

inspection report

Fostering Services

Borough of Telford & Wrekin Fostering Service

The Mount
1 Haygate Road
Wellington
Telford
Shropshire
TF1 1QX

21st June 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

Borough of Telford & Wrekin Fostering Service

Address

The Mount, 1 Haygate Road, Wellington, Telford,
Shropshire, TF1 1QX

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

01952 641641

Address

The Mount, 1 Haygate Road, Wellington, Telford,
Shropshire, TF1 1QX

Fax No:

01952 643400

Email Address

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

Date of Inspection Visit		21st June 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Janet Manders	133244
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin provide a fostering service as part of the range of family based care for children and young people who need to spend some time away from their family of birth. The Family Placement Team is based in Wellington and undertakes the recruitment, assessment, support and training of foster carers and aim to make appropriate matches between the assessed needs of children and the skills of the foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose indicates that the Borough of Telford and Wrekin fostering service offers a range of different types of fostering. A Part-time Fostering Scheme offer short breaks for children at times of family crisis and a Shared Care Scheme allows short breaks for children with disabilities. Short Term Foster Care where children are unable to live with their family at the time they are placed but where the plan is to rehabilitate the children, they provide permanent substitute families for children unable to return to their families. They also provide day care support with a foster carer where this will support the child's parent and prevent reception into care or where such support would assist the child's full time foster carer in the fostering task.

The Family Placement Team consists of a Manager, two Senior Social Workers and seven Social Workers, one of which is presently an agency worker. At the time of the inspection the Family Placement Team were supporting 104 foster carers with 139 children in placements.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

In addition to the inspection work undertaken within the fostering service itself, information was sought from young people placed by the fostering service, foster carers, placing officers and family members. However, only 19 questionnaires from foster carers were returned. Foster carers' views were also sought through visits to four foster carer households and through attendance at a group meeting with a small number of foster carers. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire, of which only 4 were returned. A questionnaire was used to gather views from young people, aged 7+, of which 13 were returned. The inspector also met with a group of young people placed with foster carers at the youth club organised by the Fun and Leisure Coordinator. Permission was sought to talk to the birth families of those young people who were fostered in the households selected for visiting. One family member responded positively and was contacted by the inspector.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was partially met.

The Statement of Purpose has been updated and is now compliant with the Standards, however it contains confidential information in respect of a foster carers, which must be removed. It should then be circulated with the Children's Guide to all relevant parties.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

Both of these standards were met

Both the nominated manager and team manager have the relevant qualifications and experience. Appropriate checks have been undertaken, but the department must ensure that telephone enquiries are undertaken to follow up written references.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Both standards were not met, due to minor shortfalls

There has been an improvement in the evidencing of monitoring procedures within the fostering service and there has been a clarification in the levels of delegation and accountability within the service. However, the manager must develop clear procedures for the notification of significant events as required by Schedule 8 and ensure that all staff are aware of the procedure. The nominated manager must have a current job description that accurately describes her position.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

0 of the 9 standards inspected were met, 7 standards were not met due to minor shortfalls and 2 standards were not met due to major shortfalls.

The fostering service fails to meet the needs of the young people it looks after in a number of significant areas. The reasons for this is the lack of sufficient trained and support foster carers to offer young people a well matched, planned placement. Lack of sufficient staff results in risk assessments being undertaken as required, appropriate training being

provided or that all relevant information is provided to foster carers. Allegations and complaints must be thoroughly investigated in a timely fashion, and that all placements are supported by a detailed and specific Foster Placement Agreement as required by Regulation 34 and Schedule 6.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

1 of the 9 standards assessed was met, 7 standards were not met due to minor shortfalls, 1 standard was not met due to major shortfalls.

The Authority has again failed to meet most of these standards due to a lack of staff. As a consequence the management and support offered to staff has diminished since the last inspection with supervision not taking place on a regular basis. Further attention must be given to The Authority's recruitment and assessment of foster carers to ensure that foster carers can meet the needs of the young people placed. Assessments must be thorough and robust. Foster carers must have appropriate written guidance, which mirrors The Authority's policies and procedures. The appointment of a part-time training officer should assist in ensuring that foster carers are appropriately trained.

Records (Standards 24-25)

1 of the 2 standards assessed were met, 1 standard was not met due to minor shortfalls.

