



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Stockport MBC Fostering Services

Stockport Social Services

Ponsonby House

Edward Street

Stockport

SK1 3UR

6th December 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

Stockport MBC Fostering Services

Address

Stockport Social Services, Ponsonby House, Edward Street, Stockport, SK1 3UR

Local Authority Manager

Sue Westwood

Tel No:

0161 474 4611

Address

Stockport Social Services, Ponsonby House, Edward Street, Stockport, SK1 3UR

Fax No:

0161 429 8113

Email Address

Sue.westwood@stockport.gov.uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

29/11/03

Date of Inspection Visit		6 th December 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		08:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Susan Winson	096596
Name of Inspector	2	Helen Humphreys	074698
Name of Inspector	3	N/A	
Name of Inspector	4	N/A	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		N/A	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Sue Westwood	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Stockport MBC Fostering Services. 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.

Stockport MBC has a Family Placement Service which provides a range of placements to meet the needs of children and young people. These include permanent and temporary foster care and emergency placement. Specific schemes provide for mother and baby placements, teenagers and short break care.

Following a recent review there has been a re-organisation of family placement services into a Fostering and an Adoption Team. The Service Manager has responsibility for all these services. The fostering team has a dedicated manager. The functions of the fostering team is the recruitment, selection, support and training of Foster Carers .

Short breaks for children with disabilities are provided through an independent agency.

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.)

Since the last inspection there have been significant changes within the fostering service. The separation of the fostering team from adoption and the appointment of a fostering team manager in August 2004 have led to a clarity of purpose and direction.

The manager and team manager are actively assessing the services provided to looked after children and their families and have identified priorities for change or development and have action plans in place with realistic timescales.

Although it is recognised that a lot has been achieved in a short time, several initiatives have yet to be carried out and some developments need further consideration and consultation. For this reason, there are outstanding requirements and recommendations from the last report.

It is evident that the manager, team manager, the fostering team and the administrative staff are committed to working together (and with other services for children in Stockport) to improve the outcomes for looked after children and that there is potential for further positive changes and developments.

Statement of Purpose

The fostering service has a statement of purpose and a children's guide which meet regulation and NMS.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

The fostering service is managed by people with appropriate skills and experience in this field.

Management of the fostering service

The service is managed efficiently by the service manager in conjunction with the fostering team manager. Lines of accountability are clear.

Systems for collating information and monitoring the fostering service as required by Regulation and NMS have largely been put into place.

The manager and team manager have clear objectives and systems for monitoring the service which inform future directions.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The work of the fostering service is underpinned by policies and procedures, some of which are common to Stockport MBC, others are specific to the fostering team and appropriate, common policies have been developed with other services including health and education.

The foster carer handbook, which is cross referenced to the policies, provides a useful and informative written reference document for foster carers which is clear about the service's expectations of them in regard to the standards of care provided to looked after children.

Good practice was evident in meeting the health, educational and social needs of young people in foster care. The commitment from managers, staff and carers to encouraging young people to maintain contact with their families is high.

There is work to be done to ensure that comprehensive written information is provided to foster carers about the children and young people in their care. The fostering service is working with the fieldwork teams to this end.

Foster placement agreements have been revised and, although much improved, need to be specific about the way in which carers are expected to meet the identified needs of children placed.

Further development is planned in regard to risk assessments and safe care, regular health and safety checks, unannounced visits and annual reviews of carers taking place on time.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

Stockport MBC's recruitment and selection of staff are appropriate and based on equal opportunities policies. The teams are fully staffed and an increase in the staffing complement has been agreed.

The staff of the Family Placement team are appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced and have access to regular training.

The service is working to increase its pool of in-house foster carers and is using independent agencies to increase placement choice. Increased recruitment activity and efficient systems for following up initial enquiries have resulted from specific posts in the team being dedicated to recruitment.

Foster carers have access to a comprehensive training programme and support groups. Health and safety checks are carried out at annual reviews. Systems for consultation with foster carers and their involvement in the development of the fostering service are well developed and valued by the enthusiastic group of carers and staff who are committed to raising standards.

Foster care agreements comply with Regulation but reviews of carers are not all carried out within the required timescales.

Further work is planned to improve recording across the service.

Records

The service maintains registers of carers and placements and there is a system for updating the registers.

Fitness of premises

The premises are secure and appropriate health and safety checks are carried out. Space is limited and there are plans for some changes and refurbishment to improve the working conditions.

