



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Leicestershire Fostering Service**

County Hall

Glenfield

Leicestershire

LE3 8RL

15th March 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**

Leicestershire Fostering Service

**Address**

County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8RL

**Local Authority Manager**

Cath Sartoris

**Tel No:**

0116 2759267

**Address**

Bassett Street, South Wigston, LE18 4PE

**Fax No:**

01162759382

**Email Address**

csartoris@leics.gov.uk

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

25/03/03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		Week beginning 15th March 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Trisha Gibbs	071373
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Sharon Treadwell	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Cath Sartoris Principal Officer Fostering	

**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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.**

The stated mission of the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service is to provide appropriate high quality, safe, family placements for the 210 children and young people placed with 241 foster carers (figures for March 2004)

The service is managed and overseen by the Principal Officer Family Placements, (referred to in this report as the Manager) and is provided and supported by a team of supervising social workers. Two Team Managers are responsible for the supervision of two supervision groups and the day-to-day provision of the service. The groups operate from the same premises, one focussing on maintaining an active duty point for placement requests, and the other on recruitment and assessment functions. Both groups also carry a caseload of carers, for whom they provide ongoing advice and support. Within each group there are supervising social workers dedicated to specific fostering tasks and activities.

At the time of this Inspection, over 241 carers were providing placements designed to respond appropriately to the differing placement needs of Leicestershire County Councils Looked After Children. For the most part the placements are of a 'mainstream' family care nature and provide general care to children and young people of all ages. Kinship/family care placements constitute a growing area for service development and the service is positively responding to this. The service also provides Remand and Community Placements and Contract Care, both of which are operated within tight formal arrangements, and supported with a high level of contact and supervision from the foster care service. These schemes provide placements for young people presenting with very challenging or offending behaviour. The service also includes a substantial group of Family Link Carers who provide flexible respite care to children who have disabilities.

The foster care service undertakes the full range of fostering activities, recruiting, assessing, approving and supporting carers. Supervision and annual reviews identify achievements and ongoing training needs.

## **PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Inspector's Summary**

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

The following Inspection of the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service was a good one. One requirement and eleven recommendations have been made. The service has been commended in several areas of practice.

### **Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**

The work of the fostering service is very well represented in the Statement of Purpose. The service has been recommended to develop a more visual leaflet (Children's Guide) for children who cannot read.

### **Fitness to provide or manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2 & 3)**

The managers carrying on and managing the fostering service are suitably qualified and have been subject to statutory checks.

### **Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 & 5)**

Good systems and procedures were seen to be in place, for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. Individual managers duties and responsibilities were clearly delineated in Children's Services documents.

### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

All Carers receive good information, training and documentation about the importance of safe care through pre and post approval processes, however three recommendations have been made under Standard 6 of the National Minimum Standards. Although carers are encouraged by the service to draw up their own Family Policy (or House Rules) as recommended in the Safer Caring book and pre approval training, this practice is not routinely occurring on a formal basis and the fostering service has been recommended to work with all carers in drawing up Family Policies. The foster care service has been recommended to include in its Carer's Handbook, reference to Safe Caring and to Health and Safety. A recommendation has also been made with regard to Safe Care policies being made at the time of children being placed noting that this would also cover good risk assessment practice.

The very positive comments made by staff and carers about the training provided by the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service have been noted.

The fostering service provides placements for a large number of Looked After Children and Inspectors observed the efforts of the whole team to appropriately match children to carers even in emergency situations.



The fostering service does not retain the required Looked After Children's placement agreement (See Regulation 34.3 and Schedule 6 of the Fostering Regulations) on carer files and Inspectors were informed that carers retained these. This placement agreement is referred to several times within the National Minimum Standards and a recommendation has been made for copies of these to be filed in carer files.

Good initiatives were recognised with regard to the service facilitating respite care provision for children with disabilities.

The fostering service as part of the Children and Family Service's team was seen to fulfil its responsibilities with regard to children and young people's health and education. The achievements of the Caring to Read programme and Looked After Children Education Panel (PLACE) have been commended.

There was evidence of children being consulted through the Looked After Children process. Looked After Children from Leicestershire have participated in an excellent national consultation project and the fostering service is now implementing one of the recommendations of the children and young people.

### **Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)**

The fostering service has produced a very good Carer's Handbook and has consulted with both the fostering service team and carers, including the Leicestershire Foster Care Association, in compiling this however this has still not yet been circulated to carers. This is a very good, accessible reference document for carers and was seen in draft form at last years Inspection. The service has been urged to prioritise the distribution of this Handbook to carers.

A requirement has been made for the fostering service to work with the department's personnel section to ensure that all checks and written references (Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations) are in place when new fostering employees are recruited. These were not all in evidence in staff files looked at during the Inspection.

Carers were seen to receive a good and relevant programme of training however it has not been possible for the fostering service to implement the National Vocational Qualification programme for carers, since there has been no response to recruitment attempts for a specialist National Vocational Qualification Assessor. A recommendation has been made with regard to the recording of carer training.

It was evident to Inspectors that carers receive different levels of supervision and that this is recorded through various means. The fostering service has been recommended to clarify with staff, expectations with regard to the supervision of carers and the recording mechanism for this. The fostering service has also been recommended to formalise the process for undertaking annual unannounced visits to carers.

Carers were very positive about support provided to them by the fostering team, however several negative representations were made about the variable and inconsistent levels of support provided out of office hours by the Emergency Duty Team. The fostering service has been recommended to review its out of hours support.

### **Records (Standards 24&25)**

Reference has been previously made about Looked After Children placement agreements of children placed by the service, being retained by carers at their homes and not within carer files. Other records were appropriately maintained. Records of Allegations and Complaints maintained by the fostering service were observed to be very well recorded.

### **Fitness of premises for use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)**

The fostering service for all of Leicestershire County Council operates from one central location. Premises are appropriate and secure and all fostering staff provided with well-equipped workstations.

### **Financial requirements (Standards 27-28)**

The fostering service fully complies with the above Standards. Good information is provided to carers about allowances and additional payments.

### **Fostering Panels (Standard 30)**

The Fostering Panel has been observed to make good progress over the last year in recognition of the Panels role and status in relation to the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations.

Two commendations acknowledge this and one recommendation has been made with regard to the Panel Guidelines.

