



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service**

Beldray Building  
66 Mount Pleasant  
Wolverhampton  
WV14 7PR

4th October 2004

## Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

### The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

## Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service

**Address**

Beldray Building, 66 Mount Pleasant, Wolverhampton,  
WV14 7PR

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

01902 553130

**Address**

Beldray Building, 66 Mount Pleasant, Wolverhampton,  
WV14 7PR

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

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**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**

29/03/04

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		4th October 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Sarah Moore	148259
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Janet Manders	
<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 CSCI. 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>		Mrs Lynn Noble	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

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

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

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**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

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

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Wolverhampton City Council 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 CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service provides a range of foster care to children and young people aged 0-18 who are looked after by Wolverhampton City Council. The service provides short-term, intermediate, long-term, shared care (including children with disabilities and kinship care placements). At the start of the Inspection the Service was providing full-time placements for 221 children, and a further 24 children with learning disabilities were linked with shared care placements. There were also 51 externally purchased placements.

The Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and development of all its foster carers. On 1 September 2004 the service had 168 registered foster carers. There is a single Fostering Panel.

The Service is led by the Family Placement Group Manager, with a Fostering Team Manager, an Assistant Team Manager and 8 social workers, and administrative support.

## **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.)

### **OVERALL THEMES**

- **A number of areas of innovation and good practice, such as the Foster Care Centre, the Foster Carer Helpline, and the Marketing and Recruitment Officers**
- **Very positive progress since the last inspection in terms of the management of the service**
- **However, this is very fragile since the good management is based on acting up arrangements which are temporary, as is the current duty officer post.**
- **There are insufficient staff to carry out the tasks and meet the standards**
- **There are insufficient carers to meet the needs of children**

This inspection took place only six months after the previous inspection, and the progress achieved in that timescale is truly commendable. The inspectors would like to thank the managers, the team, the Foster Care Centre, the foster carers and the young people for all their support with the inspection. The inspectors would particularly like to thank the 13 young people and 31 foster carers who returned questionnaires. No questionnaires were received from placing social workers.

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

**This standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.**

There was a full statement of purpose which had recently been revised, and the Children's Guide was in draft form. Some additions to the Children's Guide are required, and this must then be produced and distributed.

#### **Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2 – 3)**

**These 2 standards were met.**

The service was managed at the time of the inspection by knowledgeable, experienced and suitable staff, but all management posts were covered on an acting-up basis only, and the continuity of this quality of management was therefore vulnerable to change.

#### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4 – 5)**

**These 2 standards were met.**

Appropriate systems for the management and monitoring of the service have been established since the last inspection, and the effectiveness of these will be assessed as part of the next inspection. The operation of the service was somewhat affected by the fact managers were in temporary positions, and this needs to be addressed without delay.

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

**3 of these 9 standards were met, and 6 were not met. Of these 5 were not met due to minor shortfalls and 1 was not met due to major shortfalls.**

Many matters within this group of standards were well met, and the shortcomings were due to three main factors; the shortage of staff and carers; the need for some policies such as safe caring guidelines and guidelines on preparation for adult living; and inadequate information and risk assessments regarding children from placing social workers. The fostering service should not be making placements unless there is sufficient information for adequate matching, protection and planning. The placement agreement is inadequate.

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

**2 of these 9 standards were met, and 7 were not met. Of these 6 were not met due to minor shortfalls and 1 was not met due to a major shortfall.**



In this group of standards, once again the quality of management provided by the staff in acting-up positions, has resulted in the standards concerning management, accountability and support being well met, with staff receiving regular supervision, appraisals and regular team meetings. Training needs for both staff and carers were also generally well met, although induction training for agency staff has yet to be addressed, and the issue of restraint training for foster carers is still under discussion. Fostering staff are providing an invaluable training programme for 'children who foster,' which is very positive. However, the shortage of staff prevents the service from meeting the need for regular supervision of all carers, and no annual reviews were taking place in the absence of a review chair. The service cannot be said to have adequate staff even when fully staffed, or sufficient foster carers, and the excessive reliance on acting-up arrangements coupled with differential leave allowances make it difficult to see the authority as having sound employment practices.

**Records (Standards 24 – 25)**

**1 of these 2 standards was met, and 1 was not met due to major shortcomings.**

The children's records, which are maintained by the placing social workers within Wolverhampton City Council, frequently lacked LAC paperwork, including care plans, and the paperwork that was present was often ill-completed and so of little value. The records maintained by the fostering service did not include central monitoring of complaints and allegations, and the registers of foster carers, and of children placed, did not contain all the required information.

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

**This 1 standard was met.**

At the time of the inspection the fostering team had only 2 computers, which were shared with the adoptions service, and the office was shabby and cluttered. However, during the inspection the news was received that all staff were to be provided with a computer each, and new desks and carpet were to be supplied. These actions will ensure that the service is meeting this standard.

**Financial Requirements. (Standards 27-29)**

**1 of these 3 standards was met and 2 standards were not applicable.**

Financial matters were well managed, and it was positive to note that payments to carers were made promptly. However, the level of allowances fall considerably below the Fostering Network minimum recommended rate, and review of this is recommended.

