



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

## Fostering Services

### **Stoke Social Services Fostering Service**

Civic Centre

Glebe Street

Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire

ST4 1HF

10,13,21,22,23 and 27 January 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**

Stoke Social Services Fostering Service

**Address**

Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire,  
ST4 1HF

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

01782 235901

**Address**

Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire,  
ST4 1HF

**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 ?**

**Date of last inspection**

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		13 January 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Vivien Slyfield	075999
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Chris Garrett	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Helen Oakley	

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<b>Lead Inspector</b>	Viv Slyfield	<b>Signature</b>	<i>Viv Slyfield</i>
<b>Second Inspector</b>		<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Locality Manager</b>	Stuart Rudd	<b>Signature</b>	<i>Stuart Rudd</i>
<b>Date</b>	25 October 2004		

#### 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.

## 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 Stoke Social Services 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

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.

Stoke-on-Trent was established as a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. It is described in the Joint Review undertaken by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Audit Commission as “overall it has a significant level of deprivation, with high levels of disability and limiting long-term illness, below average life expectancy, lower earning levels and higher unemployment than the average for the West Midlands and England.” In this context the authority provides a fostering service as part of its provision of social services for the communities it serves.

The family placement service provides substitute family care for children and young people between the ages of 0 – 17. The service recruits, trains, assesses and approves all foster carers, apart from those family and friends carers who care for specific children known to them. The service provides carers who offer a full range of care; emergency placements, respite, task-centred, long-term, Family Link Respite and Remand Care. Most of the workers are based at Heron Cross House. From here they provide a duty placement finding service and run a range of training and support activities. Two further teams based in other parts of the city support the Family Link and Remand Carers.

At the time of the inspection the family placement service was under internal review as the last aspect of a full review of the authority’s social service provision.

## 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.)

At the time of this inspection Stoke-on-Trent was reviewing its fostering service, as the last phase in reviewing all its social service provision. It also came at a time when the nominated manager for the service was about to leave. The service was therefore at a time of change, which was reflected in some of the inspection findings. Despite this staff and carers were well prepared, welcoming and contributed well. The Family Placement Team manager planned and organised the inspection very effectively.

Foster carers, children, family placement and placing social workers and managers of the fostering service were interviewed as part of the inspection fieldwork. The carers were selected to cover examples of the range of different types of care provided by Stoke-on-Trent Social Services. In addition to these interviews questionnaires were sent to carers, children and young people over eight and placing social workers. Of these, 25 foster carer questionnaires, 23 children and young people's questionnaires and 161 questionnaires from placing social workers were returned. Inspectors met with a group of young people, a group of foster carers and another of family placement workers and a group of family placement and children's social workers. Information was received in the form of the Pre-Inspection questionnaire and Managers Self-Assessment. Information is drawn from all these sources in completing the report.

The most significant findings relate to the number of children in some placements and lack of compliance with the Children Act in considering exemptions from the usual fostering limit and to the fragmented structure of the service, which has an impact on a number of standards inspected. The National Minimum Standards used for the inspection are still relatively new and there are a number of areas that need further work and improvement.

In summary the following addresses the standards consecutively;



**Statement of Purpose.** The Statement of Purpose provided was in draft form. It needs to include all the services provided by the fostering service. There was a Children's Guide in place, which was available in a range of different formats.

The policies and procedures need to be reviewed to comply with the regulations and standards from 2002.

**Skills to carry on or manage, suitability to manage and effectiveness of the management.** The manager at the time of the inspection had appropriate experience and qualifications. Issues raised during the inspection and its findings question the effectiveness of senior managers in the operation of the service. There was a lack of consistency across the different arms of the service, which appeared to reflect the lack of monitoring and overview. The service was not viewed as a whole and separate parts viewed their role differently.

The information system needs strengthening to provide accessible, accurate information for the fostering service managers.

**Providing suitable foster carers.** Although under considerable pressure to increase the number of foster carers those approved were seen to provide suitable placements for most children. The concerns in relation to this standard are to do with the high number of children placed with some carers. There were situations of regular misuse of exemptions from the usual fostering limit and a lack of monitoring and strategic planning to address the problem. There was a need to ensure that appropriate checks are recorded and repeated at the time of review to confirm approval continues to be appropriate.

**Valuing Diversity.** The evidence of the inspection was of carers working to address the range of needs of the children placed with them.

**Matching.** There were concerns about the services ability to match children with appropriate placements. Situations where there were large numbers of children indicated a difficulty in meeting the needs of all those in the household. There was also evidence of the Family Placement Team's continuing attempts to control and limit numbers in placements and of their commitment to match appropriately when it was possible.

**Protecting from abuse and neglect.** Foster carers felt well trained in preparation for fostering and have appropriate on-going training available. The training was advertised in the "Foster Carers Training Programme", which was viewed positively by carers. There was some collation of information about allegations and complaints against foster carers, but it was not a consistent and robust system covering the whole service.