### **Short term breaks (Standard 31) and Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)**

The fostering service operates a good flexible respite service for all children. A contract carer has been appointed to provide respite for children who have more profound physical needs.

A Senior Practitioner has been recently appointed to specialise in kinship care assessments and support. His work has been commended in this report.

### **Questionnaires**

The fostering service forwarded questionnaires to all carers. 43 were returned.

Most carers, with a few exceptions, were happy about the way the fostering service operated and satisfied with the support and training offered to them.

Carers were asked to say what were the best and worst things about the service. These are summarised accordingly.

### **Best**

21 Carers said that the best thing about the fostering service was the specific support they received from their individual supervising social worker or the team generally. 11 said that they enjoy the fostering task and 'making a difference to a child's life' e.g. 'It's rewarding' 'working with social workers for the best possible outcomes' 11 enjoyed 'generally working with' and 'good relationships' with social workers. Other additional positive comments were made about training and being paid on time.

### **Worst**

These comments were less easy to categorise and 6 carers either wrote 'none' here or n/a. **19** carers made negative comments about availability of placing social workers, and poor communication with placing social workers; 'there is a lack of support from the children's social worker' 'not enough contact with the link worker or children's social worker' 'lack of recognition from child's social worker' 'They do not ring back when they say they will' At least **6** carers commented on poor out of hours support, and emergency duty team support. Others commented on the lack of resources, the need for a 'respite baby sitting service' and 'aggressive parents'

Carers are also invited to measure their satisfaction about support provided by the fostering service.

**19** carers said they were **very satisfied** with support provided, **9** indicated they were supported **quite well** and **14** saw the support as being **OK most of the time**. Only **1** person said they did not get enough support.

### **Placing Social Workers**

Fourteen questionnaires were returned. Each questionnaire relating to different placements.

**11** responses said that they thought carers were looking after the children very well, **2** said fairly well and **1** said OK.

In terms of how the fostering service works with placing social workers, **7** said very well, **4** said fairly well, **2** said average and **1** did not comment.

### **Children**

Children's questionnaires are circulated to older children through the fostering service.

Four questionnaires were returned. While these could not be considered as representative of children's views, all said they liked their carers and 2 missed being with their birth family.

## **Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

### **(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

**Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service has been required to confirm through its Personnel Section, that evidence of Criminal Records Bureau clearance, two written references and other information identified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations be maintained on staff personnel files.**

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

**If No please list below**

<b>STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>				
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	
			None	

**Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.**

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector**      Trisha Gibbs      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector**      Sharon Treadwell      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Locality Manager**      Sue Shaw      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**      \_\_\_\_\_

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	20	FS15	<b>The fostering service is required to confirm through its Personnel Section, that evidence of Criminal Records Bureau clearance, two written references and other information identified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations must be evidenced during the recruitment process.</b>	April 1 <sup>st</sup> 2004

### 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	<b>The foster care service is recommended to draw up a visual leaflet (Children's Guide) for the benefit of younger children.</b>
2	FS6	<b>The foster care service is recommended to encourage all carers to develop and draw up, in consultation with their family and supervising social worker, their own Family Policy (House Rules) as described in Safer Caring. A Safe Care policy should also be agreed on the occasion of each new placement to demonstrate consideration of safe care and risk assessment.</b>
3	FS6	<b>The foster care service is recommended to include in its Carer's Handbook clear reference to Safe Caring and to general Health and Safety matters.</b>
4	FS6	<b>The foster care service is recommended to utilise the comprehensive Health and Safety checklist included in the Family Placement Team Procedural Manual, for the purpose of an annual unannounced visit and/or annual review.</b>
5	FS15	<b>The fostering service is recommended to discuss the Form F Assessment process and training with both the fostering teams and the Fostering Panel Chair.</b>
6	FS21	<b>The fostering service is recommended to give serious consideration to reviewing it's out of hours management and support service to foster carers.</b>
7	FS18	<b>There is no direct reference in the Carers Handbook to a Health and Safety Policy for carers (Standard 18.5), and the service is recommended to include this.</b>



8	FS22	<b>It is recommended that carer supervision be discussed at a team meeting an agreement made about on which occasions this format will be used.</b>
9	FS23	<b>The service is recommended to systematically record training attended by carers on a training log in their file.</b>
10	FS30	<b>The Fostering Service's written Panel Procedures have been updated however they do not make direct reference to the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations that provide the legislative framework for the establishment and functions of the Fostering Panel. It is recommended that these be included.</b>
11	FS8	<b>The fostering service is recommended to maintain copies of placement agreements on carer files.</b>

\* 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	14
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	15/03/04
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	100

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

The Leicestershire County Council fostering service Statement of Purpose has been revised and approved in December 2003. Both an abridged and a longer version have been produced and these have been circulated to staff and carers. The Statement of Purpose fully complies with the Fostering Service Regulations.

A small children's leaflet has been designed and the Manager and staff team confirmed that that this is now being distributed to children who enter the foster care service.

The Children's Guide leaflet is appropriate for children who can read and for young people. **It is therefore recommended that a similar more visual leaflet be drawn up for the benefit of younger children.**

## 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
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The Manager of Leicestershire County Council foster care service is a qualified social worker who has over 30 years extensive experience within the child-care field, in an operational and family placement setting.

The Manager holds a Diploma in Management 1996.

The Manager of the fostering service is now based on the same premises as the two fostering service teams, and it is anticipated that this move will positively contribute to more efficient communication and assist in decision-making processes.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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At the time of being appointed to Leicestershire County Council, references and police checks were appropriately taken up with regard to the Manager of the fostering service.

The Manager now has up to date enhanced level Criminal Records Bureau clearance.

The Manager successfully underwent a Fit Person interview with the National Care Standards Commission in May 2003.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The roles of respective managers and staff within the foster care service are clearly delineated and lines of communication open and established. The staff team were aware of the various roles and responsibilities of Team Managers, and of the Manager (Principal Officer) of the service.

The financial systems and procedures for the foster care service are detailed in the Foster Care Procedure Manual and the Children and Families Procedure Manual, and are overseen and administered through a central Finance section.

