



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Attachments Fostering Limited

**24-26 High Street
Snodland
Kent
ME6 5DF**

Lead Inspector

Announced Inspection
16th January 2007 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Attachments Fostering Limited
Address	24-26 High Street Snodland Kent ME6 5DF
Telephone number	01634 244555
Fax number	
Email address	attachments@btconnect.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Attachments Fostering Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Dorothy Helen King
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 5th June 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Attachments Fostering Limited was first registered in September 2004 and, according to its statement of purpose, seeks to "provide a secure family base for children and young people who are unable to live at home, in order that they may grow and reach their full potential".

Whilst still in its infancy, the agency recruited and approved a range of carers, some completely 'new' to fostering and others with a wealth of experience from both local authority provision and private independent agency backgrounds.

The agency seeks to provide the following placements: short and long term, bridging, parent and child, sibling, emergency, 'difficult to place' and respite. Currently, much work is being undertaken by the agency to establish links with therapeutic services and specialist educational provision, outside of mainstream schools and colleges; however, at the time of this inspection, the majority of the children / young people in placement were positively benefiting from being in full time mainstream educational provision.

At the time of this inspection the agency advised that an administrative and social worker post were being advertised.

Currently, the standard weekly fee, charged to placing authorities is £760.00. This would be reviewed, and possibly increased, if a child or young person presented with additional support needs, incurring extra costs to the agency.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This announced inspection commenced on 16th January 2007 and was conducted by lead inspector, Sophie Wood, over a four - day period. The reason for re - visiting the agency so soon, (previous inspection was conducted on 5th June 2006), was due to the previous overall rating being given as 'poor', with areas of particular concern relating to the 'management' and 'staying safe' outcome groups.

Throughout the course of this particular visit, time was spent interviewing the responsible individual, registered manager and reading relevant policies and procedures.

A training session was partially observed; three carer families and the children placed with them were visited in their own homes and 'case - tracked'. A number of placing authority social workers were directly spoken with and written information, pertaining to the role and function of the panel, was scrutinised.

Written questionnaires were received from foster carers, children & young people and placing authorities, the contents of which, provided additional valuable inspection information.

The overall findings from this particular visit were variable; outcome groups, such as 'enjoying & achieving' scored well and the training session observed was of very good quality.

Outcomes under 'staying safe' and 'management', however, continue to give cause for concern. The agency does not have a sufficient number of suitably qualified social work staff and this leads to a lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities that need to be undertaken to demonstrate objectivity within the agency.

In 'real' terms, this has led to the manager being involved with assessments, presentations to the panel and subsequently being the agency 'decision maker'.

Such practice presents an unacceptable lack of boundaries within the agency's internal structure, probity is clearly compromised and decisions are being reached in the absence of robust processes.

A number of requirements have been made as a direct result and these must be addressed, to avoid further action being taken.

What the service does well:

The agency has recruited a group of foster carers who come from diverse backgrounds; a number of them have previous experience of being foster carers.

The training programme is in a continual state of development and foster carers are encouraged to ask for courses, which are relevant to their own specific learning needs.

Children & young people receive very good support in terms of maintaining contact with their relatives and friends.

Placing authorities receive regular and ongoing updates from the foster carers and the agency, in terms of the progress each child is making.

The agency and its carers, work hard to obtain and support mainstream school / college placements for children & young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Following the previous inspection, all of the requirements made had either been fully or partly implemented:

- The statement of purpose and children's guide now meet with the NMS guidance.
- A clearer system with regards monitoring the performance of the agency has been devised.
- Staff personnel records now hold all of the required information, as detailed within the Fostering Service Regulations.
- Staff records pertaining to induction and supervision are clearer.
- Training for foster carers has been expanded upon.
- Health records for children & young people have improved.
- The 'whistle blowing' policy has been reviewed and updated.
- A rolling programme of 'unannounced' visits to foster carers is now underway.

What they could do better:

The agency does not have a sufficient number of qualified social work staff and with the recent departure of an administrative worker, a number of records, as required under the regulations, are 'falling behind'.

The registered manager is continuing to undertake a number of roles and duties, which should be delegated elsewhere. This practice is compromising objectivity.

Written records of foster carer supervision meetings do not always adequately track and follow ongoing issues. Similarly, staff supervision records also need more detail added.

