



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Surrey County Council Fostering Service

Childrens Services

Beaufort House

Mayford Green

Woking

Surrey

GU22 0PG

3 – 26 March 2003

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

Surrey County Council Fostering Service

Address

Beaufort House, Mayford Green, Woking, Surrey, GU22
0PG

Local Authority Manager

Ms Annie Maclver

Tel No:

01483 728022

Address

Beaufort House, Mayford Green, Woking, Surrey, GU22
0PG

Fax No:

01483 776326

Email Address

Anniemaclver@surreycc.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 ?

N/A

Date of last inspection

N/A

Date and Time of Inspection Visit		3 March – 26 March 2003	ID Code
Name of Inspector	1	Mrs S A Floyd	075626
Name of Inspector	2	Mr J Hollingdale	
Name of Inspector	3	Mr P Benthom	
Name of Inspector	4	Mr R Blades	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Interpreter/Signer (if applicable)		N/A	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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10. Short-term breaks

11. Family and friend carers

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Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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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 2001 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

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

The Fostering Services Regulations 2001 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 2001. 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

Prior to the formation of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC), Local Authority Fostering Services had been inspected as part of the Social Services Inspectorate's Children's Services inspections. Therefore this inspection report is the first by the NCSC under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, and serves as an audit of the service against the new requirements, identifying developments needed to meet the new requirements within a reasonable period of time. Any more urgent issues are identified in the report.

Local Authority Fostering Service managers do not have to register with the NCSC, nor do Local Authority Fostering Services themselves have to register with the NCSC as providers. However, Regulation 10 requires each Local Authority to appoint a Fostering Service manager and to notify the NCSC "forthwith" of the person concerned. Regulation 10(2) requires Local Authority Fostering Services managers to meet the same fitness criteria that an Independent Agency manager has to meet.

Surrey County Council Fostering Service is a Local Authority Fostering service operated by the Social Services Department. It manages all the authority's in house fostering functions from temporary placements (emergency, short term, assessment and bridging placements) through to long term permanent foster care placements, placements for a named child/young person only, link carers, specialist carers, specialist plus carers and lodgings plus carers. The Children's Services Department has three fostering teams. West Team is based in Heritage House in Chertsey, East Team is based in the Omnibus Building in Reigate, and the Family Finding and Recruitment Team is based both in The Meads and in Chertsey. As part of this inspection the Adoption and Permanency Team, which consists of two teams based in Beliar House, was also inspected for the reason that currently, there are a number of permanent fostering placements being 'held' by them.

The teams are headed by a Head of Family Placement (Fostering Service Manager) and there are 49 staff directly employed to work in the Fostering Service. There are 7 managers including assistant team managers, 28 qualified social workers, 3 unqualified social work staff and 11 administrative staff. In addition the Fostering Service employs an Independent Chair of Foster Panel, an agency Decision Maker and a Psychotherapist. A full time Family Placement Social Worker would normally hold a caseload of between 15 and 20 Foster Carers and at the same time be undertaking approximately three ongoing assessments.

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.)

Staff working in Surrey County Council's Children's Services have experienced significant change and re-organisation. Fostering service staff are no exception and acknowledgement of this process should be made when reading the report.

The inspection produced mixed findings with many areas requiring further action, for example, staffing matters, limited placement choice and social work practice that does not meet the reasonable expectations of foster carers and children. Other areas that had been subject to development and updating, for example, training and development for foster carers, fostering documentation and meaningful involvement of foster carers in decision-making processes, have been positive features of the service. A great deal of work had been carried out by the fostering service to update their records, policies and systems. Examples of this work are the new foster carer agreement, the new foster carer's handbook, the new monthly newsletter, 'Fostering OK' and the continuing review by the authority of its payment system to foster carers.

The service has recruited a dedicated team of staff and foster carers who are striving to improve communication and information sharing across the service. There are regular meetings, support groups and other events arranged for foster carers to attend. A recent very welcome initiative is the new group set up for birth children of carers who foster.

There is an insufficient number of foster carers, and of placement choice. This has led to a proportion of foster carers being regularly asked to exceed their authorised placement number. Matching of children usually begins on the basis of whichever foster carer is available and willing to take a child. Recruitment of new foster carers is a key goal of the service and this includes recruitment of a more diverse range of carers, including those from minority ethnic groups.

The new independent chair of the foster panel is a particularly positive appointment and although very new in post the chair had already identified areas for improvement, for example, training for panel members and handouts for panel members in the form of an information pack, explaining the role of the panel and its members. The chair has noted that more effort needs to be put into preparing thorough, organised and complete documentation for the panel meetings and passed to the panel in good time.

Appreciation is expressed to the staff of the fostering service, foster children/young people, foster carers and all personnel involved, for their willing and thoughtful co-operation during the preparation of the inspection visit and the inspection itself.

A number of requirements and recommendations have been made and are detailed in the main body of the report.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

As detailed in the main body of this inspection report. Please refer in particular to Standards 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection fully actioned?

N/A

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 2001.

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.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

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 2001, 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	5,7,20 Schedules 1 & 7	2, 3 & 15	That appropriate checks are carried out on all staff employed to work for the Fostering Service as detailed below:	With effect from 5.03.03
2	20 Schedule 1	15	Documentary evidence of any relevant qualifications must be sought and copies kept on personnel files.	With effect from 5.03.03
3	20 Schedule 1	15	Criminal Records Bureau checks must be carried out on all staff before employment commences and retrospectively on all existing staff. Staff working directly with children must obtain the enhanced CRB check.	With effect from 5.03.03
4	20 Schedule 1	15	That CRB checks are renewed every three years and the CRB number that evidences the check having been carried out maintained on file.	With immediate effect 5.03.03
4	20 Schedule 1	15	Two written references are obtained by the Fostering service before employment commences, one of who must be the current or previous employer, and that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references.	With effect from 5.03.03
5	20 Schedule 1	15	A full employment history must be obtained together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment.	With effect from 5.03.03
6	20 Schedule 1	3	Positive proof of identity including a recent photograph must be obtained and kept on file.	With effect from 5.03.03

7	20	3	Satisfactory medical information must be obtained on all new employees and kept on file.	With effect from 5.03.03
			Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how the following requirements and recommendations are to be addressed.	
8	21	20	That all staff be afforded appropriate regular one to one supervision sessions.	To be agreed
9	21	20	That the recording of supervision and the supervision files provide consistent information and cross referencing, and are appropriately maintained.	To be agreed
10	21	15	That recruitment procedures in terms of good practice in the safeguarding of children and young people are made available and that staff are aware of the content of the procedure.	To be agreed
11	21	15	That staff are provided with a clear understanding of matters under Standard 15.5.	To be agreed
12	21	15	That a formal induction programme is drawn up and implemented for all staff new to the fostering service. Staff must sign and date each section on completion.	To be agreed
13	21	15	That evidence is provided that all staff have updated training to carry out assessment work.	To be agreed
14	3	1	That copies of the Statement of Purpose and the Children's guide be circulated to all staff of the fostering service, foster carers, foster children as appropriate, and other stakeholders of the fostering service.	To be agreed
15	21	15	That updated Child Protection training is provided to staff and foster carers as appropriate.	To be agreed