Financial requirements

The standards on financial processes and viability are not applicable to Local Authority fostering services.

There is a system in operation to ensure that foster carers receive allowances and payments promptly. The system of fees and allowances to carers is subject to review.

Fostering panels

The fostering panel is properly constituted (with the exception of a member who has experience of being in care) and meetings are well organised and conducted.

Short term breaks

This remains an area for development as the current arrangements for short breaks for children with disabilities, provided by an independent agency will come to an end in March 2005.

Family and friends as carers

This remains an area for development; more work is needed on clarifying policies and processes, particularly where children are placed permanently with friends or family.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
N/A		
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector S Winson Signature _____
Second Inspector H Humphreys Signature _____
Locality Manager S Woods Signature _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	20(3)(d) and Schedule 1	FS3 FS15	Stockport MBC must ensure that personnel records include all the information outlined in Schedule 1 of Regulations. (Not achieved by 31/05/04).	01/05/05
2	42(1) and Schedule 7	FS4	Stockport MBC must ensure that systems for monitoring all the matters in Schedule 7 are in place. (Not fully achieved by 31/05/04).	01/05/05
3	33	FS8 FS7	Stockport MBC must continue with developments to ensure that sufficient carers are available to meet the needs of young people referred for placement. (Not fully achieved by 01/08/04).	01/05/05
4	34(3) and Schedule 6	FS8	Stockport MBC must ensure that foster placement agreements comply with Schedule 6 of Regulations. (Not fully achieved by 31/05/04).	01/05/05
5	15(1)	FS9 FS12	Stockport MBC must ensure that all carers are provided with appropriate information to meet the needs of young people in their care, including full health information.	01/05/05
6	21(4)(a)	FS19 FS20	Stockport MBC must ensure that all staff have regular appraisal and that personal development plans are compiled outlining training needs.	01/05/05

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	
7	29(2)	FS21	Stockport MBC must ensure that foster carer reviews are carried out annually. (Not fully achieved by 31/05/04).	01/05/05
8	29(2)	FS21	Stockport MBC must ensure that foster carer reviews take place at least annually.	01/05/05
9	37	FS32	Stockport MBC must ensure that Regulations and NMS are complied with in respect of carers who are friends or family and that positive developments are consolidated.	01/05/05

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	FS6	Stockport MBC should ensure that risk assessments are carried out as appropriate.
2	FS7	Stockport MBC and the fostering service should review the provision of aids and adaptations to foster homes.
3	FS8	Stockport MBC should ensure that the policies and procedures for placements with independent fostering agencies are completed and put into operation.
4	FS8	Stockport MBC should develop policies and procedures for permanent family finding.

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
5	FS11	Stockport MBC should continue with plans to ensure that the opinions of young people, their families and others concerned in their welfare are routinely sought.
6	FS14	Stockport MBC should continue with plans to improve leaving care planning.
7	FS22	Stockport MBC should ensure that unannounced visits, at least annually, to foster homes are carried out.
8	FS22	Stockport MBC should ensure that there is a system in place to monitor foster carer's recording.
9	FS24	Stockport MBC should ensure that only appropriate information is retained on files.
10	FS30	Stockport MBC should continue to monitor the standard of reports presented to the fostering panel.
11	FS30	Stockport MBC should appoint a person who has previously been or had a child in care to the fostering panel.
12	FS31	Stockport MBC should ensure that there are policies and procedures in place in respect of short term breaks and continue to improve the service.

* 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	10
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	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	06/12/04
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	70

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?
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The statement of purpose for the fostering service has been reviewed and ratified by Stockport's Children in Public Care working party. The manager stated that it is an accurate reflection of the work of the fostering service. Foster carers and fieldwork services have been provided with copies of the updated statement of purpose, which is also on Stockport MBC's website.

A children's guide to the fostering service has been compiled following consultation with a group of young people. At the time of this inspection the final version was with the printers and is due to be distributed in the near future. It is written in clear language and includes contact numbers and websites in respect of bullying and complaints. Contact addresses and phone numbers for children's rights officers and CSCI are included. The guide refers young people to the statement of purpose for further information.

The fostering service also intends to produce a guide for parents.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The service manager and the fostering team manager have considerable relevant experience and skills in family placement and in management. The manager holds a CQSW and a NVQ level 5 in strategic management.

Following an audit of the fostering services in late 2003 the fostering and adoption teams were separated and a permanent manager of the fostering service appointed in August 2004. From January to August an agency team manager was in place.