The fostering service along with other children's services maintains records and information for the accounting of the activities of the service. Some management information is recorded against performance indicators. **The work of the Family Placement Team is represented in a good annual report and service plan for the year 2002/3.**

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

**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.**

0

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

0

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

0

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

0

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

0

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

3

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

1

**Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:**

0

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**

**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The Manager of the foster care service has a clear and detailed job description outlining delegated duties.

Flow charts in various documents describe the relationship of the Manager to the team and to the Senior Management Team.

In the Manager's absence the Service Manager-Placements deputises and carries out the Manager's responsibilities.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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New Carers receive information and 'messages' about the importance of safe care through the assessment process. Pre and post approval (core standard) training to carers also addresses the need for appropriate care to be provided for children who have been abused. All prospective carers are given a copy of the Fostering Network publication about Safer Caring. However, although carers are encouraged to draw up their own Family Policy or House Rules as recommended in the Safer Caring book, this practice is not routinely occurring on a formal basis. Carer files tracked for Inspection purposes contained neither Family Policies nor Safe Care policies in respect of specific placements. Staff (and carers) confirmed that safe care issues were discussed at reviews, and at time of placement, but that these were not usually put into writing. Representatives of the Leicestershire Care Fostering Association also indicated that they repeatedly encourage carers to be aware of safe care issues.

There is an excellent Health and Safety checklist available in the Family Placement Team Procedural Manual for supervising social workers, which could also be utilised for risk assessment purposes, but this does not appear to be actively or consistently utilised at this present time.

There was good evidence in files of Annual Reviews taking place. The Team Manager chairs these reviews at carer's homes. Health and Safety is discussed (and recorded in review notes) at this time.

Although supervising social workers record dates of unannounced visits to carers in three monthly case summaries (completed and ratified at supervision) these visits are not utilised for the formal checking of Health and Safety / Safe Care issues or recorded as a discreet visit.

The service has in place support systems and guidelines to assist carers to provide safe transport.

Carers visited for the purpose of the Inspection generally demonstrated an awareness of Health and Safety issues. The home of one set of carers visited however had a number of vehicles, some in need of repair, parked in their front yard. This is an example of where evidence that a discussion with carers about safety, and an assessment of risk would have been good practice.



**The foster care service is recommended to encourage all carers to develop and draw up, in consultation with their family and supervising social worker, their own Family Policy (House Rules) as described in Safer Caring. A Safe Care policy should also be agreed on the occasion of each new placement to demonstrate consideration of safe care and risk assessment.**

**The foster care service is recommended to include in its Carer's Handbook clear reference to Safe Caring and Health and Safety.**

**The foster care service is recommended to utilise the comprehensive Health and Safety checklist included in the Family Placement Team Procedural Manual, especially for the purpose of an annual unannounced visit and/or annual review.**

**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?**

**3**

From the recruitment process through to placement and longer term support of children in foster homes, the service was seen to take its responsibilities seriously with regard to endeavouring to meet children's individual needs.

Recruitment material contains information and images to indicate that all suitable candidates are welcome to apply to be carers, and that no individual person or people are excluded from taking this opportunity.

The staff interviewed and information seen in files and documents confirmed that carers are now all expected to undertake Valuing Diversity training as part of their pre-approval course.

Within the Social Services Department there is a Black Cases Monitoring Panel that meets monthly and consists of specialists working within the organisation, who closely monitor and consider whether the racial and cultural needs of Looked After Children are being appropriately met. Religious and cultural needs are also routinely discussed at placement reviews. Inspectors, through file tracking and discussions with the staff team, saw evidence of this.

The Statement of Purpose and carer agreements, also give a clear indication of the expectations laid upon carers to respect, value and encourage children's racial and cultural heritage.

The foster care service provides a respite scheme for children who have a disability, and training and necessary specialist equipment has been made available to assist carers with this. The service is looking at acquiring mobile hoists to assist with respite care provision **and this is commended.**

The Manager noted that carers who provide longer-term care to children with special needs

receive the same level of support as respite carers. There is now also a specialist contract carer who will provide respite care for children and young people who have profound and multiple disabilities. This carer's house has been especially fitted and adapted by the Local Authority to facilitate the provision of appropriate care **and this initiative is commended.**

There was a very good example of a young person with a disability receiving foster care as a child and remaining with the same carers as an adult placement.

There was good evidence provided by the staff team, carers and children visited to demonstrate that children's individual hobbies and interests are encouraged.

**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

Leicestershire County Council fostering service does not have a written 'matching' policy as such, however the principle was seen to be implicit in the services practice and operation.

Managers and supervising social workers demonstrated a commitment to matching children with appropriate foster care placements, but acknowledged that due to the pressures on the service and the emergency nature of many admissions, in the short term this was not always possible.

The Inspectors observed the busy Duty system where all new referrals are processed, to be a rigorous one, and duty social workers reported that the systems for screening and placing new referrals gives priority to matching children with a placement. An initial or a core assessment, completed by the placing social worker, must accompany all new referrals. This is used as a tool to assist with matching children to placements. In the first instance it was noted that keeping children placed close to their families and schools would be a priority. Supervising social workers were seen throughout the Inspection to utilise each other's knowledge about carers experience and skills to inform appropriate placements. Team meetings also provided a forum for discussing placement allocation.

The staff team noted that the matching process was more likely to be accomplished through the system that has been set up for the identification of long-term placements for children. A list of these children and their needs is maintained by a named social worker that systematically looks for appropriate placements and screens new vacancies as they arise. The list is reviewed and discussed on a monthly basis. A similar system is adopted for allocating respite placements.

Social workers recognised the need to keep family groups together when this was appropriate and said that this could cause some delay in the matching process.

Since the foster care service does not maintain the Looked After Children foster placement agreements on file (Standard 8.4) it was not possible for Inspectors to utilise this document

as evidence of matching.

The Managers of the foster care service and the staff team said that although there is no written policy on matching children to placements, that the service did succeed in generally fulfilling the matching principle and that systems for basic monitoring of placements indicated this. Files of children placed, looked at for tracking purposes, indicated that within resource constraints children had generally been satisfactorily matched.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Leicestershire County Council has in place comprehensive Multi Agency Child Protection Procedures and an Area Child Protection Committee. All employees who work within the Local Authority receive training specific to their own role and responsibility. New staff members who work for the Social Services Department receive Child Protection training as part of their induction and additional training if they work in Child Care services.