16	3	1	That the Statement of Purpose reflects the high numbers of placements made in an emergency situation and that the arrangements for managing the impact of these placements is recorded.	To be agreed
17	4	1	That staff, foster carers and foster children/young people are made fully aware of the significance of the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide and their contents.	To be agreed
18	4	1	That the Statement of Purpose and the draft Children's Guide is appropriately formatted and made available to all staff, new and existing foster carers and foster children/young people.	To be agreed
19	3 & 11	1	That details of the NCSC Surrey Area office are referred to in the Children's Guide and in the complaints procedure as an alternative agency for complaints to be made to by foster carers, foster children/young people and other stakeholders of the fostering service.	To be agreed
20	34 & 38	8	That the role of the fostering service in exceeding "the usual foster limit" is examined and reviewed.	To be agreed
21a	35	8 & 11	That the fostering service are proactive in ensuring all children/young people are appropriately and regularly visited by their social worker.	To be agreed
21b	35	8 & 11	That both children/young people and their foster carers are able to make contact with the child's social worker to request a visit/advice.	To be agreed
21c	35	8 & 11	That children/young people are provided with consistent social work input.	To be agreed
22	34 Schedule 6	8	That sufficient information is provided to foster carers on commencement of a child's/young person's placement.	To be agreed
23	34	8	That all foster carers sign the foster carers agreement.	To be agreed
24	42 & 43 Schedules	9	That the Child Protection procedure is extended to include notification to the NCSC, Surrey Area office of any instigation and	To be agreed

	7 & 8		outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers.	
25	20 & 17	9	That further work is carried out with staff and foster carers to ensure all policies and procedures are known and made clear to them.	To be agreed
26	11	9	That foster carers are clear regarding records required to be maintained by them and these records are regularly checked.	To be agreed
27	17	9	That out of office hours support provided to foster carers is reviewed and improved.	To be agreed
28	20	11	That the communication difficulties experienced between fieldwork staff, fostering service staff and foster carers are identified, acknowledged and addressed.	To be agreed
29	17	14	That foster carers receive the necessary information, training and support in order to provide appropriate opportunities and effective support and guidance to the young people in their care.	To be agreed
30	11 & 17	14	That pathway plans are agreed and implemented with each young person preparing to move to independent or semi independent living.	To be agreed
31	22 Schedule 2	16	That the fostering service complies with the details required to be maintained in the register of each child placed and with the details required to be maintained in the record of details of each foster carer.	To be agreed
32	19	16	That the practice of fostering staff carrying childcare cases from their previous team is addressed and all social work matters passed back to the appropriate team.	To be agreed
33	17 & 21	18	That staff and foster carers are made aware of the Whistle-blowing procedure.	To be Agreed
34	17	21	That the newly developed handbook is made available to all foster carers.	To be agreed
35	27 & 29	21	That all assessments and reviews of foster carers are up to date and available on the appropriate files.	To be agreed
36	21 & 32	21	That all files are secure and documentation is	To be

			recorded in a professional manner.	agreed
37	17	23	That the draft training profiles are implemented and clear records of the training undertaken by foster carers is made available.	To be agreed
38	17	23	That the draft mandatory training policy is established and implemented and a system developed for an annual evaluation and review.	To be agreed
39	11	24	That foster children/young people are always consulted, age appropriately, and their views and wishes obtained prior to a review	To be agreed
40	18,12, 42 Schedule 7	25	Records of allegations and complaints must provide clear details of the investigation carried out, the conclusion reached and the action taken.	To be agreed

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	15	That when staff are transferred to the fostering service from other departments within the County Council updated recruitment checks are carried out.
2	15	That the process of internal recruitment of staff is reviewed and made clear to them.
3	15	That managers be involved in the short-listing and interviews of job applicants.
4	17	That the content and quality of the supervision provided to administration staff is reviewed.
5	20	That all members of staff attend team meetings as appropriate; that the names of staff attending are clearly recorded and the minutes of meetings are signed.
6	7	That staff and foster carers preparation and training features more prominently the areas of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.
7	7	That sufficient foster carers are recruited in order to increase the amount of placement choice available to children and young people referred to the fostering service and to ensure appropriate matching can take place.
8	8	That foster carers are not pressurised into agreeing placements.
9	9	That support offered to foster carers subject to allegations is reviewed.
10	9	That husbands/partners are involved in further training to promote understanding of safe caring practices.
11	13	That the difficulties experienced by foster carers in dealing with the educational needs of children particularly where they receive education from other local authorities be addressed through training and support.
12	16	That more structured support is available to administrative teams in order to deliver the service in a more effective and planned way.
13	18	That the certificate of insurance in respect of liability is consistent with the standards covering the fostering service.
14	21	That consideration is given to the replacement of some filing cabinets.

15	24	That all information collated and stored on file is maintained in a consistent manner and in line with the authorities, 'Files For Fostering Teams' policy.
16	25	That the draft policy for case recording and the retention of records is implemented and staff made aware of its contents as soon as possible.
17	25	That the system for keeping together allegations and complaints continues but copies are kept on the relevant files for staff, foster carers and foster children/young people.
18	26	That issues of confidentiality, particularly in relation to the office arrangements for the east and west teams are regularly reviewed.
19	26	That the male W.C. arrangements are reviewed and action taken to improve the facilities.
20	26	That accommodation generally is reviewed with a view to improvements.
21	25	That foster children/young people are provided with more direct information concerning accessing their files.
22	30	That a consistent approach be adopted regarding information/documentation presented to the fostering panel
23	30	That documentation/information should only be accepted by the fostering panel if all details are correct and the information is professionally recorded.

* 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	25
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NA
• 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	03/03/03
Time of Inspection	9:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	160

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.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service has a draft Statement of Purpose that was examined during the inspection and found to meet the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Foster carers were not in receipt of the Statement of Purpose. Staff employed by the authority to work in the fostering service reported that they had been provided with a number of documents, which may have included the Statement of Purpose, which they had been asked to read the week before this inspection.

The Statement of Purpose should reflect that a high number of placements are made in an emergency situation. The arrangements for managing the impact of these placements on the children and young people concerned and the children and young people already in the placement must also be recorded.

The draft Children's Guide had not been formatted and therefore is not child friendly. Foster carers and foster children were not in receipt of the Children's Guide and children interviewed did not understand that such a document existed. The Children's Guide outlines the authority's complaints procedure. While the Children's Guide contains the name, address and telephone number of the headquarters of the NCSC, this is specified under the section on Children's Rights Workers rather than the Surrey Area office details being referred to in the complaints section.

The Social Services Committee has formerly approved these documents and therefore it is a requirement that copies of the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide be circulated to all staff of the fostering service, existing foster carers, foster children as appropriate, and other stakeholders of the fostering service. A system for distribution of these documents at the point foster carers are approved and a child/young person's placement commences must to be set up.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service manager has extensive child care experience and possesses an MA in Organisational Consultancy in addition to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and a Diploma in Advanced Social Work (Children and Families). The manager will need to verify whether these qualifications are equal to NVQ Level 4 in management and forward the information to the NCSC. The manager has managed the Family Placement Team for the last two years and prior to then was a social work team manager for three years. Surrey County Council Children's Service's has appropriate support teams to ensure that the financial and budgetary management of the service is monitored effectively.

The family placement team managers have not all obtained a management qualification. The authority therefore needs to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in order for this training to be achieved by 2005. Newly appointed managers will need to have obtained an appropriate management qualification or be prepared to begin this training within 6 months of their appointment.

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

In reference to Regulations 19, 20 and 21 and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 – National Minimum Standards 15, 16, 17,18, 19 and 20, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate these standards had been met. The managers will need to undertake further work in relation to these standards in order to comply fully with Standard 3.

Please refer to Standards 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of this report for further detail.

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

Regulation 42 requires that a monitoring system be maintained and that any changes in management structure are notified to the NCSC.