Work is needed to ensure that foster carers are provided with full information about the children they care for.

**Promoting Contact.** Information gained during the inspection indicated foster carers understand the importance of contact with birth families and work hard at maintaining contact.

**Consultation.** The fostering service has established systems and methods of consultation with children and young people. There were a number of methods used to listen to the views of young people, for example, the Children's Forum and Bumblebee Group. It was clear the service valued young people's views and was active at looking for ways of seeking them.

**Promoting children's health.** The evidence was that all children and young people placed with foster carers were registered with a GP and had regular dental checks. Information from children and young people indicated a healthy diet was of particular importance to carers. More constructive use could be made of the Child Health Record Book to ensure a consistent record is maintained for all children.

**Promoting educational achievement.** Education was seen to be valued by foster carers, who worked closely with schools. Social Services and Education had also worked closely together in the provision of PCs for children and young people placed with foster carers, to assist with their education. It would be supportive of this development to establish information systems to collate data about children's achievement and school attendance.

**Preparing for adulthood.** This was included in training and seen as an integral part of the carers work with children and young people. There were positive comments from young people about carers help in developing skills for independent living. While there was some evidence seen of Pathway Planning this needs to be clearly and consistently in place on all appropriate files. Involvement with the Leaving Care Team was viewed positively by foster carers and young people.

**Suitability to work with children.** There are some appropriate recruitment and selection processes in place. However, there was no evidence of telephone interviews being required to support staff references. There is also a need to improve the recording of the selection process, ensuring that all references, qualification and CRB checks are in place and that there is full compliance with schedules 1 and 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Systems should be put in place that ensure all staff undertaking fostering assessments are trained in this work with refresher courses made available.

**Organisation and management of Staff.** The structure and organisation of the fostering service is in need of review in order to provide an efficient and effective service that supports foster carers and staff in providing quality care for children and young people.

**Sufficient staff/carers with the right skills/experience.** The assessments of foster carers was variable in quality. There needs to be consideration of all carer assessments being completed by the teams and workers who focus on substitute family care assessments. Currently assessments are not competency based nor do they reflect risk assessment of the carers' home.

There were consistent messages received about insufficient staff for the service, some of which relates to difficulties in recruitment. The vast majority of foster carers saw the Family Placement Team as doing an excellent job limited by the number of staff available.

**Fair and competent employer.** The evidence of the inspection was that Stoke-on-Trent was a fair and competent employer. There were clear systems for supervision, which was reported to take place regularly. There are appropriate policies and procedures in place to support practice.

**Training.** Training was reported to be available for staff, although not always relevant to family placement work. More specific family placement training is needed. A programme of joint training with carers and staff also needs to be established.

**Accountability and support.** Due to the structure of the fostering service the lines of accountability are clear within each team but not for the service as a whole. There are regular team meetings, but all those working in fostering do not have an opportunity to meet together, nor do the managers involve in the provision of fostering.

**Management and support of carers.** Carers were mixed in their view about the amount and quality of the support they received. Some felt the need for far greater involvement from the children and young people's social workers. The majority felt well supported by the Family Placement Team.

**Supervision of carers.** There was regular supervision of carers, which is recorded. These meetings were viewed as being different from other visits undertaken by the family placement workers. The Foster Carer Agreement has been reviewed and updated in line with Schedule 5. This format needs to be signed by all foster carers and a copy placed on their files.

**Training of carers.** The content of the carers training is appropriate and well constructed. Training is well planned and accessible for foster carers. Foster carers appreciated being able to view the training programme for the whole year, rather than course by course.

**Case records for children.** Some records were well structured and ordered but this was not consistent across all files. There was concern about the limited use of Placement Agreements, which should be completed and held on file in relation to each child placed with foster carers.

Some carers felt they had limited information about children and young people at the time of placement, others that they had full information. There was a clear recognition that this information was sometimes not available, but some carers still felt communication of this information could improve.

**Administrative records.** Children and carers' records are appropriately stored separately. The separate recording of complaints and allegations and their outcomes needs to be established in a comprehensive and robust system in order to provide an overview of these occurrences across the city and to comply with the National Minimum Standards. The recent improvement in notification of such situations to the Commission needs to be maintained.

**Premises.** The premises seen during the inspection were appropriate for the purpose. Consideration is needed of the provision of lockable doors for the rooms where files are stored.

**Payments to carers.** Carers reported payments were regular and on time. There is a need to improve the information to carers about all allowances to ensure all are fully aware of the availability.

**Fostering Panels.** The panel is still in the process of establishing full membership under the current regulations. This needs to be rectified and systems put in place to allow the panel to fulfil all its functions of monitoring and quality assurance.