The remit of the fostering team and the responsibilities of the manager and service manager are now more clearly defined. The manager reported that the new arrangements have already proven effective in moving the service forward and there are clear plans in place to improve the service. It is clear that the profile of the fostering service in Stockport has been raised to the extent that the manager has been able to bid successfully for extra funding and resources.

The manager and team manager provide effective leadership of the staff and the operation of the service.

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?

2

Personnel files for the managers and staff have improved since the last inspection following an audit of the files. The application forms do not specify that full dates must be included in the employment history so that any gaps in employment can be identified and queried, and this must be rectified. The manager stated that she checks out any gaps in employment.

Stockport MBC must ensure that personnel records include all the information outlined in Schedule 1 of Regulations. (See also NMS 15).

The manager now verifies all references and documents this on file. Reference requests ask why employment has ended.

Systems to ensure that police checks are renewed every three years are in place.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Systems for monitoring matters outlined in Schedule 7 of regulations are mainly in place, including complaints, accidents and restraint. The manager has yet to develop monitoring systems for behaviour management measures and medication.

The manager must ensure that systems for monitoring all the matters in Schedule 7 are in place.

The systems for monitoring the recruitment, retention, assessment and supervision of carers are now more robust and inform future planning, as well as ensuring that the manager can carry out a quality assurance role.

The fostering service can evidence that they notify the appropriate people of significant events and incidents involving child protection. Child protection issues have been handled appropriately, in conjunction with the child protection unit.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

4

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.

2

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

4

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The manager's job description reflects her role and responsibilities and lines of accountability and delegated powers are clearly defined. In her absence the fostering manager deputises on day to day matters and her line manager, who is a senior service manager, is available for decision making. The manager plans to move to the same building as the fostering team in the near future.

The development of specific roles within the team and allocation of specific areas of responsibility appears to have had a beneficial effect. Comments from team members in this respect were positive, as were opinions about the management of the service in general.

The manager and the team manager are working together to raise the profile of the fostering service within the authority by promoting effective working together with the fieldwork teams and evidencing what the team is achieving to the senior management.

It is clear that they provide effective leadership to the fostering team and that they are balancing the need to move forward with consideration for the staff and foster carers who have experienced a lot of change during the last year.

The manager and team manager have improved the management of the service and have identified areas for development.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The fostering service management and staff expressed a commitment to promoting and securing children's welfare by completing full assessments and by inspecting carers' homes and care practices on a regular basis.

Foster carers' homes visited by the inspectors were adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The manager and staff stated that children and young people usually have a bedroom to themselves and any sharing of rooms would be risk assessed.

There is guidance for carers on health and safety in and around the foster home and a policy on transporting children in privately owned vehicles.

Health and safety checks on foster homes are carried out as part of each carer's annual review and are retained on file. Policies are in place which cover transport of children in foster care and health and safety. Safety equipment is provided to foster carers as needed.

Work is being done to improve the use of risk assessment in foster placements. Placing social workers complete personal risk assessments for each young person at the time of placement. Ongoing risk assessments which are regularly reviewed and updated have yet to be developed.

The safe caring policy has been reviewed and revised and the fostering team have attended a training event. Training for foster carers includes safe care. The manager stated that there is a plan to link the safe caring practices with risk assessments.

Stockport MBC should ensure that risk assessments are carried out, and risk management plans compiled, as appropriate for all children in foster placement.

The fostering service has a system to ensure that foster carers' CRB checks are renewed every three years. The renewal dates are included in the carer's review documentation. CRB checks on sitters are carried out as necessary.

Foster carers have a supervision agreement which sets out the methods used to ensure young people are safeguarded and their welfare promoted. Supervising social workers are expected to go through new policies and procedures with foster carers on visits or in training.

The foster carers visited by the inspector were aware of the Commission's role and were prepared for the visits.

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

Stockport MBC has an emphasis on valuing diversity through the Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and the Disability Equality Scheme which are linked to improved information and training for staff and improving services. A written equal opportunities policy is in place.

Staff and foster carers are invited to seminars which aim to raise disability awareness and knowledge. These are not limited to those foster carers who care for children with disabilities. In addition, pre-approval and ongoing training incorporates anti-discriminatory practice.

The services for children with disabilities are developing and there are two specialist posts within the fostering team to concentrate on short break care for all children.

Liaison, planning and working together with Stockport's Children and Families Disability Team has increased and is informing recruitment and training of foster carers. The manager of this team was involved in the inspection and he and the manager of the fostering service are identifying areas for development leading to joint strategies for improving placement choice and outcomes for children with disabilities.

