



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Solihull MBC Fostering Unit

655 Auckland Drive

Smiths Wood

Solihull

West Midlands

B36 0SN

2nd March 2005

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

Solihull MBC Fostering Unit

Address

655 Auckland Drive, Smiths Wood, Solihull, West
Midlands, B36 0SN

Local Authority Manager

Mike Gregory

Tel No:

0121 749 8143

Address

655 Auckland Drive, Smiths Wood, Solihull, West
Midlands, B36 0SN

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

9/6/05

Date of Inspection Visit		2nd March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Ann Appleby	135667
Name of Inspector	2	Lynda Dale	165309
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mike Gregory	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Solihull MBC Fostering Unit. 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 Solihull Fostering Service, is part of the range of childcare services within Solihull MBC and exists as the primary source of accommodation and care for children who are being looked after either temporarily or long-term by the Local Authority. The Fostering Service is, organisationally within the Education and Children's Services Directorate and the Local Authority has adopted a corporate approach to parenting.

The Service makes foster care provisions for children and young people (0 – 18 years) of either gender and strives to make available a range of foster carers whose households, skills, aptitude and interests as closely as possible match the needs and circumstances of the children and young people who might need to enter foster care.

The care provided is broken down into 4 distinct areas of provision, Mainstream carers, Friends and Family carers, Family Link for respite care and the CHES scheme for children and young people with complex needs.

The Service also has the function of recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers. In addition, the Service administers the Fostering Panel, which considers foster carer approvals and reviews. On the whole, this functions at 'arms length' from the day-to-day running of the service.

As mentioned above the Local Authority has adopted a corporate parenting approach and therefore the services described above are not provided in isolation; the Fostering Service works in partnership with each child's social worker, Education professionals within the directorate and other organisations concerned with the health, education and wellbeing of children and young people.

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 Inspection took place over a period over a 2-week period in March 2005. Inspectors met children and young people in foster care, their carers, social work staff, admin support staff, panel members and management during this time and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their warm welcome and co-operation during the inspection process. Detailed below is a brief summary of inspection findings, followed by the statutory requirements. This inspection has generated more requirements than the previous inspection, which in part arises because initial inspections were intended to be more of an audit-style introduction for fostering services to the inspection process. Accordingly, this should not be taken as an indication of deterioration since the previous inspection but instead as a sign of the Solihull Fostering Service's commitment to the government's social care improvement agenda.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (Standard 1)

Subsequent to the previous Inspection, the service has amended the Statement of Purpose and introduced a Children's Guide. The Service is in the process of producing this in separate formats to meet the varying needs of the children and young people. The Statement of Purpose will be kept under review and would benefit from further modification as detailed in the report.

FITNESS TO PROVIDE AND MANAGE (Standards 2-3)

The Manager has a sound skills base from which to deliver a Fostering Service, based on his extensive experience working with children and families in this field. The Manager will need to obtain a relevant management qualification to comply with minimum standards. Satisfactory checks have been obtained in respect of the Manager.

MANAGEMENT OF FOSTERING SERVICE (Standards 4-5)

The Manager and Responsible Individual are closely monitoring the range of work currently undertaken by the Fostering Service. Certain aspects of the work are devolved to area childcare teams. This lacks clarity, which can create tensions, particularly for foster carers. This could be improved by the introduction of clearer lines of accountability and a firm working protocol between the Foster Care Team and childcare teams.

SECURING AND PROMOTING WELFARE (Standards 6-14)

The Authority has in place a corporate approach to parenting, with a range of joint working across the Education and Children's Services Directorate. Again many of the responsibilities under this area are devolved to childcare teams. Some work is required to ensure the joint working arrangements are delivered to these standards.

RECRUITING, CHECKING MANAGING, SUPPORTING AND TRAINING STAFF AND

FOSTER CARERS (Standards 15-23)

Staff recruitments systems are sound, as is the system for recruiting, training and approving carers. There are sufficient staff to deliver the service but additional staffing resources for assessments would be of benefit. Lines of accountability between the Fostering Service and child care teams need to be made clearer to ensure better support for carers. Comprehensive training is available for both carers and staff.

RECORDS (Standards 24-25)

The Service has introduced a comprehensive recording policy and maintains children and carers files electronically, with hard copies available on request. The Manager has recently introduced a system for monitoring children's educational outcomes, complaints and allegations.

FITNESS OF PREMISES FOR USE AS A FOSTERING SERVICE (Standard 26)

The Service premises are more than adequate for their purpose and provide an ideal setting for delivering a fostering service.

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS (Standards 27-29)

These are generally well in order. Carers' fees and allowances are under review. Closer working is required with the area childcare teams to provide clarity regarding expenses for carers and prompt reimbursement.

FOSTERING PANELS (Standard 30)

The Service has a well functioning Panel, which requires only minor improvements and adjustments. The Service had been monitoring this well and accordingly further resources have already been identified and a Panel Advisor is shortly due to be appointed to co-ordinator the panel processes.

SHORT-TERM BREAKS (Standard 31)

The Family Link Carer Scheme is a very useful resource within the department. The Scheme works well for those already involved. Further carers are required to meet the demand, as there can be waiting lists to access services.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS CARERS (Standard 32)

This area of the service is on the whole working well, although would benefit from additional resources for assessments.