Improvements have been made in ensure a comprehensive record for young people, foster carers keep records of work undertaken. Appropriate arrangements are made to ensure that records are kept confidential. However, the service must develop a record of young people placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22 and ensure that the register of foster carers includes all the information required by Regulation 31.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

This Standard was met.

Financial Requirements

1 of the 3 standards assessed were met, 2 of the standards are not inspected as part of a Local Authority Fostering Service Inspection.

The payment of foster carers is promptly undertaken and carers are advised annually of changes in the rates of allowances and fees. Improvements could be made in respect of the efficacy of payments for additional expenses.

Fostering Panels

This standard was not met due to minor shortfalls.

The Fostering Panel is well organised and chaired efficiently, however due to changes in the family placement team the Panel's composition does not presently meet the requirements of Regulation 34. Discussions also need to take place within the Authority to ensure that all members of the Panel have appropriate checks and references as identified in Schedule 1.

Short Term Breaks

This standard has not been inspected.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report and therefore this standard has not been inspected on this occasion as a separate standard.

Family and Friends as Carers

This standard has not been inspected.

Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report and therefore this standard has not been inspected on this occasion as a separate standard. However, the inspectors expressed concern about the increasing workload of the worker responsible for kinship care and has made a requirement that consideration must be given to ensure that the service had sufficient staff to recruit, assess and support kinship foster carers.

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	
2	3	FS1	The Children's Guide must be updated to include all elements required in Regulation 3 and Standard 1. The Guide should then be given to each foster carer and, subject to his age and understanding, to each young person placed by the fostering service, in addition to the Commission.	1.04.04
7	29	FS6	The manager must ensure that annual reviews are undertaken within the statutory timescale and that these include the necessary checks to ensure that young peoples needs are met.	1.04.04
8	12	FS6	Risk assessments carried out in line with Standard 6.5 should also consider the needs of young people already in placement and the outcome of the assessment is recorded in writing and placed on file.	1.03.04
10	19 & 34	FS7	The authority must ensure that it has sufficient diversity of foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.	1.05.04
11	17	FS8	Where transracial or transcommunity placements are made the authority must provide additional training, support and information for foster carers as specified in Standard 8.6.	1.05.04

12	12 & 34	FS8	The authority must ensure that all relevant information including a young person's Care Plan and recent written assessments of the young person, and their family and the carers are taken into consideration when matching young people with foster carers.	1.03.04
14	33 & 34	FS8	The fostering service must not request foster carers to accept placements that are clearly outside their approval range and for which they do not have the appropriate skills.	1.03.04
15	34	FS8	The fostering service must ensure that Foster Placement Agreements are completed, meet the requirements of Schedule 6, and contain specific reference to elements of matching.	1.03.04
19	12	FS9	The service needs to incorporate information as to how it will counter bullying in to its new bullying policy and ensure that all foster carers are aware of the policy.	1.05.04
21	11 & 12	FS9	The authority must provide full information about the foster child and his/her family to foster carers to enable the carer to protect the foster child, their own children, other children for whom they have responsibility and themselves.	1.03.04
22	14 & 34 Schedule 6	FS10FS10	The authority must ensure that each child in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships if this is consistent with their welfare and that the plan for contact is clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement.	1.04.04
27	15 & 17	FS12	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers are given appropriate information regarding the state of health/health needs of any young person placed or to be placed with them	1.03.04
29	16	FS13	The Fostering Services must clearly identify how it will meet the educational needs of all young people in foster care.	1.05.04
32	16	FS14	The authority must ensure that all young people who require a Pathway Plan are actively involved in the development of such a plan and monitoring it's implementation	1.04.04

34	20	FS15	The authority must ensure that its recruitment policy and procedures fully comply with Regulation 20, Schedule 1.	1.03.04
37	21	FS16	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff have job descriptions that accurately reflect the work they undertake.	1.05.04
38	19	FS17	The Authority must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff employed by the Authority to allow a clear distinction between the roles of fostering service social workers and that of the children's social workers.	1.05.04
39	27	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that, a consistent and thorough approach to foster care assessment is undertaken and that such assessments consider all aspects identified in Standard 17.7.	1.03.04
41	20 Schedule 1	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff and carers are subject to CRB checks at an enhanced level and that such clearance is recorded on file.	1.03.04
43	12 & 21	FS18	The Fostering Service must ensure that practice in respect of Whistle Blowing conforms with the expectations of Standard 18.7 and that all foster carers are familiar with the Confidential Reporting Policy	1.05.04
44	17	FS21	The Fostering Service must provide foster carers with such training, advice, information and support, including a comprehensive system of support outside office hours, taking into account the needs of children placed with them.	1.05.04
46	28	FS22	The Fostering Service must ensure that the foster care agreement meets the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations.	1.03.04
47	29	FS22	Records about allegations of abuse are kept and monitored and there is a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.	1.05.04