Panel meeting minutes indicate areas of disagreement and a number of items have needed to be represented due to inadequate or incomplete information. Papers for panel have been delayed in being sent out to members.

Although work has commenced in terms of reviewing and updating a number of policies and procedures, some remain incomplete.

Although the monitoring and reviewing systems, as defined under regulation 42, have improved, care must be taken to ensure that **all** of the elements under Schedule 7 continue to be subject to robust monitoring.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is adequate.

Foster carers work hard to promote and meet the health needs of those in their care. The agency needs to ensure its record – keeping accurately reflects the work being completed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

At the previous inspection, work was being carried out to provide all fostered children & young people with their own health record, in order that they can take these with them upon leaving the agency. This remains ongoing.

Of the care files inspected, all had a separate medical / health care section, although some were more complete than others and not every file seen held a completely up – to – date medical history.

Those foster carers interviewed were familiar with the agency's policies and procedures with regards accident reporting and other issues, relating to the health needs of those in their care. Such records need to be clearly collated and used for greater monitoring purposes, for example, accident trends and identifying training needs.

Foster carers had recently benefited from health promotion and first aid training, however; the new training programme seen, which covers the period, January to May 2007, did not feature any specific subjects pertaining to health promotion or other associated health care aspects. It is strongly recommended that the agency expand upon its training provision in this area, to include a broad range of health – related topics for foster carers.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30.

Quality in this outcome area is poor.

The agency does not have a sufficient number of qualified personnel; this compromises objectivity and hinders quality assurance processes. Matching evidence needs to improve and the panel is dysfunctional.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and has over 20 years' experience of working with children, much of this within a local authority, child protection setting. She has also now completed her NVQ Management award. Since the last inspection, the qualified social worker had left, however; this post has now been successfully filled by a part - time qualified social worker with sound, relevant experience of this work and she is now providing support to all of the foster carer families within the agency. (This aspect has addressed the requirement made last time to stop using an unqualified member to conduct foster carer supervision).

A third year DipSW student is also now placed with the agency and she is receiving fortnightly supervision from the registered manager.

Since the last inspection, the responsible individual had left and this post has now been filled. This person was interviewed and demonstrated a good understanding of her role, however; at present, she is completing a lot of administrative tasks that otherwise would fall behind and she has also been attending the panel as a 'minute taker', as there is nobody else available to complete this task.

At the time of this visit, one of the two administrative workers had just resigned and this position was being advertised.

Personnel records were scrutinised, given the previous shortfalls identified with regards recruitment processes and the findings were positive. Such records now hold all of the required information and the most recent appointment, that of a qualified social worker, showed clear evidence of sound checking processes being undertaken.

Through visiting foster carers within their own homes, good sources of evidence were found to demonstrate that the children and young people in placement were being well looked – after. The carers were able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the needs of those in their care and gave many positive examples of the support they were providing.

Through viewing the content of carers' files and from the examination of panel meeting documentation, concerns were highlighted with regards some of the recruitment processes and ongoing support in respect of foster carers. Panel meeting notes indicated a number of times whereby decision recommendations had to be referred due to a lack of information and there were a number of instances whereby the registered manager had been involved with assessments and presentations. Given her role as the agency decision maker, this presents a direct conflict of interest. Some examples were found whereby there had clearly been disagreement between panel members and the role of panel, in terms of providing a quality assurance service, was unclear. Annual reviews of foster carers were not up to date and the minutes of the previous panel meeting, held some weeks ago, were not available, as they had not yet been typed.

At the time of this inspection, the independent chair - person had been given notice with immediate effect and the independent vice chair had resigned. The registered manager advised of a replacement independent chair being imminently recruited, however; although written records showed he had been offered the post, there was no record as to how the decision to appoint had been made.

The registered manager advised that panel training had been booked for April and this timescale gave cause for concern, given the issues identified above.

Matching evidence was found within the care files examined, however; the agency is advised to expand upon the content, paying particular attention to

identify any skill deficits or training / support needs of the carers, and how these will be met. This recommendation applies, in particular, to those carers who remain 'new' to fostering.

The child protection policy and procedure remains clear and foster carers know how, and under what circumstances to report incidents, disclosures and concerns. The requirement made last time to expand upon the 'whistle blowing' policy had been implemented.