There are clear lines of accountability within the fostering service and this was evidenced by examination of records and individual discussions with staff. All professional staff are subject to regular supervision sessions, which are recorded in writing, agreed and signed by supervisor and supervisee. It was of concern to note that administration staff are not afforded regular supervision and that in one team they do not attend the weekly team meeting. Those staff felt unable to recognise the benefit of regular one to one meetings with their supervisor. It was unclear as to which staff attended the weekly team meetings, and the minutes of meetings were not signed.

Supervision records were seen to be of variable quality. Samples indicated that it was very much down to the individual worker (the supervisor) as to how much information was recorded and whether it was appropriately cross-referenced on the record to the case under discussion during the supervision. The format of the supervision recording was chaotic and muddled and requires urgent action to ensure a consistent and uniform style.

Please also refer to NMS 16.2 and 26.1 and to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC 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.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

X

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

There is a clear management structure with explicit lines of responsibility characteristic of an established local authority management arrangement. Surrey County Council has a policy of providing all employees with well-defined job descriptions. These are however to be reviewed in order to take account of the changes staff working in Children's Services have had. The fostering service is a discrete service within the County's Children's service's with a senior officer dedicated to overall management.

The fostering service has not experienced the inspection process of the NCSC or its forerunner previously and is now faced with the challenge of responding constructively to the requirements and recommendations herein. The responsible manager has indicated their desire to work collaboratively with the NCSC and the outcomes achieved will reflect on the responsiveness and adaptability of the management team and their practice.

Interviews with the team managers established that they were clear about their duties and responsibilities, the level of delegation and the lines of accountability. Discussions with staff demonstrated that they were clear about their manager's role and of the lines of accountability within the organisation. A number of staff confirmed that they thought they had job descriptions and agreements in place outlining their roles and responsibilities but were unsure. Staff reported that their uncertainty was due to the reorganisations that had taken place. There are contractual agreements in place outlining conditions of service. The fostering service manager reported that the Head of Residential Care is responsible for deputising as the person in charge in her absence.

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?	3
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As part of the inspection, Inspectors visited the homes of nine foster carers who were interviewed individually, and a foster carers' and foster children's/young person's survey was instituted. In addition a foster carers' meeting and a foster carers executive meeting were attended. Records examined including 16 foster carers files provided evidence that there is relevant preparation and ongoing training in place for foster carers in regard to health and safety matters. Underpinning the service is a programme of annual review at which health and safety checks are carried out, although one example was discovered where a kinship carer did not have a review between 1998 and 2001.

There is a detailed assessment process in place for prospective foster carers, which is completed before presenting a case to the fostering panel. This includes covering health and safety issues as part of assessing the prospective foster carers home environment. One set of foster carers was presented to panel, observed by Inspectors, for a second time having undertaken work requested by the panel to make their home safe.

Of the nine foster carers homes visited by Inspectors, environments were warm, homely and free from avoidable hazards. Each child was accommodated comfortably in their own bedroom although a number were sharing bedrooms with other foster children. The foster carers visited had been made aware that the NCSC might inspect their home and interview them and the foster children placed as part of the inspection process.

The foster carers handbook published in 1997 has written guidelines on Health and Safety issues. The handbook is in the process of being developed and updated.

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

It was of concern to note that up to 70% of foster placements are made in an emergency, which means that often the children/young people have no opportunity for a period of introduction to the family. It was reported by foster carers that often no suitable placement is found within a reasonable time period and that an emergency placement or a short-term placement often lasted between 2 and 3 years.

There is insufficient placement choice and although children are assessed as part of the matching process the choice of placement is limited. This is due to the overall shortage of approved foster carers, and that most of them are white British or white European. During the interview with the Panel Chair she acknowledged that Surrey suffers from a shortage of carers recruited from ethnic minorities but that she currently did not know exactly how many were required. Fostering management estimated that only 2% of approved foster carers come from disabled and ethnic minority groups. The fostering service considers a child's/young person's ethnic origin, class, language and religion as important factors in the matching process. Matching a child/young person with a family who shares similarities in culture and background is most likely to meet a child's/young person's needs, promote continuity and provide an environment familiar and sympathetic to the child/young person. The fostering service has consequently set up a recruitment project and the main aim of the project is to recruit sufficient foster carers to ensure there is a year on year increase in the amount of placement choice available to the children and young people referred to the service. Plans are in hand to complete the transfer of the respite service for children with disabilities to the fostering service and this will obviously further impact on the numbers and choice of foster placements required. It should be noted, however, that in the one case of transracial placement inspected, the foster carer received additional support and information to enable positive understanding of cultural heritage.

A number of staff and foster carers were unclear in their understanding of equal opportunities, discrimination, values and promoting diversity. Inspectors did however observe some excellent examples of foster carers acceptance of the rights and differences of the foster children and young people in their care. It is recommended that staff and foster carers preparation and training needs to feature more prominently the areas of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Following the SSI concern about the need for greater care in relation to anti-discriminatory attitudes, the Children's Services Training and Development programme has a module entitled, 'Promoting the Identity of Black & Asian Young People', which staff and foster carers can attend. A number of foster carers have commenced training for the NVQ level 3 award and the training includes reflection on personal values, attitudes and experience.

The training programme does not explicitly address techniques for enhancing young people's self-esteem. There was, however, anecdotal evidence from visits to carers that link-workers were seen as partners in encouraging young people in developing life opportunities, but their placing social workers were perceived as doing so less consistently.

There was reported to be policies on employment and anti-discriminatory practice.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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 matching of foster children/young people and foster carers is where possible achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child/young person and their birth family, the potential foster carers, their families and any other child/young person already in the placement. The subsequent care plan and written assessments of the child/young person, the family and the foster carers are all taken into account as part of the matching process. When interviewed fostering staff reported that due to the matters detailed above in Standard 7 matching usually began on the basis of which foster carers were available and then progressed from there.

Foster carers' expressed concern over a lack of information provided, on occasions, on the foster child/young person concerned, and that they felt obliged to take placements. One of the foster family's visited reported that they had on occasions had up to ten foster children and regularly have six. Foster carers files gave a picture of the pressure of placements, with as already stated under Standard 7 a high incidence of emergency placements. Inspectors were told that some 15-30 carers were 'over-numbers' at any one time, although more in the east than the west of the county. When foster carers are asked to take children outside their approval and over numbers the match is presented to the next panel for approval and the foster carer is granted an exception to numbers. It is of concern that a high number of foster carers are regularly operating for long periods of time with more than three children ("the usual fostering limit"), who are not necessarily siblings with respect to each other. When the usual fostering limit is exceeded by the examples above the fostering service must consider that it is in fact operating a children's home and must take the necessary action to safeguard the children concerned. The Fostering service are referred to, The Children Act 1989 Part VIII, 63 (12) Schedule 7, which relates to, "Limits on Number of Foster Children".

Foster carers reported that they had not all signed the Foster Carer Agreement for at least the last two years because it provided out of date information and information they did not agree with. Not all files scrutinised had copies of the former foster carer agreement in them and in one case the agreement was unsigned. There was a newly published foster carer agreement in the process of being implemented during the inspection. However, foster carers reported a lack of familiarity with it. The new foster carer agreement should be made available to foster carers as soon as possible and all foster carers must sign the document.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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

There is a draft Child Protection procedure, which relates specifically to investigating allegations against foster carers and should therefore be read in conjunction with ACPC procedures, which outline the process to be followed when allegations are made. The child protection procedure should be extended to include the requirement to notify the NCSC of any instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers, as required by Regulation 43 (1). Three foster carers expressed concern regarding the authority's response to allegations of a child protection nature. They reported that the fostering service does not always follow procedures and that they did not feel adequately supported.

