



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

## Fostering Services

### **Poole Fostering Services**

Borough of Poole

14a Commercial Road

Parkstone

Poole

Dorset

BH14 0JW

24th February 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**

Poole Fostering Services

**Address**

Borough of Poole, 14a Commercial Road, Parkstone,  
Poole, Dorset, BH14 0JW

**Local Authority Manager**

Ms Gerry Moore

**Tel No:**

01202 261501

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Poole, Dorset, BH14 0JW

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01202 714410

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**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

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

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

**Date of last inspection**

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		24th February 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		10:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Susan Harvey	078139
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Veronica Crowley	072706
<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>		Mr Luis Pujol	

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the 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.

The Borough of Poole's fostering service is managed within the Borough's Children and Families Services structure and falls within one of its five service divisions, Children's Services Adoption, Fostering & Residential. Due to the vacancy of the Children's Services Manager the responsibility for line management of the service has passed temporarily to the Principal Officer. Day-to-day management of the Fostering, Adoption & Residential Team, is currently undertaken by the Team Manager.

The fostering element of the team consists of:

- 1 - Team Manager (also responsible for Residential & Adoption work)
- 1 - Full time Senior Practitioner
- 2 - Full time Family Placement Worker
- 4 - Part time Family Placement Workers
- 3 - Full time Social Work Assistants

The Shared Care Scheme is located within the Children's Health and Disability Team, line managed by a different Children Services Manager.

This team consists of:

- 1 - Team Manager (responsible for the Children's Health & Disability Social Work Team)
- 1 - Part Time Senior Practitioner
- 1 - Part Time Shared Care Worker

The two teams have responsibility for the recruitment, assessment, training and support to all of the borough's foster carers and shared care families.

The service has a Statement of Purpose which states:

*The fostering Service aims to meet a diverse range of need by providing:*

- *Regular short break care to support families and prevent family breakdown e.g. when a child or parents has a disability or long term illness*
- *Short term foster care to support families through crisis or in an emergency to protect children from harm*
- *Permanent substitute family care by way of adoption or long term foster care, for children who cannot return to their birth family*

At the time of this inspection the fostering service had eighty-eight approved foster carers and a total of eighty-nine children in foster care. The shared carer service has twenty-six carers who provide short-term break placements for children with disabilities, of these; nineteen provide overnight care and are therefore approved foster carers.

Placements made with carers approved by Borough of Poole were supervised and supported by social workers from the fostering team. Support groups were organised on a regular basis, including groups for new carers and for the children of foster carers. Training programmes were held on a rolling programme. The fostering service offered sessional support and respite to carers, sometimes using workers from within the team, and sometimes providing respite breaks using other approved carers.

There were specialist fostering schemes, including Assessment, Key and Project. Carers were identified who had specialist skills for dealing with certain types of placements and received enhanced payment and support. Poole had also recently entered into partnership with neighbouring authorities to offer Treatment Foster Care, the Turnaround scheme.

The fostering service had access to a clinical psychologist who had time allocated for use in a consultation role with carers and workers. The Education Department employed a teacher and an Educational Psychologist an Education Welfare Officer with special responsibility for 'Looked After' Children who linked closely with the fostering service. The Borough also employed one nurse and a Health Visitor to oversee the health needs of 'Looked After' Children.



## 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.)

This is the second inspection by the National Care Standards Commission giving consideration to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The inspectors found that attention has been given by the service to implementing the requirements and recommendations of the first inspection and this is recognised as positive in the face of the past years staff shortages and changes. The Team Manager identified that he was aware that there was still work to be done to meet the teams' own expectations. The inspectors would like to highlight that some standards are scored lower in this report in comparison to last years report. In some circumstances this represents a better understanding and interpretation of the standard on the part of the inspectors, rather than a reduction in service. Where this is the case the inspector will identify this under each standard.

Fostering services are managed within the Adoption, Fostering and Residential Service (AFR). Shared care is placed within the Children's Health & Disability (CHAD) team and work independently of each other, although there is some cross over for example in the use of the fostering panel and for the collation of significant events. Both are placed within the Borough's Children & Families division. Each team is line managed on a day-to-day basis by different Children's Services Manager (CSM) although overall responsibility for fostering services is placed with the CSM for AFR. This post is currently vacant therefore line management responsibility has been placed temporarily with the Principal Officer.

Since the last inspection, the main stream fostering team have gone through many personnel changes. Of, most significance was the departure of the CSM who had worked for the Borough for many years. The post holder held a wealth of local knowledge and her experience and knowledge base is missed. The team has though, also grown in strength and numbers. The Senior Practitioner has been promoted to Team Manager with his previous post being very recently filled. Two Social Worker Assistants have been appointed and two part time and one full time Family Placement Social Workers now ensure that the team at full complement, although still carries the disadvantages of one member of staff on long-term sickness. The team presents cohesively and energised by the recent appointments. The shared care service has lost one part time family placement worker and this post is currently frozen.

The close proximity (same building) of Children and Family Social Workers ensure close liaison has been developed which aids and supports the work of the fostering service. The same applies for the shared care service.

Questionnaires were sent to all children over eight years old in foster placements. Sixty-eight were sent with seventeen returned. In the vast majority of cases, children's comments about the foster care arrangements that had been made for them were very positive. Young people spoke of feeling well cared for, supported in education and were enjoying their experience of foster care. The overriding negative aspect of being in foster care was reported as not seeing birth families often enough. A small number of birth parents were contacted by phone and their comments were also positive about the foster placements. At the time of this inspection the inspectors did not have the availability of a suitable means of gathering the views of children with disabilities and communication difficulties.

Questionnaires were sent to twenty-four children's social workers. Twelve social workers, representing twenty-two children returned completed questionnaires. In the majority of cases these were extremely positive reports about foster placements and the fostering service. A significant proportion made comments which would suggest that good matches had been made. Social workers commented, "...this is a stable and excellent placement", "Excellent and reflective carers", "Placement suitable and meets child's needs". One social worker made reference to the fact that the two placements were unable to fully address the ethnic/racial needs of the children. 94% felt that the fostering service worked either 'very well' or 'fairly well' with the placing social workers.

Questionnaires were sent to all approved foster carers. Eighty-one were sent to main stream fostering foster carers and twenty-six to shared carers. Eleven responses were received from foster carers and one from a shared carer. Once again mostly positive responses were received. 91% reported that they felt 'very well' or 'quite well' supported by the fostering service. 100% of respondents felt that they had been adequately informed about the children's background. 100% felt that there were insufficient staff in the fostering service. Some additional comments were made which suggest that there have been problems of staffing but overriding this were positive comments about the team which recognises the pressure on the resource for example, "The staff do a good job but paperwork sometimes takes priority over seeing the children, never enough staff, always people leaving", "I think they do an excellent job given the resources they have", "Wonderful job considering all the difficulties they have had", "They do a excellent job despite being understaffed at times".

Inspectors also made telephone contact with nine social workers, made home visits to six foster carers and the fourteen children placed, attended one young person's support group, one carers support group and met with TASCA (independent support group for carers) representatives. Comments received from the majority were positive. Reports suggested that the fostering service works hard, provides a good service to the Borough's social workers, supports good outcomes for children and well supports foster carers. However, TASCA representatives made comments about insufficient levels of support in times of crisis, felt that carers were loathe to complain and that there were issues about poor consultation with carers prior to policy changes.

This report will include recommendations and comments arising from some of the shortfalls that were indicated in the surveys and in other inspection activity. The inspectors would emphasise that the proportion of positive reports far outweighed any areas of concern.

### **Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)**

#### **This standard is met.**

The service has a suitable Statement of Purpose which meets the expectations of this standard. However, recommendation is made with regard to developing a more in depth presentation of the shared care service within this document. A children's guide had been produced and recently circulated to children in the fostering service

### **Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)**

#### **These 2 standards were met.**

The previous manager of this service has recently left and the position is being advertised. The person specification for the post meets with the expected criteria including appropriate qualification and experience. In the interim, management responsibility has been temporarily passed to the Principal Manager. The shared care service is managed within the Health & Disability team with different and temporary line management arrangements. The management of the service continues to be good.

### **Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)**

#### **One standard was met, one was partially met.**

Day-to-day management was considered to be good. Staff confirmed that there were clear lines of accountability and delegation within the fostering service. Links between shared care and the main stream fostering service need to be formalised.