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

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	15&16	FS14	The fostering service must set out, in its manual of procedures and in guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook, what service it expects to be provided in preparing children and young people for independence or semi-independence and for the time when they cease to be looked after by the local authority.	30/1/04

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Ann Appleby	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Lynda Dale	Signature	_____
Regulation Managers Date	Neil Arculus & Barbara Skinner	Signature	_____

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	3(3)(c)	FS1	The Service must ensure that the Children's Guide clearly explains the role of the Commission with regard to complaints.	30/06/05
2	3(1)(b)	FS1	The process for making complaints, as detailed in the statement of purpose, lacks reference to process and should be updated to provide clarity for service users, parents carers and others.	31/08/05
3	7(2)(b)(i)	FS2	The Responsible Individual must make provisions for the Manager to undertake a management qualification at NVQ level 4 or equivalent.	31/12/05
4	42(1)(b)(2)	FS4, FS9, FS10, FS12, FS13, FS29	The lines of accountability between the Fostering Service and childcare teams must be reviewed and formalised via a joint working protocol. A report of this review should be forwarded to the Commission.	Action plan with timescales
5	15(1)(2)	FS6 FS12	The Service must take steps to ensure that carers receive suitable equipment and training for dealing with clinical waste and infection control.	31/08/05
6	Children Act 1989 Section 22(3)(a)		The Service must ensure additional risk assessments are completed following alterations to carers' homes.	31/08/05
7	34(1)(b)	FS6	The Service must ensure that no child is placed with carers outside of their terms of approval.	30/05/05 & ongoing

8	Children Act 1989 Section 22(3)(a)	FS7	The Fostering Service should develop joint working systems with the childcare teams to ensure the carers have access to adequate resources for the work being undertaken.	1/11/05
9	13(1)	FS9	The Service must ensure that all carers are provided with policy and training regarding restraints.	Action plan to CSCI by 1/11/05
10	Children Act 1989 Section 22 (3)(a)	FS9	The Service must ensure that compatibility risk assessments are undertaken for children with a history of inappropriate behaviour that poses a significant risk to others, prior to placement and behaviour management strategies are addressed in the child's plan.	30/05/05 & ongoing
11	14 & 17(1)	FS10	The Fostering Service must make arrangements to advocate on behalf of children and carers when contact arrangements are not working well, to ensure that the Service is delivered to the national minimum standard (Standard 10).	30/05/05 & ongoing
12	15&16	FS14	The Fostering Service must set out, in its manual of procedures and in guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook, what service it expects to be provided in preparing children and young people for independence or semi-independence and for the time when they cease to be looked after by the local authority This requirement is repeated from the previous inspection, as the foster carer's handbook was in the process of being reviewed at the time of this inspection.	31/08/05
13	17(1) & 42(3)	FS21	The Manager must introduce a system of monitoring carer complaints and grumbles to improve the review of quality of care.	30/06/05
14	28(5) Schedule 5	FS22 FS6	The Foster Service must undertake a review of the Foster Carer Agreement to ensure that all matters and obligations detailed in Schedule 5 are included, including a commitment to co-operate with inspection and consent to visits at their home at reasonable times.	30/05/05 and ongoing

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The Statement of Purpose has been somewhat overdeveloped in certain areas to include information regarding fostering standards, inspection findings and recommendations and would benefit from the removal of this information. It would also benefit from further expansion regarding each area of work covered by the team. This should have regard to its relevance to all parties outline in Regulation 3(2), in particular service users, their families and foster carers. On revision, the statement should include details of the CHESSE service within the statement rather than as an appendix.
2	FS2, & FS4	Further development is required on guidance and practice to ensure any decisions regarding the arrangements for placing children and changes to children's plans, are made in full consultation with the Fostering Team and foster carers and not directly through area childcare teams.
3	FS5	The Service would be strengthened by the provision of a full-time deputy manager's post.
4	FS6	The Service should consider expanding the range of practical support offered to carers for physical modifications to their homes, which may in turn help increase the range and number of carers coming forward for assessment.
5	FS6	The health and safety checks on pets would benefit by inclusion of checks regarding booster injections and worming etc.
6	FS7	There are still a number of placements where young people have to share bedrooms, and the Service should consider introducing a system of compatibility risk assessments in all such cases prior to placement.
7	FS7	The Service should consider implementing a more comprehensive policy regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking minors to address welfare needs and other issues affecting diversity.
8	FS10	The Service should consider providing training for new carers regarding contact where required, on an informal basis via supervision, as an interim measure until training can be arranged.
9	FS16	The approval process would benefit by greater clarity of procedures with regard to the recommendations of the panel and the process of review of the information and approval by the decision maker.
10	FS17	The Service should consider identifying alternative resources to address shortfalls in respite care to children with disabilities and thus reduce waiting times.
11	FS21 FS25	Inspectors formed the judgment that carer supervision would benefit from the introduction of a record of all minor complaints and grumbles experienced by carers, in particular in respect of the childcare teams and placing social workers, in order that the Service can monitor these more effectively.