Positive developments in the field of recruitment mean that the service can target advertising and recruitment at a range of carers to reflect the needs of children coming into foster care. There is more work to be done to identify the needs of children with disabilities in Stockport.

The manager and staff outlined the limitations of the fostering service in regard to meeting the needs of young people in regard to religion ethnic origin, language, culture and disability. Where appropriate, when placements are not available in-house, there is provision for the manager to commission placements from independent providers and appropriate protocols are in place.

Stockport MBC must continue with developments to ensure that sufficient carers are available to meet the needs of young people referred for placement.

The provision of aids and adaptations and specialist services such as translation services are said to be readily accessible. However, carers reported that the provision can be variable, and the process can be prolonged.

Stockport MBC and the fostering service should review the provision of aids and adaptations to foster homes.

The grants available to carers include festival allowances which the foster carers know how to access.

Stockport MBC has a corporate diversity group with representatives from all service areas. Principles of promoting equality and valuing diversity permeate many of the policies and procedures of the fostering service.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service acknowledges that the current pool of foster carers imposes limitations on matching considerations, particularly for adolescents, children with disabilities and larger family groups. The agency is using external placements to increase placement choice and is developing policies and procedures for the effective monitoring of these placements.

Stockport MBC should ensure that the policies and procedures for independent fostering agencies are completed and put into operation.

The fostering team have a member of staff whose focus is on family finding and it is proposed that this post is expanded from part time to full time. The post spans the adoption and fostering teams. The manager is tracking those children who are awaiting appropriate foster placements and this informs the recruitment strategy. The manager stated that this is an area for development in order to clarify the systems and processes for finding permanent placements for children and young people, including clarification of the roles of the family placement workers and field social workers. This will be followed by a matching policy for long term foster placements.

Stockport MBC should develop policies and procedures for permanent family finding.

The team manager is involved in emergency placements and in ensuring that children are matched with appropriate foster carers. Planning meetings take place within 72 hours of emergency placements.

The fostering service manager monitors placements which are made outside of carer's age range or numbers.

Records and discussions with staff and carers demonstrate good practice in regard to introductory programmes for young people moving into foster care on a planned basis.

A format for foster placement agreements has been devised which meets Regulation and NMS. The service has implemented these but has yet to go back to replace the older versions for long standing placements and to ensure that they are on all foster carer's files.

Stockport MBC should ensure that all foster placement agreements meet Regulation and NMS and that they specify in full the tasks the placing social worker's expectations of the tasks and work that carers will carry out to meet the assessed needs of young people in their care.

Matching reports for young people going into long term placements are comprehensive and include consideration of the young person's assessed needs. These do not go to the fostering panel but decisions are made at a case planning meeting which involves service managers.

Workshops on care planning are taking place involving all social work staff.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Stockport MBC has revised its policies on child protection and bullying to meet Regulation and NMS. Procedures on professional abuse include references to foster carers. Appropriate policies on behaviour management, bullying and absence without authority are in place. The latter includes the need to undertake risk assessments and outlines actions to be taken on return of young people.

Guidance for foster carers on behaviour management includes permissible and prohibited strategies and sanctions.

The manager continues to work with the social work teams to ensure that foster carers are provided with full, written information about young people in their care and to monitor the quality of the information. Files and discussions with carers indicate that the quality of the information is still variable (see also NMS 12).

Stockport MBC must ensure that foster carers are provided with full information about young people in foster care.

The information for foster carers in relation to developing a safe care family policy is comprehensive and wide ranging. It includes practical aspects, such as safety in the home, car safety, dress and the use of babysitters and information on young people missing from home. Records indicate that safe caring policies are followed in practice. There are plans to link safe care with risk assessment (see also NMS 6).

Foster carers visited by the inspector were clear about appropriate and inappropriate sanctions and demonstrated a range of skills in managing behaviour. Details of prohibited methods of behaviour management and useful strategies are in the foster care agreement and are outlined in the foster carer handbook and cross referenced to relevant policies.

The handbook also contains information on the definitions of bullying and refers to the countering bullying policy. Information on bullying is included in the children's guide to the fostering service.

Appropriate training is available to foster carers, including behaviour management, child abuse and building self-esteem.

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

0

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Stockport MBC has a policy on contact which was implemented in 2001 and which includes short break care. The foster carer handbook is clear about the expectations on carers and the rights of young people. These include preparing young people for contact visits and making time to spend with them afterwards. There is an expectation that where possible contact visits will take place in the foster home.