**Short-term breaks. Family and Friends as Cares.** These services are integrated into the fostering service as a whole and the previous comments relate to carers providing short-term breaks for children and young people.

**Family and Friends as Cares.** At the time of the inspection the assessment of this group of carers was undertaken by the social worker for the child. Family and friends carers did not routinely have a support worker from the Family Placement Team, they did not attend initial training and they did not have an annual review. Provision of this aspect of the service needs to be incorporated in to the fostering service.

There are a number of significant areas that need to be strengthened in the fostering service and it is hoped that the internal review will provide a structure on which to base the sound progress and development that is needed. There are some skilled and experienced workers within the service whose potential could be realised in moving the service forward.

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

**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

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

YES

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

Failure to comply with the Children Act 1989 and with the Fostering Service Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

**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	

**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>		

## 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	3 (1)	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must include all aspects of the fostering service and comply with NMS 1.4	31.5.04
2	20 (3)		The fostering service must ensure that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references in the appointment of all staff and that all references and checks are appropriately recorded.	30.4.04
3	20 (2) (3)	FS3	The fostering service must ensure CRB checks are renewed every three years.	30.4.04
4	29 (2)	FS4	The fostering service must monitor and control all aspects of its service in compliance with Schedule 7.	30.4.04
5	10 (1) (2) (3)	FS5	The structure of the fostering service must be reviewed to ensure it can be managed effectively and efficiently.	30.7.04
6	33 (b)	FS6	The fostering service must ensure that the needs of children and young people are met with regard to the number of people living in each foster carer's home.	28.6.04
7	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7	FS8	The fostering service must address the high number of exemptions from the usual fostering limit.	Immediate



8	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 4.(2)(3)(4)	FS8	Where an exemption from the usual fostering limit is granted the requirements of Schedule 7 are fulfilled.	Immediate
9	34(3) Schedule 6	FS8	The fostering service must ensure Placement Agreements are in place in respect of all children in foster placements.	30.4.04
10	20 Schedule 1	FS15	The fostering service must ensure that appropriate records are kept of the matters relating to the appointment of staff identified in Schedule 1.	30.404
11	10, 8	FS16	The fostering service must be structured in such a manner as to ensure it can consistently provide an efficient and effective service.	30.7.04
12	29	FS16	The fostering service must consistently review all its foster carers annually.	30.4.04
13	21	FS17	All Family Placement Workers must receive training in assessment work, including the use of competencies.	29.10.04
14	21(4) (a)	FS19	The fostering service must provide appropriate and relevant training for its staff, including training on recording for social workers.	On going
15	21(4)(a)	FS20	The fostering service must provide appropriate supervision for all staff engaged in fostering work.	30.7.04
16	35 (1)	FS21	The social services must provide appropriate support to the foster carers and visits to the child placed by their social worker.	On going
17	28(5)(b)	FS22	The fostering service must ensure that Foster Carer Agreements complying with Schedule 5 are in place on all foster carer's files.	30.7.04
18	22	FS25	The fostering service must record in the form of a register the information specified in Schedule 2.	30.4.04
19	22	FS30	The fostering service must ensure an appropriate CRB check is obtained on all panel members before they start work.	On going

20	29	FS32	The fostering service must ensure annual reviews are undertaken in relation to family and friends carers and that their training needs are met as a part of this process.	30.7.04

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The fostering service should finalise the Children's Guide and consider the provision of a range of Guides accessible to children and young people with a range of skills and abilities.
2	FS1	The fostering service should review its policies, procedures and guidance in line with the NMS.
3	FS4	The fostering service should have an IT system, which supports the monitoring of the service and provides managers with relevant information to assist in the management task and compliance with the NMS and Fostering Regulations.
4	FS4	The fostering service should provide information about the costs of its service to assist managers.
5	FS6	The fostering service should ensure that appropriate information is available and recorded about foster carer's vehicles at the time of approval and review.
6		The fostering service should establish a clear written protocol from granting and monitoring exemptions from the usual fostering limit.
7		The fostering service should consider the development of albums/booklets about foster carers and their homes to allow children and young people to have some information prior to all placements, including emergency placements.
8	FS9	The fostering service should address in training the need to boost and maintain children's self-esteem.
9	FS9	The fostering service should ensure that placing social workers are clear about the methods and standards of discipline expected from foster carers.