12		Not all children interviewed were aware they could have access to their fostering files. The Service should take steps to ensure that all children are made aware of this. In addition all file records should be maintained chronologically to reflect all decisions made.
13	FS25	The children's Register is complicated to follow and would benefit from a review of the format, to present information more clearly and distinguish children who have left as well as those in place.
14	FS25	Records of assessments of carers in couples, where both partners have been assessed should be retained separately to ensure maximum privacy is maintained.
15	FS30	The policies and procedures for the Panel would benefit from some development to cover all task areas of the panel practice. Currently those in place address the process for approval and termination of foster carers. The process for the first review of carers and any subsequent review are not in place. The review of exemptions to the number of children placed and changes to approval would benefit by clearer guidance of the areas to be addressed by the Panel.

* 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	22
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NA
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	NA
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• 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	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	NO
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	2/3/05
Time of Inspection	9.5
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	154

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 has revised the Statement of Purpose since the last Inspection and in addition, has developed a Children's Guide with the aid of a group of children and young people in foster care. This is well designed and informative, although the Service must ensure that the Children's Guide clearly explains the role of the Commission with regard to complaints. The Manager and staff confirmed additional versions of the Children's Guide are currently being developed to meet the differing abilities and communication needs of children to be placed.

The Statement of Purpose has been somewhat overdeveloped in certain areas to include information regarding fostering standards, inspection findings and recommendations and would benefit from the removal of the information. However the revised statement of purpose would benefit from further expansion regarding each area of work covered by the team. This should have regard to its relevance to all parties outlined in Regulation 3(2), in particular service users, their families and foster carers. The appendix relating to the CHES scheme is clear and informative. On revision, the statement should include details of the CHES scheme within the statement of purpose rather than as an appendix. The process for making complaints, as detailed in the statement of purpose, lacks reference to process and should be updated to provide clarity for service users, parents, carers and others.

The Responsible Individual and Manager may wish to consider collating all the information requiring regular update together, to assist the process e.g. complaints, staffing updates and carer numbers, placements made, allegations.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Skilled, qualified and experienced staff of Solihull MBC oversee the provision of the Fostering Service overall. The Manager of the service has a social work qualification and has substantial experience and skills in work with children and families and fostering services. The Responsible Individual must make provisions for the Manager to undertake a management qualification at NVQ level 4 or equivalent, as a matter of priority.	
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Staff and carers met during the course of the inspection were of the opinion that the Manager had developed the service very well since coming to post. Inspectors were able to gather evidence that the staff, carers and children are encouraged to contribute to the development of the service, through foster carer support groups, children's groups and staff meetings and development groups. This leadership is supportive and encourages the team to deliver good practice and outcomes for children.

Further development is required on guidance and practice to ensure any decisions regarding the arrangements for placing children and changes to children's plans, are made in full consultation with the Fostering Team and foster carers as opposed to directly through area social work teams.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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At the previous Inspection it was noted that at the time of the manager's appointment these standards had not yet come into effect, therefore there were no records relating to telephone calls made to referees "to follow up" written references. Accordingly, there was no change at this Inspection. However, during the course of this inspection staff files were examined and these included an up-to-date CRB check in respect of the Manager.	
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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
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Subsequent to the previous inspection, the Manager had implemented systems for monitoring the service, although there was some considerable delay in this respect. Inspectors did not inspect all areas detailed in Schedule 7, although evidence was provided covering key areas including allegations, notifications of Schedule 8 events and children's complaints. The Manager reported that the processes for full monitoring and control of the service had commenced and would be ongoing.

Evidence from this inspection identified a lack of clarity of roles with regard to how practice issues and concerns raised by foster carers are followed through. The vast majority of the concerns raised related to interventions by other corporate services, principally the childcare teams, where the Fostering Service had not been properly consulted. Unfortunately, this lack of consultation with the Fostering Service had on occasion adversely affected the children placed and carers. Examples included carers being left out-of-pocket for expenses or undue delay in receiving reimbursement, carers being unclear regarding their right to decline placements and onerous expectations to facilitate contact arrangements. This lack of clarity obstructs the Manager and social workers of the Fostering Service in the management of the foster carers and delivery of the service. It has also impacted on the safe care of children.

The lines of accountability between the Fostering Service and childcare teams should be reviewed and formalised via a joint working protocol. A report of this review should be forwarded to the Commission.

Further development is required on guidance and practice to ensure any decisions about arrangements for the placements of children and changes to children's plans, are made in full consultation with the Fostering Team and foster carers, and not directly through area social work teams.

The review should include clear lines of accountability for the CHESS Scheme. Currently the service appears to be managed by the specialist sector manager, with three persons reporting for different aspects, including, the Programme Manager, Programme supervisor and Foster Service Manager. Solihull MBC has financial responsibility for the Fostering Service. The CHESS scheme is underwritten for funding by Solihull MBC.

The Fostering Service is currently undertaking a review of the fees and allowances for carers following a detailed consultation exercise.

Inspectors were given access to the Borough's Policies and Procedures database, which contained a policy for conflicts of interests. No separate conflict of interest policy for the Fostering Service was provided at Inspection. The Manager should consider implementing

a local policy regarding conflicts of interest, tailored to the specific needs and functions of the service.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:	9
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Death of a child placed with foster parents.	0
Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.	0
Serious illness or accident of a child.	1
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	1
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	0
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	0
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	2
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	4

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
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Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0
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Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The job description for the manager's post in this fostering service was examined at the previous inspection, and it was deemed commensurate with the expectations of such a post-holder in the discharge of duties arising from the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The designated manager is employed to manage the fostering service exclusively and lines of accountability are clear.