The issue of physical punishment is addressed in the Handbook for Foster Carers and the guidance given, that corporal punishment is unacceptable, is clear. The 1997 handbook does say that, "it is not possible to be rigid about this" and, "a smack in the heat of the moment will not automatically lead to the removal of the child, or to a decision not to place further children". The files gave examples of where this flexibility had been applied. The questionnaires received back from foster children/young people stated that punishments by foster carers consisted of, "being grounded", "having to go to bed early", and "stop me watching television", which the majority of children/young people recorded as being either, "very fair" or "usually okay". A number of unacceptable punishments recorded on questionnaires by foster children/young people will be taken up directly with the fostering service. The majority of foster children/young people stated in the questionnaires that rules and punishments were discussed with them. The foster children/young people that understood the meaning of restraint recorded never having been restrained.

Fostering managers were open about circumstances and outcomes of allegations of abuse in foster care. Surrey County Council Child Protection and Independent Review Unit provided information concerning six cases where allegations had been made against foster carers. Of these cases two foster carers have been de-registered and one foster carer has been charged with offences against children.

A number of foster carers had attended specific courses on Child Protection training, although from the questionnaires returned this is a small number given the overall numbers of approved foster carers. An introduction to child protection is included in 'The Choosing to Foster' training and foster carers will be expected to complete, when set up, a number of other training courses, within a two year period, post approval, one of which is Child Protection.

Two foster carers expressed concern regarding the length of time CRB checks had taken on members of their extended families and friends. One of the cases related to a CRB check for a friend of a foster carer who was to baby-sit/supervise the foster children when the foster carer was out in the evening. It was still not back four months later and the foster carer had been unable to go out throughout this period.

The policy on 'Dealing With Incidents Of Bullying Against Foster Children' provides sound information and directs foster carers to further guidance if required. However, foster carers were not aware of the document, therefore further work should be carried out to brief carers about the issues around bullying and appropriate strategies for managing the problem.

Safe caring is addressed as part of the 'Choosing to Foster' training. The detail of the fostering service's Safe Caring Policy complies with Regulation 12 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Many of the foster carers spoken with and visited during this inspection, reported that their husbands/partners had attended the initial foster carer training but had not attended any further training and did not attend monthly support groups or reviews. It is therefore recommended that to ensure safe caring the fostering service should find ways of involving these carers, to promote understanding. The fostering service are intending providing separate 'Safer Care Practices' training for members of fostering households to attend.

Foster carers were unclear regarding the need to record relevant information and did not provide any recording on foster children/young people of any significance. One foster carer provided a logbook in which she recorded significant events, but there was very little recording. Another produced life-story books created by the foster carer with her foster children of significant people and events in the children's lives. A third carer maintained records of contact by a child with her birth parents, but not in any particular format. These records were reported by the foster carer to only be maintained because the child was expressing distress at having to spend time with her birth mother and the child's social worker was insisting on the contact because the birth mother wanted it. Please also refer to Standard 11 of this report.

The procedure for missing foster children/young people could have greater clarification and explanation, in that foster carers in some instances seemed unclear about the procedure. The procedure, dated April 1997, is somewhat outdated and relates mainly to children in residential care with a small paragraph right at the end headed "For Children Boarded Out". Foster carers also reported that at times they were left unsupported out of office hours with challenging situations to resolve. They reported receiving insufficient information on particular foster children/young people with the result that they and the child/young person concerned, felt very vulnerable. The fostering service does provide a member of staff as out of hours telephone back-up in one part of the county and the authority's Emergency Duty Team (EDT) are also available for assistance out of hours. Foster carers reported that they found the service from EDT of little assistance to them in a difficult situation and that they mainly used the service for reporting incidents etc.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	11.33	%
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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

Placement agreements show that consideration is given to contact arrangements and to the child's/young person's view of such arrangements. The files show foster carers' recording of contact visits and requests for help and support when difficulties arise. There is evidence on file of risk assessments being carried out in relation to contact carried out away from the foster home, although it was reported that there is a scarcity of appropriate premises to carry this out at the moment. Foster carers reported taking responsibility for assisting foster children/young people with contact arrangements. Questionnaires indicated that foster carers understand the importance of foster children/young people maintaining regular contact with their birth families, if appropriate. Foster carers reported that they communicate positively regarding birth parents, provide transport for supervised contact, show photographs of parents, encourage telephone contact and offer their home for visits.

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**

There is a strategic objective for staff to make two unannounced visits a year to each foster carer to see the foster child/young person's bedroom and to 'pick up' any issues that may have been missed before hand. The regularity and thoroughness of foster carer and foster children/young people's reviews provide opportunities for children in placement to make their individual needs and views known. File evidence showed that foster carers themselves tend to facilitate the foster child/young person in giving feedback and being assertive in meetings. Observation during placement visits mainly re-enforced this perception.

The authority had purchased fifty-five computers with software; these were being installed into foster homes at the time of the inspection, for use by foster children/young people. A further 60 foster carers had been identified for the next purchase of computers. These will provide additional means for foster children/young people to communicate their opinions and views and can also be used for educational purposes.

There is a complaints procedure in place although it was noted to be somewhat out dated. The agency's written information on complaints needs to be extended to make clear the opportunity for individuals to approach the NCSC, Surrey Area office directly should they have a concern or complaint about the fostering service and feel unable to approach the service. As previously stated under Standard 1, the address and telephone number of the NCSC, Surrey Area office must be included in the details on complaints in the Children's Guide information in accordance with Regulation 3 (3) (c) of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Questionnaires and interviews with foster children/young people indicated that they were aware of how to raise any concerns or complaints and would usually make those to their social worker. However, foster carers and foster children/young people were not aware that they could complain to the NCSC, Surrey Area office.

The contract with the Children's Society SCRIPT project has proved important in providing an innovative avenue for looked after children to express and demonstrate their views of the service and their experience of fostering. Inspectors spent a morning at the SCRIPT premises with a group of foster children and children who foster arrived as well. The children/young people were made to feel very welcome and their views valued. They expressed a range of positive and negatives views of their fostering experience and the morning concluded with a good lunch and each child receiving £10 for turning up. One matter that particularly concerned the Inspectors present was when the children discussed their low feelings of self-worth at turning up at a new foster home with their clothes and personal belongings thrown into a black dustbin bag. It is acknowledged that senior management has now instructed that all children fostered must be provided with suitcases to transport their clothes in any move.

There are arrangements in place for foster children/young people to have regular contact with their social workers, although the quality of this relationship was thought to depend on the competence of the individual social worker. A high number of foster carers and foster children/young people reported the unsatisfactory service they received from placing social workers. Social workers were reported to be constantly changing and to be more interested in the views of the birth parents than those of the child/young person. Foster carers' expressed concern regarding the length of time it can take to get in touch with placing social workers during normal office hours. They described numerous telephone calls and

messages being left without response from the social workers concerned. This is an area that requires urgent action by the authority.

Fostering service staff, foster carers and foster children/young people reported communication issues between themselves and placing social workers. These matters were reported to negatively influence the relationships and trust between supervising social workers, foster carers, foster children/young people and placing social workers.

Please also refer to Standard 25 and to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The expectation of foster carers is clearly specified in the handbook and in practice. Evidence from reviews show that foster children/young people's health care needs are regularly attended to and taken seriously. Foster carers are provided with what the placing social worker considers to be adequate detail with regard to medical information, and training is also provided for foster carers on specific health care needs. Post approval training courses when set up will include, for example, first aid awareness and health, hygiene and sexual health (including HIV, AIDS and Sex and Sexuality). Other appropriate training opportunities are provided; although foster carers did identify drugs awareness training in particular as an area they would like more targeted information on. One set of foster carers specified a lack of out-of-hours medical advice concerning the inappropriate taking of medication by the father of the young person placed with them.