### **Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)**

#### **Two of these standards were exceeded, six were partially met.**

In general the inspectors directly observed, and read comments from children and social workers, that foster homes provided nurturing and safe environments. A more rigorous approach to recording risk assessments is recommended especially in relation to sharing bedrooms and privacy arrangements.

The service has continuing difficulty in recruiting a wide and diverse range of carers from minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Some trans racial placements are made with an understanding that not all ethnicity needs can be met by the placement. Efforts need to be made to evidence the added support which may be available to carers where this is the case.

Although some foster carers mentioned that placement resources were limited and that at times they felt mismatched to children, this was not supported by outcomes which suggests that matches made have been positive experiences for the children.

The fostering service has comprehensive child protection procedures. The bullying policy could however, be further developed to address bullying specific to foster children and recommendation is made to ensure that safe care guidelines are written as a matter of routine for each family. Recommendation is also made to develop a system for the collation and monitoring of statistics of children missing and where restraint has been used as a method of control.

Inspectors were pleased to note that foster carers actively supported contact arrangements where this was within the child's interest and agreed within placement plans. Although, written guidance is recommended to be added to the foster carer handbook. Also guidance is required on the fostering service expectations of foster carers to make records of their observations of such visits.

The fostering service exceeds the standard in the matter of consulting with children. Children's views and opinions are given high priority.

Children's health is also given high priority. However, some examples were given to inspectors of circumstances where children were received into foster carers homes with insufficient information on health matters. Requirement is made to ensure that practice is tightened in this respect.

There was a commitment to promoting the educational needs of young people. The inspectors consider that this standard is exceeded.

A number of foster carers were supporting young people moving into independent living. Inspectors note tensions and lack of clarity between the role of foster carers, the fostering service and the leaving care service. It is recommended that roles and responsibilities be clearly defined and carers be given written guidance on what is expected of them.

### **Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster carers (Standards 15-23)**

**Three of these nine standards were met, five were partially met and one not met.**

Staff working for the fostering service have been recruited using suitable procedures. Recommendation is made as a matter of good practice to ensure that administrative staff also undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check at standard level.

The organisation and management, of the main stream fostering service in particular, has undergone significant change as a result of staff shortages, long-term sickness and the loss of the manager. Definition of roles and responsibilities remain an evolving issue.

Recommendation is made to assist foster carers in the development and maintenance of a training portfolio.

The fostering service has a good number of foster carers, although all parties spoken to felt this could be improved. In particular there is a need to target the recruitment of a greater range of foster carers with differing cultures or ethnicity. More shared carers are required to meet the services's current waiting list of seventeen children waiting for matches.

The inspectors consider the Borough of Poole to be fair and competent employers, offering good support for staff and carers. Staff generally expressed satisfaction in regard to the Council's employment practices.

The Borough has a training programme and other training opportunities were available to staff through Fostering Network and other organisations. There was no systematic regular review of training needs evidenced.

Lines of accountability were clear to staff in the fostering team. There has been irregular supervision and appraisal but this was showing improvement along with greater team stability.

Foster carers received support from their family placement worker, and in some cases a support worker. Carers generally reported positively about the level of support they receive although some negative comments were received in respect of the availability of part time workers.

The standard relating to supervision of foster carers is not met. Requirement is made to ensure that Social Work Assistants are not responsible for the supervision of carers as only qualified workers should undertake this work. The supervision of shared care foster carers meets with expectations. Requirement was made last year to make changes to the foster care agreement in line with the expectations of the regulations. Whilst the agreement was changed its use has not been universally implemented. The foster carer handbook for the main stream fostering service is also in need of update and review.

Pre-approval preparation and training courses were available to all applicants. More experienced carers reported that they felt that they had done all training on offer and now sought something more specialised to meet their needs. Recommendation is made to review the training strategy for more experienced and long-standing carers.

### **Records (Standards 24-25)**

**One standard was met, one was partially met.**

Separate records were kept for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. Following a review of case files inspectors felt that they would benefit from an overhaul. Files maintained by the shared care service were good.

The fostering service's administrative records contained the information relevant to the running of the service and as required by legislation. Records were kept securely.

### **Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)**

**This standard was met.**

The main stream fostering service is located in the same building as the Borough's social workers. This office has had a significant increase in IT provision which now better supports the work of the team. The shared care team are in an adjacent building along with social workers of the Health and Disability Team. Both offices offer adequate space and security.

### **Financial Requirements (Standard 27- 29)**

**Two of these three standards do not apply the other was met.**

The fostering service has clear procedures on fostering fees and allowances. Foster carers did not raise any concerns in this regard. New procedures are currently in draft format.

### **Fostering Panels (Standard 30)**

**This standard was partially met.**

The panel observed during this inspection was conducted in a well-organised, effective and professional manner. However, there is a need to develop fully rounded procedures to support its processes. Also, there is a need to ensure that the panel receive management information in a more structured and formalised manner with particular respect to the availability and range of carers in comparison to the needs of the children.

### **Short-term breaks (Standard 31)**

**This standard was met.**

The shared care service was considered to be well managed and effective. However, a shortage of carers to meet current demand was noted. The service follows closely to the procedures of the main stream fostering service in assessing and approving carers.

### **Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)**

**This standard was met.**

One Family Placement Social Worker has particular responsibility for kinship carers. There is recognition that the presentation of kinship carers is not currently great but likely to increase in 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:

NO

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

NO

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

1. The service has an insufficient range of carers to meet the needs of children in particular to meet the needs of children from differing ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.
2. The service did not have a clear policy and procedure establishing the fostering services protocol and expectations of safe care and the development of safe care guidelines.
3. There were examples of foster carers not having adequate health information about a child in placement.
4. 15% of foster carer reviews of approval were overdue. This matter is outstanding from the last inspection.
5. The foster care agreement used by the service does not comply with the obligations of Schedule 5. This matter is outstanding from the last inspection.
6. Examples were noted of foster carers being supervised by unqualified staff.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	27	FS22	The fostering agreement must be updated to comply with all matters and obligations specified in Schedule 5. In particular each agreement should make specific reference to the terms of the foster carer approval.	01.09.03
2	29	FS21	Reviews of approvals must take place at intervals of not more than a year.	01.09.03

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





## 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	33	FS7	Continuing efforts must be made to attract and recruit a broader range of foster carers which more closely reflect the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of the 'looked after' children. (Standard 7.2)	01.07.04
2	12	FS9	Policy and procedures should be written which establish the fostering services protocol and expectations of safe care and the development of safe care guidelines. (Standard 9.3)	01.09.04
3	17 (3) (a)	FS12	The fostering service must ensure that each foster parent is provided with appropriate information about the health and health needs of any child placed. (Standard 12.4)	24.02.04
4	29	FS21	Reviews of approvals must take place at intervals of not more than a year. (Standard 21.3)	01.07.04
5	27	FS22	The foster care agreement must be updated to comply with all matters and obligations specified in Schedule 5. In particular each agreement should make specific reference to the terms of the foster carer approval. (Standard 22.4)	01.07.04
6	20	FS22	Foster carers must only be supervised by a named and appropriately qualified social worker. (Standard 22.3)	01.07.04

### 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	FS4	Arrangements should be made as a matter of good practice to establish a greater range of formal systems which support management monitoring. For example, unauthorised absence from a foster home by a child accommodated, use of measures of control, restraint and discipline. (Standard 4.1 & 25.13)
2	FS6	There should be documentary evidence of the consideration of the need for a risk assessment when children share bedrooms.
3	FS7	To support carers in providing a service which values diversity and promotes equality a resource base of information, toys and equipment could be established to support carers of children from differing ethnic backgrounds. (Standard 7.1)
4	FS8	Matches should be achieved by information sharing and consideration involving all relevant parties. This could include the provision of family profiles to enable children to have access, prior to placement, of a greater range of information about the family they are to live with. (Standard 8.3)
5	FS9	A written policy should be established which addresses matters of bullying. Procedures should be established which recognise, record and address any instances of bullying and helps foster carers cope with it. (Standard 9.6)
6	FS9	Safe care guidance should be agreed and written for each foster family. (Standard 9.3)
7	FS9	The fostering service should monitor and collate information about the frequency and use of restraint by foster carers.
8	FS10	The fostering service should give clear and consistent messages to carers on its expectations in relation to the recording of outcomes of contact arrangements. (Standard 10.9)