Deputising arrangements are in place and covered by senior practitioners during the absence of the Manager. The Manager is responsible for seven different elements of fostering, provided by the foster carers and support social workers. These include Long Term, Short Term, Respite Disability, Respite Support, Emergency Duty, CHESS, and Family and Friends placements, all of which require specific areas of expertise and knowledge, developed upon the fostering task. Each area of the service has a senior practitioner in post, to provide support to the social workers and carers. However, the fostering service as a whole is large and has to balance the competing demands of day-to-day management with a commitment to a continued development and improvement agenda. In view of this, the service would be strengthened by the provision of a full-time deputy manager's post.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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Assessment of the fostering service performance against this standard is based on observations of foster homes visited during the welfare tracking process and a review of various service records of all the stages in assessing, approving and monitoring/supporting foster carers.

Homes seen were of a good standard and were warm, safe and nurturing environments. The department can provide safety equipment if required. However, there is no indication support is facilitated to carers requiring more than basic equipment, e.g. grants to support the fitting of additional electrical sockets to reduce trailing wires. This can have implications for health and safety, particularly in cases when carers already have limited financial resources. The Service should consider expanding the range of practical support offered to carers for physical modifications to their homes, which may in turn help increase the range and number of carers coming forward for assessment.

The Service policy and practice provide for additional health and safety checks to be completed, reflecting changes of approval in the age ranges of children and carer's circumstances. However, not all checks had been completed following alterations and modifications to carers' homes and gardens. The Service must ensure additional risk assessments are completed following alterations to carers' homes.

Foster carer training includes elements of health and safety. Checks are completed annually on foster carers transport including, insurance, Tax and MOT's. The health and safety checks on pets would benefit by inclusion of checks regarding booster injections and worming etc.

A number of health and safety issues were raised in respect of family link carers. The provision of suitable equipment for dealing with clinical waste and relevant training would strengthen safety of care given. The Service must take steps to ensure that carers receive relevant training in this respect.

All carers were aware that they may be visited as part of the inspection process, although this was not specifically covered in the Foster Carers Agreement in line with Schedule 5. The Inspectors were grateful to the carers for their warm hospitality and co-operation with the inspection process. The Service should ensure all Foster Carer Agreements incorporate a commitment to co-operate with inspection and consent to visits at their home at reasonable times.

At the time of the previous inspection a significant number of placing officers expressed concern about the lack of choice of placements and felt that exemptions were too frequently

granted for foster carers to operate outside the conditions of their approval. The Service has made significant improvements in this area, with the majority of amendments to terms of approval being taken back to panel on each occasion. During the tracking process Inspectors found only one example where foster carers had children in placement, which exceeded the terms of their approval. The Service must ensure that no child is placed with carers outside of their terms of approval.

There are still a number of placements where young people have to share bedrooms, and the Service should consider introducing a system of compatibility risk assessments in all such cases prior to placement. For young people with a history of inappropriate sexualised behaviour, young people should never share rooms and compatibility risk assessments must be undertaken on every occasion as detailed in standard 9.

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 previous inspection found ample evidence to confirm that the Fostering Service is established on a basis that recognises diversity. The evidence for this was found in the recruitment of foster carers for disabled children who are being looked after and those living with their own families, but require short break or respite care. It was also noted that some attempts have been made to recruit and develop black foster carers to provide opportunities for same race placements, where this is deemed crucial to the child's proper development.

In relation to areas for development, it was noted that with regard to the diversity of placements, demand outstripped supply and that some children were being placed in circumstances where needs associated with their race, religion and identity are not been addressed effectively. At that time many such children were placed trans-racially and this continued to be the case during this Inspection. The Service would benefit from finding ways of broadening their recruitment strategies to encourage more carers from diverse backgrounds.

Since the previous inspection, the Service and carers have worked hard to address particular issues relating to unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, whom they come into contact with through the local asylum applications processing office. Some policy has been developed, although this concentrates on age disputes. The Service should consider implementing a more comprehensive policy regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking minors to address welfare needs and other issues affecting diversity.

Particular concerns were raised by carers relating to the use of language line, a translation service for non-English speakers. They had been cautioned by the childcare teams not 'over-use' the service as it was expensive and the carers reported they felt under pressure to use the service sparingly. Interpreters were only provided for reviews and other official meetings. The Fostering Service should develop a joint working systems with the childcare teams to ensure the carers have access to adequate resources for the work being undertaken.

The Service places disabled children within the group of mainstream carers. Random sampling meant that no disabled children within long-term fostering were case tracked on this occasion. However, the Service operates the Family Link scheme for respite care for children with disabilities. This was tracked and Inspectors received excellent feedback

regarding the philosophy behind the scheme and how it worked in practice. This provides an enriching experience for children, valuable support to parents and a rewarding challenge to carers.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is good process in place for matching and a willingness to decline placements if a suitable match was not possible. The Manager confirmed there is much less pressure now, to place children when there was no space or place children who abuse or have been abused, without being clear all children could be placed safely. This is due to the use of external to the Borough placements to provide more appropriate placements if necessary.

Children and families are given the opportunity for introductions and consulted wherever possible. This was particularly evident with respite care for disabled children and the CHES Scheme.