The foster care service staff reported that all carers receive different levels of training in Child Protection and Safe Caring. Carers are also provided with training in specific areas of Child Protection and caring for children who have been abused. They are provided with a book on Safe Caring. Agreements require that carers cooperate with Child Protection procedures and placement plans. Carers visited and interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of the key issues in reporting procedures.

Carers are provided with training and written guidelines on the management of children's behaviour, and sign to agree that they will only use 'punishments' that are acceptable to the foster care service and not smack or slap children. Carers spoken to were very clear about acceptable and unacceptable sanctions.

The foster service maintains a system for the collation of complaints and allegations specific to the service, and these were noted by Inspectors to be clearly and systematically documented.

There is very good information on the management of bullying in the Carer's Handbook. There are also Bullying procedures in the Looked After Children services. The Manager of the service said that bullying was rarely an issue that had presented as a problem to date. Supervising social workers said that potential for bullying is taken into account through the referral and matching process

The Carer's Handbook includes a clear description of the procedure and process for the Social Services Department response to allegations against foster carers. The existing Missing from Care procedures in the handbook are currently being revised to reflect the Missing from Home Regulations. This will necessitate carers to report directly on 'missing' incidents to a central nominated person.

Standard 9.3 states that **'Safe caring guidelines are provided based on a written policy for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the**

**household. The guidelines are cleared with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child.'**

Currently there is no evidence of written safe caring policies (or Family Policies) being in place in the homes of established carers and therefore a recommendation has been made in respect of this under Standard 6.

Since the National Care Standards Commission's children's questionnaire no longer contains a question about bullying it is not possible to complete the figure below.

**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**

The fostering service does not retain Looked After Children's placement agreements on carer files. This placement agreement (Regulation 34) is referred to several times within different Standards. It was often not possible during tracking activities to confirm whether carers and the fostering service were complying with the placement agreement. Looked After Children reviews were in place however and provided some key information. Managers and staff said that placement agreements are maintained in carer's homes. It was the view of Inspectors that copies should be retained on carer files.

**The fostering service is recommended to maintain copies of placement agreements on carer files.**

The foster care service supports the Social Service Department's policy on the active promotion of contact between Looked After Children and their parents, whenever this is possible and appropriate. The Carer's Handbook outlines the principles and expectations that carers will support contact in the carer's home where possible. Throughout the assessment and approval process carers are made aware of the importance given to parental contact. During a Choosing to Foster session, trainers were observed to make reference to parental contact, and potential carers expressed their anxieties or reservations about this. However all carers spoken to, knew that they were expected to cooperate with and to support contact arrangements, and if necessary and appropriate, contact within their own homes. Returned questionnaires also indicated this.

There is written information about Contact with Parents and other Family Members in the Carer's Handbook as well as record keeping and the use of a diary.

Standard 10.6 sets out an expectation that the foster service ensures that placing social workers routinely carry out risk assessments for contact visits, and a recommendation was made at the last Inspection for the service to confirm that such assessments were taking place. Although was again not evident in the files tracked that this process was consistently taking place, the Manager confirmed that risk assessment for contact would now be included on the agenda for all Placement (72 hour) Meetings.

**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**

Evidence was seen that the views of children are consistently sought for the purpose of the Looked After Children systems. Children not wishing to attend meetings or reviews, have alternative ways of making their views known. Notes from children's reviews indicated that they had been consulted when appropriate by their social worker, about their placement. All children entering the care system are provided with details about the Children's Rights Service. Children spoken to by Inspectors visiting carers said that social worker and carers talked to them about what was happening to them. Carers also showed an awareness of the Children's Rights Service and said that they would help a child access this if necessary, and gave examples of having done this.

The Manager of the foster care service noted the duty and responsibility of placing social workers to seek views from children, and also indicated that carers are made aware through the assessment and ongoing supervision processes, of the need to listen to and take into consideration their opinions.

The children's leaflet describes how children can make a complaint about the service and includes in this a contact number for the National Care Standards Commission.

A recent national project undertaken by the organisation Voice for Children in Care, named the Blue Print Project, worked with eight Local Authorities to improve genuine participation and involvement of children in care. The outcome of the project in Leicester, following real involvement and consultation with Looked After Children, is the proposal for an individual profile of foster carers and households (known as Estate Agent details) to be made available to children in preparation for placement. These pro forma, of 2 or 3 sheets, will contain accessible facts and photographs about carers for children who are being considered for placement. This proposal is recognised as being practical and meaningful to children and young people and the foster care service is urged to implement this as soon as possible.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

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

3

The pilot scheme referred to in last years Inspection, i.e. for Leicestershire County Council is to provide each Looked After Child with an individual Health Care Passport containing an up to date record of essential health information to follow the child through future placement, has yet to be implemented.

Carers are made aware of their role and responsibility to maintain children's good health and to fulfil medical needs, through their agreements, training and ongoing supervision. Carers spoken to were clear about these responsibilities and said that generally they did receive relevant health care information when children were placed.

All carers are provided with training on general and specific health care issues e.g. substance misuse, sexual health. They are also routinely encouraged to undertake first aid training following approval. Good guidelines are included in the Carer's Handbook on Health Care and diet. At annual reviews good health care is discussed with carers, and children's individual health care needs are discussed at Looked After Children reviews.

The foster care service has available to it a Community Paediatrician who can be consulted for medical and therapeutic advice as and when necessary. A nurse is also available to train and advise carers who look after children who have special needs.

The service has access to an annual Health Fair arising out of work with the Community Paediatrician, for staff and carers who work within the Looked After Children service. The Fair has resources and information about a range of health care issues and child development and is a very useful resource for carers. The Manager of the foster care service indicated that there are plans for future carer training to focus on homely 'over the counter' remedies as well as more specific health care needs e.g. dealing with tracheotomy.

**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?**

4

The need for carers to support children with their ongoing education is very clearly stated in the Carer's Handbook. Carers sign in their agreements with the service that they will promote children's educational attainment and employment. There was good evidence of carers helping to facilitate ongoing school attendance in children's existing schools and encouraging them in their educational achievement. Since the fostering service does not include the Looked After Children foster placement agreement on carer files it was not possible for Inspectors to assess the extent carer's contribution to individual placement requirements.