10	FS22	The fostering service should ensure that all allegations against foster carers are recorded, collated and monitored consistently.
11	FS9	The fostering service should provide full information to foster carers about each child they intend to place with them.
12	FS12	The fostering service should consider the use of the Child Health Record Book in providing a written health record for each child placed with foster carers.
13	FS13	The provision for children and young people who are excluded from school while placed with foster carers is made explicit in the Placement Agreement for each child.
14	FS13	The fostering service should establish information systems to collate, monitor and evaluate the educational attainment of children and young people in their care.
15	FS14	The fostering service should ensure that young people are able to have private consultation with a doctor if they wish to.
16	FS16	The fostering service should establish a training portfolio for all its foster carers, which is appraised as part of the annual review.
17	FS17	A clear retention strategy should be in place for the staff of the fostering service. <sup>17</sup>
18	FS18	A written whistle blowing policy should be established and copies given to staff of the fostering service and carers.
19	FS19	The fostering service should provide joint training between staff and foster carers.
20	FS20	The fostering service should provide the opportunity for all fostering staff to meet together on a regular basis.
21		The fostering service should ensure appropriate, consistent support is given to all approved foster carers.
22		Consideration should be given to training for children's social workers in the role of the foster carer.
23		The system for the annual review of foster carers should ensure that all the relevant information is collated and considered before the review is finalised.
24		The fostering service should ensure that all approved foster carers are supervised by a named and appropriately qualified social worker.
25		All training courses should be made available to all foster carers, including those with specific approval.

26	FS23	The fostering service should review its training provision at least annually.
27		Stoke-on-Trent Social Services should encourage all social workers to attend training in recording.
28	FS26	The fostering service should consider the storage of confidential information in lockable rooms.
29	FS29	The fostering service should provide written information covering the full range of allowances for foster carers.
30	FS30	The fostering service should review the method used to deliver panel papers to panel members.
31	FS30	The fostering service should ensure that all panel minutes contain full and appropriate information.
32	FS32	The fostering service should ensure assessments of family and friend's carers are undertaken by social workers with skills and training in substitute family placement assessment.

\* 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.

<b>PART B</b>	<b>INSPECTION METHODS &amp; FINDINGS</b>
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The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	11.3
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NA
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NA
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	NA
• 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	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	10/1/04
Time of Inspection	13.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	84

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?

2

At the time of the inspection there was a draft Statement of Purpose in place, which had been subject to some consultation with staff but not approved by the council. It goes a long way to meeting this standard. It needs to include details of the fostering services provided by the Youth Offending Team and the Family Link Team and some information about reviewing carers. The inspectors were informed that neither the manager of the YOT or Family Link Team had been asked to comment on the draft Statement of Purpose. A Children's Guide was in draft and stated it was available in audio, disk, Braille, large print and other languages, specifying Punjabi, Urdu and Bengalese. It was positive to note the consultation with young people about the Guide. It would be helpful to build on this positive start by considering different formats for the Guide, which would make it accessible to children and young people of different ages, as the current draft would appear more appropriate for older children and young people.

The policies, procedures and guidance of the fostering service need to be reviewed in line with the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

## 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?

1

The appointed manager at the time of the inspection had appropriate child care experience and qualifications. However, not all aspects of the fostering service were responsible to the same line manager and the appointed manager had no responsibility directly for the Family Link and Remand Care. In addition to this the inspectors were informed that the appointed manager was soon to leave the department.

The situation in the fostering service at the time of the inspection raised questions about the level of competency and effectiveness of senior management in relation to this service. The direct management of the main Family Placement Team offers effective leadership based on experience, skills and knowledge of family placement work. It was reported that this was highly valued by staff.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The Recruitment and Selection procedure for the service does not specify the need to follow up written references with telephone enquiries. Similarly the system for the recording of checks and references needs to be clarified and more specific. These selection issues need to be rectified to comply with the regulations and NMS. The procedures also need to be reviewed to ensure that CRB are renewed three yearly. This was not being undertaken routinely at the time of the inspection.

The person specification indicates the need for managers of the service to have knowledge and experience of child care work and the post holder at the time of interview fulfilled the criteria.



## 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?**

1

There were different aspects of monitoring present in the fostering service. There were established systems for supervision of staff and foster carers, which were reported to work effectively. The annual reviews of foster carers were found not to take place consistently, although there was reported to have been an improvement in the number of reviews undertaken in the last few months.

The management structure for the service makes it difficult for clear and consistent monitoring and control to take place. The lines of accountability are clear but they do not converge to one senior manager even at the level of the director, as the YOT have a separate management system.

The high level of exemptions from the usual fostering limit noted during the inspection did not appear to have been monitored or addressed. Some foster carers commented that they saw inconsistency in the way placements were viewed. At times they were told a sibling group “counted” as one and at other times the children were counted individually. There appeared to be no comprehensive system for monitoring the service as a whole in relation to Schedule 7 of the Fostering Regulations. There was a paper-based system in place in relation to the Family Placement Team at Heron Cross.

The IT system was reported to be unhelpful in providing accurate, reliable information to assist in managing the service. It was reported that staff in the YOT did not have access to computers and that their database was not consistent with that of the Family Placement Team. Inspectors were informed that a new system was about to be installed and managers and staff were optimistic that it would address their needs.