Foster carers reported that the matching process had improved in the last year and the Fostering Service was in the process of implement further changes. Interviews with carers and sampled records revealed that the initial placement agreements, additional support and background information were not always provided on placement of children. This was more likely with short-term placements and EDT placements. This is particularly important where young people placed will be sharing a room with another child and the Service is currently addressing this issue.

Policy requires that specific elements of matching are contained in care plans, along with additional support to address shortfalls. There appears to be some element of reactive planning in the consideration of additional support for carers, including educational needs, CAHMS input, respite support for carers with difficult and needy placements, health assessments to provide a service to children. This was identified by carers met and was reflected in sampled records, across the services, with the exception of CHES. Pro-active planning, wherever possible, would help foster carers better support children in placement. There was evidence of excellent levels of planning for the CHES scheme, which is crucial given the nature of the work undertaken.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Overall there is good evidence that children placed are protected from all forms of abuse and that foster carers provide strong advocacy and support for children in their care. The pre and post approval training for carers covers safe caring and behaviour management. There is a written policy on safe care, which requires all foster carers to produce their own written policy for their home. These should be provided to social workers at the point of placement. However, copies of these safe caring policies were not contained on any of the files inspected. The Service should consider keeping copies of these on each carer's file.

There were some key short falls regarding child protection issues. There was evidence from some foster carers that they are not always advised of all issues regarding safe care of the children placed, in advance, to ensure proper protection of themselves and their families. Also carers reported that when issues were raised regarding harm to their own children by foster children, these were not responded to in the same way it would have been for the foster child. This seemed to arise due to a lack of clarity of roles between the Fostering Service and childcare teams, as opposed to any professional neglect on the part of the Fostering Service. Further specific child protections issue came to light, which included the use of taxis for an unaccompanied young child, the collection of newborn babies from hospital without relevant paperwork and placing unaccompanied minors in placement with other children whilst there were ongoing negotiations regarding age. Again, these appeared to arise from a break down in communication and/or lack of clarity regarding roles with the childcare teams. These and other issues could be addressed through the implementation of a joint working protocol between the Fostering Service and childcare teams, as referred to requirement 4. This protocol should cover all areas of joint working with the childcare teams to ensure the delivery of a safe and efficient fostering service that meets each of the national minimum standards, regardless of whether specific tasks have been devolved to other teams.

Sampled records did not contain details of any compatibility risk assessments carried out on children with a history of inappropriate behaviour that poses a significant risk to others, when being placed with other children. The Service must ensure that such compatibility risk assessments are undertaken prior to placement and behaviour management strategies for these are detailed in the child's plan.

The Service has a no corporal punishment policy in place, and this is included in the foster carer agreement. The behaviour management policy for the CHES scheme included guidance on restraints. However, the Service's policy regarding restraints for mainstream carers and evidence of restraint training attended by carers was not available. This was particularly relevant as several young people in mainstream care who responded to the survey, said they had been restrained. It is crucial that carers receive proper training in this respect to ensure the safety and welfare of the child and ensure the carers can carry out any necessary restraints competently. The Service must ensure that all carers are provided with policy and training regarding restraints.

The Service has a comprehensive protocol for missing children and there is a system for reporting and monitoring such incidents. The Manager collates information on the number of allegations and complaints, with further detailed records contained on files for carers and children.

A separate bullying policy was not in place at the time of inspection but the Manager confirmed this was in draft form and to be included in the review of policies and procedures. Bullying is included in the safe caring guidelines for carers. Of the children tracked only one child reported being bullied, in a school setting and confirmed that appropriate support was provided.

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

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Service works closely with the childcare teams to deliver contact arrangements. The Service is aware of their role in maintaining contact and attempt to place children locally wherever possible to assist the process.

Not all of the sampled files contained risk assessments regarding contact, although the area teams may have been the taking the lead on contact arrangements for those children. Issues of concern raised by carers and foster children included:

- lack of support to ensure transport and appropriate venues arrangements were in place,
- failing to take proper account of travel and other costs for carers,
- lack of consultation regarding contact arrangements impinging on carers own families i.e. contact arrangements set at times when they were due to collect their own children from school or being asked to supervise contact they were not comfortable with.
- contingencies for when children were uncomfortable about contact being supervised by workers they hadn't met before.

It was difficult to establish to what extent these were issues that the childcare teams were responsible for delivering. Carers did report sharing their concerns with their fostering link workers but felt these were not all concluded satisfactorily.

As previously indicated a comprehensive working protocol with the childcare teams could provide clear lines of accountability for contact arrangements and address some of the problems experienced by children and carers. The Fostering Service must make arrangements to advocate on behalf of children and carers when contact arrangements are not working well, and ensure that their responsibilities are met.

Training is in place for carers but there is evidence that additional post approval training and support to inexperienced carers does not fully to meet their needs in order to promote safe contact. The Service should consider providing training for new carers regarding contact where required, on an informal basis via supervision, as an interim measure until more formal training can be provided.

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

Carers receive pre-approval training, which incorporates the importance of listening to the views of children in their care and responding to these. The Service made efforts to seek the views of children in a variety of ways, including the production of the Children's Guide and in the recruitment of carers.

