



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Shropshire County Council Fostering Service**

The Shirehall  
Abbey Foregate  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY2 6ND

8th March 2004

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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

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

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

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

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

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

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Shropshire County Council Fostering Service

**Address**

The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire,  
SY2 6ND

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

01743 460560

**Address**

The Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire,  
SY2 6ND

**Fax No:**

01743 460562

**Email Address**

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**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

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

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

N/A

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		8th March 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Janet Manders	133244
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Sarah Moore	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>			

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

**Description of Fostering Service**

**Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings**

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

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

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

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

**Part D: Provider's Response**

**D.1. Provider's comments**

**D.2. Action Plan**

**D.3. Provider's agreement**

## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.**

Shropshire County Council Fostering Services aims to recruit a wide range of placements to meet the family placement needs of the great majority of children and young people looked after by the local authority.

The service is organised in two teams, each with a team manager, under the overall management of the appointed manager of the service; the Service Manager, Resources. At the time of the inspection the fostering teams were located in three office bases in the north, the south and the centre of the county. Within a month of the inspection date the teams and the Service Manager were to be relocated to a single office base in the county town of Shrewsbury.

Foster carers receive the Fostering Network recommended allowances and most have access to fee payments on a Payment for Skills scheme, currently payable on four skill levels.

## **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.)

In common with other local authority fostering services, this service has not been previously inspected. This report is the first by the National Care Standards Commission and serves as an audit of the service against the new regulations and National Minimum Standards, identifying areas which are creditable and where development is needed. Since this is the service's first inspection, this report may contain a substantial number of recommendations and requirements. If so, these should fall significantly at the next inspection when the Agency will have had time to take account of the new legislation and standards and to take action to meet them

In addition to the inspection work undertaken within the fostering service itself, information was sought from young people placed by the fostering service, foster carers and placing officers. Foster carers' views were sought through a questionnaire, visits to six foster carer households and through a meeting with foster carers. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire. A questionnaire was used to gather views from young people, aged 7+.

Shropshire County Council deserves recognition for the considerable investment in the Fostering Service over the past few years. This has included investment in the development and implementation of a 'Payment for Skills' scheme, and in a contract with a professional agency to run their recruitment programme for foster carers. A full time Training Officer has been appointed, and this has had extremely positive effects on foster carer training, which is reflected in the scoring for that standard.

### **Statement of Purpose**

**This standard was almost met.**

The Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide are new requirements for local authority fostering services. Both were still in the process of development, to some extent, at the time of the inspection and there is a need for some improved clarity in some areas if these documents are to achieve the intended purpose.

The service intends that the whole policy and procedure framework should be provided to carers in CD Rom format, in the very near future. However, the inspectors considered the currently available CD Rom falls short of what is required, and is not well designed to meet the needs of carers.

### **Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service**

**2 of the 2 standards were met**

#### **Management of the fostering service**

**1 of the 2 standards was met and there were minor shortfalls in the other standard.**

The authority has appointed a Service Manager, Resources, which has improved the management and the development of the service, by introducing a cohesive management structure. Unfortunately, the establishment of this post was at the expense of a team manager post, and in general the inspectors considered the service to be understaffed.

There is evidence that the service has benefited considerably from the professionalism and



commitment of the managers and staff.

### **Securing and promoting welfare**

**2 of the 9 standards were met, there were minor shortfalls in 5 standards and major shortfalls in a further 2 standards.**

Although there were shortcomings in a number of these standards, many of these related to the need for appropriate policies, training and recording, and did not necessarily reflect a failure in practice to meet the welfare needs of children and young people.

The significant shortcomings are to be found in issues of matching and placement choice.

The recruitment strategy has resulted in considerably increased numbers of new carers recruited. However, the campaign has yet to achieve sufficient numbers of the types of carers most needed by the service, and therefore the matching of children to carers able to meet their needs is still inadequately met.

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

**1 of the 9 standards was met, there were minor shortfalls in 7 standards, and 1 standard was exceeded**

The service operates sound processes for the recruitment and overall management of staff and carers, which are well established. The shortfalls in these standards reflect some need for development in this area, and a degree of uneven practice, which needs to be addressed.

The change in the management structure has enabled the service to work in a consistent way across the whole of the county, and the appointment of the training officer has ensured uniformity in the provision of foster carer preparation and training. However, some assessments read during the inspection did not demonstrate the necessary rigour and attention to detail required of this key task, and further work is needed to ensure a consistently high standard is reached in future.

### **Records**

**There were minor shortfalls on both standards.**

The key issues are the need for greater provision of information, particularly in writing, to foster carers in respect of the children for whom they are caring, and the need to ensure that there are clear distinctions made between allegations against foster carers and complaints.

### **Fitness of premises for use as fostering service**

**There were major shortfalls in this standard.**

Clearly this shortcoming had been recognised by the service and steps have been taken to address the matter, which will shortly be effected.

### **Financial Requirements**

**2 of the 3 standards are not assessed in relation to local authority fostering services, and there were minor shortfalls in the other standard.**

The only requirement in respect of the standard assessed is to provide carers with particular financial information in writing.

### **Fostering panels**

**There were major shortfalls in this standard.**

The fostering service has successfully established a reconstituted panel in line with the 2002 Regulations, although appropriate checks were not carried out on all panel members. The need is now to address a number of issues of procedure, ensuring that these too are compliant with the regulations.