Information was available in information packs for carers about the amounts paid to carers. It was not possible to establish the specific charges for aspects of the fostering service. Again this would be useful management information.

<b>Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:</b>	4
<b>Death of a child placed with foster parents.</b>	0
<b>Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.</b>	0
<b>Serious illness or accident of a child.</b>	0
<b>Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.</b>	1
<b>Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Serious complaint about a foster parent.</b>	1
<b>Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.</b>	7
<b>Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	0
<b>Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:</b>	0

<b>Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	1
<p>There were clear arrangements for delegation of some responsibilities within the management group. The fostering responsibilities of the appointed manager were not explicit in the job description nor was there a clear understanding of who was responsible in her absence. The effective and efficient management of the service is not possible with the current structure. There was no effective senior management overview of the service and no meeting of the managers involved in the provision of fostering.</p>		

## 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

Direct observation during the inspection, comments from the placing social workers' questionnaires and discussion with staff indicated carers were providing a safe environment for children. All the placing social workers felt the children placed with Stoke-on-Trent foster carers were safe and well cared for.

There were areas of concern about the space available to children in foster homes. Eleven of the placing social workers questionnaires raised concern about the space available. This was a significant issue during the inspection in consideration of the number of exemptions from the usual fostering limit that had been in place within the last year. It raises concerns about the level of privacy afforded children and young people in such situations. There were a number of examples of three children sharing a bedroom.

Health and Safety issues are included in the preparation training for foster carers and post approval training is also available. Checks on the vehicles used by foster carers in transporting children need to be made explicit and recorded at the time of assessment and review.

In preparation for the inspection information about the Commission and its role was sent to foster carers. The need for their cooperation is now clearly stated in the revised Foster Care Agreement.

### Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Information sent out to prospective foster carers and the training they receive emphasises the value placed on diversity and the promotion of equality. During the inspection it was evident that it was difficult for the service to consistently recognise each child's full range of needs due to the pressure to find placements leading to increases in the numbers of children in individual foster homes.

The Family Link carers provide a specialised service for children with disability. Evidence from this group of carers was that they had specific training and support in the care they offered. Some referred to social workers visiting children at the weekend to allow them to see the children with the carers. There were examples of close and effective work between carers and social workers and other situations which were not so positive.

**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

This was an area of significant pressure for the service. The number of placements needed had increased in the last year necessitating a particular emphasis on recruitment and approval of carers. The need was still greater than the placements available. This has led to some carers being asked to take children outside their approval range and to be re-approved to accommodate this. There was also evidence of a number of carers repeatedly being granted exemptions from the usual fostering limit. In such situations the Children Act requires the Local Authority granting the exemption to consider the needs of all the children and young people in the household, including those of the carers' own children prior to the placement being made. The Children Act also requires a certificate stating the grounds and conditions of the exemption to be issued to the carers. There was little evidence of this happening. Nor was there a consistent mechanism to ensure such situations were notified to the fostering panel. There was evidence of the Family Placement Team's attempts to control these placements, but no senior managerial support for this action. There was evidence of placements made by EDT with carers where the Family Placement Team were attempting to control the number of placements made with specific carers.

Despite the pressure for placements, there was evidence that where possible planned placements were made, including introductions to carers. Consideration of a foster carer booklet with photos and brief information about the foster home would allow some level of information for children, even if it was only possible to show the booklet on the way to the carers.

Placement Agreements were not consistently in place on all carer and children's files. Further evidence of this was provided in the questionnaires returned by placing social workers which indicated a significant number either stated no Placement Agreement was in place or that they did not know if there was one.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

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

1

All the placing social worker questionnaires described the children placed with the services as safe. Carers have training in recognising and understanding the effects of abuse prior to approval including written guidance on safe care. It was not clear from the training information whether there is any specific focus on ways of boosting and maintaining children's self-esteem within the training programme.

There are clear statements in procedures, guidance and Handbooks for carers and children that identify unacceptable forms of punishment. The same is so for situations where a child is missing from the foster home. It is therefore of some concern that questionnaires indicated a lack of clarity from placing social workers about methods of discipline.

There are systems in place to collate information about allegation of abuse or neglect of children in foster care. However, the structure of the service led the inspectors to be concerned that this information was not collated consistently across the service. There have been inconsistencies in the notification to the Commission of situations where allegations have been made. It was reported to the inspectors that this has been rectified and this has been evidenced by an increase in the number of notifications made.

There is information available to carers and children about bullying. This was not presented as an issue during the inspection by those interviewed.

The provision of full information about each foster child varies. There were many examples of carers feeling they had full and accurate information. Foster carers recognised that social workers did not always have full information about children. However, there were situations where carers felt information had been withheld prior to placement, some which had a direct impact on the care offered to children.

**Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: This is no longer included in the Children's Questionnaire.**

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 files seen all had care plans in place. This evidence was further supported by the placing social workers questionnaires which all stated care plans were in place for each child placed with foster carers, who worked within these plans. There was a less positive picture of the placement agreement being in place as referred to earlier in this report. However, all the information indicated that carers understood their role in relation to contact and actively encouraged and supported children and young people in maintaining contact where it was appropriate. There was evidence of carers transporting children, supervising contact and having various members of the children's families visit their home.

There was evidence indicating foster carers recorded the impact of contact on children and passed on information appropriately to the social worker involved.

The views of children and young people appear to be listened to. There were comments from young people about changes to contact arrangements made on the basis of issues they had raised.

**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**

The fostering service has developed a number of strategies in order to establish effective consultation with children and young people. These include a Children's Panel, which has representatives from all Looked After Children, The Bumblebee Group for those in foster care, inclusion in reviews and the completion of consultation booklets. During the inspection children and young people indicated they felt their opinions were generally sought, although they were not so confident that their views were specifically asked about of ways of improving the fostering service. Similarly the majority of children with input to the inspection did not feel comfortable with the review process.

The majority of children knew how to complain or raise an issue that concerned them. There was evidence of a leaflet providing this information for children and young people, including how to contact the Commission.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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There was evidence that the health needs of children placed with foster carers were well met. The information indicated that all were registered with GPs and had dental appointments. Some carers felt they could have more background information on children prior to placement, but recognised the difficulties in relation to this. It would be possible for the service to make greater use of the Child Health Record Book for young children. Children and young people's questionnaires showed carers were aware of healthy diets and encouraged young people in developing sound health and hygiene practices.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
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The questionnaires indicated that education was given a high priority by foster carers. There was evidence from carers that they viewed this in the widest sense of developing children and young people's interests, as well as working closely with schools. There was evidence of carers' involvement with schools, working closely with teachers and attending a variety of meetings.

Work in this area has been assisted by the provision of computers for Looked After Children. It was reported that social services and education had worked closely together on this project. Seventy PCs have been purchased and 59 had been installed with carers by the time of the inspection.

There is an issue for some carers and social workers about where a young person should be if excluded from school. There was evidence that this caused an element of friction due to the different expectations of those involved. Such arrangements should be explicit in the Placement Agreement.

Information about the education of children with foster carers should be collated, monitored and evaluated more closely.

**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**

Stoke-on-Trent has established a Leaving Care Team, which works with young people in their move towards independence. There were positive comments about the work of this team from both carers and young people. There were also some comments from young people who felt that carers did not acknowledge their age and maturity appropriately, one example was not being able to see the doctor without the foster carer accompanying them. There was evidence of carers working with young people in establishing goals and aims in the development of the skills needed to live independently. This was included in the Pathway Plan for the young people concerned.

Young people commented positively in their questionnaires about the role of carers in assisting their development of independence 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

There is a clear written recruitment and selection procedure for the authority. It needs to be reviewed in line with the current standards and regulations, for example establishing telephone enquiries are made in relation to all staff references. The system for recording references and checks is in need of strengthening.

The current staff group are mainly qualified social workers. The unqualified staff undertake appropriate tasks under the supervision of qualified workers. The Family Placement Team viewed the establishment of a Social Work Assistant and Customer Liaison Assistant positively.

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

14

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

4

**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?**

1

The most significant issue in relation to the organisation and management of staff was the structure of the fostering service. Three managers managed different aspects of the service and related to different line managers themselves. Some workers appeared to feel they had two line managers. The managers did not meet and there was no forum for all those working in fostering to meet for professional development. Nor did the teams consistently combine resources in areas of training and recruitment. Similarly there were different approaches to assessment work and some lack of knowledge of the fostering panel in the specialist fields. This is a concern as the service identifies the panel as one of its mechanisms for maintaining quality control.

While there was an annual report on the fostering service it did not encompass the YOT and Family Link work.

The system for reviews had been identified as failing to ensure annual reviews of all foster carers. Work has been undertaken to rectify this in the main Family Placement Team, but there are different approaches across the service as a whole. The review should be used to establish and appraise a carer training portfolio for existing carers. A portfolio should be established at the time of approval for new carers.

The majority of workers reported they received and valued regular supervision.

The main area for work in relation to this standard is the establishment of a clear and unified structure for the service.