Of the children surveyed 45% of those who responded indicated that carers consulted them all of the time or with a further 45% stating they were being consulted some of the time. The questionnaires do not address all issues of consultation but young people spoken to during the tracking process indicated that they did feel consulted by their carers and had opportunity to express their views through 1-1 sessions with their placing social workers from the childcare teams and at reviews. There were some issues regarding consultation over contact issues for one very young child and which could have been improved by closer working with the Guardian Ad Litem. This was an area that currently falls within the remit of the area childcare teams and will be improved by the introduction of a clear working protocol with the childcare teams.

Responses from the questionnaires, indicated that nearly all children were clear on how they could make a complaint to or about the Fostering Service, but just under half did not know how they could make a complaint to the Commission/Inspectors. The Service must ensure this is clearly addressed in the children's guide.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Welfare tracking revealed that Carers are skilled at promoting the health and development of children in their care. Children's healthcare is considered during placement planning and reviews. The Service has prioritised the health care of children placed by addressing this in both the Foster Care Agreement and Foster Placement Agreement.

The Authority has access to a Paediatric Consultant for Looked After Children (LAC) medicals. This service is accessed via the childcare teams and these medicals are supposed to be carried out immediately following placement, although Carers reported there could be significant delays. In order to address this, some Carers had taken the steps of registering foster children with their own GP when they were willing to undertake LAC medicals. Foster carers met reported that they did not always receive the medical history of children on placement and were consequently unable to register the child at their local GP.

This is another area where practice would be strengthened by the introduction of a joint working protocol with the childcare teams. The lines of accountability between the Fostering Service and childcare teams must be reviewed and formalised via a joint working protocol. A report of this review should be forwarded to the Commission.

There were some particular issues experienced by Family Link Carers, for respite placements. They were not provided with suitable means for handling clinical waste and had not received training in the use of protective equipment or had relevant health and safety advice regarding communicable diseases. The Service must take steps to ensure that carers receive suitable equipment and training for dealing with clinical waste and infection control.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Authority has a Looked After Children Education Service to address the particular needs of accommodated children. This is a valuable resource, which has limited spaces and some carers reported occasionally experiencing delays in accessing the service. The Responsible Individual and Manager confirmed that the Authority is already in the process of expanding this service to address this need.

Carers highlighted particular issues regarding asylum seekers, where English was not their first language and delays in accessing education could be particularly lengthy. Again these are areas of responsibility covered by the placing social worker from the area childcare teams, although fostering services are required to meet the national minimum standard in this respect. This also needs to be addressed via a joint working protocol as previously outlined.

Financial support for school uniforms is an issue, particularly for emergency placements. Carers reported a number problems including inconsistent policy regarding whether they or the local authority are responsible for payment and/or obtaining reimbursement from the childcare teams. [Further issues regarding expenses are outlined in standard 29].

The Manager of the fostering service is monitoring the educational outcomes for all children placed.

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?

2

Carers encourage children to develop age appropriate independence skills. The Borough has an Aftercare scheme which works in partnership with the Fostering Service. Carers had encountered some difficulties working with the Aftercare Team and the Fostering Manager had made efforts to resolve these on their behalf.

Policy documents and practice are in place for preparing young people for independence. These are currently under discussion and review, to provide an integrated consistent practice and service for young people moving to independence. The young people will benefit from an early conclusion on this process. The Service should ensure that there is provision for children and young people with disabilities to receive a fully integrated Aftercare

service.

The Department has a training flat for young people to help build on the independent living skills developed in placement. This is done through a short period of independent living, whilst still in placement. They are given support with budgeting skills, shopping and other independent living skills during this period.

The Service was in the process of reviewing the Foster Carers' handbook, so Inspectors were unable to review the up-to-date version. Therefore, the requirement from the previous inspection is carried forward: The Fostering Service must set out, in its manual of procedures and in guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook, what service it expects to be provided in preparing children and young people for independence or semi-independence and for the time when they cease to be looked after by the local authority

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?
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	3
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The Service operates within the Local Authority's recruitment and selection procedures. Sampled personnel files contained all relevant information, with the exception of one panel member from whom personnel did not have a file. This appears to have been a genuine exception caused by human error rather than the absence of an appropriate protocol and the authority were already undertaking enquiries to rectify this. Inspectors were satisfied that no young person was placed in danger, given the panel member was also employed by another department within the Authority and had been appropriately checked in this respect.

There are good training supervision and support systems in place. Evidence from the staff met indicates that they feel very well supported and that part of the support is access to available training. However, there are areas where the workload is very high due to staffing shortages.

One minor omission in this area related to the recruitment of Panel members and the need to ensure that telephone enquiries are followed up on all references. This was clarified during with the Manager during the course of the Inspection.

Total number of staff of the agency:	X	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	X
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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?
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	3
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Procedures are in place for the management of assessments, approvals and reviews of carers. There has been some delay in reviews, due to staffing shortages, but the Service are aware and have made efforts to address this.

The approval process would benefit by greater clarity of procedures with regard to the recommendations of the panel and the process of review of the information and approval by the decision maker. In practice and in policy guidance there is lack of clarity about the process, with carers being advised the Panel have approved them. Policy guidance appears to confirm the decision maker merely affirms that approval, rather than ensures the process has been rigorous and confirms the Authorities decision to the carers.

