who undertake assessment work.

With regard to Criteria 18.6 of this Standard, the County Council's Insurance covers the fostering service.

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 was a training programme in place for fostering social workers, which included induction, post qualifying and in-service training. There were training courses for joint training between fostering service staff and foster carers including foundation training for child protection.

With regard to Kinship Carers, the fostering service had identified the need to provide specific training for this group to address expressed needs in this area, and this was due to be actioned. Inspectors were informed that one meeting had been arranged with the trainers, and further meetings were to be arranged.

The fostering service had ensured that training was delivered at times and venues to suit foster carers i.e. at evenings and weekends, as well as during the day. However, some foster carers found travelling to particular venues difficult particularly if they were reliant on others for transport.

It was noted at the last inspection that some foster carers had not taken up training opportunities. It was evident at this inspection that at the Fostering Panel, the trainers were available on site to discuss training needs within the first year of approval. This was a positive development, but the Inspectors would advise that the fostering service was more clear about what is 'Core' training, and what must be undertaken within the first year of approval. The fostering service should also be clear about its expectations on both members of a joint fostering household for training requirements. There continued to be a need to ensure training attendance was maintained after the first year and this would include attending updates on training e.g. child protection, first aid, health and safety.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Job Descriptions have been referred to earlier in this Report, see Standard 5

Staff reported to Inspectors that they were well managed and supported, including regular supervision, and out of hours support. They also reported that team managers had an 'open door' policy. Although the Inspector's understood there was an appraisal system within the Department of Social Care, this was not explored during the inspection.

There were regular Team meetings and Minutes were maintained.

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

Foster carers had in some parts of the county developed their own support groups. An inspector attended two of these meetings and from discussion with the foster carers present it was clear that such groups were useful for newer inexperienced foster carers. They provided opportunity for chatting informally about their experiences and concerns as well as the equally important social contact with people undertaking the demanding fostering task of caring for other people's children, some of whom had experienced abuse and neglect. These support groups were held during school holidays. One group focussed on older children, some of those children were present. It provided a lively atmosphere and enabled foster carers and children to join in-group activities and enjoy a buffet Brunch. Foster carers from one meeting discussed the concerns (with the inspector) they had about a range of subjects. These meetings were clearly valued. A comment was included in the foster carers questionnaires about the need for more support groups especially for single carers.

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?****3**

From discussion with fostering social workers and inspection of foster carers supervision records the support provided to foster carers particularly in the first year following their approval was generally in line with the requirements set down in Regulation 35 (1) a of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. The majority of foster carers commented positively about the level of support.

There was a formal system for Complaints, which included a staged process, designed to seek early resolution. Complaints would normally be dealt with at Fostering manager level.

Foster carers spoken with felt that any initial concerns would be discussed with the fostering social worker but it was clear that there continued to be issues relating to the support given by placing social workers and foster carers were not clear about who they should complain to.

There was evidence that the fostering service had investigated the care provided by a few foster carers. The evidence indicated that they had acted appropriately and removed foster carers from the 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?**

3

There continued to be a comprehensive training programme for foster carers and as noted earlier, a development had been the availability of trainers, at the time of the Fostering Panel, to discuss training needs. See also Standard 19 above.

With regard to 23.8 The Fostering Panel did discuss the training attended and Panel was being more proactive in ensuring that training identified was being met. This needed to continue.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Inspectors found that the information provided about where children were placed was not always up to date. When inspectors visited homes they found other children were in placement. It was a requirement of this inspection that the register showing where children were placed was kept entirely up to date.

There was evidence of foster carers keeping appropriate records regarding children's life events, for examples, birthdays, holidays, photo albums, and life story work, and certificates of achievement.

Following a recommendation following at the last inspection the fostering service had introduced duplicate books for recording daily events. However, the use of these was variable. In one instance the book was used to record on a daily basis, with records about health, about mood, about activities, and about general wellbeing. This provided evidence of good practice, and information that was helpful towards the child's review. Another example was a foster carer who was keeping records on computer rather than using the book, and this did not meet with the policy on maintaining records. It was recommended that the fostering service agreed their expectations with foster carers about recording.

Children's files kept with the fostering teams were kept securely, were indexed, and contained a wealth of information, including Looked After Children (LAC) paperwork.

With regard to Foster Carers records, there were comprehensive files, which included approvals, evidence of assessments, and signed Foster Carer Agreements.

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
<p>As noted in the previous standard The Register of Foster Carers was not up to date and was subject to a requirement. Files were secured in appropriate offices across the county. COMPASS security was good. Each worker was provided with a password. Arrangements were put in place to provide inspectors with access and training was available to support this. There was a clear local authority written policy on recording and retention of files. The access to records policy was in place.</p> <p>The Head of Service would keep a separate record of exemptions, allegations, complaints and notifications. Nine allegations had been made about foster carers in the last year. There was evidence that these were investigated and 7 were not substantiated and 2 were still being investigated. Foster children placed had been removed during the investigations.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £		X	Maximum £
			X

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

Local Authority office space was provided in various locations across the county. There were changes in the relocation of some offices since the last inspection.