Commitment to education is reinforced and discussed at carer's annual reviews. For some carers to become eligible for an experienced carers' payment they will have to evidence how they are promoting educational opportunities for the children placed with them.

Carers are encouraged to contribute as fully as possible to a detailed Personal Education Plan and both carers and supervising social worker have attended Personal Education Plan training this year. One Personal Education Plan was seen on file and in other instances carers told Inspector that they were involved in ongoing plans. Many expressed frustration that the progress of Personal Education Plans was held up by the Education Department despite concerted efforts of social worker and supervising social workers.

Leicestershire County Council has a Corporate Parenting Policy that recognises and promotes a joint responsibility approach to Leicestershire's Looked After Children. The Children's and Family Service's Manual contains a joint statement and objectives indicating how Departments will work together to respond to the education of Looked After Children.

There is now a recently set up PLACE panel (Promoting Looked After Children's Education) whose membership is that of senior and specialist Social Services and Education professionals. Monthly meetings are held to 'problem solve' complex cases referred by placing social workers. Foster carers are invited to attend the meetings when their foster child is being discussed.

A successful scheme, funded through Leicestershire Libraries is called Caring about Reading and includes sessions in local libraries held especially for carers and their families, including children placed. The Inspectors heard the Project Coordinator (who is also a carer with another authority) providing very positive information and feedback about the progress of this scheme, at the foster care service team meeting.

In order to promote achievements, including educational, of Leicestershire's Looked After Children, awards are now presented to the children, including those in foster care placements, at a special public Celebration of Achievement ceremony, attended by children, staff, carers, parents and councillors. Carers spoke positively about this.

**The service is again commended for the emphasis laid on carer training and support, to enable them to be actively involved in children's 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**

Young people who are in care at the age of 16 are transferred to a specialist Leaving Care team where it is expected that they will receive a high level of support to explore work opportunities, further education and independence preparation. Within the Leaving Care team there is a seconded Connexions worker. The team is based on the same premises as the foster care service and positive links and communication are maintained.

Staff in the foster care team and the Leaving Care team again confirmed that carers are encouraged to extend family placements into supported living arrangements when young

people leave the care system if this is considered appropriate, and there were examples of this happening.

In one of the cases tracked for Inspection purposes a young person in contract care was working with a social worker from the Leaving care team, and a Pathway Plan was in place. The carer was working with the young person in budgeting skills.



## 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?

2

Employees of the foster care service are recruited according to the Local Authority's policies and procedures. Managers within the Children and Family Services, who are responsible for the recruitment and selection of staff, are qualified and trained to do this.

Inspectors looked at four staff personnel files (2 supervising social workers, 1 senior practitioner and 1 Team Manager) checking against Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations. Although the Manager has confirmed Criminal Records Bureau clearance has been received on each of the four individuals, there was no evidence of an application for a Criminal Records Bureau check, or confirmation of clearance on one supervising social worker file. Two written references were available on two files, although there was evidence of references being requested or pursued on other files. Qualifications, or sight of qualifications, were only in evidence on one file, however the Manager confirmed that these are routinely checked at interview.

Criminal Records Bureau checks have either been, or are actively being undertaken in respect of all of the foster carers. The Manager also confirmed that apart from one member of staff on long-term sickness absence, the team have all received Criminal Records Bureau clearance. Supervising social workers working within the foster care team are either CQSW or DPSW qualified, and are expected to make themselves conversant with the Social Services Department Policies and Procedures. Some areas of underpinning knowledge relating to Children and Family services are provided through supervision and Team and Training days.

Although supervising social workers reported that they do not receive training on undertaking the assessment of carers as such (see Standard 15.6) they said that the Form F provided good guidelines on undertaking assessments and that they utilised their past experiences of assessment in child protection. One said they would like 'input' or training on assessments and some said that they learned from colleagues and through supervision. One noted that there was an expectation for the Fostering Panel to 'pick up' any inconsistencies or discrepancies in assessments.

There was good evidence of general staff and carer training provision and this referred to in

Standard 19.

Five administrative workers (total 110.5hours) support the fostering service. The 5 workers total 3 F.T.E.

**While acknowledging that it may not possible to obtain appropriate paperwork retrospectively, especially for longer serving staff, the fostering service is required to confirm through the Personnel Section, that evidence of Criminal Records Bureau clearance, two written references and other information identified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations is evidenced on fostering service personal files.**

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

24

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

1

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

There is a flow chart clearly delineating the structure of the Children and Family Services, included in the Statement of Purpose. Within the fostering team there are two supervision groups supervised by Team Managers, one focussing on pre approval (recruitment and assessment) tasks and the other on maintaining an active duty point for referrals. Both groups support carers and carry caseloads. The function of each of the two groups is clearly described in the Family Placement Team Procedural Manual. Supervisory staff members were seen to have appropriate knowledge and experience and training to enable them to effectively manage the experienced staff team.

Managers and supervising social workers were interviewed during the Inspection process and they demonstrated a commendable level of knowledge and expertise in the operation and support of a very demanding and busy foster care service.

Supervising social work team members have delegated responsibilities in specialist areas e.g. recruitment, training, contract or community placement and kinship care. Both supervision groups support a caseload of carers. Team Managers chair annual reviews in carer's homes with the supervising social workers and have created a system for monitoring these.

The Managers confirmed to the Inspector that a good source of specialist advice is available from social work professionals, in addition to those working in the field of Health and Education. Positive reference to direct support and training received from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service's Looked After Children team was made consistently to Inspectors throughout the Inspection.

Staff and carers are provided with training through the fostering service and the wider Children and Family Services. Training and development is referred to in more detail in Standard 19.

Leicestershire County Council provides all staff with job descriptions, contracts, conditions of service and other employee related policies and procedures.

**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

Within the next few months there will be two full time Team Managers in post (instead of one and three quarters) and 12 full time supervising social workers. The fostering team is an established one with suitably experienced and qualified social workers. The team recruit, train and support approximately 250 sets of carers, and carry out additional related operational tasks.

Staff spoken to during the Inspection indicated that the fostering team continued to work to capacity recruiting and supporting carers to provide placements for the Local Authorities increasing Looked After Children population. It was acknowledged by managers and supervising social workers however that the appointment of a Senior Practitioner to specifically undertake Regulation 38 assessments (see Standard 31) had positively impacted on the allocation of work to the team.