**Fostering panels. (Standard 30)**

**This 1 standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.**

The panel is generally operating well, but policies and procedures need to be written and enacted, and checks carried out on panel members.

**Short-term breaks. (Standard 31)**

**This 1 standard was met.**

There was a newly appointed co-ordinator, and no issues of concern were identified.

**Family and friends as carers. (Standard 32)**

**This 1 standard was not met due to minor shortcomings.**

Kinship care is now being integrated into the fostering service, but this process is not yet complete due to lack of staff.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	3	FS1	The responsible person must ensure that a Children's Guide is made available for all children (NMS 1.5, Regulation 3.3, Requirement 1).	1/7/04
2	35	FS7	The responsible person must ensure that an informed assessment of each child's needs is made before each placement (NMS 7.6, Requirement 5).	Immediate
3	34	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that the Service has a complete LAC Plan for each child placed (NMS 8.4, Regulation 34.3, Schedule 6, Requirement 6).	Immediate
4	34	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that social workers with child(ren) already in a placement are consulted when another child is being matched for that placement (NMS 8.3, Requirement 7).	Immediate
5	12	FS9	The responsible person must ensure that information on LAC forms adequately meets each child's protection needs (NMS 9.7, Requirement 8).	Immediate
6	14	FS10	The responsible person must ensure that risk assessments are made prior to commencement of contact and retained on files of both the Service and carers (NMS 10.6, Requirement 10).	Immediate
7	19	FS17	The responsible person must ensure that there is parity of employment conditions as an incentive to recruitment to the Service. (NMS 17.3, Regulation 19, Requirement 14).	1/9/04
8	19	FS17	The responsible person must ensure that a new programme of carer recruitment is planned and implemented to address the predicted loss rate of current experienced carers (NMS 17.5, Regulation 19, Requirement 15).	1/8/04
9	17 & 21	FS19	The responsible person must ensure that joint training of social workers with carers takes place (NMS 19.7, Requirement 16).	1/9/04

10	21	FS19	The responsible person must ensure that the threshold for agency staff to receive induction training is specified (NMS19.2, Requirement 17).	1/6/04
11	21	FS21	The responsible person must ensure that fostering reviews are annual (NMS21.5, Requirement 19)	Immediate
12	17	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that the agreed and specified frequency of supervision of carers is maintained (NMS 22.6, Requirement 20)	Immediate
13	17	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that all carers receive a copy of their supervision notes (NMS 22.6, Requirement 21)	Immediate
14	17	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that all carers receive unannounced visits (NMS 22.6, Requirement 22)	Immediate
15	13 & 17	FS23	The responsible person must ensure that a review of the appropriateness/feasibility of providing training in restraint for carers is carried out (NMS 23.6, Requirement 26).	1/8/04
16	17		The responsible person must ensure that kinship carers should be provided with the same equipment and support as other foster carers (NMS 32.3, Requirement 33).	1/8/04

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

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)****(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Sarah Moore</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Janet Manders</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	<u>Brian Lock</u>	Signature	_____
Date	<u>29<sup>th</sup> December 2004</u>		

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3 (3) & (4)	FS1	The draft Children's Guide must be revised in the areas discussed. The responsible person must then ensure that a Children's Guide is made available for all children.	10.2.05
2	12(1)(a)	FS6	Where a child has been abused or has abused another child, a recorded risk assessment must be carried out before any decision is made to allow sharing of bedrooms.	16.12.04
3	33(b)	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that an informed assessment of each child's needs is made before each placement	Immediate
4	33(b)	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that the Service has complete LAC documentation, including Care Plan, for each child placed	13.1.05
5	33(b)	FS8	The responsible person must ensure that social workers with child(ren) already in a placement are consulted when another child is being matched for that placement .	Immediate
6	12(1)(a)	FS9	The responsible person must ensure that information is provided on LAC forms and other documents supplied to carers to adequately meet each child's protection needs	Immediate

7	14	FS10	The responsible person must ensure that risk assessments are made prior to commencement of contact and retained on files of both the Service and carers	Immediate
8	34(3) & Schedule 6	FS12	The foster placement agreement must include all matter listed in this schedule, including the arrangements for giving consent to the medical or dental examination or treatment of the child, and permissions for school trips and overnight stays.	13.1.05
9	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	FS14	The fostering service must ensure that there is a Pathway plan for each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living.	13.1.05
10	20(3)(d)	FS15	Personnel files must contain evidence of all matters required within Schedule 1.	13.1.05
11	19(a) & (b)	FS17	An urgent review must be undertaken of the numbers of staff employed by the fostering service and their workloads, which must result in a significant increase in the number of staff employed.	13.1.05
12	19(a) & (b)	FS17	The responsible person must ensure that there is parity of employment conditions as an incentive to recruitment to the Service.	16.12.04
13	19(a) & (b)	FS17	The responsible person must ensure that a new programme of carer recruitment is planned and implemented to address the predicted loss rate of current experienced carers and to increase the number of carers.	13.1.05
14	17(1)	FS18	There must be a comprehensive Health and Safety policy for carers, children and staff, which covers all legal requirements.	13.1.05
15	21(4)(a)	FS19	The responsible person must ensure that agency staff receive induction training.	Immediate
16	29(2)	FS21	The responsible person must ensure that fostering reviews take place at least annually.	13.1.05
17	17(1)	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that the agreed and specified frequency of supervision of carers is maintained	10.2.05