9	FS14	The fostering service should develop clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. This issue also needs to be specifically addressed in written agreements with foster carers and by inclusion in the foster carers handbook. (Standard 14.2)
10	FS15	Recommendation is made to retain all Criminal Records Bureau checks until a Commission inspector has reviewed them. This is contrary to the current practice of destroying them after six months.
11	FS15	It is recommended that all administrative staff be subject to a standard level Criminal Records Bureau check.
12	FS16	Foster carers should be supported and encouraged to maintain a training portfolio. (Standard 16.9)
13	FS16	A review of the provision of foster carer training should be made and consideration given to the provision of a laptop to support training presentations. (Standard 16.10)
14	FS17	A formal recruitment strategy should be developed aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. (Standard 17.5)
15	FS18	A review of the support arrangements for carers should be made, specifically where the worker responsible is employed part time. Action should be taken to address any shortfalls noted.
16	FS18	A comprehensive health and safety policy should be written and made available to carers which covers all legal requirements. (Standard 18.5)
17	FS20	The fostering service manual which includes all policy and procedures pertinent to the fostering service should be reviewed and updated to ensure that staff have a clear reference resource. (Standard 20.2)
18	FS22	The fostering service should review, update and make inclusions to the foster carer handbook. (Standard 22.5)
19	FS22	Arrangements for the support of carers who are the subject of allegations should be made clear. These arrangements should also be reviewed to ensure that it meets with any reasonable expectation of carers in this position.
20	FS23	The effectiveness of current training should be evaluated and reviewed, taking into account the views of carers and in particular the views of more long-standing carers who are not currently taking advantage of training opportunities. (Standard 23.9)
21	FS24	There should be a review of the management and maintenance of foster carers' and children files to ensure that they contain up to date and current information. (Standard 24)

22	FS24	The expectation on foster carers to make and maintain events diaries should be reinforced. In particular, all foster carers should be encouraged to complete an <i>individual</i> diary for children in their care.
23	FS30	Policy and procedures for the fostering panel should be written and gathered into a comprehensive document to support the work of the panel. (Standard 30)
24	FS30	Whilst acknowledging the challenges, the service should continue to seek representation on the foster panel from someone who has either been in foster care or has had a child in foster care. (Standard 30.9)
25	FS20	The foster panel should receive management information about information about foster carer reviews and the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children. (Standard 30.6 & 30.7)
26	FS31	Written procedures should be developed which formalises the communication, responsibilities and reporting links between shared care and the main stream fostering service.

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

**PART B****INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	9
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• Contact with parents	YES
• 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	NO
Date of Inspection	24/02/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	73

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?

3

This standard is met.

The fostering service has a suitable statement of purpose which is available on request. The authorities elected members have formally approved the statement which will be reviewed annually.

Since the last inspection the service has developed a children's guide with a smaller tri-fold version. Each sets out a short summary of what the service intends to do for children. Information on how to secure access to an independent advocate and how to make a complaint is included. Children do not have a complaints procedure directed at them specifically, although all children spoken to said that they were aware of their right to complaint and felt able to identify someone who they could complain to.



## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The post of Children's Services Manager is currently vacant. This post holds overall responsibility for the main stream fostering service and shared care. In the interim, management responsibility of the fostering service falls to the Principal Officer. Shared care services are temporarily overseen from within the Health & Disabilities Service. Effective leadership was evident in both and teams were seen to be operating well under suitable guidance.

The service managers are mindful of the expectations of this standard in the recruitment of a replacement manager.

### 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

The recruitment of all staff is subject to the Borough's corporate recruitment procedures, which are both thorough and comprehensive including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). A system had been established to ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years. Staff recruitment records reviewed confirmed that the managers of the fostering service and the shared care service have been suitably appointed.

Evidence was seen to support that it is common practice to ensure that references are supported by telephone references. These were not available within all staff files. The service is reminded to retain written evidence of this practice in all circumstances.

## 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 fostering service staff and shared care staff confirmed to inspectors that they were clear about lines of communication and accountability. The fostering team in particular have undergone extensive change over the last 12 months and is currently without a line manager. However, interim line management responsibility is clear and has been well documented in a written procedure.

Management monitoring is undertaken to gain a general overview of the service. For the main stream foster service these systems are re-evolving following the departure of the previous manager whose responsibility it was to upkeep such systems. As a matter of good practice management monitoring systems should include the monitoring of unauthorised absence from a foster home by a child accommodated and the use of measures of control, restraint and discipline.

The authority has a number of ways of demonstrating overall performance matters and these include; statistical evidence, performance reviews, case audit and supervision.

There were clear arrangements for informing foster carers when fees and allowances were reviewed and statements of the amounts they have been paid. Foster carers spoke of prompt payments and no concerns in this area were identified.

Guidelines, previously seen, were available to staff about their responsibility to declare any conflict of interest. Foster carers are asked at assessment stage to declare any conflict of interest and adherence to the service policy in this respect is included in the Foster Care Agreement.

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

1

**Death of a child placed with foster parents.**

0

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

0

**Serious illness or accident of a child.**

0

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

0

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

0

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

1

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

2

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

1

**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**

All managers have job descriptions with lines of accountability clearly defined. In the absence of a Children's Services Manager lines of accountability have been made clear in a written document. Clear arrangements are also in place to ensure that there is a person in charge in the absence of the manager. Staff spoken to were confident that they would know who to go to in these circumstances.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspectors visited six foster homes in the course of this inspection. Homes were seen to be warm, comfortable, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to an adequate but varied standard of cleanliness. Each home is annually inspected by the foster service and a health and safety audit is undertaken, evidence of this was seen on files. All homes visited by inspectors presented as safe environments for children to live.

Initial training for foster carers covers matters of health and safety which is also an integral part of the review process. Written guidance is given in the form of a checklist for carers so that they may make their own regular checks of health and safety matters.

The majority of children made comments about having healthy food and being encouraged to do exercise. They indicated they felt cared for in foster homes.

Arrangements for transport provided by foster carers are monitored by the presentation of yearly checking of insurance and driving documents.

Risk assessments were reported by staff to be routinely undertaken in respect of children who may have been abused or may have abused another child and may be sharing a bedroom. None were seen during the review of file documentation. Inspectors saw examples where bedrooms were shared and no risk assessment was recorded, and no evidence that consideration had been given to whether one was needed. The inspectors recommend that there should be more attention paid to documenting arrangements which involve sharing bedrooms. Sleeping arrangements are reviewed at the annual review; this was seen on each review seen by inspectors. This matter was also seen to be further explored by the panel where concern was raised.

The inspectors met with a range of foster carers representing, family and friend carers, those with exemptions, short term, long term and respite. Social workers who responded by completing a questionnaire indicated that they considered the placement they were supporting to be safe. Children/young people spoken to either through the tracking process or via the children's support group expressed the view that they felt safe and well cared for within their foster families.

**Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The fostering service works within the scope of the borough's equal opportunities statement and policy. Details about gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability and language of children needing care and of foster families providing care, are gathered through the assessment process. This information is used to assist in making the most compatible matches possible.

The service has a limited range of carers of differing cultural and religious groups and recognises the need to recruit a more diverse base of carers. This is a constant challenge for the service in an area, which is predominately white (approximately 98%). At present the service has two Black, one Chinese and one Portuguese carer and is providing care for ten children who are not white British. The service has taken on board the need to ensure that all carers are well equipped with the skills and knowledge to care for children of differing cultures, religions and abilities. Carers spoken to confirmed that they had undergone diversity training. Foster workers said that helping children deal with discrimination is a theme in carers training. Two foster carers tracked for the purpose of this inspection were caring for mixed heritage children. Whilst carers presented as supportive there was little in either house to reflect multi cultures.

Positive links have been made with the Civic Chaplin. The manager reported that there are future plans for the Borough to recruit a part time Spirituality Project Worker.

The shared care scheme specifically recruits carers with the appropriate skills to support children with disabilities for short breaks. Parents in receipt of this service and spoken to by inspectors confirm that this is a particularly good aspect of the support they received from social services. One shared carer spoken to said that they felt 'very well supported' by the shared care team.