It is clear that the authority is committed to ensuring that the policy is carried out in practice and that contact arrangements are established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

Foster carer training includes a session on 'retaining the links' and the carers interviewed demonstrated a commitment to encouraging and enabling contact and an appreciation of the rights of young people in this respect. Where children and young people are placed out of the area attention is paid to supporting contact.

Contact arrangements are specified in foster placement agreements and monitored at statutory reviews and by family placement officers when they visit carers. Placing social workers are invited to comment on how carers manage contact for the annual foster carers' reviews.

Young people stated that they are supported to maintain various forms of contact.

Introductions to foster placements which are documented on files include the foster carer meeting with the young person's family and previous foster carers.

Support is available to carers to ensure that contact visits are facilitated, from family support workers and family resource workers.

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?

2

Consultation with children and their families remain an area for development in Stockport.

Stockport MBC should continue with work to ensure that the opinions of young people, their families and others concerned in their welfare are routinely sought.

Exit interviews are undertaken by children's rights officers. Young people stated that their foster carers consult with them and listen to their views and opinions. The manager said that there is a need to develop the links with the Children's Rights Service to ensure that young people's views are heard.

Young people are encouraged to attend and participate in their reviews and to complete the authority's consultation document. Foster carers encourage or assist young people in completing these documents and support them in attending their reviews. Records show instances of parents being consulted about specific issues.

The parents of children with disabilities in Stockport have been consulted about developments in the service.

There was evidence at the inspection that foster carers are consulted and are actively involved in the development of the family placement service. A foster carer forum has been set up to increase the numbers of carers involved in policy developments and initiatives. Foster carers stated that they welcome this involvement and are committed to being part of an improving service to children.

Information on how to complain and the process involved are included in the children's guide and foster carer handbook.

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

Stockport MBC has a comprehensive health policy which includes health monitoring, contact numbers for LAC nurses and facilities for young people to make their own arrangements to contact an independent health worker.

A joint health and social services policy on the health of looked after children is in draft form and is due to be launched in April 2005. Following this, a health portfolio will go with each young person to each placement and there will be an expectation that a health plan will be in place within four weeks of placement.

All children and young people in foster care are registered with a GP.

LAC documentation on file do not always contain full health information and history and this should be rectified. Most commonly there is sparse information on immunisations and health history.

Health issues and needs are covered in foster carer training and monitored through reviews. The manager stated that work is being undertaken to ensure that foster carers have a written health record for all young people in their care (presently this is limited to under 5's).

Stockport MBC must ensure that full information on young people's health needs and history is provided to foster carers.

The foster carer handbook outlined carer's responsibilities in respect of health promotion and care and includes information about local resources and guides. The role of foster carers in promoting health care is reinforced in training and at reviews.

The panel has a member whose experience and skills are in the field of healthcare

Examples of carers being supported to meet complex health needs indicate that the fostering service is working to promote the health and development of young people placed with foster carers.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Staff reported positive links with Stockport's Education Support Team and gave examples of joint work undertaken to enhance the educational opportunities of young people in foster care. The service they provide to young people in foster care includes homework support. All looked after children have an allocated education support worker. The service manager can evidence that multi-agency working is raising educational achievement for looked after children.

The education support team monitors SATS results and delays in waiting for school allocation. The manager of the family placement team meets with the education support team every two weeks and the education of all looked after children is discussed, including educational progress, exclusions and those who are likely to be excluded from schools.

Expectations of foster carers in terms of supporting education are documented in foster placement agreements. Family placement officers gave examples of good practice where foster carers are supporting young people in education and advocating on their behalf. Educational progress is discussed at every young person's review.

The fostering service supports carers when young people are not in full time education. Prompt action to put in support, through outreach workers, when a young person was unexpectedly excluded from school allowed the foster carer involved to keep to commitments made.

Education provision is monitored on a fortnightly basis through joint meetings between social services and education.

PEPS and SEN statements are on young people's files. The manager stated that foster carer households have personal computers for use by the young people and the fostering service can provide them. Access to educational psychologists was also said to be available.

The fostering service holds financial responsibilities for school costs, including uniform, trips and equipment.

The fostering manager has links with the education support team and is running a course for carers which aims to give information on subjects such as the national curriculum to enable carers to be more involved in the education of looked after children.

The foster carer handbook outlines how carers can support children and young people including pre-school activities and library registration. Information on the Education Support Team's resource centre and helpline are included.