18	17(1)	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that all carers receive a copy of their supervision notes	Immediate
19	17(1)	FS22	The responsible person must ensure that all carers receive unannounced visits	10.2.05
20	29(5)(b)	FS22	The Foster Care Agreement must be further revised in the areas indicated.	13.1.05
21	13 & 17	FS23	The responsible person must ensure that a review of the appropriateness/feasibility of providing training in restraint for carers is carried out	10.2.05
22	31(2)	FS25	A register of foster carers must be maintained which complies with all the requirements of this regulation.	13.1.05
23	22 & Sched 2	FS25	A register of children placed with foster carers must be kept which complies with all the requirements of this schedule.	13.1.05
24	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7	FS30	The local authority must ensure that when an exemption to the usual fostering limit is granted, all the required issues are considered, and that carers are given written notification of the exemption.	Immediate
25	24(8)	FS30	Members of the fostering panel should be checked for suitability. This should include CRB checks.	13.1.05
26	17	FS32	The responsible person must ensure that kinship carers are provided with the same equipment and support as other foster carers	10.2.05



### 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	FS2	The authority should reduce the reliance on acting-up arrangements to a minimum, and appoint permanent staff to fostering management positions without delay.
2	FS7	The process for accessing additional support from the Black Support Group should be made known to all staff and carers, and be available in the foster carer's handbook.
3	FS7	Agreement should be reached at senior management levels between the local authority and the health authority regarding the provision of equipment for disabled children in foster homes, both those placed on a full time basis and those receiving shared care.
4	FS7	Carers should receive training in how to help children deal with all forms of discrimination.
5	FS9	A policy should be written, and safe caring guidelines drawn up for each foster home, agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child.
6	FS9	The guidance to carers on foster children missing from home should be revised to make it clear exactly what actions the carer should take, and what records should be kept.
7	FS10	The service should review the arrangements for carers to claim for mileage undertaken for the department, to take into consideration the total cost of providing that transport, not just the petrol costs.
8	FS13	The authority must ensure that each child in placement has a personal education plan.
9	FS14	There should be written requirements regarding what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living.
10	FS15	Two written references should be obtained before appointment to any permanent post within the fostering service, even where the applicant has been previously employed within the social services department. These should be followed up by telephone and a record made of that conversation.

11	FS18	Appropriate Whistleblowing policies should be prepared and made known to staff and carers.
12	FS26	The recent commitment to the provision of computers for each member of the fostering service, new desks and new carpeting, are needed for the premises to be regarded as providing an equipped base from which staff work.
13	FS29	The fostering service should consider revising the allowances paid to carers, in the context of the Fostering Network minimum recommended rates.
14	FS30	The Fostering Panel should have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions. These should include requirements as to the suitability of panel members, and should cover the process of making a recommendation when all members of the panel are not in agreement.

\* 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	13
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	04/10/04
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	114

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There is a full Statement of Purpose which covers all the areas required. This was first produced in August 2003, and was revised in September 2004. The document provides an accurate account of the work of the fostering service, with only minor exceptions, for example, the paragraph on Kinship carers states that they are approved under Regulation 38, which is not legally the case. The initial placement with kinship carers may be made under regulation 38, but when approved as foster carers they are approved under regulation 28 as are all foster carers.

A Children's Guide has been developed and is ready to go to print. It is suitable for children from the age of about ten years upwards, and the fostering service has plans to develop a second version suitable for younger children. The guide covers a number of relevant areas, and is enlivened by graphics. It is presented in a plastic folder which allows for the easy insertion of other relevant material. However, the draft guide does not include information about the actual complaints procedure, which is needed to ensure children know what to expect and have confidence in the system to meet their needs, nor about the Commission for Social Care Inspection, as required by the regulations, so this needs to be added before the document goes to print.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The named manager of the service at the date of the inspection was the manager of the adoptions team, acting up in the role of Group Manager for Family Placements. The fostering team was also being managed in an acting up capacity, by the Assistant Team Manager of the adoptions team.

Both these persons have a professional qualification in social work, and substantial relevant experience, and the acting group manager holds NVQ4 in Management.

The evidence of the inspection, including feedback from staff, was that these managers were providing excellent leadership, management, and staff care. However, since both were working in a temporary capacity only, the continuation of this quality of management must be considered to be fragile. The authority needs to take effective and swift action to secure in post these managers or others of equal quality.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The evidence held on personnel files indicated that the managers were suitable people to manage a fostering service.

In future management appointments the service should ensure that written references are followed up verbally, and a record of that conversation kept on personnel files.

## 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 service had recently established a Performance Improvement Board and the inspectors were informed that managers were now receiving a considerable amount of information about the performance of the fostering service. The fostering service was also in the process of reinstating the workload management system. This is considered to meet the requirement made following the last inspection, and the next inspection will be looking at how this information is being used to effectively manage the service. There are written financial procedures within the local authority, which are followed by the fostering service.