Children's surveys produced a number of responses which indicated that they felt supported and that their confidence was enhanced by their experience of foster care. Many children made comments about being encouraged in a rich variety of sport and leisure activities since being in foster care.

**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?**

**3**

The inspectors visited many homes where good matching was observed. Social workers and children also reported on positive matching experiences. Paperwork is completed of the process of matching child need to carer skill/competence. Files reviewed showed evidence of this matching paperwork.

The fostering service keeps details of all foster carers, their approval status and availability easily at hand. A new computer database has just been established which shows vacancies at a glance. The team approach referral requests by weekly team discussion at the team meeting or immediately with as many team members as possible in the event of emergency placements. Matches are achieved with due consideration to the assessed need of the child and the positive attributes of a carer to meet these needs. Although matching is sometimes constrained by availability the fostering team felt that overall they were able to match carer skill and children. Carers spoken to said that they were sometimes asked to take a child based on bed availability. However, all confirmed that they there were given time and space to consider each referral and any non-acceptance was recognised without detriment or bad feeling.

The inspector observed one weekly matching meeting and noted that this was well aided by a good local knowledge of each carers specific skills and current placements and highlights one of the benefits of a small service. Discussion took place about the current referral form and how best to ensure that the fostering service receive sufficient supporting information from social workers to aid matching. This is an ongoing discussion but once again is supported by the fact that the Borough is small and the close proximity of the social workers in the same building.

Written foster placement agreements are developed with social workers, carers and in most circumstances with the foster workers. Both carers and young people confirmed that wherever possible introductory visits take place.

Transracial or transcommunity placements have been made. Where this was the case in two files reviewed the matching paperwork indicated that not all of the child's needs could be met by the placement in relation to their ethnicity. Placement agreements highlighted these gaps and in some cases made reference to other support to be offered. Staff reported that links have been made with the Racial Equality Council for Dorset that training has taken place and individual carers have been supported in specific information and advice.

Young people spoken to expressed a wish to have known more about their foster family prior to living with them. Examples were given of only knowing the family's name. In response to this the inspectors recommend the development of family profiles. This matter was already under consideration by the fostering service.

**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

The Child Protection Co-ordinator confirmed that no concerns had arisen in regard to procedures followed within the fostering service. Incidents of all allegations of abuse are collated by the service, monitored by the manager and reported to panel.

Foster carers and workers spoken to said that safe care guidelines were often discussed. Foster carers were well versed in understanding the necessity for safe care arrangements. These matters are discussed during placement meetings, reviews and through the formal supervision of carers. No written evidence was seen to support that this. The fostering service does not have adequate written procedure on these matters neither is this included in the foster carers handbook. Requirement and recommendation are made in these respects.

A management system had been put in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care.

Following the last inspection recommendation was made to expand on the services policy in relation to bullying. Although this was addressed, it is the inspector's opinion that this is unsatisfactory. The original policy presented to inspectors relates specifically to schools and the addition is not sufficiently in detailed to address the particular vulnerability of foster children. Further recommendation will be made for the development of a 'stand alone' policy on matters of bullying as it relates specifically to children in foster care.

The fostering service makes clear its expectations and issues written guidance that the use of corporal punishment is not acceptable. Training and guidance on permissible forms of control are given. Foster carers sign their acceptance and adherence to the service policy on control and discipline which includes a 'no smacking' expectation.

The service has written information for carers on how to respond in the event that a child goes missing. A protocol has been established and agreed with the local police. Specific information may also be included in a placement agreement if there are any issues of particular note in this regard. The fostering service was unable to offer definitive figures of children who had gone missing from carers over the past 12 months. These should be kept as a matter of good practice and has been recommended previously in this report.

Children were asked about punishments that were used in foster homes and no concerns were raised by their responses. There were references made to being sent to bedrooms, sent to bed early, being told off and in some cases never needing to be punished. All social workers, who responded via the questionnaire, indicated that they felt that the carers practice of control was acceptable.

Two children referred to have being restrained. From the presentation of one questionnaire response the inspectors believe that one was incorrectly answered. The other, a 15 yr old, felt that they had been restrained wrongly. It would be good practice to evidence more management monitoring of the incidents of restraint. The use of restraint in placements when a child has a disability should also be collated.

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

X

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last years report. This is in part responsible to the inspectors better understanding and interpretation of the standard but also as a result of the inspectors noting a lack of clarity to carers on recording contact visits (see below).

A number of children responses specifically referred to 'missing family' or 'not being with own family' as the worst thing about fostering. The small sample of birth parents who were contacted reported 'good working relationships' with foster carers. Young people spoken to said that they had been able to maintain friendships and contact with significant people in their lives where there were no legal restrictions. The survey response for social workers indicated that all were satisfied with the fostering services management of contact and restrictions.

Foster carers spoken to confirm that they had received both training and written guidance in respect of their role in contact arrangements. Foster children also confirmed that they were enabled to meet with parents and/or friends. Arrangements for contact are included in the placement plan and foster carers spoken to were clear of the expectations placed upon them. The 'looked after' children procedures outlines guidance for staff to promote contact with families. The Independent Reviewing Officer also reviews all contact arrangements. Some carers are able to support contact in the foster home, others assist by taking children to neutral meeting places. Carers gave testimony to the difficulties that can be encountered but also gave examples of how contact arrangements had proved positive for the children and birth parents. In some circumstances this has supported a transition home. The fostering service routinely support contact as necessary, e.g. with sessional workers, transport, financial help.

There was a discrepancy noted on the expectations placed on foster carers to make records of their observations of contact arrangements. The foster carer handbook gives a detailed account of expectations and guidance on writing style. However, this was in conflict with what foster carers were actually doing and were reportedly being told to do by some fostering workers. Examples of daily recordings seen by inspectors were sparse. Some foster carers were still using one book to record all child events rather than individual records for each child as recommended following last years inspection. One foster carer told the inspector of how they had previously written in their log observations of contact. They had also asked the child to contribute to the record. The inspector confirmed this as good practice but was then told that they had been told by the foster worker to not bother with such detail and to only record significant events such as doctors or dentist appointment. Recommendation is made to ensure that a clear and consistent message is given to all foster carers of what the service expects in relation to good practice and record keeping.



There are no fostering service policy and procedures on matters of contact neither is this matter raised in the fostering handbook collated by Poole fostering services. Although this is the same handbook as presented to inspectors last year, this omission was not noted. Foster carers are given a copy of a fostering handbook developed by Anne Wheal for carers of children under 11yrs old. Whilst this is useful information it may put off some carers of children over 11yrs from reading it and therefore negates its usefulness. Recommendation is made later in this report under standard 25 which indicates a need to review and update the foster carer handbook.

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

**The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

4

The views and opinions of children are integral to the planning for their care. On entering foster care, agreements are drawn up in the presence of the child, social worker, foster worker and foster carer. This gives the child an opportunity at the outset to express views, which may affect their daily life and future. As an ongoing task, social workers represent the frontline responsibility in ensuring this is maintained although foster workers will routinely speak with foster children and ask for their views during supervision visits. Children have the opportunity of expressing their views through the consultation process in preparation for LAC reviews. The authorities independent reviewing officer spoken to by inspectors also said that gaining the opinions of children was a significant part of his role within each review.

Foster carers are routinely asked for their feedback following a placement although no work is undertaken to collate these views and therefore can only be seen in isolation to each episode of care. This standard is considered to be well met, although the service may wish to consider collating these views to enhance the overall monitoring of the service.

There is an independent advocacy service and the fostering service manager had made prompt responses to issues raised through the advocate. The children's guide also gives children and young people access to information on how to make their views known.

Training called Total Respect is also provided for staff, carers and managers and is aimed at ensuring that this matter is considered central to all work undertaken with children and young people. Young people currently being cared for deliver parts of this training.

Children with communication difficulties are individually assessed and provided with communication aids through other services, although if necessary the fostering service would support with interpreters or equipment.

Inspectors met with a group of eight young people representing those in the later years of foster care or had recently left and with fourteen during visits to foster carers. There views were almost entirely positive about their experience of foster care. All except one confirmed that they had been consulted with throughout their time in foster care.