The Panel Chair had also identified deficiencies in being able to access adequate medical advice to inform approval decisions. The availability of specialised medical advice to foster carers is likely to become more of a salient issue with the integration of disability respite into the fostering service.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The authority actively promotes the need for children of school age to attend school and this area forms part of foster carers core training. It was reported that children are kept in their own schools wherever possible and moves are usually only made where there would be long journeys involved or where long term placements are made away from the school area. The Children's Services Training and Development Programme is designed with specific training that foster carers can attend to enable them to be aware of the educational needs of looked after children and their own roles and responsibilities.

Inspectors attended a foster carers evening meeting in which speakers from Social Services and Education were present. Presentations were made to foster carers regarding the joint review and the impact for looked after children, of education and social service provision coming together. Foster carers responses were mixed concerning the attention paid to foster children/young people's education. There were a number of views and individual situations described by foster carers who claimed that children excluded from school were receiving no educational input or support. Some issues were reported to relate to cross county border differences where children placed in Surrey attended schools in another County. The purpose of PEP's (Personal Education Plan) was explained to foster carers and the role of placing social workers to work directly with the designated teacher in each school for each child/young person in foster care to ensure that their PEP is in place, and how the teacher concerned should take responsibility for completing and monitoring the plan.

It was acknowledged that foster carers did not always feel sufficiently informed and confident to challenge school authorities when they felt their foster child was not receiving sufficient support. It was agreed that foster carers required a considerable amount of training in order to address these matters and that there was a case for involving foster carers in strategy development.

Questionnaires, files and visits confirmed that foster carers actively encouraged and supported the educational opportunities facing foster children/young people. Planning and review documentation also supported this. Copies of PEP's were on some files, but not others. The difficulties experienced by foster carers in dealing with the educational needs of children/young people particularly where they receive education from other local authorities should be addressed through training and support.

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 fostering service has a number of specialist foster carers who prepare young people for independent living. It was acknowledged that there is a shortfall in leaving care workers. This means that young people often have to stay living with foster carers who have not had the training, support and guidance necessary in order to provide effective assistance to the young person.

Foster carers visited with appropriately aged young people told inspectors that they approached this issue in their own way and did not think that they received sufficient support and information to equip the young people for leaving care. They had not heard of the Connexions service, for instance. No Pathway Plan was found on any file checked. The relevant age group would have to be sampled further to establish the degree to which the fostering service ensures consultation with young people about gaining independence.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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?

1

Immediate requirements were left with the authority during the inspection in relation to this standard as it was identified that there was insufficient evidence to illustrate full compliance. A sample of staff files were examined during the inspection on 3 March 2003 at the Children's Services Personnel Department and a number of areas were found to be insufficient in as much as:

- There was no evidence of relevant qualifications being retained on file, and a number of the staff confirmed that they had not been asked for proof of qualifications at interview or subsequently.
- There was evidence that police checks had not been renewed for many years. However for a number of staff the "old" style police check had been renewed in February 2002. There was no evidence of CRB checks having been carried out. All staff working with children in any way require the enhanced level check. Staff who will not work in any way with children, but may in the course of their work have opportunity for regular contact with children require a standard level check. An "old" police check is not sufficient.
- There was evidence that at least one member of staff previously employed by another agency had been allowed to commence work whilst the fostering service awaited their police check. This employee was allowed to commence work on the basis of verbal assurances from the previous employer that a satisfactory police check had been made some time earlier. Verbal or written assurance that an individual has undergone a CRB check at the necessary level is not sufficient; the judgement about the fitness of workers cannot be delegated by the provider to another agency.
- Positive proof of identity including a recent photograph must be obtained and kept on file.
- Satisfactory medical information must be obtained on all new employees and kept on file.
- Recruitment procedures in terms of good practice in the safeguarding of children were not available during the inspection and staff were unaware of the content of any

procedure. Inspectors were therefore unable to track an application through to an appointment.

- A number of staff had been transferred to the fostering service from different departments of Surrey County Council's Children's Services and it was of concern that updated checks had not been carried out prior to their appointment.
- There was no evidence of telephone inquiries being made in relation to and in addition to written staff references.
- Gaps in employment must be satisfactorily examined with staff during interview and their explanations clearly recorded.
- Files and interviews with staff indicated that there was no consistency in the internal recruitment of staff and concern was expressed by staff in relation to the interview process. In some instances, application forms had been completed and in others they had not. Some staff had been subject to a fairly rigorous process in that they were interviewed and were required to complete a written presentation prior to interview. Managers were not always involved in the short-listing of applicants and on one occasion received application packs on the day of the actual interview.
- Staff referred to the "sloppy" manner in which personnel dealt with them when dealing with their appointment detail.
- Staff were unsure when asked about their understanding of matters relating to Standard 15.5.
- Many staff had not received induction training when commencing with the fostering service. It was reported that there was no formal induction programme available for new staff.
- Staff reported that although during social work training they had received training in assessment, many had not received any up date since. As these staff carry out assessments as part of their regular work additional training may not be necessary. However, for staff without a professional qualification this would need to be identified during supervision and appropriate training provided.
- Staff could not remember when or if they had received Child Protection training. A number were unclear what Child Protection training meant.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Total number of staff of the agency:	49	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	5
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Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Discussions with staff demonstrated that there is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability. Staff confirmed that they received regular and appropriate support from their team managers and the fostering service manager. The family placement team managers were particularly reported by all staff to be approachable and accessible should they require advice or support at any time. There is access to a good range of advice and literature for both staff and foster carers. It should be noted that the authority had recently introduced a new IT system named SWIFT, which wasn't totally operational. Staff are yet to be convinced that the new system can provide the information analysis fostering tracking requires. The register of placement of children/young people was produced via SWIFT in a very messy and inconsistent format. However, the fostering service did eventually obtain the correct information and it should now be available in a consistent and legible format which details specific information of all children/young people placed, their named foster carer and the placing and supervising social workers.

A number of staff and foster carers stated that the constant changes to the children's services, to practice, policy and procedure was impacting on their ability to carry out the job for which they had been employed. They described the changes as tiring, confusing and in some cases de-skilling. These changes and the changes in legislation have put a tremendous pressure and workload on the fostering service. Staff and managers are required as part of their job descriptions to work an evening and/or part of a weekend to contribute to various group discussions etc that can add to the pressure. No staff however reported any concern regarding their time commitment. A bank of sessional social workers are employed in order to carry out assessment work for both the east and the west teams. It was of concern to note that two staff having been transferred from another team to the fostering team where still carrying their previous childcare cases. There was some confusion over which team was supervising what aspect of work. There was conflict for the workers providing social work to placed children and supervision/assessment to foster carers. This culminated in a lack of opportunity for these staff to learn their new role. Administrative staff expressed concern that due to the need to prepare documentation for panel meetings, administrative staff shortages and professional staff having a lack of computer skills, they were constantly managing crisis. This must be addressed and all social work matters passed back to the appropriate team.

The teams appeared to manage well, but with a full workload. More structured support should be considered by the children's service in order to deliver the service in a more effective and planned way.

Many of the children/young people placed through the fostering team have been without social workers or had a number of changes of social worker. It was reported that often the social workers are newly qualified and lack experience in the field of fostering, fail to constructively listen to the child/young person and fail to take the views of the foster carer into consideration. Comments from foster carers, foster children/young people, supervising social workers and analysis of questionnaires provides clear evidence of ongoing concern regarding poor social work. This must be addressed.