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 manager outlined that there has been a recent review of 16+ services in Stockport and that work is being undertaken to improve the relationships between 16+ workers and foster carers.

She gave examples of positives moves in this area, whilst acknowledging that this area needs further consideration. A group involving 16+ workers and foster carers is to be set up to increase understanding and training in pathway planning and managing risk is to be arranged.

Stockport MBC should continue with plans to improve leaving care planning.

Transition to adult services for children with disabilities was reported to be problematic for young people receiving respite care in residential homes and it is suggested that this be considered in the planned review of foster care for children with disabilities.

There is evidence from foster carers and young people that preparation for adult living is being carried out and that young people are supported in developing living skills such as cooking, shopping, budgeting and personal care.

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

Stockport MBC has a written procedure for recruitment and selection of staff, which includes interviewing all staff and ensuring that references are taken up.

As stated in NMS 3 the files have yet to fully comply with Schedule 1 of Regulations in terms of full employment history (see NMS 3).

All staff involved in the assessment of foster carers are qualified social workers with experience and skills in family placement. They have undertaken training in completing competence based assessments.

Administrative staff have clear guidelines which outline the service's expectations in terms of confidentiality.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The manager and fostering manager are monitoring caseloads and managing the changing roles of the family placement workers. They have made a decision not to try to change all the working practices and systems at once but rather have identified some areas for development as a priority, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

The administrative team have had several changes since the last inspection and the use of temporary workers has led to a high turnover of staff. Clarity of roles in the administration team has improved and supervision and training needs are being addressed. Improved administrative back up systems are developing.

The team members stated that their roles are clear and levels of responsibility are defined. The family placement team evaluate their practice and are involved and enthusiastic about service developments.

There are structures and systems in place to ensure assessments and approvals of carers are managed and implemented effectively.

Social work staff and administrative staff are supervised by appropriately qualified and experienced people.

All employees are provided with written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service in addition to policies and procedures for staff guidance which include equal opportunities, whistle-blowing, disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service is fully staffed and increased staffing has been agreed.

The staffing complement consists of the service manager, team manager, assistant team manager (temporary agency post), seven family placement officers, a family finder (agency staff), a recruitment officer, a marketing officer and a child specific family placement officer.

The addition of a dedicated recruitment FPO and a marketing officer to the team has clearly moved recruitment forward. New recruitment and advertising initiatives and material have led to an increase in enquiries, all of whom are responded to within 24 hours. Enquirers are tracked and followed up when necessary. A recruitment group, consisting of supervising social workers, foster carers and the authority's publicity section, meet to develop annual plans for recruitment.

The service has a recruitment strategy which combines single campaigns with continuous recruitment. There have been positive developments in the creation of recruitment materials which are of a high quality and have a common brand image. Clear systems for the monitoring of advertising campaigns inform future planning.

The fostering service has a person specification for foster carers who work with sibling groups of three and above which includes essential and desirable attributes and skills.

There is specialism amongst the pool of foster carers and it was evident to the inspector that carers have developed skills and expertise in areas such as the care of adolescents, moving children on to adoption and work with pre-school children.

The fostering service uses a competence based model for the assessment of foster carers and staff have been appropriately trained. Portfolios of evidence are on file which include witness statements.

The team manager outlined that the quality of carer assessments is improving and she is monitoring all the assessments prior to their going to panel. She intends to audit the assessments done prior to her appointment.

It is suggested that the fostering service develop guidelines which clarify the circumstances in which foster carer assessments need to be updated or completely re-done, in consultation with the fostering panel.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Stockport MBC appears to be a fair and competent employer with reasonable employment practices.

Support to carers outside office hours is being addressed and has improved (see also NMS21). Carers expressed satisfaction with the levels of support they receive from the fostering service.

There is a comprehensive health and safety policy which covers all legal requirements and appropriate insurance is in place.

Appropriate whistle blowing procedures are in place.

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
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Staff training within Stockport MBC is well established in conjunction with the Staff Development Team.

Staff files do not yet include full records of training undertaken. Formal appraisal which identifies the training and development needs of staff must be carried out. (See also NMS 20).

The team manager is running in house staff training events as part of the strategy to improve the fostering service.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)
All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Supervision contracts are in place and the team manager supervises the family placement officers regularly. These formal supervision sessions are recorded and include records of the discussion, monitoring of caseloads and decisions made. Staff training needs are included.