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

7

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

1

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

2

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.

4

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

### Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Clear job descriptions are in existence for the managers of the service, and the management structure provides for delegation of responsibility from the group manager to the fostering team manager during any absences, and where necessary upwards to the Senior Operations Manager, Resources. There is a need for greater clarity regarding the respective responsibilities of the team manager and the assistant team manager. With so many key staff in 'acting up' roles, some lack of clarity regarding roles, responsibility and delegation was evident, and probably inevitable. This needs to be addressed by making permanent appointments and by supporting staff as they adjust to their posts.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Those foster carers visited by the inspectors provided a high quality of care for the young people placed with them, with some foster carers showing exceptional commitment to the young people they care for.

The Foster Carers Handbook includes some guidelines on specific safety issues in the home. Health and Safety Checklists are completed as part of the assessment of prospective carers, and repeated annually at the time of the foster home review. Checks are also made on the vehicles used by the foster carer. Any recommendations are noted in the review report. However, problems current at the time of the inspection in undertaking annual reviews, will affect these checks.

The inspectors were informed of an occasion when, due to shortages of placements, two siblings were required to share a bed for a number of weeks. There have been other occasions when young people have had to share a bedroom with other young people when it has not been appropriate. This is because the authority has insufficient foster carers to provide suitable placements for all young people.

Risk assessment were not seen on files regarding sharing of bedrooms if a young person has been abused or has abused other young people. The referral form does ask for details of any history of sexualised behaviour and whether there are any concerns or suspicion that a young person may pose a risk to other children, either physically or sexually. Inspectors were also shown draft proformas for recording risk, which the manager hopes will be introduced in the next few months.

### 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 examination of the foster carers register it was apparent that there are a number of foster carers from different ethnic backgrounds and this allows the service to meet the needs of a number of young people who are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Inspectors met with asian foster carers who had two young people placed with them from the same racial heritage. The placement was seen to meet the young people's religious and cultural needs well. Same race placements are not always possible although the authority does strive for this. Where a racially appropriate placement is not available workers from the Black support group can be used to offer additional support, however, it was unclear as to how this additional support is triggered.

Inspectors saw evidence of foster carers providing considerable support for young people with disabilities to ensure that their needs were met. This was often in spite of a feeling of lack of support from the department. For example some foster carers commented on the



difficulty in obtaining suitable equipment for young people with disabilities due to disagreements between health and social services as to who is responsible for providing the equipment. It is recommended that a protocol is established regarding this issue between the two authorities, and that where there is any dispute, the equipment is supplied to the child as needed, and the finance agreed afterwards.

Carers were seen to ensure that young people are supported to meet their potential, but there is a need for carers to receive training in helping young people deal with all forms of discrimination.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

Inspectors have considerable concerns about the authority's ability to provide matched placements for young people. Whilst there have been improvements in ensuring that relevant information is available at the point of referral, it is considered that there are still frequent problems in obtaining information other than basic details. Social workers sometimes have very little information themselves, and sometimes there is a resistance to providing it, as social workers do not understand why it is needed.

In addition, there is little or no opportunity to match a young people's needs with the skills of foster carers due to a shortage of foster placements. Young people generally have to be placed with whichever foster carer has a vacancy. Well over a third of carers considered that they had been asked to take unsuitable placements, and just under a third felt they had received insufficient information about children. In both areas a few carers said there had been recent improvements, and one carer said they thought social workers were 'trying to be more honest these days'.

The inspectors were informed that the social worker for children already in placement, or their team manager, would be consulted if the placement of another child in that foster home was being planned. It was estimated that this happens in about 70% of cases.

Care plans were not available on most young people's files

Foster placement agreements are not compliant with Schedule 6 and do not contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement. At the time of the inspection only LAC placement plans were being used, and not all placements had fully completed plans. However, the authority is hoping to introduce Foster Placement Agreement meetings, working to a new format, in the near future, at which such plans will be agreed between all parties.

Both foster carers and social workers commented that that it is rare that a young person has the opportunity to have a period of introduction or to give their views about a proposed placement. Most placements are made in an emergency although the inspectors did visit two young people who had had the opportunity for a brief period of introduction.

<b>Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)</b> <b>The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Foster carers were aware through training of the need to practice safe caring however, each foster home does not have safe care guidelines that are based on a written policy. This policy needs to be developed and each foster home's guidelines agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child. Foster carers commented that they are not always provided with full information about the young people they care for or their families, to ensure that they are able to protect the young people, or other young people they care for. It is essential that all involved with the placement of a child appreciate the importance of such detail for the care and protection of the child and of the foster carer household.</p> <p>Foster carers are also aware that corporal punishment is unacceptable, and this is made clear in the Foster Care Agreement.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection no system had been developed to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a young person in foster care. Nonetheless, evidence seen by inspectors indicated that concerns and allegations are properly investigated.</p> <p>Foster carers spoken to were aware of how to support young people who may be subject to bullying.</p> <p>There is some guidance for carers when foster children are missing from home within the carer's handbook, but these are not clear in terms of the actions expected of carers, or the records they should keep. There is a record format but this does not specify a record of the time or manner of the child's return, and does not require the time the absence was reported to the child's social worker or the police, only the date. It is recommended that this be revised.</p>		
<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	X	%