Please also refer to Standard 15 above and the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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 Children's Services have experienced a high turnover of staff across its teams and the fostering service is no exception. Staff of the service told inspectors that they did not think the authority were able to retain staff. Many expressed an opinion that this was an achievable goal, but the authority would need to be creative in aiming for this. Shortfalls in full time staffing are met through the use of regular agency staff. However, the high level of turnover has led to ongoing concern regarding poor social work as stated above under Standard 16.

There is a fostering recruitment project that was formerly set up in October 2002 with the purpose of increasing placement choice and decreasing the large numbers of children currently funded in private and voluntary placements. Staff in the family finding and recruitment team are confident that the robust action plan they have in place for recruiting new foster carers in the coming year will prove effective. The training provision for carers has been reviewed and developed and training material brought into line with the competence framework. Fostering staff have historically carried out much of the training for foster carers. This has now been extended to include young people who have previously been in foster care and foster carers themselves. During the period October 2002 to March 2003 it was reported that, four choosing to foster courses were organised, training sixty-four individuals from thirty-seven households. Training for carers follows the National Foster Care Association Code of Practice and BAAF guidelines and assessments use the Form F process. All assessments are carried out by appropriately qualified and experienced social workers

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

Regulation 44 requires the "Registered Proprietor" to provide a certificate of insurance, but as local authority fostering services do not register this excludes the requirement. However, the authority should have insurance across all social service department services and this should be consistent with the standards and cover the fostering service. The fostering service is recommended to check that the cover does so.

Overall staff reported being satisfied most of the time by the support provided to them by the fostering service and the authority. Information gathered from foster carer questionnaire analysis and from interviews with foster carers produced a mixed picture. Comments were made that referred to a lack of support in a number of different situations, but particularly in regard to assistance with a child/young person experiencing difficulties, conflicting messages concerning placements, staffing shortages or staff not being available, lack of communication, and obtaining information. The highest number of positive support comments related to telephone contact, regular contact with supervising social worker, being listened too, social functions and regular support groups. Analysis of placing social workers questionnaires referred to the over crowding in foster homes as the worse aspect of the fostering service, but overall made very positive comments.

The out of hour's management and support has been referred to under Standard 9. However, Standard 18.3 is an area that requires further consideration by the fostering service.

Staff and foster carers spoken with were unaware of a whistle-blowing policy.

Please also refer to Standard 21 of this report.

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**

Children's Services Training and Development programme identifies a range of training programmes, many targeted towards newly qualified social workers, residential childcare staff and NVQ qualifications. Foster carers can make application for a place on a number of the training courses on offer. Fostering service staff and foster carers attend joint training. This could be extended to placing social workers in order for them to have a better understanding of the role of fostering service staff and foster carers. There were a number of areas in which staff and foster carers joined together to share their views of the fostering service and how it functions. Training for the more experienced staff was not so evident and may need further review with the staff concerned in order to identify relevant training areas. Most staff had received the local authority induction training, but not service specific induction training. No individual staff or foster carer training plans were seen. Evaluation of training programmes was also not in evidence. The team is kept in touch with legislative changes and updates.

Please also refer to Standard 15 and the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Not all staff felt they had received clear job descriptions and there was little evidence of job descriptions on staff files. Staff had received copies of policies and procedures. The majority of staff stated that supervision was received on a regular basis by experienced and qualified staff. Unqualified staff reported that they were appropriately supervised by qualified social workers when carrying out the fostering task. All staff stated that the managers operated an open door policy.

Sessional staff interviewed stated that they are given time to read and understand the policies and procedures of the fostering service. They receive formal supervision every month at which all aspects of their work is discussed. The managers are always available to discuss any issues that arise between supervision sessions. Staff appraisals take place after staff have been in post six months at which time their employment is confirmed and then they have an annual appraisal.

The fostering service has appointed two CAMHS workers for LAC in foster care (p/t) and a Psychotherapist that staff and foster carers can book for consultation.

Please also refer to Standard 15 and the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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

The fostering service is undergoing significant change, with new policies and procedures, a new handbook and foster carer agreement coming on stream during the inspection, major restructuring and a fostering strategy designed to take place over a three year period, that commences on 1 April 2003. Foster carer feedback about the impact of this tends to focus on changes in supervising social workers and on social work for the children and young people accommodated, with long-established foster carers commenting on file, in September 2002, that they were "frustrated with some of the questionable processes that extend the period during which children are in care". There were several examples of miscommunication between fostering teams and placing social workers on file. Some assessments have to go ahead without checks being back. Comments about support varied from the foster carers who were seemingly unsure as to who is their supervising social worker (or which office related to them) to another foster carer of seven years standing, living round the corner from east office, who feels she has always had excellent support.

This 'patchy' picture was also be seen through the file scrutiny:

Some west office files were pre-selected. Selection was made according to information contained on questionnaires, while others were chosen at random. Two of them related to long-standing foster carers who had entered the system via the first step-lodging scheme. In one of these cases there was no convincing assessment on file, although there was an undated first step lodging review. The other did have a Form F dating from February 2003. Discussion with the team manager confirmed that she was aware that these particular 2 cases had not been paid enough attention too, until very recently. The files reflected this. As for other carers, they met the standards for information contained, although at times this could be hard to discern, given that the paperwork was occasionally "messy". Some of the file wallets are actually disintegrating. In one case there is a recording (23.10.03) that the foster carers did not feel they were visited enough and that there had been a lack of consultation in care planning. A note on the file states that a care plan was due in February 2003.

The east office files, again were pre-selected as explained above, with others chosen at random. These files were somewhat better maintained, even if they are contained in inefficient movable cabinets. The quality of assessment seemed satisfactory, with one Form F standing out as particularly impressive through the way it faced up to difficult issues. One kinship care case looked at was Approved in August 1999, with an issue about the police check and two undisclosed thefts emerging in October 1999. The carer was re-approved as a relative carer in September 2002 but I could find no recording of how the offences were dealt with. This carer had not signed the foster carer agreement on file. In general the east files contained considerable detail and were coherent, certainly meeting the standards. The detailed recording does however give an impression of foster carers feeling under pressure and at times having to make difficult unsupported decisions.

File maintenance and recording varied from east office to west office, with the former being more consistent. Reviews are systematically undertaken throughout, which effectively provides the lynchpin of the service.

Prospective foster carers files scrutiny:

This proved to be a somewhat confusing area. It would seem that the boundaries between the newly established recruitment team and east's long-term team had not quite yet crystallized. As far as could be established there can be a proliferation of files with the same applicant information being held on file at the east or the west office, the family placement team and possibly by the permanency team if a court order is involved. The information held on these files does meet standards however.

Fostering managers were open and honest about the scale of the change process facing them. The consultative structure of executive and area groups for foster carers should provide a useful platform for disseminating an ever-clearer strategy. The role of the supervising social worker is defined through agreements and annual reviews are available to panels.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The new foster care agreement defines roles and the authority is committed to providing a supervising social worker for each foster household. Likewise the new handbook covers the appropriate guidance for foster carers – it is over five years since it was fully updated. On approval all foster carers must agree the new foster carer agreement, which complies with Regulation 28 (5) (b) and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. They must also be provided with a copy of the new handbook that contains policies and procedures and other pertinent matters for their attention.

Although the service is under considerable pressure, attempts are made to meet with carers regularly and files are adequately maintained.