The assessment process is a thorough one, undertaken using the BAAF form F and evidenced within the files inspected. **Taking into consideration comments and observations made about Form F Assessments by both supervising social workers (Standard 15) and the Panel Chair (Standard 30) the fostering service is recommended to discuss the assessment process and training with teams.**

Although the Fostering service does not operate to a written recruitment policy and strategy as such, the Manager confirmed that a recruitment plan is developed on an annual basis, targeting areas where there is a shortfall and identified need. This plan was accordingly evidenced in the most recent Annual Report that details a three-year plan to undertake a mail shot campaign, among other recruitment initiatives. The team includes a social worker whose primary function is to lead on the recruitment of new carers. Other supervising social workers provide the mandatory Choosing to Foster courses. Two information evenings for people who are interested in fostering are provided each month in different venues.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

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

2

The new Carer's Handbook provides clear details to carers about their rights and conditions of service and includes financial information and guidance on e.g. insurance claims. This Handbook is referred to in more detail in Standard 21.

Carers are provided with contact numbers for the Emergency Duty Team for out of hours support, and carers confirmed to the Inspectors that they were aware of the referral process for contacting the emergency team.

The Department also funds the Leicestershire Foster Care Association to run a 24-hour helpline.

Carers said in questionnaires, during visits and through a meeting, that they do not like having to go through a call system in Aberdeen to access help in an emergency situation.

Several (but not all) reported that the response and support received from the emergency team was not always helpful and that out of hours support was inadequate. One contract carer noted that there was an expectation by the team that she would 'manage' during out of hours occasions because this was what she was paid for. One carer said that contract carers could contact a duty residential services Manager. Others indicated that the response received from the emergency team was dependent on the worker involved. Some made positive comments about two named workers, but no others. It was evident that carers were not receiving a consistent response from the emergency team and **the fostering service is recommended to give serious consideration to reviewing it's out of hours management and support service to foster carers.**

Contract and Community Scheme carers receive formal monthly-recorded supervision sessions and reported that they also received a high level of supervision. This was evidenced on carer files. Other than this supervision levels appear to vary. Although there is a very good formal supervision schedule format available to supervising social workers these were not observed to be utilised on a regular basis on the files of mainstream carers looked at. It was evident however that regular visits are taking place because the dates of visits are recorded on regular three monthly summary sheets (utilised for supervision), along with a summary of the visits. Some files contained contemporaneous notes following visits and others did not. It was noted that visiting patterns are agreed at annual reviews. Future training needs and additional support would also be agreed at this time. A subsequent recommendation has been made under Standard 22.

Whistle Blowing Policies and Procedures are available and known to staff. The Carers Handbook contains guidance on 'How to raise issues which cause you serious concern.'

The fostering service staff team along with other Local Authority employees are made aware of and have access to Health and Safety policies and procedures. **There is no direct reference in the Carers Handbook to a Health and Safety policy for carers (Standard 18.5), and the service is recommended to include this.**

#### 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
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Staff members of the fostering service are provided with training courses targeted at staff working in Children's Services by the Social Services Staff Development section. Most of this will be general and not specific to the fostering task. Other 'in house' training is available, as identified at their annual appraisals. The team is an established and experienced one. Managers confirmed that staff training is routinely evaluated for the purpose of the Children and Family services business plan. Supervising social workers reported to Inspectors that they were generally satisfied with the range of training offered to them but would welcome the opportunity to attend more external specialist training provided by some of the national fostering agencies.

Both supervising social workers and carers were unanimous in their enthusiasm and appreciation of the CAMHS-Impact of Trauma and Abuse training. This course is presented over six sessions and the feedback to Inspectors from everyone was unequivocally positive!

Most of the staff team had attended training over the last year, and although these were mostly in house, individual workers had attended both a BAAF and Fostering Network event.

Carer training is referred to in Standard 23.

Staff training is identified through the supervision and annual appraisal system. One supervising social worker said she had not received an annual appraisal for three years however others confirmed the appraisal process.

The Staff Development Section routinely evaluates training and new courses are set on an annual basis. The Staff Development has been unable to recruit to a specialist Staff Development Officer post that would look specifically at the training needs of the fostering team. The Managers of the fostering service noted the negative impact of this on training for supervising social workers.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

All staff recruited to the Leicestershire County Council foster care service team are provided with contracts, job descriptions and the policies and procedures of the organisation.

An induction programme is organised for all new staff.

Staff spoken to confirm that they receive monthly supervision, and annual appraisals. Supervising social workers take with them to their supervision, 3 monthly summaries of the placements they are responsible for (see Standard 18), pending reviews, and imminent approvals or de-registrations.

Staff team members attend team meetings on a two weekly basis, one with their individual supervision group and one as the whole Family Placement Team. Inspectors attended a joint team meeting and found this to be an excellent forum for the efficient sharing of information for the benefit of carers and children placed. Team Managers and supervising social workers utilised each other's skills and knowledge to discuss matching children to appropriate placements. The meeting discussed recruitment, carer training, and future initiatives in addition to receiving feedback about the Caring about Reading project.

**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**

In the Statement of Purpose the fostering service outlines Leicestershire County Council strategy for The Support of Carers. This includes the provision of a supervising social worker, supervision, and membership of the Leicestershire Foster Care Association and of Fostering Network, plus newsletters, social events and out of office support.

It was evident to the Inspectors that for the most part, the above support systems were in place although dissatisfaction was expressed about out of hours support (see Standard 18) Carers, both at the group meeting and through visits and questionnaires indicated that they were either 'very well supported' or 'well supported most of the time' by the foster care service and were especially positive about the support offered by the foster care team.

The fostering service team now have access to a Family Support Worker, available to provide intensive short-term support and intervention to carers when there is a serious risk of a placement breaking down. A supervising social worker was seen to be accessing this support during the Inspection.

Carers reported that they enjoy informal social events provided by the service, where they can meet other carers and children. Some referred to a reception held at Christmas provided by Leicestershire County Council and attended by councillors and said this made them feel valued and recognised.

There are no support groups provided by the fostering service as such, however some carers who live locally to each other meet up occasionally and one of these meets on a regular basis. Some carers attend the Leicestershire Foster Care Association meetings.

First annual review reports are always presented to the Fostering Panel and were noted at the Panel attended for Inspection purposes. Following this, only significant changes in registration would be presented to Panel.