<b>Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)</b> <b>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.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Inspectors saw no evidence of risk assessments regarding contact and foster carers felt that placing social workers are not providing all available information when contact arrangements are made, and that this puts carers and the young people at risk.</p> <p>The Authority do have a contract with Spurgeon's in respect of supervising contact visits and the Placement Support team often provide support for contact visits, however, a number of foster carers expressed concerns regarding lack of support for themselves and the young people in respect of contact.</p> <p>In addition they are not paid mileage for the contact visits that they undertake, on the basis set out in the carers handbook, that approximately 200 miles per month is included in the fostering allowance for each child. Carers can claim if their mileage for the department exceeds this amount. However, this calculation is based on petrol costs only, and does not include the other costs of running a car. It is recommended that this be reviewed by the fostering service.</p> <p>As foster carers are not provided with completed Foster Placement Agreements and LAC</p>		

paperwork is often either non-existent or only partially completed, contact arrangements are not clear when a young person is placed and little consultation with the foster carers or young person takes place prior to arrangements being made.

**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

Due to the emergency nature of most placements young people's views are not sought prior to placement, although where this is possible, a period of introductions does take place. There are formats for seeking the views of young people, and of their family members as part of the foster carers review process, however, the inspectors did not see any of these used during the inspection process. Obviously the involvement of the young people and their family is an option they may not choose to take, but the presentation of the forms may be a factor, in that they are formal, not child-friendly, and state at the top 'Your comments will be shared with the foster carer and, where appropriate, will be presented to the Fostering Panel as part of the Review.' Some revision of this format, and some provision for discussion regarding the information shared may be appropriate.

Young people are encouraged to attend their own LAC reviews, and evidence indicated that foster carers provide invaluable support to young people through this process.

Information from thirteen questionnaires returned by young people indicate that all of them had been asked for their views on their foster carers, and all but one knew how to make a complaint.

Somewhat surprisingly, since the children's guide has not yet been issued, just over half said they had received a children's guide or information about the fostering service. None had been asked for their views on how the fostering service could be made better.

Within the foster home itself nine said they were often asked for their opinions and ideas, while four said they were sometimes asked.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

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

2

Young people's health needs are generally well met by foster carers, with carers ensuring that young people are registered with local primary care practitioners. However, foster carers stated that they did not always receive sufficient information from placing social worker regarding a young person's health when they were placed and this can jeopardise a young person's health.

The foster carer's handbook says that the Placement Plan Part 1 is relied on for consent to certain treatments but also states that permission for emergency treatment must be obtained from social services, and states that the person's with parental responsibility must consent to any injections or immunisations. This section is a little confusing, mainly because the section on dental and optical treatment precedes that on other medical treatment and is written in general terms.

Carers are advised to record all details of illness or injury in their diary and also to complete an injury record sheet, which then becomes the source for information to meet monitoring needs.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

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

3

Foster carers were seen to work closely with schools to support young people in their education. However, most files examined for this inspection did not contain PEP's, although it is noted that these were present on files examined for the previous inspection. There is clearly some lack of consistency which needs to be addressed.

The shortage of foster carers results in a lack of stability in young people's education placements in that it is rare that a placement can be found convenient to the young person's existing school and therefore a change of school is often necessary when a placement is made. Where there is an attempt to maintain the consistency of schooling for young people this often results in long and tiring journey's for the young people with the transport being provided being unreliable.

The current foster placement agreement does not include information as to where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including uniform, school trips and equipment. The foster carer handbook states that allowances are available for the cost of school uniform on a change of schools, but does not state how much may be paid. Similarly it states that the cost of day trips are usually met from the fostering allowance but more costly trips should be discussed with the child's social worker, and financial help must be agreed before any commitment is made. These trips must be part of the school curriculum. Inspectors were informed that some young people had missed out on school trips due to the delay in obtaining appropriate consents for such trips, and it is recommended that these circumstances be anticipated and agreed as far as possible in the placement agreement, and reviewed in the child's LAC reviews.

The handbook does not address the issue of consent for school trips, even those which involve travel abroad. This should be addressed in the handbook, and is also a requirement for the foster placement agreement.

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**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The Authority has a Service Level Agreement with Spurgeon's to provide Leaving Care Support. However, there was no evidence of this work on either young people's files or in discussion with the young people. In respect of one young person a Needs Assessment under the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 had been recorded but there was no evidence of a Pathway to assist the young person to move towards adulthood.

In discussion with foster carers it appeared that much of this responsibility is left to them, yet the carer handbook provides no guidance as to what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. This policy needs to be developed.

The training schedule for 2005 shows that a course entitled 'Leaving Care Act Briefing' is planned, although no date had been confirmed. This is to be a mandatory course, and will be useful in ensuring carers know what should be in place for young people approaching adulthood.

## 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

A sample of five personnel files were inspected, and sound practice was evidenced in many respects, including recent photographs on each file, the completion of thorough application forms for each post applied for, and that a period of probation had been attached to the most recent offer of a permanent post.