48	17	FS24	The fostering service must ensure that, in relation to any young person placed or to be placed, a foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the young person, this should include appropriate consents.	1.03.04
50	20 Schedule 1	FS30	The fostering service shall ensure that all panel members have checks carried out in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1	1.03.04

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Janet Manders</u>	Signature	<u></u>
Second Inspector	<u>Brian Lock</u>	Signature	<u></u>
Locality Manager	<u>Brian Lock</u>	Signature	<u></u>
Date	<u>9th November 2004</u>		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3 (2)&(4)	FS1	The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide must be circulated to all relevant parties.	01.01.05
2	3 & 32(5)	FS1	All information identifying specific foster carers must be removed from the Statement of Purpose.	Immediately
3	30(3) & (4)	FS4	Improvements are needed to the information system, including the urgent addition of the fostering module to Care First to allow managers to have all the appropriate information to manage the service.	01.11.04
4	43(1)	FS4	The manager must develop a clear procedure for the notification of events to agencies as identified in Schedule 8 and that all staff are made aware of the procedure.	01.10.04
5	21(1)(b)	FS5	The nominated manager must be provided with a current job description.	01.11.04
6	12(1)(a)	FS6	Risk assessments carried out in line with Standard 6.5 should be recorded in writing and placed on file.	01.11.04
7	17(1)	FS6	Foster Carers must receive training in respect of Health and Safety matters.	01.01.05

8	33(a)	FS7	The authority must ensure that it has sufficient diversity of foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.	01.01.05
9	17(1) & 21(4)(a)	FS7	Foster carers and staff must receive training on promoting and valuing diversity	01.01.05
10	17(1)	FS8	Where transracial or transcommunity placements are made the authority must provide additional training, support and information for foster carers as specified in Standard 8.6.	01.12.04
11	34(3)	FS8	The fostering service must ensure that Foster Placement Agreements are completed, meet the requirements of Schedule 6, and contain specific reference to elements of matching.	01.11.04
12	34(1)(b)	FS8	The fostering service must not request foster carers to accept placements that are clearly outside their approval range and for which they do not have the appropriate skills.	01.10.04
13	33(b)	FS8	The authority must ensure that all relevant information including a young person's Care Plan, risk assessments and recent written assessments of the young person, and their family and the carers are taken into consideration when matching young people with foster carers.	01.10.04
14	17(3)	FS9	The authority must ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed.	01.10.04
15	12(1) & (2)	FS9	The authority must ensure that all staff and carers are aware of what action to take if concerns regarding a young person's welfare arise and that prompt action is taken.	01.11.04
16	12(1)	FS9	All allegations of abuse by foster carers must be investigated thoroughly and in accordance with departmental procedures.	01.10.04
17	14	FS10	Contact must be actively promoted by social workers where it is consistent with a young person's care and placement plan.	01.10.04

18	Children Act 1989 s26(3)	FS11	The authority must ensure that all complaints are dealt with thoroughly and speedily, with the outcome being fully explained to the complainant.	01.11.04
19	17(1)	FS12	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive appropriate training in respect of first aid training.	01.01.05
20	15(2)	FS12	The Fostering Service must ensure that each young person has a Health Plan to ensure that their health needs are met and foster carers are aware of their role in meeting a young person's needs.	01.01.05
21	16(3)	FS13	The Agency must ensure that any education it provides for any child placed with foster carers who is of compulsory school age but not attending school is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs he may have.	01.01.05
22	34 (3) Schedule 6	FS13	The fostering service must ensure that the foster carers role in school contact, and in relation to the young persons personal education plan are clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement.	01.01.05
23	16(5)	FS14	The Authority must ensure that all young people who require a Pathway Plan are actively involved in the development of such a plan and monitoring it's implementation	01.01.05
24	17(1)	FS14	The Authority must provide foster carers with training, advice, information and support in relation to; preparing children and young people to move into independent and semi independent living	01.01.05
25	20	FS15	The Authority must ensure that its recruitment policy and procedures fully comply with Regulation 20, Schedule 1; this must include CRB checks and 2 references on all staff.	01.10.04
26	19	FS16	The Authority must ensure that there is sufficient competent and experienced persons to provide administrative support to the fostering service.	01.01.05