Carers again reported both directly and in questionnaires (One third of those returned) the difficulty in accessing placing social workers. This included the social worker returning calls or not being replaced when off sick. Some recognised that social work resources were stretched and appeared understanding of the situation. Most carers identified in questionnaires the support offered to them by their supervising social worker as the best thing about the service.

Some carers said that they would really value a 'baby sitting' service.

**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 Foster care service agreements meet all the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and clearly outline the expectations of the fostering service on carers. Carers demonstrated a good understanding of these expectations.

All carers are allocated a link supervising social worker and most carers regarded their supervising social workers as a significant source of support at all times, having developed positive professional relationships with them.

There was evidence to demonstrate that carers were provided with different levels of supervision from their supervising social worker, often depending on the nature of placements. The use of supervision formats to record carer supervision was seen in files tracked, to be variable on the occasion of this Inspection and only well evidenced in the file of a contract carer. Contract and Community Scheme placements are especially supported against a tightly defined monthly formal supervision structure.

Although it was clear that supervisory and support visits were being carried out, the recording of these was minimal or was not in evidence. Supervising social workers briefly summarise their supervisory visits with carers on three monthly case summary sheets for ratification and discussion with Team Managers. In some instances this is the only record of the content and outcome of these visits. (Standard 22.6) Carers would not receive a copy of these and their agreement with records not evidenced. Some staff said that they did not have to undertake formal supervisions with all carers, especially if the carer was experienced and was providing e.g. a long-term stable placement. Levels of visits and how these are recorded appear to be agreed with managers in supervision and at annual reviews. The new Carer's Handbook (yet to be circulated) provides an excellent Supervision format and carers are informed in the Handbook that this format will be utilised for recording visits and discussion between carers and their supervising social worker.

**It is clear that supervision levels, and the format for recording supervision, varies. It is therefore recommended that supervision be discussed at a team meeting and agreement made about on which occasions the formal supervision-recording tool will or will not be used.**

The new Carer's Handbook has now been fully consulted on, with carers and supervising social workers full involvement. The Manager stated that this Handbook will be circulated in April and carers representing the Leicestershire Foster Care Association said that they welcomed the launch and circulation of the document.

Although the fostering service carries out some unannounced visits (Standard 26.6) these are not currently undertaken with any specific understood purpose. **The service is recommended to introduce an agreed format for the supervising social worker to complete at a formal annual unannounced Inspection and it is recommended that the service utilise the Health and Safety/Risk Assessment document from the Fostering Procedure Manual.**

Foster carers demonstrated an awareness of the complaints system. Carers are also made aware of independent support available to them in the event of an allegation being made. The Carer's Handbook provides good information and flow charts about how the service responds to allegations against carers, indicating how independent support can be accessed at such times from e.g. the Leicestershire Foster Care Association. The service pays for each carer to be a member of this association and of the Fostering Network.

Full records of allegations and complaints are maintained by the service. These were looked at during the Inspection. **The fostering service is commended on the detailed recording of the investigations into complaints and allegations and for responding to these in a systematic and procedural manner.**

**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 service provides an annual training programme that covers both pre approval and post approval training. All prospective carers receive the Choosing to Foster training. Experienced foster carers are involved with social work staff in the provision of training programmes for new carers and were observed to provide valuable input on one of the Choosing to Foster courses.

The fostering service has been still been unsuccessful in progressing National Vocational Qualification with carers since there has been no response to attempts to recruit an National Vocational Qualification Assessor. Managers say this is regrettable since there are carers who wish to achieve these awards. It is believed that the salary grading is not sufficient to attract candidates who have the necessary qualification and experience. The Staff Development Officer post that would be focussing on fostering service training and development has also not attracted recruits. Supervising social workers are providing much of the carer training.

There was good evidence available of the needs of the carer's own children being given consideration and support. They are consulted formally both during the assessment and approval process and on an annual basis. **A special leaflet was seen on one file to record carer's own children's views and feelings and the service is commended for this.**

Some carers commented that their own children sometimes feel left out especially in long term arrangements when e.g. Looked After Children's achievements are recognised and promoted. The Inspector spoke to a carer's own child about his experience having carer's who were foster carers. He said the supervising social workers and social workers talked to him and consulted him regularly. He made some good observations about e.g. what it was like going to school with children who are fostered and feeling responsible for them.

The Annual Review meeting chaired by a Team Manager includes discussion about training received and identifies proposals for future carer training. Although Section 4 in carer files indicates that a record of carer training will be maintained there, no training records were seen on files inspected.

**The service is again recommended to systematically record training attended by**



**carers on a training log in their file as indicated.**

**This would assist in identifying when refresher courses are due as well as indicating gaps and strengths in training and development.**

**Staff and carers were unanimous in their appreciation of the CAMHS training (See Standard 19) The fostering service is commended for ensuring that as many staff and carers as possible are facilitated to attend this training.**

## 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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The foster care service maintains carer case files that store records relating primarily to carers. Quarterly summaries, placement meetings, contact visits and reviews contain critical information about carer supervision, and placement management and progress. Assessment and approval documents and signed foster carer agreements are also maintained on these files. There is a section in the files for information about children in placement, to be retained for the duration of the placement only. The fostering service keeps records of children's Looked After Children reviews and strategy meetings but does not retain a copy of the Looked After Children Placement Agreement. A recommendation has been made in respect of this.

The Manager confirmed that there are written policies and procedures on case recording and these were seen by Inspectors to clearly indicate the file management processes.

Foster carers are usually provided with the Looked After Children agreement and are made aware through training and documentation of the confidential nature of this information. This was confirmed through discussions with carers. Some carers said that they did not always receive enough information about children at the time of placement but that this was usually because of the nature of emergency admissions.

Carers also confirmed that they were made aware of the need to maintain a record of children's placements through photographs and other documentation and that they were generally provided with the necessary training support guidelines and equipment to do this. Children in a long-term placement enjoyed showing the Inspector their Life Story Books during a carer visit.

The Manager of the service noted that a Senior Officer conducts a formal monitoring exercise on a randomly selected group of the foster care service files each year. Other files in the Children's Services are monitored on the same basis and the findings recorded for local and national purposes.

Observations about the recording of carer visits by supervising social worker are note in Standard 22.