One clear example was seen whereby the agency had taken immediate, appropriate steps upon identifying a child protection concern and in another example, whereby a foster carer reported a serious incident, the agency again took an appropriate course of action, which included making notification to the Commission. The area now requiring attention is to keep and maintain a dedicated and clear record of all allegations, concerns and complaints, which subsequently become subject to close scrutiny and monitoring by the agency.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

The agency actively seeks to have carers and children from diverse backgrounds and educational attainment is being supported and promoted.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Although relatively 'small' as an organisation, (the directors were clear about not wishing to expand significantly), a good mix of foster carers, in terms of ethnicity and economic backgrounds exists. Valuing diversity is covered throughout initial training and clear 'equal opportunity' policies and procedures are in place. The agency does need to ensure, however; that foster carers be provided with training and support, which reflects the very individual and specific needs of those in their care, for example, a learning disability, particularly when such carers do not have direct experience of such conditions.

At the time of this inspection, every child / young person in placement was attending mainstream school provision, with the exception of one. This particular individual was very newly placed and had been out of education for some considerable time, prior to being placed with the agency. The foster carers, who were interviewed, had already identified a potentially suitable

'specialist' provision and they were actively working with the child's placing authority to secure a trial placement.

All of the foster carers interviewed demonstrated a real commitment to support the educational needs of those in their care and where necessary, the agency has provided additional help in terms of transport and classroom support.

From a monitoring point of view, the agency needs to ensure clear records be kept in terms of the educational achievement, attendance and exclusions of all of the children and young people in its care.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10, 11.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

The agency and its foster carers values family contact and ensures this happens in practice. Sound consultation processes ensure all stakeholders are enabled to express their views.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Through the perusal of written records, returned questionnaires and from speaking directly with foster carers and young people, it was evident that positive family contact is being promoted and supported.

It is the policy of the agency that foster carers value and understand the importance and significance of the relationships children have with their birth relatives and to this end, introductory training and beyond, covers 'attachment theory' and associated topics.

Placing officers were directly spoken with and one of the most common areas they spoke highly of was the commitment of the agency and its foster carers in supporting contact.

Similarly, those foster carers interviewed confirmed their own commitment to understanding and valuing the importance of the contact arrangements in place for 'their' child / young person.

Comments from children and young people included,

“It’s great seeing my family” and “My carers know how important my family are to me”.

Sound consultation processes remain in place and these extend to foster carers, children, birth families and placing officers. Following the previous inspection, consultation meetings have been held with the foster carers, in order that they have been kept informed of the work the agency has been doing to address the previous shortfalls. Written records also show how fostered children are given different methods to communicate their views and opinions about their care and those foster carers spoken with stated that their supervising social worker regularly speaks with the children privately during visits. One aspect that would further enhance this standard is to ensure such processes are also made available for the children of foster carers.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Not inspected.

EVIDENCE:

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25.

Standard 32 is not applicable.

Quality in this outcome area is poor.

General management and monitoring systems are failing to provide necessary safeguards.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose and children's guide have been updated and amended, as was required from the previous inspection. These documents now include all of the details, as required under the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

As has previously been stated, the registered manager possesses relevant qualifications and previous working experience, commensurate with her role, however; given that the agency does not currently have a sufficient number of qualified personnel in post, she is, at present, undertaking tasks and responsibilities that should be delegated elsewhere. This not only compromises objectivity; in 'real terms', the manager is unable to focus upon aspects of her role, such as effective monitoring and quality assurance. More positively, the new responsible individual has recently submitted a 'Quality Review' report and the content of this was of an acceptable standard.

The lack of qualified social work personnel within the agency is further exacerbated by the current lack of administrative workers. Although such a post is currently being advertised, a number of written records at the time of this inspection were not up – to – date, and, as has been previously stated, the responsible individual was undertaking tasks, such as minute – taking at panel meetings, when she should, in fact, be an active member.

Personnel records were read, not only to examine recruitment practices, but also to scrutinise staff supervision processes. In the main, supervision meetings were happening regularly, however; there were also examples of longer gaps and some of the written content was 'brief' and difficult to interpret and follow. In addition, some of the more recent meetings had not yet been 'written up', again demonstrating shortfalls within administrative processes. Similar findings were made in terms of the written records of foster carer supervision meetings.

In terms of the above, a requirement was made at the last inspection to review and update the case recording policy of the agency and to subsequently provide additional training for foster carers and staff. During the course of this inspection, a training session was partially observed. The subject, delivered by an 'external' trainer, was record – keeping and the quality was good, however; the trainer was unable to link this to the agency's own policy and guidance, because the review, although started, was not yet finished.