27	19	FS16	The Authority must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced social workers so that all Looked After Children are supported by a qualified social worker.	01.12.01
28	19	FS17	The Authority must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service.	01.12.04
29	8 (1) a & b	FS17	The registered provider and the registered manager must have contingency plans in place to address any shortfalls in staffing levels; having regard to the size of the fostering agency, it's statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed; and the need to safeguard and promote their welfare.	01.11.04
30	27(2)(a)	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that, a consistent and thorough approach to foster care assessment is undertaken and that such assessments consider all aspects identified in Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3.	01.11.04
31	Children Act Schedule 7	FS17	The Authority must ensure that a person does not foster more than three children, and where the usual fostering limit is exceeded an exemption must be made and that this should be recorded in writing and a copy is given to the foster carer.	01.10.04
32	17 (1)	FS18	The Authority must provide foster carers with a comprehensive system of support outside office hours, taking into account the needs of children placed with them.	01.01.05
33	17 (1)	FS18	The Authority must provide foster carers with written guidance in respect of Health and Safety Issues and Whistleblowing.	01.11.04
34	21(4)(a)	FS20	The Authority must ensure that all staff members receive supervision on a regular and planned basis.	01.10.04
35	29(2)	FS21	A review shall take place not more that a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.	01.11.04

36	28(5)(b) Schedule 5	FS22	All foster carer agreements must comply fully with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002	01.12.04
37	17(1)&(2)	FS22	The Authority must ensure that foster carers have a handbook, which provides comprehensive information in respect of the department's policies and procedures	01.12.04
38	29(3)(a)	FS22	Records about allegations of abuse are kept and monitored and there is a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.	01.12.04
39	17(1)	FS23	The Authority must develop, implement and evaluate a training programme for foster carers, which covers all elements required by the National Minimum Standards.	01.01.05
40	22(1) Schedule 2	FS25	The Authority must keep a record of young people placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22 and Schedule 2	01.12.04
41	31(2)	FS25	A register of carers must be produced which contains all the information required by Regulation 31.	01.12.04
42	20 (3) Schedule 1	FS30	The fostering service shall ensure that all panel members have checks carried out in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1	01.12.04
43	24(3)(a)	FS30	The Authority must ensure that the fostering panel meets all requirement of Regulation 24 in respect of its composition.	01.12.04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The department should demonstrate that appropriate consultation has taken place with both staff and foster carers in respect of the Statement of Purpose and the policies and procedures under which it operates.
2	FS1	The Statement of Purpose should be adopted by the elected members.
3	FS1	Information regarding the number of complaints the service has received should be included in the Statement of Purpose but any identifying information should be removed.
4	FS3	Telephone enquiries should be undertaken to follow up written references.
5	FS3	A policy should be developed under what circumstances CRB checks can be destroyed.
6	FS6	Carers should be provided with training and guidance in respect of Health and Safety issues.
7	FS9	Safe caring guidelines should be provided, based on a written policy, for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. The guidelines are cleared with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child.
8	FS10	The department should include a policy in respect of the importance of contact to young people who are looked after in the Foster Care Handbook.
9	FS10	The authority should ensure that a risk assessment as required by Standard 10.6 is undertaken prior to contact taking place.
10	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff undertaking assessments of foster carers have received appropriate training in this area.
11	FS17	Medicals should be undertaken at the beginning of the assessment process so that due consideration can be given to issues raised in the medical.
12	FS19	Staff training should be reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis.

13	FS22	The Authority should ensure that occasional unannounced visits to foster carers, are undertaken, at least once a year.
14	FS30	Foster carers should be encouraged to attend Panel, to ensure that all information is provided to the Panel before a decision is made.