### **Short-term breaks**

#### **There were minor shortfalls in meeting this standard.**

The fostering service needs to produce policies and procedures to cover these specific placements and to formalise the good practice which was observed during the inspection.

### **Family and friends as carers**

#### **There were minor shortfalls in meeting this standard.**

There is a need for the fostering service to reflect that the requirements of the standards apply to these carers as to others, and also to ensure that policies of equality of opportunity are applied.

It is a nationally recognised fact that local authority fostering services face an extremely challenging task, and it is regrettable that new initiatives do not always bring the planned benefits as quickly as may have been hoped. However, it is clear from this inspection that Shropshire County Council Fostering Service is operating on a generally sound basis, and has achieved many positive developments in recent years, which should continue to bear fruit into the future.

## **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:

YES

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:**

Shropshire County Council fails to satisfy the regulatory requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. This failure is not substantial and an action plan is anticipated to address the concerns.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

**If No please list below**

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

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

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

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

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

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

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

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	<u>Janet Manders</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Second Inspector</b>	<u>Sarah Moore</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Locality Manager</b>	<u>Brian Lock</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Date</b>	<u>16<sup>th</sup> July 2004</u>		

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must specify the different types of foster placements provided	28.06.04
2	3	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must differentiate between the services actually provided by the Fostering Service, and those provided by other departments of the local authority and the health authority	28.06.04
3	3	FS1	When revised, the Statement of Purpose must be distributed as required by Reg 3(2)	28.06.04
4	3	FS1	The Children's Guide must include more detail about the complaints process, details of contact telephone numbers and a brief explanation of the role of CSCI.	26.07.04
5	3	FS1	A simpler version of the Children's Guide must be produced to meet the needs of younger/less able children.	26.07.04
6	3	FS1	The Children's Guides must be distributed as required by Reg 3(4)	17.09.04
7	20	FS4	The Fostering Service must ensure that carers are informed of the need to declare any possible conflicts of interest.	01.10.04
8	15	FS6	Carers and prospective carers must be provided with training on Health & Safety, and with written guidance on their responsibilities in these matters.	01.10.04

9	15	FS6	A process for ensuring that transport provided for children by the foster carer is safe, must be introduced into the assessment process of prospective carers, as well as the carer's annual review.	28.06.04
10	33	FS7	A policy promoting equality of opportunity and valuing diversity must be developed for the fostering service, and included in the carer's handbook.	01.10.04
11	33	FS7	The fostering service must recruit carers able to meet the range of needs of children looked after by Shropshire County Council, particularly in relation to ethnicity and disability.	03.12.04
12	17	FS7	Training must be provided to social workers and carers in ways of raising children's confidence and feelings of self worth.	01.10.04
13	17	FS7	Foster carers must receive training in supporting children in dealing with all forms of discrimination.	01.10.04
14	Reg 14,15, and 16	FS8	The fostering service must ensure that they have all relevant information including recent written assessments of the child and their family, at the point of placement.	28.06.04
15	33	FS8	The fostering service should ensure that when a placement is to be made consideration should be given to the views of all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement.	28.06.04
16	Reg 12	FS9	The fostering service must produce a written policy on which safe caring guidelines for each foster home can be based.	01.10.04
17	17	FS9	Procedures and support must be provided to help foster carers cope with any instance of bullying.	01.10.04
18	12	FS9	The fostering service must develop robust management systems to collate and evaluate information in respect of allegations against carers. This information must be regularly scrutinised.	28.06.04

19	12		Foster carers must receive full written information regarding issues of any abuse in relation to the child placed, to enable them to take informed and appropriate safe caring measures.	28.06.04
20	14	FS10	The role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements must be clearly articulated in each foster placement agreement.	28.06.04
21	14	FS10	Training and support must be provided to foster carers with any difficult contact issues that may arise.	01.10.04
22	16	FS13	The foster carers handbook must make clear the carer's responsibility to contribute to the assessment of a child's educational needs and progress.	01.10.04
23	16	FS13	The foster carer's role in school contact should be clearly laid out in the placement agreement.	28.06.04
24	17	FS14	There must be clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living	01.10.04
25	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	FS14	Pathway Plans must be fully completed by all involved, and should provide a clear plan how all concerned will contribute to the young person's route towards independence.	28.06.04
26	20	FS15	Prospective staff members must be interviewed against the job description of the post to which they may be appointed.	28.06.04
27	20	FS15	References must be followed up by telephone enquiries, and a record made of the date and the conversation.	28.06.04
28	20	FS15	CRB checks must be obtained for administrative staff.	28.06.04
29	28	FS15	All statutory checks, including CRB checks at an enhanced level, and two references must be taken up in every case for prospective foster carers, including those who have previously fostered for another agency.	28.06.04