However, there was no documentary proof of qualifications on files, no proof of identity, and only 2 out of 5 files contained copies of the job description. Only 1 file contained a reference obtained for the post currently held, as staff had moved within the department.

No system has yet been established to follow up written references by phone.

CRB checks had been carried out on almost all staff during 2004, but the results of two were still awaited.

Appropriate checks are carried out on carers, and a system of obtaining two non-family references had been implemented.

Total number of staff of the agency:

10

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

5

### 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

Administrative staff reported that there were insufficient staff to undertake the tasks required, but it was difficult for the inspectors to make any objective assessment of this, in relation to fostering in particular, since these staff provide administrative support to the adoption service as well. This is a matter that the service should assess.

The workload management system has now been revised and implemented, and should now be used to monitor the ability of the service to respond to need.

There is an excellent system for responding to enquiries from prospective carers, through the Recruitment officers, and for responding to requests for services, through the Duty Officer. However, the person currently undertaking the role of duty officer is seconded from another team for a six month period, and some changes are due to be made to the recruiting officer system following the appointment of a Marketing Officer. In these areas again, the fostering service needs to ensure that permanent appointments are made swiftly, and that changes that are made result in an improved and more effective service.

When making a referral to an independent agency the authority uses only those who have

signed a Pre-Placement Agreement with the Midlands Child Care Consortium, and the inspectors were informed that the placements officer accesses the inspection reports for these agencies, as required by this standard. In considering a particular foster carer offered by an IFA, the duty officer requests their Form F and a list of recent placements. It is also recommended that the most recent foster home review is requested.

There have been tensions between the fostering service and children's social work teams in the past. The managers are working to reduce these, but there is still further room for improvement, and a need has been identified in several areas for children's social workers to understand their role in the fostering process.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The service has taken a number of positive initiatives to promote the recruitment of sufficient foster carers, including the development of the payment for skills scheme, dedicated recruitment officers, and professional marketing, all of which are commended as excellent practice. Now that a marketing officer has been appointed, it is essential that recruitment is targeted at the types of carer most needed by the fostering service.

However, it is clear that the service has insufficient carers to meet the needs of the children and young people in the care of Wolverhampton, who need a fostering service. This is a situation which is common to many local authorities to a greater or lesser degree. However, this cannot be improved without sufficient staffing.

In comparison with other local authorities inspected in this area within the past year, the fostering service in Wolverhampton is very significantly understaffed, by a factor of about fifty per cent. This results in the service being unable to meet the requirements of these standards.

Of foster carers returning completed questionnaires, 87% said they did not consider the service had enough staff, and many made the point that the staff in post do a good job, but have a heavy workload.

In addition, policies and practice do not encourage the retention of staff, in particular, the fact that staff in other children's service teams receive 4-6 days more annual leave than fostering service staff, the over use of acting up arrangements for extended periods of time, and the fact that both pay scales and workloads compare unfavourably with nearby authorities.

**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

Staff universally reported that since April they have been well supported and well supervised. They feel that they are valued and their work appreciated, even though more than one person commented that they have never worked so hard in their lives! However, this situation is a tribute to the work of the acting team manager rather than the practices of the service, and staff will not be able to maintain this high morale and level of work indefinitely unless the increase in staffing in the fostering service is implemented.

It cannot be said that the service operates sound employment practices, in the light of the excessive use of acting-up arrangements, and the differential in annual leave between different teams in the social services department, already identified.

The carer's perceptions of their own support varied in relation to the qualities of the social

workers for the children they fostered, and to the support they received from the fostering service. Some are unallocated within the fostering service.

The service is to be commended for the 24 hour support telephone line for foster carers, manned by experienced foster carers, who have access to other sources of support within the department.

There are shortcomings in respect of the two policies required within this standards. There is no whistleblowing policy within the carer's handbook at all, and deficits in the staff policy identified in the last inspection have not been addressed. Similarly there is no health and safety policy on either the carers or staff manuals.

**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?**

2

It is positive to note that both staff and carers have been trained in delivering the new Skills to Foster Programme, and that staff are undertaking the PQCC award.

There is a system for periodic evaluation of training, and joint training is available, within practical constraints. One of the issues in respect of joint training is that foster carers are only available for a relatively short day, which means training programmes have to be delivered over a greater number of days to cover the same material.

Newly appointed staff reported receiving an induction programme, but agency and other temporary staff were not so well served. The need for agency staff to receive appropriate induction was identified at the last inspection. The department should consider developing a standard but flexible induction programme and all staff, including agency staff, should receive adequate induction, commencing within 7 days of starting work, and completed within 10 weeks.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The inspectors were informed that all staff do have copies of their job descriptions, and have access to policies and procedures.

Staff unanimously reported receiving regular and good quality supervision since April 2004, which is recorded. The inspectors did not have access to these records, and it would be helpful if a supervision matrix was maintained in future, giving dates, times etc of supervision, signed by both parties. Staff development interviews have been taking place since April.

Regular monthly team meetings take place and are minuted. These are a forum in which staff can raise issues of concern, as well as an opportunity for managers to share information.