* 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 11

Survey of placing authorities YES

Foster carer survey YES

Foster children survey YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

- Directors of Social services YES

- Child protection officer YES

- Specialist advisor (s) NO

- Local Foster Care Association YES

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements YES

- Interview with children YES

- Interview with foster carers YES

- Interview with agency staff YES

- Contact with parents NO

- Contact with supervising social workers YES

- Examination of files YES

Individual interview with manager YES

Information from provider YES

Individual interviews with key staff YES

Group discussion with staff YES

Interview with panel chair YES

Observation of foster carer training NO

Observation of foster panel YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents YES

Inspection of records YES

Interview with individual child YES

Date of Inspection 21/06/04

Time of Inspection 9:00

Duration Of Inspection (hrs) 79

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

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
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"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Statement of Purpose has only just been distributed and the department should demonstrate that appropriate consultation has taken place with both staff and foster carers. Once this has been completed the Statement of Purpose should be adopted by the elected members.

The inspector received two copies of the Statement of Purpose, one of these copies did not include information regarding the number of complaints made in respect of the service the other copy included details of both complaints and allegations against foster carers, however, the information included identifying information and should be removed as a matter of urgency. Once this matter is rectified the Statement of Purpose will be compliant with the standards.

The recently revised Children's Guide must be given to all young people in foster care as 54% of those young people returning questionnaires stated that they had not received a copy of the Children's Guide.

The Foster Care Handbook was being distributed to foster carers at the time of the inspection. It did not include many of the policies shown to the inspector at the last inspection and are required by the Fostering Service Regulations. Staff and foster carers commented that they had not been involved in the development of the service's policies and procedures at any time. It is therefore imperative that these are reviewed on a regular basis in light of the comments and experience of staff and foster carers.

A CD-Rom has been produced which was to be made available to staff but has not yet been made available to foster carers. Consequently foster carers do not have access to the required policies and procedures. This will be addressed in more detail throughout the report and in Standard 22.

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

At the time of the inspection the nominated manager and the team manager were both appropriately qualified and experienced. The nominated manager has wide experience of working with children and young people and of fostering services, including significant senior management experience. She holds a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work and DipSW. She is currently undertaking NVQ Level 5 in Management. Observation and discussions with staff indicated that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and the operation of the fostering service.

The recently appointed team manager has had previous management experience and has had extensive experience of the fostering service in Telford & Wrekin & elsewhere. In discussion with the manager he confirmed that he had both a CQSW and a management qualification at masters level but both of these qualification were dated. He was keen to update his qualification and was attempting to organise supervision training through the department. Some minor improvements were noted since the previous inspection but some systems and procedures had slipped due to staffing problems, these will be addressed throughout the report.

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

Appropriate checks had been undertaken in respect of both the nominated manager and team manager although there was no evidence that telephone enquiries had been made to follow up written references. CRB checks had been undertaken and the outcome recorded however, the inspector was unable to examine the originals as they had been destroyed.

The department still needs to devise a policy, in line with present guidance, regarding when and under what circumstances such checks can be destroyed.

The Agency has a rolling three year programme for obtaining CRB checks on all its staff.

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

There are clear roles for the manager, the team manager and the staff, and the lines of accountability have been clarified. Staff reported that both the manager and team manager are accessible for advice. There is a clear policy in respect of the need for the manager, staff and carers to declare any conflict of interest.

The team manager has developed a system for monitoring and recording matters set out in Schedule 7. The system is still in the early stages of development and there is not always evidence that records have been monitored or that patterns and trends are always noted.

The IT system is used for much of the management information however, at the time of the inspection the appropriate module was not available to the team or the manager.

There has been an improvement in the notifications of child protection issues to the Commission for Social Care Inspection since the last inspection but not all required events are being notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, for example serious accidents to young people and serious incidents resulting in the police being called. The system for notifications appears ad hoc with a lack of clarity as to who will notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection. All notifications must be in writing.

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

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

9

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

9

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

The team manager does have a job description and contract and he does not hold a similar position in any other organisation. However, examination of personnel files indicated that the Business Manager still does not have a current job description although this was identified at the last inspection and the service's action plan stated that a current job description would be completed by 1st April 2004. The need for an up to date job description is especially important due to the change in the management arrangements in the near future.

The Authority must also ensure that it notifies the Commission for Social Care Inspection of the change in management arrangements as required by Regulation 46.

The role of the team manager is clearly defined and the two seniors have clear roles and responsibilities and are expected to take charge in the absence of the team manager.