There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support. Procedures for responding to enquiries from prospective carers are well organised, with a full information pack available and provided. Responses to existing carers are equally efficient with duty social workers available if the support worker for the carer is not. This is backed up by the availability of the Managers and an out-of-hours service.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people in the Borough. There are greater numbers of children requiring placement than there are placements available and the Authority has to had increase it's use of external beds to address the shortfall, as the are no residential establishments within the department. There are particular issues relating to Family Link Carers who provide respite care for children with disabilities, where there is currently a waiting list and it is not the practice of the authority to purchase external placements for this function. The Service should consider identifying alternative resources to address shortfalls in respite care to children with disabilities and reduce waiting times.

The Service has sufficient staffing resources to meet the needs of carers and children in placement. However, staffing is stretched to capacity by the volume of Form F Assessments. This is a particular challenge for the Family and Friends Support Team to ensure the competing demands of the development of the service and the processing of Form F assessments for prospective friends and family carers. The Form F assessments are dispersed amongst other support team members to address the shortfall. There are specific areas of expertise required in completing Family and Friends assessments and pre-approval training, which would benefit from more consistent staffing. The Service should consider recruiting additional staff for the Friends and Family Team.

Similarly, the CHESS scheme requires a high level of input from the social work support team, including a twenty-four hour call out service. This team would benefit from an increase in staffing to facilitate the service development and ensure adequate holiday cover.

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?**

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

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?**

0

This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Staff members who were interviewed were aware of the lines of accountability within the organisation and all have access to the Authority's policies and procedures via the intranet. Supervision is provided on a monthly basis and there is a system of annual appraisals, which some members of staff had received during the course of the inspection.

Inspectors attended one of the fortnightly team meetings and although minutes of these were not inspected on this occasion staff interviewed confirmed these are taking place regularly and provided opportunities for development and support. Staff interviewed said they felt well supported by the service and also other team members.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The Service has a range of in systems in place for the support of carers including 1to1 supervision of carers, access to the Fostering Network and facilitating carers meetings. Carers also have access to independent support through Solihull Foster Care Association.

Support workers usually act as liaison between carers and placing social workers where issues arise. However, Inspectors identified issues where foster carers were liaising directly with placing social workers and not communicating difficulties to their fostering support workers, who were then unable to follow these issues up. Carers reported that communication between themselves and the Fostering Service social workers could be varied and reported some examples of where issues had been raised with fostering social workers and no action had been taken. The Manager reported that he was unaware these issues had been raised with the support workers.

Examples of these communication difficulties were a recurring theme throughout the inspection and appeared to be rooted in the lack clarity of roles between the Foster Care Service and childcare teams highlighted earlier in the report. In light of this and given the corporate parenting approach adopted by the Borough, the Inspectors formed the judgment that carer supervision would benefit from the introduction of a record of all complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction they had in relation to all Children's Services and not just those relating to the Fostering Service. This would help the Fostering Service to monitor those areas of responsibility, which although are devolved to area childcare teams, are assessed within the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and also discharge its function of under Regulation 42 i.e. reviewing the quality of care. The Manager must introduce a system of monitoring carer complaints and grumbles to improve the review of quality of care.

There are facilities for respite care, with carers providing a valuable source of support to each other in this respect.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The Service ensures that carers are allocated a named qualified social worker and carers are provided with supervision on a monthly basis. The Carers' handbook was under review at the time of inspection. The Service must complete this process as quickly as possible to ensure carers are in possession of all necessary information.

A procedure is in place for dealing with allegations against foster carers. This does not address the issue of maintaining contact, where appropriate, for carers and children when they are removed during the investigation. This could reduce the impact of the disruption, if the decision following the investigation is to return the children to the Carers. The Service should consider the merits of this in partnership with the childcare teams.

Foster Carer Agreements are in place but require a number of additions to comply with all matters detailed in Schedule 5, in particular the individual Terms of Approval for each carer and consent to co-operate with inspection. The Foster Service must undertake a review of the Foster Carer Agreement to ensure that all matters and obligations detailed in Schedule 5

are included.

The Service has introduced out-of-hours management support since the previous inspection. The system of practical support for carers includes respite care, insurance cover and support for foster care associations. Areas for improvement regarding complaints are addressed in standard 21.

Records of all allegations of abuse are kept and monitored by the Manger and the service has systems in place if a carer is removed 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

The Fostering Service has a comprehensive training plan in place for carers. Safe care is included as part of the pre-approval training for prospective carers. Established carers are involved in pre-approval and induction training for new carers.

Carers spoken to were satisfied with the training offered. They also spoke positively about the opportunity to participate in NVQ training.

The Service offers regular updates to Child Protection Training for approved carers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Further to findings from the previous inspection, the Service has introduced a comprehensive recording policy covering all aspects maintaining file records. The Service also provides recording materials for foster carers to keep a record of the children's life events of children. In addition, Carers are provided with facilities for storing information securely.

The social work recordings are maintained electronically with hard copies of other documentation retained on files and these are kept securely. The system is robust and there are various ways of filtering information to enable the service track events and cross reference information. The Inspectors found the process of accessing the records challenging without formal training in the use of the system but were reassured that records would be printed out if young people or their families asked to have sight of their records. Likewise if carers requested access to their files.

Not all children interviewed were aware they could have access to their fostering files. The Service should take steps to ensure that all children are made aware of this.