Stockport MBC must ensure that annual appraisals and personal development planning for staff is implemented (see also NMS 19).

Stockport MBC should ensure that staff receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager.

Team meetings happen regularly.

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**

A support to carers strategy is being developed which will provide a strategic approach.

All foster carers have an allocated supervising social worker and the manager reported that around 90% of annual reviews take place within the required timescales, excluding those of child specific carers which are lower. A tracking system is being developed with the administrative staff to alert workers.

Stockport MBC must ensure that all foster carer reviews are carried out annually.

The documentation for foster carer reviews includes input from the carers and from placing social workers in a format of competencies and how carers have met them. Action plans for the next 12 months are included as are training needs.

Files indicate that the frequency of visits to foster carers is variable, as is the quality of the recording of the visits. There is a format for the recording of supervisory visits to carers, which is comprehensive but which is not always used. Some workers record every visit whilst on other files summaries of several months of visits are written.

It is acknowledged that the frequency of support visits may vary according to the needs of carers and the status of the placement. However, there should be guidelines in place for agreeing frequency with the carer which can be monitored by the manager.

Stockport MBC should devise procedures for the frequency of visits to foster carers and the way in which these are recorded.

Family placement officers are clear about their support and supervisory roles in working with carers.

Out of hours support is available to foster carers and further initiatives are planned.

There are plans in place to provide a range of support to foster carers 24 hours a day. Stockport's Community Outreach Team was involved in this inspection, and provide a service from 8.30am to 11pm seven days a week. This can involve providing respite so that foster carers to spend time with their own children. The emergency duty team provides an out of hours crisis service.

Support groups for carers meet regularly in different venues and at different times of the week. The family placement team continuously monitor the effectiveness and take-up rates of the groups.

All carers are members of Stockport Foster Care Association which provides advice and support.

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

Foster carers and family placement officers report that positive working relationships exist. Foster carers have a high expectation of support.

A new foster carer recording policy has been implemented following training sessions with carers. This separates recording for each young person in placement. Not all FPO's are checking foster carer recording on a regular basis and this should be rectified.

Unannounced visits to foster carers are not being carried out by Stockport MBC and this should be rectified and an appropriate system for recording and monitoring these visits implemented. Foster carers have been informed, by the service, that this will happen.

Stockport MBC should ensure that unannounced visits to foster carers are carried out.

Foster care agreements comply with regulations and are clear about the range of approval of carers.

The foster carer handbook is a comprehensive document which includes information on SMBC's children and family service in general and the fostering team specifically. It is readable, avoids jargon and is cross referenced to policies and procedures.

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?

4

The commitment to provision of a flexible training and support programme for carers is high, as is the quality of the training courses.

The fostering service has a comprehensive training programme for foster carers and, in addition, they have access to training provided by Stockport MBC Social Services Department staff development team, which includes joint training with social workers. The fostering service brings in specialist trainers for topics such as understanding and helping traumatised children. Mandatory training includes child protection, first aid, contact issues, education and health.

NVQ's are available to carers and training undertaken by foster carers is documented on their files.

Training and development is monitored through the foster carer training group which includes representatives from the fostering team, staff development and foster carers. The service has a group of carers who are trained and who assist in the delivery of training to carers and staff.

Family placement officers and foster carers are involved in the induction programme all for social work staff.

Child specific carers are now involved in training and have access to support groups.

Foster carers said that the training is of good quality and that they come away with lots of ideas.

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
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A register of all children placed in foster care is now in place and a database of foster carers which will inform monitoring and tracking is in place and is developing to include more information. Systems for updating the registers are in place.

A system to monitor the information that carers receive from placing social workers and to ensure any deficiencies are remedied is in place. Family placement officers inform the service manager if any documentation is not in place 24 hours after placement and she addresses this with the fieldwork teams manager. Records indicate that the family placement manager monitors this through individual supervision with family placement officers (see NMS 9 and NMS 12).

The foster carer files have been revised and are now better organised and information can be found easily. The team manager is in the process of auditing the files.

During the inspection information about young people was found on foster carers' files. Stockport MBC should ensure that only appropriate information is retained on files.

Written guidance for foster carers about the safe storage of records, returning information to young people and sharing information is provided. Foster carers are issued with a storage case for confidential records.

The fostering service is advised to develop a procedure for the archiving and destruction of case files.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The variation in current weekly payments to carers indicates the differing amounts from the youngest child specific placement to carers on the teencare project. A review of all allowances and payments is planned.