**Evidence from the survey of children and young people:**

- Do carers ask you for your opinions and ideas?  
17 responses: 11 'yes often', 6 'sometimes'
- Have those running the fostering service ever asked for your opinions about your foster carers?  
16 responses: 14 'yes' 2 'no'
- Have those running the service asked you how the service could be made better?  
16 responses: 5 'yes' 11 'no'
- Does your social worker sometimes see you on your own to ask you your opinions?  
17 responses: 7 'often' 10 'sometimes'
- Have you been told how to make a complaint about how you are being looked after if you need to?  
17 responses: 14 'yes' 3 'no'

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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The Borough of Poole has developed comprehensive policy and operational guidance for staff in respect of the health of all 'looked after' children. Information gathering and collation of medical histories of children 'looked after' is achieved partly through LAC paperwork. All children receive an initial health assessment, which wherever possible this is undertaken by the child's own GP. Information is recorded on a review health assessment record form. Foster carers spoken to confirm that in most circumstances they are furnished with sufficient information and copies of relevant documentation to support the health care needs of children. However, one foster carer told inspectors that they had been without vital health information on the foster child for a year. A minority spoke of delays in getting information or having to chase around for clarity.

In other respects the inspectors consider that the health needs of children in foster care are given high priority and would in all other circumstances have exceeded this standard.

The Borough benefits from dedicated health visitors for 'looked after' children and a "looked after" children's nurse specialist. One of the roles of the nurse is to maintain a database to track health assessments, reviews, dental care and inoculations. The nurse is also able to access or promote fast track health care for children who may move within the care system and may otherwise slip through usual systems. Fostering staff said that these posts have proved to be invaluable assets. Carers welcomed the direct accessibility of her role and gave examples of how she has been able to help with individual health care arrangements or offer advice. Health reviews are routinely undertaken in the child's home in order to support privacy and help the child feel at ease with such reviews.

The Health Visitor reported that reviews are undertaken either 6 monthly or yearly depending on the age of the child. Parental consent to medical assessment, examination and treatment is sought on entry into the care system; this was evident on children's files. Children's files reviewed by inspectors evidenced that initial assessments had been undertaken and health care plans established.

Statistical evidence presented to inspectors also indicates that Poole is recording a better than average result in the upkeep of medicals, dental reviews and immunisation. In particular improvements have been made the number of 'looked after' children receiving health assessments. In September 2001 this was 31% but had risen to 94% in September 2003.

Psychology services are linked with the fostering service including a 0.5 post Clinical Psychologist and 0.5 Family Therapist provided through the CAHMS services. Many carers and staff spoke of the positive outcomes as a result of these posts. Staff however, felt that these half-day posts were insufficient to meet demand.

The previous Children's Service Manager (CSM) held regular meetings with health professionals ensuring that good communication systems have been established. These are not consistently taking place due to the current CSM vacancy. However, health professionals spoken to confirmed that they had good and close working relations with the fostering service.

Carers records, verbal confirmation and responses from questionnaires from carers support that they have received a range of health related training including; health and hygiene, first aid training, health eating, sexual health, administering medication.

The health needs of children cared for within the shared care scheme remain the responsibility of the parent. The shared carer spoken to said that they maintained an open dialogue with parents which ensures they have sufficient information to care for the child.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

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

4

The Borough of Poole has established comprehensive policy and guidance in respect of the education of 'looked after' children'. The fostering service has good lines of communication with the Borough's education services and especially the dedicated educational welfare officer and teacher for 'looked after' children'. It is unfortunate that the long-term sickness of the teacher has impacted on the availability of this part of the service. The Education Welfare Officer said that each school has a dedicated teacher who is trained to be suitably aware of the impact of being 'looked after' and the consequent effect upon the child's education. The services of an Educational Psychologist are used to assist for example with school behaviour management, issues of inclusion and exclusion from school and training.

Data is collated about the educational attainment and exclusion from school of 'looked after' children. The latest statistics made available to inspectors indicate that Poole's 'looked after' children are achieving good results in Key Stages 1, 2 & 3, which are better than the national average. However Poole has a lower average exam result, which is attributed to the higher than national average number of children with special educational needs. None of the children currently excluded from school are 'looked after' although there had been two who had been excluded over the past year.

The Borough has made good impact on the level of truancy of 'looked after' children. Statistics show that the number of children missing school has reduced, also the number of days missed by those known to truant.

Young people were, on the whole, complimentary about the support they received from foster carers. Questionnaires returned indicated examples of help with homework, access to a computer and general support. Inspectors met with some young people who entered the country as refugees. They, in particular had high praise for the care and support they had received from foster carers and the fostering service which had aided them in learning the language, accessing additional support and specialist guidance.

**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**

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last year. This is not as a result of a reduction in service rather it is a reflection of a better understanding and interpretation of the standards by inspectors.

The fostering service does not have specific written policy and procedure about preparing young people for leaving care. There is no guidance issued to foster carers in the foster carers handbook on what is expected of them in relation to supporting young people towards independence and this is therefore recommended. The Team Manager confirmed that no specific guidance has been established. One foster carer spoken to who primarily fosters older children felt that the 'follow on' services for young people leaving care were poor in particular where the young person needed to be referred onto adult services. The carer felt that without their ongoing support that the young adult could not adequately manage to live independently. This example highlights the need for detailed expectations and responsibilities to be made clear.

The inspectors spoke to a group of young people who had either just left foster care or were very near to leaving. Each, were complimentary about the level of support they were receiving and in particular this was focussed at the support given by individual foster carers. The Leaving Care Team supports and runs the leaving care group. All young people spoken to say that they had a Pathway Plan and had been contributors to its development.

Foster carers are able to access training provided by the Care Leaving services.

## 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?

3

The recruitment of staff to Poole fostering service is subject to the Borough's written corporate procedures. These contain all good practice elements for safe recruitment including competitive interview, take up of references and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. Telephone calls are made to all referees of staff offered appointment. Systems are established to renew CRB checks every three years. Personnel records are held centrally in the Borough's personnel department. Records were reviewed of all staff who have been appointed since the last inspection. A total of eight records were reviewed. All supported adherence to the expectations of good recruitment practice. Although this standard is well met, the inspectors advise of the future inclusion in the standards of the need to retain CRB checks until an inspector has reviewed them. Recommendation is made to start this practice with immediate effect.

Although not currently required it is recommended as good practice to extend the take up of CRB checks to all administrative staff in recognition of their access to sensitive information. This should be at standard level.

The service links with the local Health Care Trust for use of psychologists, therapists and other professionals. There is an understanding that the staff have been recruited to the Trust's good practice recruitment procedures.

The fostering team has had a number of new recruits, all of whom have had varied experiences as child protection and/or children and family social workers. Most however have not had direct experience of fostering. The team however represents competent staff who are able to undertake the work of the fostering service. Staff are committed to fostering and are eager to fill any gaps in their knowledge by working alongside and learning from experienced workers in the team. Qualified staff are employed in the assessment and approval of foster carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

20

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

4

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Since the last inspection the fostering service has been under extreme pressure resulting from staff vacancies, long-term sickness and the departure of several staff including the Children's Services Manager (CSM) who was responsible for the management of the fostering service. The current Team Manager has had a period in an 'acting up' capacity, returning to Senior Practitioner post and eventually, following interview to the permanent post. This has resulted in a significant level of disruption for all workers. However, this is now partially resolved. All posts are full although the result of one staff member on long term sick still impacts on the team.

The post of CSM remains vacant but adverts have been out and responses are currently being reviewed. In the interim written guidance has been established which makes clear roles and responsibilities with particular reference to line management accountability. The team are therefore beginning to establish and define roles and responsibilities. The inspectors recognise the care that has been taken to ensure minimum disruption to foster carers. This has clearly been successful as although carers were aware of shortages only a small number made reference to conflict over accessibility or support from the service.

Workloads are a constant source of discussion and some matters remain which still need resolving within the team. In particular there is a need to look at the current role of Social Work Assistants. Later in this report under standard 22, reference is made and a resulting requirement to the fact that supervision of carers must only be undertaken by qualified workers. Some carers spoke of the problems they had experienced being supported by a part time worker. None made reference to bad quality of work but to the logistics of getting hold of the worker on their day off. The Team Manager demonstrated an awareness of the issues and confirmed that there was ongoing dialogue between the staff team, himself and the Principal Officer as to how best to distribute work tasks.

The shared care service is small but well established, well organised and managed. The inspectors had no adverse comment to make about the arrangements of this team.

Assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed in an effective manner. Where fostering agencies are used for placements this is within agreed contracts. One person in the team has traditionally overseen this work. Responsibility for this is now being spread amongst other team members.

Each team member is subject to a job description, contract and receives supervision from a line manager, either the Team Manager or the Senior Practitioner. Supervision records and confirmation from staff suggests that all receive support and supervision. This is aimed at being every 4-6 weeks and includes aspects of case management and professional development. The inspectors recognise that there has been some disruption to the regularity of supervision during the later half of 2003 but acknowledges that this is now no longer a problem.

Supervision is supplemented by annual appraisal, which identifies an action plan for the year, including the identification of training needs. Evidence was seen of staff appraisals. Staff have full access to or have received a range of personnel policies and procedures.

The team are supported by an improved infrastructure. There has been an increase in the availability of computers and this has enhanced working practice. The team however, expressed a need for a laptop computer to aid presentations of training to carers. The inspectors recognise that the current sharing arrangements of an old overhead projector are inadequate to support this vital part of the service.

The administrative team have had some changes. A new Administration Officer was appointed in October 2003. The work capacity of the administrative team is excellent despite working within excessively cramped conditions. The Administrative Officer in particular has been an invaluable source of information and support to the inspection process. The inspectors would like to thank the admin team for their patience and willingness to assist in this process.

Staff have access to training opportunities through the Borough's training unit. Requirement or interest in training is established within the appraisal system.

Carers were seen to have received training and copies of some training certificates are held on carers' files. Records held by the fostering service were not complete. Recommendation is made to support and guide carers in the development of their own training portfolios as indicated by standard 16.9.

The service is well supported by a range of professionals who are able to offer advice.

**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

The fostering service does not currently have a formalised carers recruitment strategy although adverts are released on a rolling programme. The Team Manager confirmed that the last main stream fostering advert was held back due to the current pressures on the team. The manager felt that if potential recruits were to come forward, that at this time the service would be unable to adequately meet expectations. The team is beginning to re-establish itself following a significant number of departures and income of new staff and this is effecting its current position. The Team Manager confirmed that adverts would re-start in the very near future.

Although adverts for shared care are constant there are no current potential interested parties coming forward. The service is carrying a waiting list of seventeen children, three of whom are considered high priority. The inspectors felt that the shared care team had made every effort to target recruitment actions to reach as wide audience as possible. Inspectors agreed with workers that the potential inhibitor to greater recruitment was linked to fees which are currently nominal in relation to care provided. Inspectors were told by managers that this was under review.



Previous mention and requirement has been made under standard 7 to ensure that a greater range in diversity of carers is provided to meet the needs of children.

A number of foster carers have been fostering for Poole and prior to Local Government Reorganisation for Dorset, for many years and are nearing retirement. A small number of these care for significant numbers of children and would be a substantial loss to the service. This puts an added dimension to the need to recruit sufficient carers to meet future need. Recommendation is therefore made to ensure that a recruitment strategy is developed to take account of current and future need in both the main stream fostering and the shared care service.

Foster carer recruitment procedures were well evidenced by the carers' files which demonstrated that sound and appropriate procedures are followed. Assessments were seen to be thorough and cover qualities, aptitudes and competencies as outlined in Standard 17.7. Assessments are based on a competency approach and some excellent examples of thorough assessment were reviewed. One part time worker undertakes the majority of assessments and this appears to be a good use of her working hours. However, the person holding this post is also responsible for other tasks e.g. recruitment and family and friends as carers which are in excess of the capabilities of the hours allocated. The manager confirmed that this was under review.

Staff sickness and vacant posts has meant in the past that there have been inadequate staffing levels within the fostering service. The team Manager confirmed that contingencies were made to cover aspects of the work by the use of temporary staff. Team members spoke of the constant struggle to keep up with workloads but felt hopeful that with team numbers looking healthier that this would improve.

Without exception, all foster carers spoken to or who returned a questionnaire felt that there was inadequate staff in the fostering team. Many social workers also made reference to under resources. The inspectors feel that this is partly historical problem as it is only very recently that the team has had a full compliment of staff. The inspectors suggest that this is likely to improve in the coming months.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

**The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.**

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

2

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last year. This is in part responsible to the inspectors better understanding and interpretation of the standard but also as a result of the reports made to inspectors about a lack of support to carers as a result of the part time working arrangements of some foster care workers. (See below).

Staff are employed by the Local Authority within well established and fair employment practices.

There are systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support. Foster carers files reviewed by inspectors evidenced that regular supervision was taking place, some of which were undertaken unannounced. The service aims to offer regular supervision on a monthly basis. This was achieved, and exceeded in a large number of cases reviewed.

Despite the pressures that the team have experienced due to staff shortage and the vacant management post the team have maintained good relations and contact with foster carers. Many spoken to indicated high praise for the support of those who work within the service. However, a number made reference to the inaccessibility of part time staff which was reported to cause frustration and some concern in times of crisis. The inspectors suggest that this matter should be reviewed. Carers need to feel that they have access to support when they need it.

The service is supported by an out-of-hours duty team, which was reported by carers to be responsive to need. Systems for the communicating of out-of-hours activity are effective.

There is a need for carers to be given comprehensive policies on health and safety which includes making clear all legal requirements. Recommendation is made in this respect.

**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?**

3

The Borough has a comprehensive training programme to which both staff and carers have access. Staff spoken to confirmed that they had received an induction and were supported in training opportunities. All staff are subject to an employee development scheme, which undertakes a yearly appraisal of their work and identifies developments required to support the service and personal and professional development. Records of annual appraisals of staff, including their training needs, were seen on staff files.

Personal and training needs feed into a team training profile, which in turn is incorporated into a service plan, which is passed to the training department.

There were some opportunities for carers to attend training events with staff.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last years report. This is not as a result of a reduction in service rather it is a reflection of a better understanding and interpretation of the standards by inspectors.

Staff are provided with clear details of their duties and responsibilities expected of them via job descriptions. The Borough has a range of policy and procedures and the fostering service have many that are service specific procedures. This collection of papers, are held against the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and are referred to as the manual for fostering services. The folder was reviewed thoroughly by the inspectors and was considered to be muddled and incomplete in some circumstances and would benefit from a thorough review and update. This is recommended. The shared care service by comparison has a complete and comprehensive set of procedures which support the work of the service.

A review of staff files evidenced that staff receive management support and supervision from an identified line manager. Supervisions are planned, regular, recorded with copies signed and retained in staff files. Supervision links with an annual appraisal system, copies of which were also evident on staff files. Team meetings are held weekly with all staff having an opportunity to attend. Minutes are made and retained and inspectors had an opportunity to review some over the past few months. Meetings act as an opportunity to share corporate information, allocations and matching discussions and matters specific to the management of the team.

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

The Poole fostering service is well established and therefore working strategies are well known to carers and workers. These include arrangements for supervision visits, support and access to training, the role of supervising social worker, assistance with accessing other services for foster children, arrangements for review and the expectation of out-of-hours support.

The service standard is to visit carers at least monthly, with some of these being unannounced. Carer files reviewed supported that this target was generally achieved and exceeded in many circumstances.

Annual review reports are prepared and available to the fostering panel. Where possible reviews are undertaken by an independent foster worker. The team manager spoke of consideration being given to the appointment of an independent reviewing officer, as a strategy to improve the effectiveness of the reviewing process. Reviews of main foster carers were noted to still be behind schedule, with 15% being overdue. Requirement was made last year to ensure that all reviews take place on time. This requirement is carried forward to this report. The inspectors recognise that these delays are an inevitable consequence of staff shortage and are not treated lightly by the team and were beyond the team's control. It was the inspectors' opinion that the team strive always for best practice.

The service encourages membership of a local and active carers group and membership with 'Fostering Network'. The previous Children's Services Manager and now the Team Manager maintains regular contact and support to carers via a Fostering Update Newsletter. This gives information about up and coming training and/or events and developments in fostering at both a local or national level. Information and advice is available to the carers from specialists who support the service, e.g. education, nursing, psychological services.

The relationship between foster workers and social workers was reported to be positive. Social workers spoken to confirmed that the close proximity of the fostering service (same office building) ensured that informal networks were establishment.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**1**

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last years report. This can be attributed in part to a better understanding and interpretation of the standards by inspectors. But, is also due to the fact that matters required in relation to the foster care agreement have not been implemented.