30	20	FS15	All staff must receive training in assessment of prospective foster carers.	26.11.04
31	20	FS16	The fostering service must check the Commission inspection reports before making a placement with a fostering agency. The proposed foster carer's assessment report, and most recent foster home review, should also be checked in order to protect children, and promote effective management.	28.06.04
32	19	FS17	The fostering service must review the workloads of managers and staff, in conjunction with plans for the expansion of the service, to ensure that the service has sufficient staff to meet the needs of the fostering service.	01.10.04
33	27	FS17	Foster care assessments must fully comply with the relevant standards and regulations, and must be carried out in a thorough and investigative manner.	28.06.04
34	17	FS18	Urgent consideration must be given to alternative methods of providing out-of-hours cover for the fostering service, and should be implemented as quickly as possible.	01.10.04
35	12	FS18	All staff and carers must be made aware of the Whistleblowing Policy.	01.10.04
36	19	FS19	There must be a clear plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work.	01.10.04
37	19	FS19	A defined induction programme for new members of staff must be developed to ensure that each new member of staff has a thorough induction into the fostering service and their job role.	01.10.04
38	17	FS19	A joint review scheme must identify the training and development needs of both staff and carers and joint training must take place on a regular basis	01.10.04
39	8	FS20	Staff supervision must take place regularly, with both manager and staff having copies of the record of supervision and decisions made.	28.06.04

40	17	FS22	Foster carer supervision must take place on a more frequent basis; at least every two months.	28.06.04
41	28	FS22	The fostering service must issue to all carers a written foster care agreement covering all matters specified in Schedule 5.	01.10.04
42	17	FS22	All foster carers must be issued with a handbook which specifically addresses their needs and includes policies and procedures covering all the areas set out in the standards, in an accessible format.	01.10.04
43	19	FS22	The fostering service must ensure consistency in the way in which complaints against foster carers are investigated and recorded.	
44	44		The fostering service must review the insurance cover available to staff and carers and ensure that sufficient cover is provided, using as a guide the fact that children's homes are required to provide cover to the value of £5 million. Carers must be informed of the cover available, and the extent of their own potential liability.	01.10.04
45	29	FS22	The fostering service must set out a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.	01.10.04
46	17	FS24	The fostering service must ensure that detailed, written information is provided to foster carers regarding the children they are caring for, and fostering social workers must have the same information.	01.10.04
47	31	FS25	A register of carers must be produced which contains all the information required by Regulation 31.	26.07.04
48	42	FS25	Separate records must be kept for complaints and for allegations.	26.07.04
49	22	FS25	The records maintained under this regulation must be maintained with complete accuracy.	26.07.04

50	23	FS26	The move to new premises must take place as soon as possible after 1 April 2004, and the fostering service must ensure that the office is adequately equipped.	28.06.04
51	17	FS29	Details of the circumstances in which additional mileage allowances may be claimed, should be set out in writing and included in the foster carers handbook.	01.10.04
52	24	FS30	The composition of this joint panel must be accurately described in procedure items.	01.10.04
53	26	FS30	There must be full written policies covering the range of matters to be referred to panel, and the procedures which will be followed in dealing with each matter. These must be consistent with the requirements of the regulations.	01.10.04
54	28,29	FS30	Representations by foster carers must be dealt with by the agency decision maker.	28.06.04
55	26	FS30	Panel procedures must cover decision making when all members of the panel are not in agreement.	01.10.04
56	24	FS30	The fostering agency must carry out CRB checks on all members of the panel, other than the members appointed by Find Us Keep Us.	28.06.04
57	24	FS30	Panel procedures must cover requirements as to the suitability of panel members, and the circumstances in which the fostering service provider would determine that they could not continue their membership of the panel. An appropriate level of attendance should be included in these requirements.	01.10.04
58	43	FS30	Schedule 8 notifications must be made to all the relevant authorities including NCSC/CSCI without delay, and should not first be reported to the fostering panel. A robust system must be established to ensure this is consistently applied.	28.06.04
59	11	FS31	There must be a policy and procedure item setting out the particular arrangements for short break/respice placements.	01.10.04

60	14	FS32	The fostering service must review the practice of paying a lower level of allowances to family and friends carers, in the light of the Mumby judgement and the requirements of Standard 29.	01.10.04

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The Children's Guides should include an explanation of the respective roles of the child's social worker and the fostering service social worker.
2	FS2	The manager of the fostering service should obtain NVQ Level 4 in Management.
3	FS1	The Fostering Service's policies and procedures should contain reference to the relevant legislation, regulations and national minimum standards for each item.
4	FS8	Where it is not possible to arrange introductions between children and their prospective foster carers, photographs and information about the proposed carers should be readily available for the placing social worker to share with the child or young person, and their family.
5	FS12	The provision of Health Consents Cards would be more comprehensive, appropriate and convenient than relying on the LAC paperwork.
6	FS13	A format should be produced for consent and delegated consent to school trips and after-school activities.
7	FS16	Both team managers should undertake refresher training in supervision skills.
8	FS19	As the fostering service of the local authority it is recommended that the service work with the authority to ensure that all staff, particularly those in positions of management responsibility, as informed about the up to date regulations and standards in relation to fostering.
9	FS30	That profiles of panel members, similar to those produced for the inspectors, be made available for the information of foster carers.

10	FS32	The fostering service should consider giving family and friends carers access to Payment for Skills on the same basis as other carers, thereby providing equality of opportunity, and an incentive for these carers to train and develop their skills.

\* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

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

Number of Inspector days spent	14
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
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	08/03/04
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	118

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>A Statement of Purpose has been produced and was approved in early March by the elected members. The Statement of Purpose covers all the areas set out in Standard 1 and Regulation 3, but greater clarity is required in some areas:</p> <p>The statement that the fostering service aims to provide 'a comprehensive range of foster placements' is not sufficiently explicit, and must state exactly what types of placement are provided. A future inspection would also be looking for evidence that carers have received appropriate training in the type of placements they are approved to provide.</p> <p>The Statement of Purpose must also clearly differentiate between the services actually provided by the fostering service, and those provided by other departments of the local authority and health authority. The final version of the statement must be distributed appropriately.</p> <p>There is a draft Children's Guide to foster care, which is written in a style appropriate to most children aged about ten years and over. However, younger children and some with learning or concentration difficulties would find it too lengthy and consideration should be given to producing a simplified version. It is recommended that the Children's Guide contain an account of the respective roles of the Child's social worker and the Fostering Social Worker. An explanation of what 'advocacy' is should be included. Fuller information on making a complaint should be included, with details of what the child should expect from the process, including timescales. Details of contact telephone numbers and a brief explanation of the role of NCSC/CSCI must be added and the document distributed as detailed in Regulation 3</p>		

## 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
<p>Those involved in the management of the service have appropriate qualifications and experience in child care and fostering. Observation and discussions with staff indicated that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and the operation of the fostering service.</p>		
<p>The manager has a Diploma in Management Studies, completed in 1997. However, this does not meet the requirements of Standard 2.2, since it is not a competency based qualification. Whilst this is not a requirement in respect of the manager of a local authority fostering service, good practice would indicate that it would be beneficial for him to obtain NVQ Level 4 in Management.</p>		

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The personnel records contain the outcomes of checks and references made at the time of the appointment of the manager in 2001, and there is every indication of suitability to work in this setting.</p>		
<p>Telephone enquiries were not made to follow up written references, and it is noted that this appointment pre-dated the issue of the Standards and Regulations.</p>		
<p>The inspectors were assured that this requirement was to be incorporated into revised personnel procedures which are in the process of being written. Similarly, assurances were given that police checks with the Criminal Records Bureau will be renewed every three years as required by the Standards.</p>		



## 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

The client records system is used for some financial procedures such as the commencement and cessation of payments for places. A separate IT system is used to provide management information regarding the use of placements, and some inaccuracies were noted in this. Further, the register of foster carers as supplied to the inspectors does not contain all the information required by Regulation 31.

There are clear roles for the manager, the team managers and the staff, and the lines of communication are well established. Staff anticipate a further improvement in communication, and more effective operation of the service from April, resulting from the move of all fostering service staff to a single office base. A policy should be produced which informs carers, managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

The systems for recording matters to be notified to NCSC/CSCI needs to be further developed to ensure that matters are recorded and reported appropriately and consistently. The fostering service acknowledges that this system has not been thorough in the past twelve months, but is improving.

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

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

2

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

4

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

3

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

The manager has an appropriate job description and does not hold a similar post in another organisation.

The level of delegation for decision making is considered appropriate by staff interviewed, and the lines of accountability are clear to them. In the absence of the manager, the two team managers would take delegated responsibility for the service, and are clear as to which decisions would need to be referred to more senior management.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Foster homes visited in the course of the inspection generally provided a safe, warm and welcoming environment, and most children had pleasant rooms. No child shared a bedroom inappropriately with any other child, and a format for assessing the risks which may be involved in this had just been introduced. Issues raised by particular young people in respect of their environment and care have been shared in writing with the relevant fostering social worker and team manager.

A Health & Safety checklist is to be part of the Foster Home Review process, but there is a need to provide carers with training on Health & Safety matters as required in 6.7 and 12.5, and with guidance on their responsibilities in these matters.

A process for ensuring that transport provided for the children by the foster carer is safe, has just been incorporated into the Foster Home Review Format, and needs to be included in the assessment process as well.

### 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?
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The fostering service currently has no carers of minority ethnic origin, and therefore several children are placed cross-culturally. Equality and diversity issues are integrated throughout the fostering preparation course, but an Equal Opportunities session of post approval training has not been available during the current year. Asylum seekers have been assisted by their carers to attend English language classes, but are placed in a community where there is no opportunity to speak their own language.

All carers must be provided with training to equip them to support a child in dealing with any form of discrimination, and also in raising the child's confidence and feelings of self worth.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

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

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

1

This standard is well met in the manner in which long term placements are presented to Panel, but not well met in the making of short term placements, particularly emergency placements. Care plans and recent written assessments of the child and their family were rarely received in urgent situations. Fostering service staff also felt that they had insufficient placement choice as yet to undertake adequate matching. The opportunity for introductions was considered to be rare, although some examples were seen during the inspection process.

Where introductions cannot be arranged, some information and photos of the proposed carers would be helpful to the child or young person. This was suggested by a young person in their questionnaire.

The elements of matching which have been taken into consideration in making each placement must be referred to in the written foster placement agreement for each child placed.

**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

Shropshire Fostering Service prepares carers for the placement of children who may have been abused, as part of pre-approval training, and safe caring practices were evidenced in discussions with carers.

The agency must produce a written policy on which safe caring guidelines for each foster home are based, as set out in Standard 9.3. Those guidelines must be agreed with the child's social worker and explained to the child.

The agency and all carers interviewed are clear about the unacceptability of physical punishment and this is included in procedural guidelines on the Care and Control of children and young people and the Foster Care Agreement, as required by Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Training must be provided for foster carers on how to cope with bullying, in conjunction with the written guidance in the policy and procedural manual.