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

Administrative and statutory records were sampled. There are no serious shortfalls identified although Inspectors have several good practice recommendations, which may contribute to the service delivery improvement agenda.

The Service has a register of children placed. This is a somewhat complicated to follow and would benefit from a review of the format, to present information more clearly and distinguish children who have left from those in currently placement. A register of Foster carers is in place and there are records of staff.

File records are maintained by the support social workers, which are monitored as part of the supervision process. Records of assessments of carers in couples, where both partners have been assessed should be retained separately to ensure maximum privacy is maintained.

The Service had no system in place for monitoring complaints that do not involve children placed. This could serve as a valuable quality assurance tool to inform the service improvement agenda.

A valuable forthcoming development will allow the Manager of the fostering service to apply CRB checks for carers directly.

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 £	108.49
Maximum £	311.57

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises where the Foster Service is now based are more than appropriate for the purpose. The building is shared with the adoption service and of a good design with access for wheelchair users. Social workers and administrative staff have ample workspace and there are robust administrative systems with up-to-date IT. There is a large meeting room for carer meetings and large training events

It was especially positive note that Carers have a dedicated office to use as a base and for meetings. Inspectors were not able to see the public liability insurance certification as the Local Authority holds this centrally.

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?	
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This standard was not fully assessed at this inspection. The Manager is responsible for an annual budget. Inspectors were provided with copies of the budgets, which detailed some slight overspend relating to the use of agency staff but otherwise accounts appeared to be in good order. The Service is underwritten by the Local Authority, which authorises the use of agency staff.

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?	
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This standard was not assessed at this inspection.

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?

2

Foster carer's fees are processed and paid centrally by the Borough. Carers interviewed reported this is system works well and payments are usually made on time.

Carers had encountered a range of problems with the reimbursement of expenses paid on behalf of children placed, which included clothing and travel etc. The childcare teams hold the budget for these types of expenses. Carers reported being left out-of-pocket through delays and disagreements around figures claimed. Again the lack of clarity regarding roles created confusion for carers regarding which team was accountable. There were also reports of social workers being unable to access sufficient petty cash for the immediate needs of emergency placements, due to petty cash floats being insufficient. The Responsible Individual clarified that arrangements had already been made to increase petty cash availability. As referred to in requirement number 4, the lines of accountability between the Fostering Service and childcare teams must be reviewed and formalised via a joint working protocol. A report of this review should be forwarded to the Commission.

The Service is in the process of reviewing fees and allowances for foster carers, involving a consultation exercise with carers. First year carers do not receive a carer's allowance and are only reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. Inspectors were advised that this was being looked at as part of the review process.

The Friends and Family Link scheme is operated on a voluntary basis, although carers are reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. This was also due to be reviewed along with all fees and allowances, with consideration to Family Link carers being paid on a pro-rata basis.

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
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Overall the Panel is well run and operates to promote and safeguard the welfare of the children in placement. At the time of inspection a number of changes were occurring with regard to the Panel. An Independent Chair had been appointed and the authority had recently advertised for a permanent Panel Advisor to assist in the organisation and co-ordination of the Panel processes. The Chair was aware that some areas needed strengthening but was awaiting the appointment of the Panel Advisor before addressing these. The Chair was also aware that the policies and procedures required some development.

The policies and procedures for the Panel would benefit from some development to cover all task areas of the panel practice. Currently those in place address the process for approval and termination of foster carers. The process for the first review of carers and any subsequent review are not in place. The review of exemptions to the number of children placed and changes to approval would benefit by clearer guidance of the areas to be addressed by the Panel.

There are written procedures regarding the decision making process, when all members of the Panel are not in agreement, with the Chair having a casting vote. There were some minor recording issues with regard to the minutes. These must clearly indicate that the decision made at panel is to 'recommend' approval of a carer to the Independent Person, who is responsible for the final approval. In addition, evidence that the panel have deferred their recommendation until all information is presented needs to be recorded clearly.

The Chair confirmed that the Panel had picked up some variation in quality of assessments and recordings with minor errors such as children's names and dates of birth being incorrectly recorded. This was also observed by Inspectors and ought to have been picked up on proof reading. Hopefully the introduction of a Panel Advisor will bring about improvement in this respect.

The panel membership included the provision of a vice chair, elected member and independent members providing educational and medical expertise. Recruitment to the membership of the Panel is addressed, and Legal advice can be accessed if required.

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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This aspect of the service is working very well. Carers reported that they were well supported and find the role a very rewarding one. Assessments and reviews were in place to ensure the particular needs of each child were met.

There were some difficulties regarding health and safety issues covered which were addressed in standard 12.

The Friends and Family Scheme is currently run on a voluntary basis but this is being reviewed.

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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The assessment, training and support to kinship carers is still in the process of being developed. Training opportunities for Friends and Family Carers is a relatively recent development and carers were still adjusting to this. The Service is sensitive to the pre-existing relationships during the assessment process. Carers interviewed felt supported by the Foster Service and were generally satisfied with the service they received. Contact arrangements were an area of concern for some carers, although from the cases tracked at this inspection the problems identified arose from tasks undertaken by the childcare teams.

The service is likely to require additional staffing to facilitate appropriate assessments, support and training as it expands.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2nd March 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

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

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

YES

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request. Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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