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 fostering service was linked to the Local authority financial systems.

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 processes were not inspected but inspectors were informed that the financial systems were compliant with the local authority's requirements for financial regulation and auditing. Budgets were set according to the County Councils' procedures and on the basis of this, it was concluded that the standard was met.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was a written policy on fostering allowances provided to each Foster Carer as part of the Foster Carer's Manual. The information set out how the weekly allowances broke down into five areas i.e. food, clothing, transport, personal and household. There was also guidance about how to claim for additional expenses such as holidays and special occasions.

Foster Carers spoken with were generally satisfied with the routine financial arrangements although there still appeared to be some problems See standard 4 for more detail.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The local authority's fostering panel had clearly defined written terms of reference and protocols which defined the role of the Panel; the decision making process; and what the procedure was in the event there was any disagreement between members.

Since the last inspection the Panel had developed a leaflet to explain the purpose and process of Panel, designed to help applicants and social workers understand their role and responsibilities in that respect.

Panel members had also been provided with their own training opportunities, and were due to receive training regarding the competency assessment framework used by social workers undertaking the assessment of foster carers.

There were two panels, which alternatively met every other week on a Monday. The Head of Family Placement normally chaired one of the panels but in her absence a Locality Manager had undertaken the role. The Head of Children and Additional Needs who approved Link Carers chaired the second Panel. The panels agreed approvals of first time Foster Carers, re-approvals of Foster Carers under the arrangements for Annual Review, and variations to the terms of approval of Foster Carers.

Two inspectors observed the panel and it was noted that the Panel membership fulfilled the requirements of Regulation 24 although it was recommended that an education representative sit on both panels. This would also reinforce the developments relating to the education team (see standard 13). The Panel had access to medical and legal advisers when necessary. An administrator who worked in the Woodbridge Area Office kept minutes of each panel. The Panel was well chaired, and organised. Each member had opportunities to input to discussion and to ask questions. The Panel Chair ensured that the Panel was clear about what areas needed to be discussed with the assessing social workers, and prospective foster carers. The Inspectors observed the process to be business like and efficient, without being overwhelming or intimidating for those attending.

The presentations of assessments were variable including some that were detailed and well presented while others had gaps. Panel members picked up these issues.

The Inspectors queried the process for informing applicants whether or not they had been approved, as it was observed that in one case this involved asking the applicant to leave the room and in another it did not. The Panel Chair was asked to ensure there was consistent practice and even-handedness in that regard.

The Inspectors met with the Chair of the Panel, following the Panel Meeting. It was evident that she was very aware of the need to remain Independent.

It was positive that a 'child who fostered' attended the Panel to give their view, and the Inspectors also heard of other instances where this had occurred.

The chair of the Panel took responsibility to ensure that any decisions made were accurately recorded and the Minutes of the Panel Meeting decisions were cascaded to other relevant parties.

Inspectors received comments about the location of Panel, particularly when particular foster carers had attended the Panel for re-approval only to be told that all of the relevant documentation was not in place, and also for those foster carers who felt that the distance was too far to travel.

With regard to 30.9 of this Standard, no one from another Authority i.e. Norfolk – was available to attend Panel to provide an independent view.

The Panel Chair confirmed that all members of the Panel had been subject to Criminal Records Bureau Disclosures.

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 link care system in place continued to provide an excellent service to birth families. Inspectors met with a Link Plus Carer who provided respite for children with complex disability needs. It was evident that the fostering service was committed to increasing this resource and currently a purpose built bungalow was being built to provide additional resources. Link social workers were seen to be part of the fostering team and some link workers confirmed that it was good to be part of a wider team but caution was also expressed about ensuring resources and budgets continued to be available. The Link Foster Carers who were visited gave positive feedback about receiving support and training.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.**

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Where family and friends were identified as carers this was known as Kinship Care. It was evident that the fostering service was encouraging members of the family to be assessed as carers where appropriate. There was evidence that some kinship carers were reluctant to become involved in "social services" when caring for members of their own family and questioned the appropriateness or need of being subject to the same review procedures and attendance at training sessions.

The inspection included visits to two Kinship Care placements, both involving grandparents who had taken on the responsibility of looking after their grandchild. In both cases the arrangements were reported as working well. There was contact with the child's own parents, and the Kinship Carers felt well supported by members of staff working in the fostering team. It was clear that the children placed in these arrangements were benefiting from the levels of input that their Kinship Carers had been prepared to give. Although the Carers felt their situations to be 'different' from usual Foster Carers, they knew that they could access support from the Local Authority fostering service including training opportunities, if they chose to do so.

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 25th October 2005 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

Comments were received from the provider

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

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.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 5th January 2005, 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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Local Authority Fostering 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

S0000060212.V184546.R01

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