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

The service has a good strategy for working with carers, including the excellent Foster Care Centre, which was rated as one of the best things about fostering for Wolverhampton by 52% of carers completing questionnaires. In addition a very good foster carer newsletter is regularly produced.

There is also a good system for carrying out annual reviews of carers, but this is currently suspended as the independent chair previously carrying out the reviews had had to cease work due to illness. The post is to be advertised very shortly, but no reviews were taking place at the time of the inspection. The requirement from the last inspection regarding annual reviews therefore remains in place.

Half of the carers stated in their questionnaires they their level of support was OK most of the time, and a further quarter said they were very satisfied with the level of support. The weakness of the system, as in previous matters, remains with the shortage of staff to support carers, and many carers wrote about the changes of supervising social worker they had experienced and of periods of time with no allocated worker.

**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 Agreement has been recently revised but there remain a few matters which are not covered. These include the requirements to co-operate with the Commission, and compliance with child protection policies and children missing from care policies. In addition, the arrangements for support for foster carers only states that a named social worker is provided 'in a majority of cases' when the standard requires all carers to be allocated a named, appropriately qualified foster carer. Some carers did not have up to date agreements on their files, but only agreements made under the 1991 Children Act Regulations.

Not all carers had received supervision on a regular basis, due to the shortage of staff, although there was evidence of staff commitment to achieving this wherever possible.

In addition, the service had planned, as part of forthcoming restructuring, to provide foster carer supervision and support through a group of staff comprising one qualified social worker and four support workers, recruited for their relevant experience but not qualified.

Regrettably, the inspector did not recognise that this would not meet the standards until the final day of the inspection. The interpretation of the standard has since been further clarified within CSCI, and it is confirmed that foster carer supervision must be carried out by a qualified social worker. It has therefore been suggested that the service draw up a different structure which allows for supervision to be provided by qualified social workers, and support to be provided by the appropriately experienced but unqualified staff. In addition, the caseload for each worker must be such as to allow them to provide appropriate supervision or support in a manner which is able to respond to the carer's needs. The one support worker who had already been appointed at the date of the inspection had been allocated over 40 carers to supervise. She was approaching this task with enthusiasm, but this cannot be considered a realistic workload.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The staff development officer for children's services takes a lead in arranging training for foster carers. The inspectors have received a copy of the training plan for the year. This indicates a sound programme for carers to which staff have access. At the next inspection inspectors would like to see a programme of training planned for delivery over a period of perhaps three years, which would cover all the areas of training identified in the standards, such as Health & Safety responsibilities, ways of raising children's confidence and self esteem, ways of helping children deal with discrimination, and developing independence skills.

Training is provided in Care & Control, based on the Cornell University programme of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, but this does not include training in restraint techniques at present. It has been agreed that a policy must be in place before training can be provided, and this must also link to risk assessment. The requirement from the last inspection therefore still stands.

'The Skills to Foster' is to replace the current 'Choosing to Foster' training programme, and the Black Country Consortium has made an arrangement which will allow potential carers for Wolverhampton to access training programmes in neighbouring areas as well, to provide a quicker response and greater choice. Experienced carers will co-present this training. Preparation training for the sons and daughters of prospective carers was successfully provided for the first time this year and a continuation and development of this is planned, incorporating some new material from the 'Skills to Foster' course. Inspectors were particularly pleased with this development. There is also an established ongoing training programme.

Where training takes place at the Foster Care Centre, carers are supported by the provision of a crèche, which is greatly appreciated. However, issues were raised about the accessibility of training for carers when it is located at the training unit's base, and carers were not sure about the financial support available to facilitate their attendance, such as for the use of taxis. Ongoing training in other languages, such as Punjabi, was also requested, and this was also a request made at the last inspection. Training has been made available in Punjabi, but it is suggested that the service reviews this to ensure that sufficient training is provided to allow carers to progress through the different levels of payment for skills, and to meet their other training needs.

Carers do have access to the NVQ award, now through the excellent electronic portfolio route, but the take up has been rather disappointing to date.

## 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 case records examined by the inspectors were those maintained by the fieldwork services of the local authority, not by the fostering service. They were generally well ordered but the majority lacked full and completed documentation, with Care Plans and LAC documentation missing on most files. Where such documentation was seen on file it was often poorly completed with inadequate information to ensure that the documentation is useful. A requirement regarding the provision of LAC documentation to the fostering service has already been made under FS8. Files were also not always up to date. Discussion with foster carers highlighted that they were not always informed why a young person is in foster care and are therefore unable to assist the young people to understand the reasons they are away from home. Foster carers visited clearly demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the importance of supporting young people to understand their history. The inspector was privileged to be shown the memorabilia kept by two young people in their special boxes. All carers were seen to store information in a secure manner with the service having provided carers with metal locking boxes to keep confidential information.

**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?**

1

At the time of the inspection the service did not have records as required by Standard 25.2. Neither the register of register of foster carers or of young people placed with foster carers is compliant with the standards. Nor were they seen to be accurate.

The register of foster carers does not include full name, date of birth or gender of each carer, nor the date of their approval and of each review of approval. Neither is there a record of children placed which meets the requirements of Schedule 2.