In terms of practical support, the most often reported shortfalls are in terms of out-of-hours support that has a focus on the particular needs of foster carers and access to children's social workers. Complaints procedures are disseminated and representations recorded. More dynamic use of collated complaints trends could further inform strategy. The aspect of the present set of procedures most quoted by carers was the perceived lack of independent support for carers subject to allegations.

Foster carers are also provided with a safe care book and a daily logbook for each foster child. Foster carers spoken with said that when policies and procedures are updated by the agency they receive copies of the new documents. The foster carers spoken with mainly said that they received good support from the management of the agency and are visited by their link worker from the agency at least once a month and usually more frequently. In addition, they also receive regular telephone support. Analysis of foster carers questionnaires scored telephone support as the most valued practical support.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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

There was a mixed response to the issue of training from foster carers. As the inspection continued it became clear that a number of courses were on offer and some carers took up the opportunity of training and others did not. It is however significant that training records were not filled in on most foster carer's files. Take-up last year varied dramatically between the west and the east teams, with only 5-recorded attendances from the latter. The draft mandatory training policy details pre and post approval training and induction. The induction includes introduction to the relatively new 'buddy' system and a formal explanation of the 'role and tasks of foster carers'. Once established this more formalised programme should reinforce that training must be attended by all foster carers. The introduction of the 'Training Profile' for foster carers, which is currently in draft form, will enable the fostering service to have a clear record of the training undertaken by each foster carer. These should be attached to the annual review forms and a system developed for the effectiveness of training to be evaluated and reviewed. Foster carers commented that the training programme was inappropriately pitched, inconvenient for some groups of carers to get to, and also at inconvenient times. Given the geographical spread of the county, a comprehensive training programme represents a considerable challenge. The payments system, established through the Executive, puts considerable onus onto the fostering service to deliver credible, systematic training. Foster carers also commented that training could be repetitive and more challenging and informative training would be welcome.

The west team has set up a new group for birth children of carers who foster and the first meeting was in December 2002. It was reported by children and carers to be very welcome and important for birth children to be recognised for their contribution to the fostering task, and as children with needs and aspirations of their own. Children who attend these workshops are provided with a certificate of thanks. There were comments from foster carers that the inspection process undertaken by the NCSC does not take account of children who foster.

There was a new monthly newsletter, 'Fostering OK' published by the authority in December 2002. This publication is being used as a means of communicating information to foster carers more effectively.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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

All the teams were maintaining records for each child/young person. However there were some variations on what was being held on the individual files. Some files contained "Looked After Children" documentation. For example, Looking After Children – Essential Information Record Part 1 – all details relating to the child and family and Placement Plan Part 1- Placement Agreement. All the files viewed had copies of the child/young persons Reviews that clearly noted the child/young person's comments and wishes. The Review format covered all aspects of the child/young person's needs, set goal plans and involved relevant supporting and interested parties. Generally the reviews were being held every six months, however on two of the files viewed the last review formats were dated the 15 May 2002 and the 8 March 2002. The Independent Chair co-ordinates the reviews. Some of the files viewed also contained a significant incident form, individual school reports and strategy meeting minutes.

The children and young people interviewed stated that they received very little written information. Some talked of the independent chair actively seeking their views and wishes prior to a review.

The Inspecting Officer did view two of the children/young person's files held by the Area Long Term Child Care Team in Reigate and established that a policy related to file keeping exists for the Area Child Care Teams. The files viewed contained the following information: basic information sheet, record of significant events and decisions, contact sheets, referral initial and comprehensive assessments, care plan agreements with users/carers, reviews, correspondence, confidential section, routine medical reports, court orders and life history material.

It is recommended that all files be maintained in line with the authority's, 'Files for Fostering Teams' policy.

Please refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

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?**

2

Separate records are kept in relation to Standard 25.2. An independent review had been commissioned to review the Fostering Service prior to this inspection. Every effort is made to store the records securely but please see comments on premises Standard 26.1 to 26.5. The authority is actively working with Script (The Children's Society) to promote the rights of the child/young person. Children/young people would benefit from receiving more direct information on accessing their individual records. The child/young person's records viewed were legible and non-stigmatising and distinguished between fact, opinion and third party information. Confidential information is held in a specific section of the child's/young person's file. As previously stated Looked After Children documentation is used but there was variations on what was held on each foster team file.

There is a policy for case recording and the retention of records that covers all relevant areas, although this is in draft form. It is recommended that the authority ensure all staff are fully aware of this document as soon as possible and that work is carried out to ensure all records are maintained to the required standard.

There is a system for keeping together data on allegations and complaints. There had been four complaints received by the authority between March 2002 and March 2003. The complaints had been investigated and were recorded, although the quality of investigations was unclear. The authority's response times to complainants varied from between 10 days and 12 weeks. With the exception of one complainant the other three were made by foster carers. It is recommended that copies of allegations and complaints also be kept on the relevant files for staff, foster carers and foster children/young people. These should include clear details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken.

Information relating to child protection matters is detailed under Standard 9 of this report. Please also refer to the requirements section on page 12 of this report.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

X

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

228

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

186

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

59

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

37

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

94.29

Maximum £

353.50

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

All the premises have Surrey County Council insurance cover.

The Chertsey Office (West Team) was inspected on 3 March 2003 and is sited in traditional office premises that are accessible to the public. Whilst on site parking is limited it is acknowledged that it is possible to park in adjacent roads. The premises are alarmed and a receptionist who serves the teams based in the premises on duty 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Staff can access the premises at any time but obviously need to switch the alarm off.

The IT and communication systems appeared to be adequate given that social workers hot desk.

Whilst the staff team have endeavoured to make the very best use of the space available to them, space is limited. Managers have to share a small office, some records are stored in a corridor/walk way area in not very robust lockable cabinets, interview rooms are rather small, conference rooms have to be booked and are limited in relation to size for holding panel meetings, foster carer meetings or even team meetings. Male toilet facilities are also limited.

The Reigate Office (East Team) was inspected on 4 March 2003 and is sited in new modern premises with good general facilities that are very accessible to the public. A park and ride system is operated by Surrey because of the shortage of on site car parking space. It is difficult to park in nearby roads. If staff are planning to be in the office all day they are expected to use the park and ride system. This can mean administration staff having to work a slightly longer day. The office is shared by a number of different teams and a receptionist who serves all the teams based in the premises, is on duty 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday. A caretaker/security person is also employed. Swipe cards are used to access the open plan office areas. Staff are not able to access the premises at the weekend.

The IT system and communication systems appeared to be adequate.

Staff have been creative in using the space available. However managers have no set office of their own and have to book rooms in order to supervise staff in a confidential manner, conference rooms also have to be booked and cannot be booked more than three months in advance. Parties not actually housed in the premises can also book the conference rooms. Thus putting some limits on the use of the conference rooms. The fostering team shares a record storage area with other children's teams based near them. Whilst the storage facilities are of a modern design the inspecting officer had some concerns about their operation both from a health and safety point of view and from a confidentiality perspective bearing in mind the number of staff accommodated in the premises and the number of visitors to the premises/offices. Interviewing facilities for children and carers are also somewhat limited.

The Meads (Family Finding Team) was inspected on the morning of 11 March and 2003 is sited adjacent to the Runnymede Centre in converted office accommodation that is accessible to the public. There is good on site parking for both staff and visitors. Front door access is monitored through a keypad and intercom system. The premises are also alarmed. However due to manual handling courses being held in the same premises it isn't always possible for the team to be aware who has entered the premises and once through the front door there is open access to the premises.

The IT system and communication systems appeared only to be adequate because social workers hot desk.