The Head Of Services deputises for the nominated manager in her absence.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The foster carers homes visited by inspectors were clean, warm and homely. Fire and safety equipment was seen to be in place including smoke detectors, fire guards and stair gates. One young person was pleased to show the inspector his room, which had been personalised and contained his own computer. The homes seen were maintained to a high standard. The houses were free of hazards and maintained to ensure the needs of the young people were being met. In discussion with the carers they were aware that both placing social workers and social workers from the family placement team would visit them. The visits from the family placement team were all announced and used the supervision model of visits. Carers found these visits useful and supportive but visits should also occur which are unannounced. Visits and support from placing social workers was variable with one young person commenting that they did not see enough of their social worker. Carers confirmed that they were offered training and whilst one carer had undertaken extensive training another carer who was a family carer had not undertaken any training although she had been offered training.

Health and Safety assessments are carried out of carers' homes and transport arrangements as part of their initial assessment and these are monitored at the carers' annual review. However, there is a need to provide carers with training on Health & Safety matters as required in 6.7 and 12.5, and with guidance on their responsibilities in these matters.

The department has introduced a system of risk assessments, however, these are not evident on all files.

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?

1

In discussion with the team manager, senior social workers and social workers there was an acknowledgement that the Local Authority lacked placement choice and this was particularly evident in the context of carers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Acknowledgement of the problem of caring for black or dual heritage young people also came from carers who stated that they were aware of children of different ethnic backgrounds being placed transracially with carers. The manager was under the impression that recruitment had started in a bid to address this problem but according to the senior social worker responsible for recruitment it was on the agenda but no active recruitment had started.

In the various discussions with carers it was evident that some carers would benefit from

further value base training. There was no evidence that either carers or the fostering team had undertaken any recent training on promoting or valuing diversity. The annual reviews of foster carers seen by inspectors did not address the issue of value bases.

One young person seen as part of the inspection process was of the Muslim faith and although did not attend religious ceremonies did confirm that he had been offered the opportunity to do so. He also stated that his carers had supported him in making friends and to help him become integrated into the local community. Support from the department, was felt by the carer, to have been very limited in regard to multi-cultural issues, with no clearly identified additional training or support.

A number of carers fed back that access to information about their rights, entitlements and support was limited. The Business Services Manager outlined the use of newsletters and update sent to all carers, meeting which were open to all but attended by a limited number of carers. The fostering team acknowledged some of the problems and felt that information sharing needed to be improved but until staffing was improved this was not possible. The recently appointed senior social worker had been tasked with improving communication between the team, foster carers and other social work teams.

Evidence seen and provided by carers and young people indicated a pro-active response to enabling young people to develop and pursue a range of interests/hobbies, this includes the work of the fun and leisure co-ordinator, which was highly regarded by most foster carers.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

One of the inspectors attended the team's allocation meeting. A new matching form has been introduced, as was a risk assessment, however, there is little or no evidence to support that it is being used by Case Managers to assist with the matching process. It was clear from the interaction during the meeting that several aspects of matching were assessed by individual family placement social workers with knowledge of carers, young people placed and those seeking a placement but none of this information was recorded in writing. Only part of the team were available for this meeting so information and knowledge was limited to those team members present.

Discussion took place towards the end of the inspection with the whole team and methods were identified on how the system could be improved. One suggestion was via a spreadsheet kept on the computer system. The fostering service has very little, if any, choice of placement and the use by the Resource Allocation Meeting of requesting further information seemed a way of not making decisions. The process needs to be greatly improved both from the information supplied by the fieldwork team and the responses from the fostering team.

A range of examples arose during the week of how the service could not meet the need of young people needing a placement. A carer with three young people placed had given notice and it was agreed that all three young people should be moved at the same time but was not achievable because three suitable placements had not become available at the same time.

When two placements had become available they had to be used for emergency

placements. Another foster carer had agreed a short term placement but given personal circumstances was not able or willing to give a long term commitment to the young person and despite notice of this in December 2003, no suitable placement had been identified six months later.

The opportunity for introductions was considered rare, although some examples, mainly within the shared care scheme, were seen during the inspection process.

Matching details are not included in the Foster Placement Agreement.

Several carers had voiced the view that if they wanted respite or support they had to make arrangements with other carers themselves or had not been told of arrangements until just before the set deadline. This claim was supported at the allocation meeting in relation to a request for respite that could not be matched. The information observed, read and discussed clearly demonstrated to the inspectors that standards 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6 or 8.7 were not being met in all cases.