Financial information is included in the foster carer handbook.

Systems are in place which ensure that foster carers are paid regularly and promptly.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

231

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

159

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

137

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

16

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

9

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

82.67

Maximum £

355.11

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 has dedicated office space. Space is limited and there are plans for changes in the accommodation which will provide better working conditions for the administrative and social work staff.

The office has a large conference room which can be used for training sessions.

Records are stored securely and a clear desk policy is in operation. Confidential waste is separated in the offices and is collected.

The building has an alarm and bars fitted to ground floor windows. There are systems for locking the building.

The number of computers available to staff and their levels of access to IT systems is being increased.

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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Standard met?

9

Not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services.

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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Standard met?

9

Not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Foster carers receive allowances and agreed expenses. The payments and allowances are presently under review.

In response to their requests, carers receive payslips with a breakdown of the allowances. The manager, administrative staff and foster carers reported that payments are efficiently carried out.

There is an appropriate system for petty cash and auditing.

Allowances and fees are subject to major review.

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 panel procedures are in draft form and include person specifications and job descriptions for panel members and an outline of the role of the panel in development.

A meeting of the Fostering Panel was observed, the minutes of the previous Panels were inspected and an interview was conducted with the Panel Chair.

The Panel has a good number of independent members, including access to medical advice, education, a foster Carer from another Agency and a social worker from another Local Authority Fostering Team. A Senior Service Manager is the Vice Chair of the Panel.

The Panel Chair is a well-experienced, independent social work practitioner. She demonstrated appropriate skills and experience on the day of the inspection. Her style of leadership allowed everyone to contribute appropriately and was welcoming to members of staff and carers alike.

The Panel Chair was aware of the issues facing the Local Authority and the recent developments within the service.

The minutes of the previous Panel required a number of amendments and they contained grammatical and typographical errors, as did a number of the reports presented at Panel. The Manager of the service was aware of this and had withdrawn one report prior to the meeting. The Panel Chair reported that the standard of the reports presented to Panel had improved, however the standard of some reports and the assessment of foster carers presented was poor and the Panel Chair made comment on this matter in the meeting and to the Inspector.

SMBC should continue to monitor the standard of the reports presented to Panel. SMBC should consider obtaining appropriate training for the newly appointed Panel Administrator.

Carers are invited to attend Panel and are seen prior to and after their attendance by the Panel Chair who discusses the process and outcomes. Panel members treated carers sensitively.

Panel members do not currently receive the inspection report and other information in order for them to undertake the quality assurance role. SMBC should consider this development.

The minutes indicated and the chair confirmed that the Panel has always been quorate in the last 12 months.

The Manager is aware that the Panel constitution does not meet the NMS (although it does meet the Regulations) in that it does not have as a member of the Panel who has previously been or had a child in care. SMBC should appoint someone to fulfil this role.

The Panel meets on a quarterly basis for a business meeting, which the Panel Chair reported as being very useful.

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?

2

Short breaks for children with disabilities are provided through a local independent agency with which Stockport MBC has an ongoing agreement. This agency will close on 31st March 2005 and the service will be provided in-house. The managers of the fostering service and the service for children with disabilities are working together in this respect but as yet no firm plans are in place.

A scheme for short breaks for children and young people who are living with their families has been running for three years and is staffed by supervising social workers managed separately from the family placement team. The scheme is part of the support services for families in crisis in Stockport, and includes flexible day care in the local community. Intervention is time limited and task centred. There is said to be the flexibility for the short breaks to move into full time care should a young person become looked after. Recruitment and training of staff and carers is shared with the family placement teams.

Stockport MBC should ensure that there are policies and procedures in place for short-term breaks and continue to improve services through the planned review of the service and other developments.

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The manager stated that services to child specific carers are subject to ongoing development and review. There is work to be done to develop policies and procedures in respect of residence orders (including ongoing support to carers) and permanency planning.

Stockport MBC must ensure that the required policies and procedures are in place in respect of family and friends foster placements.

A full time specific worker is in place and lines of accountability are clear.

Separate support groups operate for child specific carers (at their request) and they are invited to training groups. One of the child specific carers attends the Foster Care Association meetings as a representative of the group. A newsletter for child specific carers has been developed.

Stockport MBC must ensure that Regulation and NMS are complied with in relation to carers who are family or friends of the young person and that the positive developments are built on and consolidated.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not applicable.

Lay Assessor N/A **Signature** N/A

Date N/A

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 6th December 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

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

NO

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 13th April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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