Staff have again endeavoured to make the best use of the space available. However one of the offices in use by the administration staff is very small, storage space is at a premium, there are limits on the use of the conference room and where people can wait when attending meetings. Male toilet facilities are poorly sited and not particularly good.

Beliar House (Adoption/Kinship Team) was inspected on the afternoon of 11 March 2003 and is a modern office premises sited in an office complex that is reasonably accessible to the public. On site parking facilities are somewhat limited. Front door access is monitored through a keypad system. Generally the office was well laid out with satisfactory facilities to meet the team's needs.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Regulations and guidelines imposed upon businesses such as Tax, National Insurance and Vat are conformed to. The administration/support staff use a coding system.

A Financial Procedure Manual is provided and maintained by Surrey County Council that acts as a reference document for staff.

The County operates a budgeting system both for Care and Team support costs. Managers and the Children Services Finance Team based at County Hall monitor these budgets on a monthly basis. To date Surrey has provided sufficient financial resources to fulfil its present Care and Operational Team Support costs.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspecting officer was advised that foster carers are provided with information about allowances when attending the Choosing To Foster Course and that they are also given a letter advising of allowances/payments after being approved. A letter should then be provided on a yearly basis to all carers even if they don't have a child/young person in placement. This was not assessed.

Some foster carers made comment about Surrey's payments being low. It is acknowledged that Surrey has already recognised the need for changes to its payment system and that work is being undertaken to create a new system for implementation in 2003.

A paper audit trail was in operation as well as an IT record. Management maintain an overview of all payments made to carers.

It should be noted that the new IT system was not totally operational.

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

There is a clear policy followed for payments to carers. The Fostering Manager confirmed that current allowance levels are well published and that foster carers are kept informed of these. Foster carers spoken to confirmed that they were aware of the allowances and expenses and that they received prompt payment. Foster carers are paid fortnightly directly into their bank account. A number reported that these payments are often incorrect. One foster carer reported that for the last 6 months she has telephoned the authority after receiving each payment because different amounts had been paid to her each time. The foster carer stated that she has now given up telephoning, as she has not got the time, although the amounts are still different each time.

Foster carers expressed concern that they have no pension rights and no paid holiday leave.

A number of foster carers also expressed concern regarding the length of time they had to wait in order to obtain financial assistance when purchasing equipment and/or a vehicle.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Three separate fostering panels in different locations were observed as part of the inspection. The membership and quoracy of each fostering panel complied with Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. All panel members are reported to have undergone a CRB check. The observation of the panels identified that they provide a quality assurance function and make recommendations in relation to the assessment process and approval of prospective foster carers, termination of approval as foster carers, annual reviews of foster carers and changes to the approval of foster carers. The Panels' recommendations are made to an Independent Decision Maker. During the inspection process a number of staff reported their concern that the Decision Maker can take up to 9 weeks to reply to these recommendations when the stated timescale was reported to be two weeks. Whilst it is acknowledged that perhaps two weeks is unrealistic, it is equally unrealistic and unreasonable to expect the staff and foster carers concerned to wait for up to 9 weeks for an outcome. Unfortunately the Decision Maker was not interviewed during the inspection. Foster carers reported that when their annual review is due they are asked to complete a form and make any comments on the form that they wish to make. Foster carers stated that often the panel do not see the comments and they are not followed up.

Observation of East Panel on 6 March 2003 demonstrated that members were aware of the need to express any conflict of interest and one member did so and was requested to leave the meeting. The Panel was also aware of the least number that must be present in order to make their decisions regarding recommendations valid. The panel were having difficulty making a recommendation in relation to a Regulation 38 assessment for approval as foster carers because the placing social worker had not seen the child concerned in the placement and did not attend the panel with a report. This was a protracted discussion, which went on throughout the morning. The panel had four other cases to be considered and had run out of time to discuss them. The need to achieve an outcome for the cases not discussed did not appear to be a high priority.

Observation of West Panel on 18 March 2003 focused on one particularly complex case. The panel dealt in a reasoned way with a situation that should not arise – namely various hastily tabled supplementary reports that raised points of concern, while the applicants waited outside. The panel demonstrated that it was able to come to a reasonable decision, given the circumstances. This scenario obviously raised the whole issue of quality control prior to the panel, which was later discussed with the chair.

Observation of the Permanency Panel on 25 March 2003 displayed an impressive level of debate with quality chairing. This panel dealt well with a range of scenarios in a user-friendly way. The new draft procedures of the Surrey Area Fostering Panels' Constitution and Terms Of Reference state that, "Each area fostering panel will have an independent chair from outside of Surrey County Council". Therefore the chairing of the permanency panel should be reviewed as the manager of the fostering service currently carries it out. However, please refer to Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Inspectors subsequently interviewed the Independent Chair of the East and West Panel on 19 March 2003. The panel chair was noted to have good general experience in relation to children's services work. She confirmed that the post of Independent chair was offered to her in November 2002 and that she only commenced chairing in February 2003. Each panel has an appointed member of the panel, (a vice chair), who will chair the panel in the absence of the panel chair. The panel chair expressed concern that often there was a lack of information concerning children/young people requiring placement and that there were few approved foster carers from ethnic minorities for children needing an ethnic placement. She also stated that would like to have a medical practitioner on the panel, although medical advice is currently available if required.

The panel chair reported being in the process of preparing handouts for prospective panel members, e.g. an information pack, that explains the role of the panel and its members. She had also identified a need for development training to be made available to panel members.

The panel chair commented that she would prefer to have more administrative support and to receive information/documentation concerning cases earlier. Currently these cases are only received just prior to the dates the panels are due to sit. It is recommended that a consistent approach be adopted regarding information/documentation presented to panel and that documentation/information should only be accepted by the panel if all details are correct and the information is professionally recorded.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service has a short-term breaks policy, which takes into account short-term breaks for children in foster care, and particularly for children with disabilities. The authority's policy recognises the value of such breaks for other children as well as becoming increasingly necessary.

One foster family reported to Inspectors that a child living permanently with other foster carers had been having respite care with them, every three to four weeks and during holiday periods over a considerable period of time, the foster carer expressed concern regarding the amount of money this arrangement was costing. The foster carer reported that he had recorded on the form used during the annual review that he wished to discuss this and other matters with the Deputy Head of Children's Services. To date he has not had a response.

The fostering service should ensure that arrangements such as that described above do not contravene Regulation 37 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, in that the total duration of placements exceeds 120 days in any period of 12 months.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

In respect of family/friends as carers, policy allows this to happen but this is usually done as a temporary measure with the agreement of the child's parent supported by the placing social worker and not by the Fostering Team. Policy allows family members to be assessed as kinship carers subject to the approval of the Fostering Panel. The two kinship carers (two separate households) interviewed by Inspectors had been assessed and approved to foster the young people concerned, although the young people had been living with them sometime before they were formally approved.

The kinship carers reported that they receive the standard fostering allowances but not the reward element. The provision of equipment and the meeting of other expenses are decided on an individual ad hoc basis. Training had been offered but not attended. One of the kinship carers reported that they chose not to attend any training because the child they were caring for was family. They also reported being satisfied with the support they received from the authority, although were unable to remember when they were last visited or had contact with the supervising social worker.

The young person being cared for in one of the households' spoke positively of the allowances received for clothes and pocket money. The young person reported a very positive relationship with the placing social worker.

The other kinship carer interviewed, chose to distance herself from support groups but did have regular reviews.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

N/A

Lay Assessor N/A **Signature** _____

Date _____

Lead Inspector Mrs S A Floyd **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 3rd-26th March 2003 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

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:

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ 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 _____

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S0000043555.V52505.R01

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