<b>Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)</b>		
<b>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.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>1</b>
<p>The recruitment of social workers has been problematic in Stoke-on-Trent as well as in other parts of the country. The manager of the Family Placement Team has addressed some of the issues by creating the posts of Customer Liaison Assistant and making use of the role of Social Work Assistant with the team. The questionnaires returned by foster carers indicated a large proportion (19) saw the service as being under staffed. With this there were many comments about Family Placement workers doing their best and providing a good service within the limits of the staffing available. One comment was they were “dedicated but under pressure”.</p> <p>At the time of the inspection there were particular pressures on the service as all the staff were very conscious of the service review, which was under way. There did not appear to be a clear strategy for the retention of staff across the fostering service.</p> <p>There is a constant recruitment drive for foster carers, which is boosted by particular projects and specific adverts. Regular information meetings are held to introduce prospective carers to fostering.</p> <p>The evidence on assessments showed a variable standard. Some gave a full picture, while others needed further information. For example some assessments showed no evidence of interviews with previous partners and some had not interviewed adult children of the applicants. There was little evidence of competency based assessments. There were also gaps in information about driving licences and road tax, which were not consistently checked and recorded. Reports did not include detailed information as to how foster carers could care for a young person from another religion, although they did include information about the carer’s own religion. The same was felt to be the case regarding carers’ ability to meet young people’s racial and cultural needs.</p> <p>There was a need to give clearly stated recommendations, which were based on the assessment information. The assessment reports should be seen and used by workers as an effective tool, an intrinsic part of the assessment process.</p>		

<b>Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Comments from staff and managers indicated they saw the city council as a fair and competent employer. A supervision policy is place and reported to be followed. EDPs are established and viewed as fulfilling the function of appraisal. A whistle blowing policy was reported to be in place but there was no written information or posters supporting this.</p>		

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

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

1

There is a well organised and publicised training programme for staff working for Stoke-on-Trent. However, there was a lack of training specifically focused on the issues and skills of family placement work. Staff reported that while training needs could be identified in their EDP there were difficulties in accessing the appropriate training. There was also some confusion about the process of gaining approval for training.

The current training does not reflect the need for joint training between fostering service staff and foster carers.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

1

As referred to earlier in this report there are appropriate systems in place for the supervision of staff. Supervision is reported to planned, recorded and regular. The Family Placement Team staff talked of "open-door" supervision allowing them access to support and advice when the need arises. There was some confusion about the supervision of fostering practice for staff whose manager had no fostering experience.

Each team with workers undertaking fostering work had the opportunity to attend regular team meetings. However, there was no opportunity for all the staff to meet together making it difficult to raise awareness of issues and discuss professional development. This had an impact on the services ability to develop consistent practice.

**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

Support of foster carers was an area that concerned the manager of the Family Placement Team during the last year. Due to the pressure to approve more carers it was felt that the level of support to current carers had been reduced. This was not reflected generally in the information gained during the inspection. Some carers did identify shortfalls in support, but they were in a minority. Others felt the support from the Family Placement Team was “excellent”. The experience of support from children’s social workers was more mixed. There were some positive examples of good practice but more where contact with the social work was needed. There were issues of concern about a lack of understanding of the foster carer’s role on the part of some social workers. There is an out of hours support system available through the social services Emergency Duty Team (EDT). Some carers commented positively about this service.

Some carers made specific comment that there should be a link worker for all foster carers, including those with “specific approval”. This was not the situation at the time of the inspection and action is needed to rectify the situation.

There was a review system in relation to carer’s annual reviews in place for the Family Placement Team. This was not consistently sustained across the whole of the service. There was a helpful format for workers to use in reviewing the role of carers. It was positive to note the clear inclusion of the views of foster carer’s own children. It would be helpful to include; checks on the premises, car insurance and road tax. Inspectors were informed that the system for the renewal of CRB checks every three years was in place but needs to be refined to ensure the checks are back prior to the review being completed to ensure all the relevant information is available at the point the review is finalised.

The systems of communication between the fostering worker and child’s social worker did not appear to be problematic despite the variety of office bases involved. There were positive comments received relating to constructive professional relationships that existed.

**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?**

1

There was evidence that most foster carers receive regular supervision in their role. The clearest exception to this was specific foster carers. Most of these carers did not have a link worker allocated to them from the Family Placement Team and their support was exclusively from the child's social worker.

Foster Carer Agreements were in place on all files. However, the agreements on the files seen were not compliant with Schedule 5, which specifies the issues to be included in such agreements. A copy of the newly revised format for the agreement was shown to the inspectors. This needs to be signed by all carers and placed on their files. It was reported that a Handbook was available to all foster carers and was updated regularly. This was not seen during the inspection.

Foster carers were aware of the complaints system and whom they should contact if they wished to raise a concern. They have written information about the procedure followed in the event of an allegation being made against them. Records are kept of allegations made against foster carers but the consistent collation and monitoring of these needs to be strengthened.

**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

Foster carers were provided with appropriate training before approval and have a range of post-approval courses available. Some carers commented they appreciated the opportunity to view the courses planned for the year, which enabled them to plan and prioritise those they wished to attend. The courses are evaluated individually but it would also be helpful to review and evaluate the overall provision of foster carer training. Carers' files indicated the training available but were not consistently clear which courses the carers had attended. At the time of the inspection carers with specific approval or "kinship carers" did not attend preparation training and few attended post-approval courses.