Foster carer agreements are detailed and ensure that carers have a full understanding of the expectations placed on them, the foster service and the Local Authority. Since the last inspection an updated version has been developed which includes space to record the specific terms of each carers approval. However, a review of carer files shows that this has not been implemented. Requirement is made to ensure that all carers are issued with an appropriate agreement which meets with the expectations of this standard, regulation 28(5)(b) and schedule 5. The agreement used by shared care should also be reviewed to ensure that for all approved foster carers i.e. those providing overnight care have an appropriate agreement which meets with the expectations of schedule 5.

On approval each carer is given a handbook, which covers a good range of policy, procedures and practical information. This was comprehensively reviewed by inspectors, and was found to be incomplete in some important aspects; for example health and safety, matters of contact arrangements, preparation for independent living and bullying. The handbook also contains a copy of a fostering handbook developed and published by Anne Wheal. This is designed for carers of children under 11 years. Whilst this is useful information it may put off some carers with children over 11yrs from reading it and therefore negates its usefulness. The inspectors recommend that a review be undertaken to update and make further inclusions to the current handbook.

The shared care scheme also has a handbook, which incorporates information of particular note to their service networks. The handbook was considered to be suitable for the needs of shared carers.

The main stream fostering service currently uses either a Family Placement Social Worker or a Social Work Assistant to supervise and support carers. These workers provide information, advice and support. Foster carers spoken with had high praise for individuals within the team, whom they had built a good level of trust and an effective working relationship. However, it is not acceptable that Social Work Assistants carry caseload and supervising responsibility. Standard 22.3 indicates that only qualified workers should act in this capacity. Requirement is therefore made to address this matter.

There are systems for practical support as detailed by standard 22.7. Concerns noted last year in accessing respite care were not evident this year and represents a reported concerted effort on the part of the fostering service to address this matter.

Inspectors met with six foster carers via home visits, eight through attending an evening support group and two carers representing TASCA (an independent local support group). Inspectors also received completed questionnaires from eleven carers. As an overall statement the inspectors are able to report on mostly positive comments received. The support group members were asked how they rated the fostering service. Although not fully representative of all foster carers, a pleasing 9 out of 10 was mentioned. TASCA members reported some concern about support in crisis situations. Two carer questionnaires received also mentioned the lack of support when carers have been subject to an allegation. Managers of the service were already well acquainted with these concerns.

The complaints procedure was seen to be available to carers and is included in the foster carers handbook. The service has a system for the collation and monitoring of all complaints.

Information about the procedures to deal with investigations, are known to foster carers but are not included in the foster carer handbook in an obvious manner. This should be addressed by the recommended review of the handbook. Some foster carers spoken to made reference to the vulnerability they feel as carers and had heard of some carers who, had unfounded allegations made against them. They felt that at these times support was inadequate and some expressed the fear of foster carers "not knowing where to turn". The standards indicate the need to include the provision of independent support. This is offered by the service in the form of subscription to Foster Care Association. This service offers advice, guidance and if necessary legal support.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last years report. This is not as a result of a reduction in service rather it is a reflection of a better understanding and interpretation of the standards by inspectors.

Foster carers receive pre approval training which uses material and formats produced by Fostering Network and includes eight sessions (Skills to foster, What foster carers do, Who are the children and young people, Working together, Safe Caring, Understanding behaviour, Moving on, Sons and daughters). Evidence of pre approval training attendance is held on carers' files. More experienced foster carers confirmed that they are involved in training delivery. The shared care scheme also has training, which includes disability awareness, communication, protecting disabled children and resuscitation skills. Access to training was reported by foster carers to have been improved in the last two years.

The training needs of carers are considered within each review. Carers were seen to have received training and copies of some are held on carers' files. It is positive that a central record of all training undertaken by carers has been started. However, records are incomplete to fully evidence the level of training opportunities that carers have been given. Previous recommendation had been made to support carers in establishing their own training portfolios. Some carers reported problems in accessing training due to the need to care for children. The inspectors felt that the fostering service had made good attempts at trying to meet this need by having training at different times of the day, offering sessional staff or Social Work Assistants to support child care and by offering crèches at some training venues.

Foster carers spoken to who had been fostering for many years reported that they felt they had attended all training that was on offer and could not benefit from further attendance. Some however, expressed a wish for more specialised and focused training to meet their needs at a higher level. In part, the inspectors felt that this was the intention of some of the lunch time sessions but feel it important to take on board the views of carers. The Principal Officer reported that consideration is being given to training in Solution Brief Therapy training which will be open to staff and carers. However, recommendation is made to the fostering service to explore carers training requests in more detail and evaluate current training on offer.

The service is once again commended for the good practice of offering support to foster carer's own children in the form of a support group. The service also intends to develop a male carer's group but to date this has not been achievable due to pressure of work.

Some carers have undertaken and successively completed an NVQ but these are in the minority. It is the services intention to ensure that at least all Key carers are supported to achieve an NVQ.

Shared care workers spoke of the constant challenge in attracting sufficient numbers to training opportunities and was again possibly linked to the fee level paid to carers. Shared carers are often busy people with full time work commitments in addition to their shared care arrangements. The fact that training is not considered to be part of the package which can be claimed for as working time may also be an inhibitor.

## 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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This standard is scored lower in this report in comparison to last year. This is not as a result of a reduction in service rather it is a reflection of a better understanding and interpretation of the standards by inspectors.

Case records for children are primarily maintained by the child's social worker, sited in the same building as the fostering service team. The fostering service holds relevant information about children in placement, or for whom a placement is being sought. Case records and access to case records are the subject of a corporate policy. Information about children on files held by the fostering service, were mainly copies of the 'Looked After' Children documentation and LAC reviews. Case records were reviewed as part of the welfare tracking. Many were not up to date, held misfiling and sheets for recording systems which were no longer used and demonstrate a need for an overhaul. Although written procedures were available staff were unfamiliar with them.

This inspection did not examine the main files held by the childcare social workers.

A sample of six carer files (one shared care, five main stream fostering) were reviewed, some for the purpose of welfare tracking and others more randomly chosen. These files had a reasonable structure. Although files seen held the required information in accordance with Regulation 30, some carers' files examined had information about children no longer placed with them, some misfiling was noted. It is recommended that attention is given to more systematic file management. Although it is the service policy, some foster carers' files did not include the placement arrangement details for the current young person in placement. Files were however up to date in respect of case recording. Administrative staff were aware of the need to overhaul filing systems and had in fact begun a general review of all filing systems in the fostering service. The shared care files reviewed, met with expectations.



Fostering staff confirmed that they try to ensure that carers are furnished with as much information as is available, to enable them to care for the child. A minority of carers reported that this was not always the case, although the evidence from group discussions with carers and from questionnaires suggests that these are exceptions rather than the rule. Those who had made reference to this issue felt that the shortfalls they had experienced were as a result of social workers not releasing the required information. One notable exception to this rule related to insufficient health information. Requirement has previously been made in this report under standard 12.

Foster carers are made aware of their responsibility in respect of keeping and maintaining records and of the particular importance of supporting the child in collecting memorabilia to evidence their life history. Foster carers gave examples of how they achieve this and administrative records demonstrated that carers have been able to seek reimbursement of costs for such things as photo development. Children spoken to were able to show inspectors awards and certificates as well as photos.

**Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The fostering service keeps and maintains adequate records much of which is required by regulation. All records, asked for the purpose of this inspection were produced. Some however took time due the fact that they had been maintained by the previous manager and were not easily located by current staff. The update of recording systems will be given some priority by the manager and the administrative team. Evidence that this work had begun was clear.

Separate records were seen for staff employed, carers, children, complaints, allegations and accidents. The manager acknowledged that the inspectors would find some files in a less than satisfactory order because of prior staffing difficulties. Examples were noted and referred to under the previous standard. Written case records, were in the most part, legible with some exceptions. The contents however were clearly expressed being observational and based in fact.

Personnel files are held in the main Council personnel department, although the Team Manager also held a smaller record keeping system kept alongside supervision and appraisal records. Staff records meet with the expectations of the Fostering Regulations and in particular Schedule 2.

There is a policy and leaflets available in respect of access to records by a child or by foster carers.