Systems need to be changed and the pool of foster increased to achieve any sense of matching, which would require additional staffing resources. A further example of foster placements not being appropriately matched is that a number of foster carers reported being required to take placements outside their approval range. Of the foster carers who returned their questionnaires, 28% stated that they were approved to take an emergency placement, however, 56% stated that they had been asked to take an emergency placement.

The matching process for internal placements contrast in the extreme to external placements, which have a clearer focus and process, with appropriate checks and matching. The department needs to ensure that such a system is used for "in house" placements.

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

Both pre-approval and post approval training for foster carers includes information regarding caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills and managing behaviour. A recent positive development has been the inclusion of foster carers in the authority's Child Protection Raising Awareness training. Foster carers commented on how useful this training had been, especially as it is held jointly with other professionals.

Nonetheless, inspectors found a lack of clarity over who is responsible for instigating child protection strategy meetings, this has led to delays with none of the cases meeting the requirement in respect of timescales for the holding of strategy meetings and the completion of investigations.

Inspectors also observed that there was a lack of independence and thoroughness in the investigation of some allegations against foster carers. A system of robust monitoring must be introduced to ensure that all allegations are dealt with swiftly and thoroughly.

Inspectors did not find any evidence that work has been undertaken with foster carers to develop their own safe care policy as required by Standard 9.3

Foster carers still report that they are not receiving all appropriate information, when a young person is placed to allow them to adequately protect the young people. 27% of foster carers who returned questionnaires stated that they had not received sufficient information for them to appropriately care for the young people, although this is an improvement on the figures report last year.

All foster carers received a fostering handbook the week prior to the inspection. This included some information regarding how to deal with bullying, but was mainly aimed at young people, but the handbook did not include a procedure to be followed if a young person is missing from home. Unlike the previous handbook the newly issued handbook does not contain a written Policy in respect of Care and Control of young people, which clearly

<p>informs foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable and aims to identify measures and courses of action that are acceptable. It was of concern to inspectors that not all foster carers were aware of this information.</p> <p>It was disappointing to note that the handbook had some noticeable omission, had not been discussed with carers or the fostering team and needs to be treated as a consultation document until feedback has been received from all interested parties.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

<p>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.</p>		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>There is a commitment within the fostering team and by foster carers to promote contact where this is appropriate. The importance of contact is covered during preparation training and there is written guidance for foster carers, however this is not included in the carer's handbook.</p> <p>Whilst the inspectors were made aware of a considerable amount of positive work by foster carers in respect of contact, instances were reported to the inspectors by foster carers and young people where contact had not been actively promoted by social workers.</p> <p>Placement plans include information regarding contact, but there was no evidence of written risk assessments regarding contact.</p>		

<p>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.</p>		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Young people reported that foster carers seek their views in respect to issues that arise and there has been an improvement in the number of young people reporting that their social worker consult them over issues that are likely to affect their daily life and future. Only 3 young people who returned questionnaires stated that social workers did not discuss with them such issues with one young person commenting that they had not seen their social worker since Christmas. The inspector was informed that there were 5 young people who did not have an allocated social worker at the time of the inspection.</p> <p>Most young people spoken to were aware of the complaint's procedures, although of the young people who returned questionnaires 31% of young people indicated that they did not know how to make a complaint and 62% stated that they were not aware that they could contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection. This highlights the need to distribute the Children's Guide to ensure that all young people are aware of the avenues for them to make a complaint. Feedback is that responses are not always made to complaints or that they take many months to be resolved, this is especially the case with complaints regarding Case Management.</p>		

The department has introduced a system where young people contribute to foster carers reviews and this system now appears to be working successfully, allowing both young people who are looked after and the children of carers to contribute to the foster care reviews.

Whilst there is a zero policy on the cancellation of all statutory reviews the inspectors were informed of one review that had been cancelled during the time of the inspection.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Young people's health needs are generally well met by foster carers. Carers register children with their own GP, arrange opticians and dental appointments, and provide health information to the child's reviews. However, there are no health plans on file with foster carers relying on placement plans for relevant information, these are often scantily completed, if at all.

Placement Plan Part 1 is relied upon for delegated powers to consent to basic health care. The introduction of a Health Consents card would be better practice.

Training has been provided in respect of Promoting the Health of Looked after Children and Health Promotion, however there has been no First Aid training available to foster carers within the last year. Sexual health and substance misuse programmes have also been made available to foster carers.