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

X

%

<b>Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)</b>		
The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Contact issues are introduced in preparation training, and there is an item on contact in the Handbook for Foster Carers. Contact arrangements were outlined in foster placement agreements seen on file, although the carer's role was not specified, as required by Standard 10.7.</p> <p>Carers were sometimes involved in the supervision of contact, and reported that they were happy to do so. Any situations they were not happy with were rearranged and alternative supervision was provided. It would be beneficial to include specific help and support to carers, including training, in dealing with any difficult contact issues that may arise.</p>		

<b>Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)</b>		
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.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Over 80% of children reported consultation with them by their carers sometimes or often, and a total of 96% (40% often and 56% sometimes) by their social worker. Many (61%) had been asked about their foster carer by the fostering service, but only 34% had been asked about how the service is run.</p> <p>Over three quarters of young people said that they knew how to make a complaint, and the Children's Guide, when completed, will ensure they have all the information should they need to do so.</p> <p>Carers interviewed were conscious of the importance of the views of children.</p>		

<b>Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)</b>		
The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>This standard was reasonably well met. LAC paperwork was generally well completed in respect of health history. Placement Plan Part 1 is relied upon for delegated powers to consent to basic health care. The introduction of a Health Consents card would be better practice.</p> <p>First Aid training has been provided twice this year as a post approval course, and blood-borne infections are part of pre-approval training.</p> <p>Carers register children with their own GP, arrange opticians and dental appointments, and provide health information to the child's reviews. No difficulties in obtaining services were reported to the inspectors, other than the shortage of dentists within the National Health Service generally.</p>		

**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?****2**

The fostering service is to be commended for the rolling programme which has been established to provide computers for foster children's use with respect to their education.

There is a Looked After Children's Team within the local authority, which supports children's education, and carers commented positively on the support they had received from this team. In conjunction with the LAC Team, there is a new protocol for children excluded from school, which includes provision for educational support for children excluded from school for more than 5 days. The positive effects of this have not yet been felt, since carers have not yet been provided with the information.

Procedures exist for children's social workers to obtain consent for school trips etc, but they would be assisted if a format was provided for consent or delegated consent for school trips, etc.

The Foster Carer's Handbook should contain general guidance for carers for their role in the young persons education, including their contribution to the delivery of the personal education plan. The foster carers role in school contact should be clearly laid out in the placement plan for each child.

**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**

Training in helping children move on to independent living has recently been provided, in partnership with the Leaving Care Team, over two half day sessions, for which the fostering service is to be commended.

In addition to this training, the Leaving Care policy should be expanded to include clear guidelines as to what is expected of carers in terms of preparing children for independence, as required by this standard.

The Pathway Plan viewed by the inspectors was completed only by the young person themselves, with their wishes and aspirations, and did not contain any information as to how other involved in supporting the young person would be helping them to achieve their goals. It is essential that the Pathway Plan forms a practical working guide as to the direction for the young person, the means by which this is to be achieved, and the part to be played by each person.

## Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Personnel services are provided by the Personnel section of the Social Services, and there are well established sound practices in place. Personnel files were in good order, although there is no labelling of different sections, and copies of qualifications were not always on files. All files but one had evidence of interview, and references and checks had been completed prior to the appointee taking up the post. All permanent contracts were subject to a probationary period of six months, and there was a completed proforma on each file confirming satisfactory performance in the first 17 weeks in post.

However, references have not been followed up by telephone, as required, even in appointments made since April 2002. Also, one member of staff had applied for and been interviewed for, a training post within the fostering service, and being unsuccessful in that application, had been offered a post as a fostering social worker without further interview. The previous employer's reference had been given for the post originally applied for. Whilst it appears that this person was suitably qualified and experienced for the fostering social worker post, good practice was not followed in this appointment.

Application has been made for CRB checks for all social work staff. Eight clear checks have been received and seven responses are still awaited. However, it has not been appreciated that CRB checks must be obtained for all staff, and that therefore administrative staff should be subject to at least a standard disclosure.

Personnel procedures are being revised to include all requirements.

The completion of checks and references in relation to the assessment of prospective foster carers was generally carried out thoroughly. However, in a few instances CRB checks had not been carried out, or insufficient references had been taken up. This had particularly occurred when carers were moving to foster for Shropshire from another fostering agency. All fostering social work staff hold an appropriate qualification. There is a trainee social worker post for staff in the process of obtaining DipSW, and the person in that post is closely supervised and does not take responsibility for assessments or supervision of carers. Staff are experienced in fostering and in a range of work settings with children, and have appropriate knowledge and skills. Although staff have had some training in assessing competencies, not all staff have training in assessment of foster carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

17

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

5

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

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

The service is appropriately organised in many respects, and well managed. The imminent move to new offices should assist in the efficient delivery of services, but the service must be aware of need to maintain good and positive links with the initial assessments and case managements teams.

There are clear lines of accountability, and the service has a workload management system which is monitored weekly to check on the hours staff are actually needing to work to cover their caseload. It would be beneficial to the service to undertake further work to identify the extent to which this system provides a true reflection of workloads.

Social work staff are appropriately supervised by the two team managers. Both undertook supervision training some years ago, and one has made arrangement to refresh that training. It would be beneficial for both to undertake this.

All staff have appropriate written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service, and access to the relevant policies and procedures.