The difficulty in complying with this standard is exacerbated by the lack of appropriate computer resources and programmes. Nor does the service keep a record of allegations and complaints. Whilst there is a multi-agency concern form available on foster carers files, information is not kept centrally and is therefore not available to allow robust monitoring of trends and patterns.

There was evidence that the Assistant Team Manager monitors files.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>	221
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b> These figures include changes in legal status of children in placement.	333
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b> As above	351
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>	26
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>	10
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	£66.31
<b>Maximum £</b>	466.83

## 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 based in one of the local area offices in the Bilston area of Wolverhampton. The team is located in a large open plan office, which is not always conducive to good working arrangements. Staff have limited access to computers, with only 2 computers being available for all the fostering and adoption staff. Consequently much of the work has to be done by hand and then typed by the admin staff. Links with other departments and staff is not easily facilitated due to lack of access to e-mail system. However, during the course of the inspection a commitment was given by the Council to provide computers for each member of the fostering team staff, as well as new desks and new carpeting, which will greatly improve the working environment. Accordingly, a recommendation regarding the provision of computers has been made, but with the recognition that a commitment has already been made. All computer systems are security protected and backed up by a central team. This does on occasions interfere with work being undertaken by staff as it is undertaken during working hours and can be a time consuming process.

## 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?

9

This standard is not applicable to local authority fostering services and is therefore not inspected.

### 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?

9

This standard is not formally inspected as part of a local authority fostering service inspection, but the authority has provided the inspectors with budget information for the fostering service, and with the financial procedures in operation in the local authority. These demonstrate a clearly written set of principles, standards and practices, which are known to the managers of the fostering service.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Carers are paid weekly in arrears, and written information is provided each week detailing the composition of the payment. It is positive to be able to say that carers unanimously reported that payments are made promptly and accurately, and that any difficulties are quickly resolved by the finance officers, who are unfailingly helpful.

All carers are paid a weekly allowance to cover the costs of caring for each child. The Fostering Network, the national charity which takes a lead in fostering issues, provides a recommended minimum level of allowances for foster care, which varies with the age of the child and which is reviewed each year. The allowances paid by Wolverhampton fall short of these recommended minimum rates by an average of one third, and this may also contribute to the shortage of foster carers for the authority.

However, the authority also has a scheme of Payment for Skills for carers, on three levels, which provides carers with a fee in acknowledgement of their time and skills. This scheme is not without problems and a review of its structure and operation had just commenced at the time of the inspection. Consultation meetings had been arranged at three different times of day to discuss proposed changes with carers. The new scheme was to be managed within the same overall budget, so while some will gain from whatever new structure is agreed, others will lose some income.

Since the recommended minimum rates are calculated to cover the average actual costs of providing for a fostered child, the authority should consider revising the allowances alongside the revision of the payments for skills.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

2

Panel is largely appropriately constituted, and it is very positive to have an independent chair. The authority has now nominated an elected member who is committed to this role and has now commenced attendance. Another independent member is needed and there may have been a suitable person identified who has been previously fostered and has had a child in foster care. Panel carried out their functions thoughtfully and appropriately. There do not appear to be panel policy and procedures covering the process when member are not in agreement, or the suitability of Panel members. Members have not been checked for suitability.

It is a point of good practice that exemptions to the usual fostering limit of three are reported to the Panel. However, Panel does not have sufficient information about these situations to make an informed decision or confirmation. For example, Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 details the issues the local authority should have regard to in respect of exemptions to the usual fostering limit, and it does not appear that carers receive notifications of the extension of their approval, as required by paragraph 3 of the schedule.



## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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A part-time dedicated Shared Care Organiser had been appointed shortly before the inspection. This person has previous experience in disabilities as well as fostering and is enthusiastic about this new role. She intends to develop weekend support groups for shared carers and has already achieved parity for shared carers in terms of receiving Christmas and birthday allowances for the children they care for. A Shared Carers newsletter is also planned, as is a Christmas Party designed to meet the specific needs of the children who use shared care.

The inspectors did not identify any specific issues in relation to the Shared Care Scheme, but from previous experience consider that the issue of medical consents and the administration of medication needs to be carefully examined in such schemes.

## 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?

2

The need to transfer responsibility for relative and friend carers to the fostering service is fully accepted and has commenced, but in the light of insufficient staffing in the service, more staff are needed for this to be a realistic option.

There is evidence that the authority does approach family and friends carers in ways that encourage their consideration as carers and recognises the importance of pre-existing relationships. Support and training needs should be individually assessed but with the understanding that there will be some differences with other carers, and also some specialist needs common to kinship carers.

The payments for skills scheme is not open to relative carers, and as the scheme is revised the fostering service should ensure that the reasons for this are consistent with the other requirements of the scheme, and that relative carers are not simply excluded because of their relationship to the child.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include Provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

**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 16<sup>th</sup> December 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I \_\_\_\_\_ of WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL 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 \_\_\_\_\_ of WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL 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.

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

Telephone: 020 7979 2000  
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120  
[www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

S0000058404.V181258.R02

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