Although there was no particular course offered to the children of foster carers it was noted that there are plans to establish a group for these children and young people, reflecting an understanding of their role and a commitment to addressing their needs.

Foster carers reported they had fortnightly informal support groups. They also receive regular Newsletter and there is an annual questionnaire from the Family Placement Team which asks their views of the service.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Some records gave a full picture of the child's situation, others were limited. The written policy on recording was not viewed during this inspection, but the files seen showed a variety of standards in recording. Foster carers had a daily record book in which they record events and details relating to each child. They had a lockable box for the storage of confidential information.</p> <p>As referred to earlier some foster carers felt they had full information about the children placed with them. Others stated this was not the case and some cited some significant deficiencies. It was clear from carers and children that foster carers had an understanding of and commitment to helping children and young people in their care to reflect on their past and that children and young people were supported in doing this.</p>		

**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

The systems used at the time of the inspection created difficulties for staff in the collation of material for the inspection. There was no system that ensured the appropriate record was kept in relation to each child placed with a foster carer in compliance with Schedule 2. This also had an impact on the management information available in considering the placement information for the service. Data submitted as part for the inspection was found to be inconsistent. Again this must impact of the efficiency of the management system. It follows that the monitoring of the quality and adequacy of the records was inadequate.

The recording was compatible with LAC documentation and most social workers demonstrated an awareness of these records. Separate records are held in relation to children, staff, carers, complaints and allegations. Records were stored in lockable filing cabinets.

The quality of the content of the records was varied, some were clear, legible and well constructed, and others were in need of further work. The system for recording checks and references was in need of strengthening.

While there were separate records of complaints and allegations it was not clear that all the information from each part of the service was collated consistently.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			286
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			372
<b>Number of placements made by the agency, which ended in the past 12 months: This information was not provided during the inspection.</b>			0
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			11
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			26
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	105.77	<b>Maximum £</b>	189.49



## 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?**

2

The office premises seen during the inspection were only those at Heron Cross House. It is recognised that the next inspection will need to incorporate the other office bases from which the fostering service functions. The Heron Cross office was suitable for the purpose of operating the fostering service. However, the rooms in which files are stored need to be lockable and this was not consistently the case, including some locked cabinets being stored in an open area used by young people, prospective foster carers and adopters and approved foster carers and adopters.

The IT system was not seen to provide the information needed by the managers of the service. These deficiencies have been identified earlier in this report.

The insurance is included as part of the city council's overall insurance policy.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard is not applicable to local authority provision.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard is not applicable to local authority provision.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

Foster carers commented that in general payments were made on time and they were able to rectify inaccuracies directly with the payments section. Comments were also received indicating carers found some inconsistencies about the range and availability of allowances, with different carers receiving differing amounts.

There is a written policy on fostering allowances, but it needs to include the full range of allowances to which foster carers may be entitled.

## 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

The policies and procedures had been reviewed shortly before the inspection to ensure compliance with the standards. Some areas are in need of some further clarification, for example inclusion of a written procedure to cover decision-making when panel members disagree.

The systems supporting panel were reported to work effectively. The previous minutes and panel papers were delivered by hand to panel members a week before panel. It would be possible to ensure confidentiality but improve the time effectiveness on this task. Minutes are taken for each meeting. These need to reflect appropriate information and state clearly panel's role of recommendation rather than decision-making.

Some action had been taken in relation to CRB checks for panel members but these were not consistently in place in relation to all members at the time of the inspection.

The panel membership had been reviewed and action taken to bring it in line with the standards. At the time of the inspection this had not been completed. However, there were panel members with expertises in children's health and education and a current foster carer from another service, included in the panel membership. The evidence from minutes and observation was that panels were quorate.

The quality assurance function of the panel and the system for providing information to the panel about the functioning of the service had not been functioning strongly. However, The impression gained during the inspection was that this was being addressed.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The fostering service does provide short-term breaks for children in foster care. All the previous standards and findings are also relevant to short-term care.	3
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## 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?	1
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The service provided for family and friends carers at the time of the inspection was markedly different from that given to other foster carers. Issues have been raised throughout this report, which identify the need to review the service to this group of carers. While continuing to maintain sensitivity to existing relationships the service needs to ensure that family and friends carers are assessed by social workers with family placement assessment skills and that each carer has a named family placement worker who will support them. Similarly the training needs and review requirements were not given the same attention as those of other carers. This needs to be rectified.

**C.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 10 – 27 January 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

A copy of the Providers comments and action plan are available at the Area Office, where these have been submitted.

**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

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

**Note:**

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

**C.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 12 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

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>



**C.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**C.3.1 I \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

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

**Or**

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

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

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

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