The local authority has few placements with fostering agencies, and there is a protocol for the making of such placements when they do arise. The protocol needs to be amended to reflect the requirement that Commission inspection reports must be checked before making a placement, and that the proposed foster carer's Form F and latest foster home review should also be checked.

Carers are soon to be provided with a training portfolio.

Prospective carers are effectively dealt with through the service's contract with 'On Trac', who provide a swift first line response, which is then efficiently followed up by the fostering team members.

It has been recognised that there is currently insufficient administrative support to the service, a situation which would have become more acute when the service moves to the relative isolation of the new office, and a new full time administrative post had just been created at the time of the inspection.

**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?****2**

In the process of the inspection, the inspectors have formed the view that staffing within the fostering service is not adequate to meet the needs of the service, particularly in the light of the current recruitment drive and the local authority's need for the service to provide and support greater numbers of foster carers. This shortfall in turn affects the ability of the service to provide some of the facilities which support the retention of staff, such as training, study leave and manageable work loads. In addition, staff have expressed the view that the Resources Section is in need of another team manager. The two team managers have a very wide range of duties. Operational responsibilities in respect of the two children's homes in particular have sometimes resulted in the postponement of matters important to the fostering service such as staff supervision. The findings of the inspection support this view. Shropshire is to be commended for the initiative that has been taken in contracting with a specialist agency, On Trac Communications, for the recruitment of foster carers. This has resulted in a very professional campaign, with excellent publicity material including a video featuring staff and existing carers from the fostering service. On Trac has also produced a



new information pack for carers and run a series of information meetings which staff informed the inspectors had been presented in a very professional manner. They provide an information phone line for prospective carers which includes a two stage screening process before details are passed on to the fostering service to follow up. This has resulted in a very effective and efficient recruitment process, and has freed time for fostering service staff to focus on other areas of their work.

However, inspectors were disappointed to note that, despite a requirement in the contract to undertake an analysis of the gaps in the existing provision of foster care placements in relation to the needs of children looked after by the local authority and to prepare material which would actively target those types of carer, a generalised recruitment campaign was mounted, and the carers thus recruited have not necessarily matched the needs of the children awaiting placement.

A second contract has now commenced, which is to be targeted to carers for older children and carers who can provide skills at a new fourth level of the Payment for Skills Scheme. The service is also currently in need of more carers able to foster children with disabilities, and has no carers of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The fostering service is also to be commended for introducing a scheme of 'Payment for Skills', which is a competency based scheme, currently on three levels, under which carers with over six months experience receive a fee in addition to the allowances for children fostered. This is expected to improve both recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Foster care assessments are undertaken using BAAF Form F1 and F2, including completion of the competencies format on the basis of information contained in the main body of the report. It is important that assessments are carried out in an investigative and analytical manner, and that evidence of competency is not solely based on self-reported information. Assessments carried out by agencies with whom carers have previously been registered must be rigorously reassessed, and all checks renewed, before approval by Shropshire. Foster care assessments read during the inspection were not all compliant with Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>As part of the Shropshire County Council, the fostering service has sound employment practices, and is committed to equality of opportunity. This is generally well evidenced in practice and within the terms and conditions under which staff are employed. However, there is currently an unsatisfactory situation in relation to the provision by the two team managers of an out of hours service to the Emergency Duty Team, and via this team, to foster carers. This service has been provided since last April, but, as yet, the level of remuneration has not been agreed, although there is a commitment to backdate it, once it is determined. The managers have been asked to come up with a proposal, but, unsurprisingly, have not yet found the time to research other agencies and write a paper. In addition, it is very onerous for those two people to be 'on call' for 50% of their off-duty hours, and urgent consideration should be given to finding alternative methods of providing this cover.</p>		
<p>On a positive note, staff reported an improvement in the service provided by the Emergency Duty Team, resulting from staffing increases and from improved communication between the two services.</p>		
<p>The fostering service, through the local authority, has appropriate insurance but a carer has</p>		

queried the level of cover with both the inspectors and with the fostering service. The service should consider whether or not £1 million is adequate, and consider upgrading to cover of £5 million.

The service has a whistle blowing policy, of which all staff and carers must be made aware, and be clear how to take any necessary action under that policy.

**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

Recently appointed staff reported undertaking an induction programme, but realised subsequently that it would have been valuable to have spent time with a number of other, mostly specialist teams within the local authority during the induction period. The production of a defined Induction Programme for new staff within the fostering service would help to ensure that a comprehensive induction was undertaken by all new staff.

Staff have the opportunity to undertake the Post Qualifying Award in Child Care, and have access to the local authority's general training programme for staff working with children.

There are plans for 4 staff to attend 'Training for Trainers' with The Fostering Network in the next few months. However, in general, there is inadequate access to specialised training in fostering and family placement issues.

The training needs of staff are identified in an annual staff development interview, and the needs of carers in their annual foster home reviews. However, there is no joint review scheme and no joint training programmes at present, although in the next year it is intended to identify 4 or 5 sessions on the foster carer training programme as particularly important for staff members' participation.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

All staff have written job descriptions. There is access to Policies and Procedures on the IT system, but there is inadequate provision of computers for staff use, and some staff reported difficulties in accessing the relevant 'drive.'

Supervision is valued by staff, but operational pressures sometimes leads to cancellations.

In addition, the pressure of work sometimes leads to an emphasis on practical matters, rather than reflection and analysis. Supervision needs to be undertaken regularly, with both manager and staff having copies of decisions.