Foster carer files contained a full record of checks and references that had been obtained. Evidence of checks with the CRB were kept centrally by the Borough's personnel section, with a separate record made for foster carer files.

Confidential records are maintained securely. File cabinets are secured at the end of the day and the building is locked and alarmed.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>				88
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>				78
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>				60
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>				18
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>				15
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b> (These figures represent fostering fees only)		81.50	<b>Maximum £</b>	520.00

The following figures are representative of the shared care service:

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>		27
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>		23
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>		24
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>		6
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>		4

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

Premises used for the fostering service are appropriate for their use. The building is shared with other social services activities, including a day centre for older people and social work assessment and long-term teams. Access to the building is via coded or call systems.

The main stream fostering service offices are generally adequate consisting of one large and three smaller rooms. The large room has been re-organised to make better use of its space. Two separate smaller offices are available for the Children's Services Manager and Team manager. The third is a very over crowded room used by administrative staff. This offers barely enough room for three people to work. Although some work has been undertaken to better organise this room it seems very crowded. Staff using the office however said they find it adequate.

The fostering service has links to the Borough's computer networks. There has been an increase in computers and this has greatly enhanced and eased working conditions since last years inspection.

Shared care services are located in an older style building adjacent to the main stream fostering office. Security systems are similar. The shared care service staff share space with the Children's Health & Disability Team. Space is considered to be adequate.

## 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

This standard is not applicable.

### 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

This standard is not applicable.

### Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Allowance and fees are subject to written policy and are reviewed annually and are well known to carers. New financial procedures in draft form were presented to inspectors.

Matters of finances were not raised as a significant concern by carers. Two of the eleven carers who responded via questionnaire made negative comment about fees. One said it was the worst thing about fostering and the second indicated that the rates were poor. Member representatives of TASCA reported unhappiness at some practice in respect of fees. They reported that a young person may be referred and placed with them at a higher fee (Project £169.50 per week) due to the accepted greater input and work required for the young person. After a period of settling down and as a result of the work undertaken by carers to stabilise the young person the fee lowers, without warning to the regular fostering fee of £81.50. Whilst the representatives acknowledge that this may need to happen they felt that this should be mentioned as a possibility at the beginning of the placement in order that carers could make an informed choice about the placement. The managers of the service explained that these matters should be part of the discussion which takes place during placement agreements and that more effort is now going into highlighting finance matters.

Fees for shared carers were reported to be under review in recognition that this may hold the key to increasing a greater number of carers and retaining those already caring. This is highly recommended as an appropriate course of action.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Poole's fostering service panel is constituted in accordance with the guidance of Standard 15 and Regulation 24, with exception to their inability to locate someone as a panel member who has previously been in foster care or has had their child in foster care. The service has made attempts to address this but have yet to be successful. The panel does benefit from legal advice from the Borough's legal department also medical/child health and educational expertise. The panel also has an independent member who is a foster carer for Dorset. The panel chair is a Children's Service Manager with the Borough of Poole but who does not have day-to-day line management responsibilities for the main stream fostering service. On occasions when shared carers are presented to panel the Chair stands down in favour of the Vice Chair in recognition of the potential conflict of interest as the person with line management responsibility for the work of the shared care team.

The panel is subject to agreed procedures. Procedures developed include an appeals procedure for foster carers and prospective carers and following the last inspection additional written guidance was produced which advises the panel what to do in the event that panel members do not agree. These procedures are not written into a definitive policy and procedure document and this is recommended. All panel members are given a terms of reference, which details the appointment process, attendance expectations, confidentiality, training, equal opportunities and are asked to sign a confidentiality bond. Panel members have been appropriately checked for their suitability and have been cleared by the CRB.

The inspectors were able to review the previous two months panel minutes and observed the convened panel arranged for the month of March. This panel included presentation of an approval for a shared carer. The panel was observed to be very professional, well informed of the items on the agenda for the day. Panel members showed a high level of awareness of many complex issues, were comfortable at raising matters for clarity and made clear recommendations. A quality assurance feature was obvious within a case-by-case model.

A process had been undertaken for a report of all foster carer reviews of this past year to be presented to the panel, in accordance with Regulation 29(5). In general the panel would expect to give direct consideration to those reviews where there has been some concern. There is not a regular process established for the panel to receive management information about the outcome of the reviews as suggested in Standard 30.6. A recommendation is made about this and other information that the panel should be monitoring, i.e. the range and type of carers available to the Local Authority in comparison with the needs of children.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service short term break provision for children with disability is located with the Children's Health & Disability Service (CHAD) and is referred to as the Shared Care Scheme. Day-to-day management takes place within the CHAD team although overall responsibility for fostering services is held by the Children's Service Manager (CSM) for Adoption, Fostering and Residential (AFR). This post is currently vacant and responsibility is temporarily with the Principal Officer. In the interim the shared care service retain a need to report matters of importance through to the main stream fostering service e.g. statutory notifications, allegations and accidents for central collation. However, these are subject to custom and practice and should be defined in written policy and procedure. This is recommended.

The shared care service is well placed in this team these are linked clearly with the social workers who are supporting the families in need and aids the work of both teams.

Despite the recommendation this standard is considered well met. The service has a good range of policy and procedure to support the work of the service.

The team is small and consists of a part time senior practitioner and one part time shared care workers. One further part time post holder has left and this post is currently frozen. The smallness of the team ensures there is a good knowledge base and awareness of specific children and carers; support can therefore be tailored accordingly. However, the team currently carries a waiting list of seventeen children requiring links, three of whom are considered high priority. The service is currently undergoing a review of fees, partly in response to the need to attract a greater number of carers and retain those current.

Currently the service has twenty-six shared carers who provide short-term break placements. Nineteen can provide overnight care and are therefore approved foster carers. Procedures followed for the recruitment, assessment and approval of these carers is a mirror of the main stream fostering service function, although competencies required of shared carers have been adapted to address the particular skill required. Carers, who do not provide overnight stays are assessed following broadly similar lines, are checked but do not proceed through the panel approval stages.

Supervision and support is offered on the basis of need linked to the number of days/nights of care offered and the intensity of the provision. Carers who provide care to children with complex and more challenging needs will be offered a greater level of supervision. For the purpose of this inspection one shared care arrangement was reviewed. The file evidenced that the full assessment and approval process and the evidence of ongoing review and supervision.

A home visit was made to one shared carer. The carer was happy to be providing this service and was extremely complimentary about the support and help given by Poole shared care workers.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

### Standard met?

3

At the time of his inspection four kinship/friend carers were being supported by the fostering service. Policy and procedure guidance seen last year in draft form has now been fully established. One foster worker has special responsibility for overseeing these arrangements.

The inspectors visited and tracked one for the purposes of this inspection. In these circumstances the kinship carer had been the carer for the child, prior to assessment and approval as foster carers, for a considerable period of time. In his respect they had exceeded the expected six-week time limit for emergency placements made without an approval status. (Regulation 38). This represents a heightening awareness on the part of the social workers for the need of such approvals and assessments to be brought to panel. The Team Manager said that it was now expected practice that such assessments would take place in the given time.

The assessment reviewed was considered by inspectors to be a robust assessment which showed sensitivity to the particular family relationships. The kinship carer had praise for the way they had been dealt with and supported by the fostering service. They reported also being somewhat bewildered by the process but had found it to be thorough and the necessity for it fully explained. Although they have been offered the same level of training opportunities as other foster carers they have not full use of this, although had attended one, lunchtime training session.



**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 24<sup>th</sup> February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The Report appears to be a fair and balanced one. One factual inaccuracy has been identified concerning the line management of Child Health and Disability (CHAD) (ref. Summary of Inspection pg.8 and Standard 31 pg.53). This rests permanently, not temporarily, with the CHAD Children's Service Manager. The Children's Service Manager (CSM) Fostering and Adoption, as registered manager for the Fostering Service, has overall responsibility for all Fostering services, including shared care. The line of accountability is achieved through formal communication between the CSM CHAD and the CSM Fostering and Adoption.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

**Note:**

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

**D.2 A written Action Plan, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion, will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

Action plan was required

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

### 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 Mr Luis Pujol of Poole Fostering Service 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	<u>Luis Pujol</u>
Signature	<u><i>Luis Pujol</i></u>
Designation	<u>Team Manager Fostering</u>
Date	<u>15/04/04</u>

Or

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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