Comments regarding the support being received from the agency were variable, both through direct interviews and from the questionnaires, returned

by foster carers. Such comments included, "Excellent support – always there" and "I feel let down and have not had enough support / direction". Scrutiny of carer files and panel meeting records also found such variances, for example, one carer family experiencing particular ongoing difficulties with a placement were not receiving the type and nature of support that their experiences were dictating at the time.

The agency's strategy for working with, and supporting foster carers would benefit from being reviewed and further clarity in specific areas is needed. One example concerns the 'terms and conditions' for foster carers, as some degree of confusion was expressed, for example, pay rates, dependant upon experience, expertise, etc. This needs to be made explicitly clear.

Case files for children & young people were being securely held. In the main, the contents were of an acceptable standard, however; more time dedicated to the monitoring and reviewing of these records would further enhance this standard.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	2
8	2
9	2
15	1
30	1

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
31	N/A

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	4
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	3
4	1
5	1
16	1
17	1
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	2
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	1
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	N/A

YES

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS9	42(1) & (2)	<p>The registered person shall establish and maintain a system for - (a) monitoring the matters set out in schedule 7 and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the agency. The registered person shall supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review conducted by him. This requirement is made within the context of the ongoing monitoring role of the manager, including her responsibility to forward such reports, at regular intervals, to CSCI.</p> <p><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection. Although improvements have been made, the agency must ensure that <u>all</u> items under Schedule 7 are robustly monitored.</i></p> <p><i>This requirement is to be implemented within one month.</i></p>	16/04/07
2.	FS24	22	The current policy on case	16/04/07

			<p>recording is to be reviewed and implemented.</p> <p><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection. Although work has commenced, it remains incomplete. This requirement is to be implemented within one month.</i></p>	
3.	FS12	15	<p>The fostering service provider shall promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>This requirement is made within the context of the agency conducting a review of the contents of the health care sections of all children's files to ensure that pertinent health information, for example, immunisations and medical consent is explicitly recorded in all cases.</p> <p><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection. Although this work has commenced, it remains incomplete. This requirement is to be implemented within one month.</i></p>	16/04/07
4.	FS9	11	<p>The registered person shall ensure that the welfare of children is safeguarded and promoted at all times.</p> <p>This requirement is made within the context of the registered manager needing to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. In addition, the agency must ensure that carers</p>	16/04/07

			<p>receive appropriate support and guidance to implement their own 'safe care' policy and procedure, which should be subject to ongoing review and monitoring.</p> <p><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection and although some work has commenced, shortfalls remain. This requirement is to be implemented within one month.</i></p>	
5.	FS17	19	<p>The fostering service provider shall ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the fostering service.</p> <p>This requirement is made within the context of the agency needing to conduct a full and thorough review of its staffing structure, which should include numbers, status and roles & responsibilities. The findings are to be used to determine the need for immediate and future recruitment.</p> <p><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection and although some work has commenced, shortfalls remain. This requirement is to be implemented within one month.</i></p>	16/04/07
6.	FS30	24	<p>The agency is required to establish a fostering panel, in accordance with Regulation 24. Furthermore, written evidence in terms of satisfactory checks are to be available on all panel members for inspection purposes.</p> <p>Written procedures must cover</p>	16/04/07

			decision – making processes and the quality assurance role of the panel. An Improvement plan, detailing how, and by when, these shortfalls will be addressed is to be returned to the Commission by the date shown opposite.	
7.	FS30	29	The agency is required to ensure that annual reviews for all foster carers be brought up to date. An Improvement plan, detailing how, and by when, this shortfall will be addressed is to be returned to the Commission by the date shown opposite.	16/04/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS13	It is recommended that clear and explicit systems be implemented to demonstrate the educational needs and attainment of children are being monitored.
2.	FS30	It is strongly recommended that due consideration be given to providing appropriate training for administrative staff in terms of fulfilling administrative tasks for the panel.
3.	FS30	It is strongly recommended that a review be conducted by the agency in terms of the independent social workers currently being used for the purposes of assessments and reviews.
4.	FS24 & FS25	It is strongly recommended that the supervision meeting minutes for both staff and foster carers be reviewed and audited, to ensure these contain sufficient detail.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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