Annual Appraisals are taking place, as are regular staff meetings.

**Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)****The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The main strategy for working with carers is contained in the Payment for Skills scheme, supported by fostering policy and procedures. All matters listed in 21.2 are covered by the fostering service. Arrangements for training and development are focused on the work of the training officer, and a contract has been signed with the Shropshire Foster Care Association to formalise the council's support to the Association, and the expectations of the support the Association will provide to foster carers.

The arrangements for Reviews has just been revised and has become more inclusive of all involved.

It would be helpful if all the elements of the strategy for working with carers could be brought together into a single document.

There is no formal system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker, but good contact is generally maintained by phone, email, memo and face to face contact.

**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**

A system for foster carer supervision is in place and each foster carer has a named supervising social worker. However, the requirement for foster carer supervision to take place four times in the first year of fostering, and three times each year thereafter, is not considered to be sufficiently regular to be effective. It is understood that the frequency of supervision is limited by the workload of the fostering service staff, and this reinforces the suggestion that the service is not sufficiently staffed for the requirements of the service.

The Foster Care Agreement refers to the 1991 Regulations, now revoked. A new Agreement must be drawn up, which covers the requirements of Schedule 5, and each carer must receive and sign this new agreement.

Immediately prior to the inspection, carers had been issued with copies of a number of Policies and Procedures in paper form. These are close to being finalised, and the foster carer's handbook will consist of these items in the form of a CD Rom, or in printed form if carers prefer. Care must be taken to ensure that these items are easily accessible to carers, particularly since the current CD Rom is aimed at the whole Children and Families department, and is not focused on the needs of foster carers.

Complaints must be recorded consistently. Two different foster carer's files reviewed by the inspectors contained accounts of very similar issues, one of which had been appropriately processed as a complaint, while the other had not.

There is also a need for a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

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

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

4

The appointment of a full-time Training Officer for the fostering service twelve months ago, has been very supportive to this aspect of the work of the fostering service. Pre-approval training is well established in Shropshire, but this is now provided on a consistent basis throughout the county, and five courses have been provided this year in order to respond to the response to the recruitment campaign. In all, ten different foster carers have been involved in co-presenting this training over the year, alongside fostering service staff. Where carers are in a partnership, both partners complete the pre-approval training programme. This programme includes training on Safe Caring.

This year there has also been a significant programme of post-approval training, and each course has been offered at a choice of daytime or evening sessions. A more extensive programme is planned for the coming year. The service also has plans to address the needs of the daughters and sons of foster carers in 2004/5.

Certificates of attendance are provided for on-going training, copies of which are placed on the carer's file. There is also a practical system of recording the carer's attendance at training on a summary sheet in their files. Foster carer's files read during the inspection provided evidence of this system working in practice.

The effectiveness of training is evaluated at the close of each course, and evaluation of each course is included in the council's annual training plan. Each carer's annual review format will in future contain an appraisal of training and development needs.

The fostering service is to be congratulated on the very positive developments of the past year, and the level of provision achieved thus far.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The children's files reviewed during the inspection were generally well maintained, although not all were up to date. Most carers felt they had appropriate information about the children in their care, but there is a need to ensure this is done on a consistent basis. There was evidence on one file of further information being provided verbally to carers, when they requested it. Consideration should be given to appropriate and practical methods of providing more detailed information in writing to carers, and it should be recognised that the fostering social worker needs the same quality of information in order to be able to provide appropriate supervision to the carer. The fostering service needs to be pro-active in requesting this information.

Lockable filing boxes are to be provided in the near future to those carers who have not already received these, for the secure storage of information.

### Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Appropriate records are kept by the fostering service in general. As previously stated, separate records must be kept for allegations and for complaints. The inspectors were told that the local authority's complaints department records all allegations against carers as a complaint. This practice does not comply with the standards and regulations. Where a complex situation is raised which contains elements of complaint as well as allegations of abuse, the two components should be separated and each dealt with by the appropriate procedures, with the child protection procedures taking priority.

The record of young people placed, and of foster carers, provided to the inspectors was not entirely accurate. This record is currently held on a self-contained IT system, not integrated into the 'Carefirst' client records system. This integration is planned for the very near future and should ensure accuracy of those records. This should be monitored.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			115
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			151
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			134
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			17
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			9
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	72.33	<b>Maximum £</b>	391.37

## 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?**

1

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service staff were located in three office bases in different parts of the county, with the Service Manager located in yet another office. The premises were inadequate and inappropriate, and did not meet the requirements of this standard. Although the IT system is adequately password protected, there are inadequate numbers of computers for staff. Following the move to new premises, it is planned that staff will share one computer between two, which would be the minimum appropriate provision. In all offices files are kept in filing cabinets which are locked outside office hours.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not assessed in relation to local authority fostering services. However, during the course of the inspection matters were raised with the inspectors which lead to questions about the adequacy of funding of the service. One example of this is that £11,000 per annum rental costs for the new fostering service premises at Bourne House have to be met from within operational budgets. There should be a review of the budgets for the provision of the fostering service in the light of this consideration.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

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

2

There is an effective system for activating and ceasing the payment of allowances to carers for children placed with them, which is part of the Carefirst client records system. Carers reported prompt and accurate payments.