**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**

Separate files are maintained by the Local Authority for staff, carers, and children and situated at various office bases. (E.g. staff records in personnel office, children's at placing social workers office base.)

Monitoring systems are in place to monitor records.

The foster care service is operated from an office that is visited by members of the general public and very good security systems were noted to be in place.

The records of children placed within the fostering service are filed in a separate section within carer files. Staff confirmed that these would be removed and returned to placing social workers or shredded at the end of the placement.

Electronic records are also maintained on carers and children and accessible via security systems to essential front line staff only.

Carers, parents and children are made aware, through leaflets and procedures of how they can gain access to their records.

The foster care service is fully supported by an experienced administration team. A member of the administrative team detailed the systems and procedures for filing, and locking up at the last Inspection.

Case files looked at during the Inspection were noted as being adequately managed, documented and maintained.

Records of allegations and complaints are maintained in by the service and are referenced in main files. These are now to be collated on an annual basis and figures are provided for reports and monitoring.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>	241
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>	500
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>	588
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>	43
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>	48
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	70.49
<b>Maximum £</b>	532

## 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 fostering service is centrally located and serves all of Leicestershire. This can mean travelling long distances to visit carers however since the whole of the service is based together good communication and consistent practice is promoted.

There are good security systems in place to ensure maximum security at the foster care service office base, including rigorous signing in system, keypads and window and door locking systems.

The team are provided with good quality standard office equipment and work stations. There are also rooms available for meetings and interviews on the premises.

## 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 foster care service is one of a range of the Children and Family services provided by Leicestershire County Council. As a Local Authority function, financial viability is accepted. The Inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the County Council does not resource its fostering service appropriately.

### 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 above budget is subject to the statutory accounting and auditing processes of the central finance section, within Leicestershire County Council. The foster care service has access to good financial information and a copy of all the budgets available to the team is provided at the beginning of the financial year.

Throughout the year regular information about financial expenditure of the service is provided. The fostering Team Managers or their line managers hold all of the budgets for the fostering service. Team Managers confirmed that they were delegated specific responsibilities within the services budget to enable them to respond promptly to additional financial needs of carers. **This is commended.**

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Foster carers have their allowances paid directly into their bank. This was changed from cheque payments at the request of foster carers.

Managers said that carers are made aware of all fostering rates paid through the department through annual information letters and that the new Carer's Handbook will also include updated details of all carer payments. Carers said that they received payments promptly and in most instances were well supported with the provision of equipment. Some carer's providing mainstream care commented that the financial remuneration did not reflect the needs of teenagers.

## 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 Fostering Panel meets on a monthly basis to approve all new carers, including family/kinship carers, to undertake first reviews and to consider any major changes in registration or de registrations. The Panel also considers reports arising out investigations and other reports relating to significant fostering related situations.

The membership of the Panel is appropriately constituted, however the service continues to seek to recruit a Panel member who has experience of being in foster care. Various Panel members were spoken to or interviewed by the Inspector and all expressed a commitment to the role of the Fostering Panel and indicated that they were appropriately facilitated by the Chair to submit their views and to question or challenge where necessary. There have been two new members appointed to the Panel since the last Inspection, both a local Councillor and an experienced fostering Manager from the Barnardo's project. The medical advisor for the Panel was interviewed for the purpose of the Inspection, and demonstrated a genuine interest in and commitment to his role on the Panel. He said he felt able at any time to express his views, both on medical and fostering issues.

The Chair of the Panel is the Children and Family Service, Quality Protects Service Manager. **She indicated that the Fostering Panel has made good progress over the last year in developing systems for the more efficient and appropriate management of the Panel process and this is commended.** Following the Panel the Chair takes the recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker to present for signing and discussion if necessary. The Chair was able to demonstrate with examples, that the Panel recognises the need to develop its independent status and that members were facilitated to question and challenge where necessary. The Chair confirmed that the Panel did comment on the quality of assessments. She noted that discussion with fostering managers on assessments would be helpful, especially having observed some of the strengths of the new senior practitioner's assessment work.

The Manager of the fostering service has produced an Annual Activity of the Fostering Panel April 2003-March 2004. This report is an very good, succinct representation of the Panels work and responsibilities over the year.

The service is still endeavouring to recruit a Panel member who has been in foster care but has been unable to identify a suitable person.

As noted in the last Inspection report, new applicants being considered for approval do not currently attend the Fostering Panel. Both the Fostering Panel Chair and the Manager indicated a commitment to implementing the introduction of carer attendance at the time of their approval and state that they are hoping to invite carers from next month. They recognised that some Panel members will require training to prepare for this positive development.

**The Fostering Service's written Panel Procedures have been updated however they do not make direct reference to the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations that provide the legislative framework for the establishment and functions of the Fostering Panel. It is recommended that these be included.**



## 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 service provides a range of carers that offer short term breaks to disabled and non-disabled children. The specialist Family Link scheme offers short-term breaks to children with disabilities, and carers are actively recruited, trained and supported to undertake this specialist task. Some other respite services are also offered in mainstream placements.

Breaks can be flexibly arranged to include periods during the day and at the weekend.

The fostering service has also established a contract respite carer to facilitate the provision of good quality appropriate respite care for children and young people who have physical disabilities. This carer has had her house adapted for this purpose.

## 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 foster care services Statement of Purpose dated October 2003 indicated that the fostering service supported 36 kinship care arrangements. Kinship carers are assessed and approved using the broadly same processes as mainstream carers, but in relation to the specific child or children in question. The same support mechanisms are available as for other carers in the service and the full fostering allowance rates.

A Senior Practitioner has been recently appointed to specialise in the assessment and support of kinship carers. The Managers of the service and the Chair of the Fostering Panel acknowledged the impact and work already achieved by this practitioner. This worker enables the fostering service to give advice to placing childcare operations social workers and to respond swiftly to requests for Regulation 38 assessments. This worker has also been able, when appropriate, to promote and advise in the spirit of the Children Act 1989, Residence Order arrangements with some families who would have otherwise pursued the full kinship care assessment process. **The service is commended on the appointment of and identified role of this worker.**

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Not applicable**

**Lay Assessor** Not applicable **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 <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

NO

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by Tuesday, 11 May 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I Felicity Schofield of Leicestershire County Fostering Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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