Changes were brought about as part of the introduction of increased allowances for carers, in respect of the mileage allowances carers can claim, in addition to the portion of the allowances for transport costs. This has been clarified at a number of support group meetings and a written explanation of the new scheme is included in the Payment for Skills document.

## 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?

1

The fostering service has established a joint panel with the Find Us Keep Us Fostering Agency and a meeting of the panel was observed as part of the inspections of both agencies.

The panel meeting was well chaired, with processes for establishing key issues and questions from panel members. Foster carers, in respect of whom complaints and allegations had been made and investigated, were enabled to attend panel, with the support of an Advice and Mediation Worker from the Fostering Network. This difficult matter was handled appropriately, and both carers and panel members were able to ask questions of the other.

A Service Manager who presented a report to panel in respect of this matter quoted the 1991 Fostering Regulations, which have now been revoked and replaced by the 2002 Fostering Services Regulations. As part of the local authority, it is strongly recommended that the fostering service ensure that all social work staff, particularly those in positions of management responsibility and decision making, are informed about the up to date Standards and Regulations pertaining to fostering.

Of three Form F assessments listed for this panel meeting, one was withdrawn because it had been realised that the young person was not in fact looked after, and the other two were both appropriately deferred to a future panel to allow for further information and more rigorous exploration of issues of potential concern in respect of suitability. In this, the panel demonstrated the appropriate exercise of the quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process as detailed in standard 30.5.

The Fostering Panel is appropriately constituted under Regulation 24, particularly 24 (5) as a Joint Panel with the Find Us Keep Us Fostering Agency. However, the procedures do not accurately describe the composition of the Panel, since the staff of Find Us Keep Us are described as independent members. The procedures state that Panel is quorate with 3 members present, which does not comply with the requirement of Regulation 25 that at least six specified members be present.

The procedures also do not adequately cover the way in which the Panel will handle its functions. In particular, the policy and procedures do not cover decision making about recommendations when all members of the Panel are not in agreement.

There is also a lack of clarity regarding the procedure for representations by carers when the agency proposes making a decision with which the carer is not in agreement. The procedures describe this as an appeal against the decision, whereas the regulations are clear that the decision is not actually made until this process has been completed. The regulations are also clear that it is the fostering service provider (the agency decision maker) who corresponds with the carers in this process, and this is not a matter to be delegated to the team managers, as detailed in Shropshire fostering service procedures.

There are no requirements in the policies about the suitability of panel members, and therefore no guidance as to the circumstances in which the agencies may decide a panel member is not suitable, or not able, to remain in office. A policy must be produced to cover this matter.

The panel procedures also state that Schedule 8 notifications should be made to Panel, with the NCSC/CSCI notified by the Service Manager on the basis of the panel minutes. This must be amended to reflect the requirement that Schedule 8 notifications should be made to all relevant bodies without delay. Notification to panel is not a requirement, but would be good practice.

CRB checks were not carried out by Shropshire County Council prior to members commencing their role. At the date of the inspection only the members appointed by Find Us Keep Us, and one other Panel member had up to date CRB checks, while checks were awaited on two other members. CRB checks must be carried out in respect of the Chair and the 5 other panel members, including the foster carer members.

A profile of each panel member was produced for the inspection, which was very helpful to the inspectors. It is suggested that, as a matter of good practice, a similar document be produced for the information of foster carers and applicants with matters before the panel.

Both Find Us Keep Us and Shropshire Fostering Service must be involved in producing the revised Panel Procedures, which will be required as a result of both inspections. Both agencies must be confident that the procedures accurately reflect their practice and understanding of the standards and regulations. If there are any appropriate differences between the two agencies in the procedures, the process for each agency must be clearly differentiated. Each agency must satisfy itself as to the checks carried out by the other agency in respect of panel members.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The provision of short term breaks for children with disabilities is now contracted to Barnardos, and no longer the responsibility of the local authority's fostering service.

However, some foster carers are approved to provide short breaks for children and young people, in order to support them and their families. Case tracking one of these carers revealed that the appropriate balance of parental responsibility was maintained, and communication between carer and parents was informal and effective. These placements were not specifically covered by policies and procedures, and this should be provided.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

### Standard met?

2

There is a positive and enabling approach to family and friends carers within the fostering service, and assessments are carried out by fostering service staff using the Form F2. Carers are offered foundation training, but this offer is rarely taken up. The training needs of family and friend carers are considered at their annual foster home reviews, as for all carers, but no specialist training has yet been provided. Family and friends carers have a designated fostering social worker, but are not offered formal supervision as provided to other carers and as required in the standards.

In addition, family and friends carers are not offered the same financial support as other carers, in two respects. They receive a lower rate of allowances for the child – a rate only two thirds of the allowances paid to all other carers. Also, family and friends carers do not have access to the Payment for Skills Scheme, and are not able to receive a fee for fostering, whatever their level of competency.

It is against case law, as established by the Mumby judgement, to pay family and friends carers a different rate of allowances to other carers, simply on the basis of the carer's relationship to the child. This should be urgently reviewed by the fostering service.

In addition, it would be good practice to offer family and friends carers access to Payment for Skills on the same basis as other carers. This would provide equality of opportunity, and an incentive for family and friends carers to access training and develop their skills, in a way which would benefit the children and young people they foster.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

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

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

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

**Public reports**

It should be noted that all 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 SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 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 SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:**

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

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