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin are a pilot authority for the National Healthy Care Standards and hope that this will have a positive impact on the health of the young people placed with foster carers.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspectors were informed that there is continued improvement in respect of the support received by foster carers when a young person is excluded from school, however, some foster carers expressed concern that some of the young people who have been excluded only receive 9 hours of education per week. Foster carers commented positively regarding the work of the Corporate Parenting Manager. Some foster carers also commented that the delay in finding an educational placement for some young people, especially when they are first placed can cause major problems and put placements at risk.

The service should also be commended on its provision of computers to looked after children to assist in their education.

Foster placement agreements are not specific enough in respect of education and do not identify who pays for each element of cost incurred in providing a young person's education.

Such agreements also do not cover consents for school trips or the foster carers role in school contact.

The Foster Care Handbook should contain general guidance for carers for their role in the young persons education, including their contribution to the delivery of the personal education plan. Whilst the inspector had sight of such guidance at the previous inspection this has not been incorporated into the present Foster Care Handbook.

Personal Education Plans were seen on most young people files though this was not consistently the case regarding the younger age range of Looked After Children.

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

A visit to one foster home demonstrated that individual practice in assisting a young person to develop skills to prepare for independence was good. The young person in placement was being encouraged to attend a college placement but the transit from the case management team to the 16+ team was not progressing smoothly. Other foster carers commented positively on the support they received from the 16+ team.

One of the files examined by the inspectors did not contain a Pathway Plan even though the young person is almost 17 years old. It is essential that Pathway Plan are developed for all young people to form a practical working guide as to the direction for the young person, the means by which this is to be achieved, and the part to be played by each person.

No training has been provided for foster carers in respect of assisting young people to move into independent living since the last inspection. The inspector would hope that this will be a high priority once the training officer is employed.

A Leaving Care policy should be included in the Foster Care Handbook and should include clear guidelines as to what is expected of carers in terms of preparing children for independence, as required by this standard.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The department has clear written procedures regarding the recruitment and selection of staff. Examination of personnel files showed an improvement in the implementation of the procedure with records of interviews and evidence of written references being followed up by telephone contact being present on the files of more recently appointed staff. Improvements were also noted in respect of the organisation of the files. Nonetheless, the authority must ensure that all staff have two written references, with one being from their present employer. This should be the policy even if the member of staff being appointed is an internal candidate. A newly appointed member of staff, who had previously worked within the Case Management Team did not have a current CRB check. The department still needs to develop a policy regarding destroying CRB checks in light of the current guidance from the CRB.

Further work is underway to ensure that all files contain documentary proof of qualifications and that there are written explanations for any gaps in a member of staff's career history. Presently one member of the family placement team does not have a professional social work qualification.

All staff are to undertake training in respect of the assessment of foster carers later this year. However, workers who are not qualified should only carry out assessments and approvals under the supervision of someone who is qualified and experienced and who takes responsibility for the assessments and approvals.

No students were working within the agency at the time of this inspection, however a student had worked with the team between January and May 2004. An enhanced CRB check and references were supplied by the educational establishment prior to the student commencing work.

Total number of staff of the agency:

11

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

3

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

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

The family placement staff are based in one team, with a manager. There are two senior social workers, one who has recently been appointed. One of the senior social workers is responsible for recruitment of foster carers and the other senior social worker is responsible for support and on-going training. Other team members also have specific responsibilities, for example with kinship carers and the shared care scheme.

The manager is developing systems to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of foster carers are managed and implemented effectively, however, lack of staff has reduced the effective implementation of the systems and therefore not all annual reviews have been undertaken on time and assessments are taking longer than required.

There is an efficient system for responding promptly with enquiries from prospective carers however, again due to staff shortages, not all prospective carers have been followed up once they have received the initial information pack, consequently some prospective carers have not pursued their application with the Borough of Telford and Wrekin and have approached other agencies.

Discussion with both the manager and staff highlighted that supervision is seen as an important support for staff however, they stated that it does not always taking place on a regular basis, due to the pressures of work on both parties. The manager has undertaken training in the supervision of staff but states he would benefit from updated training and is arranging to undertake such training.

The team are supported by a full-time administrator and a part time panel administrator.

Evidence suggests that this is not sufficient to support the team, especially as a new computer system has been introduced but sufficient time has not been allowed for the proper transfer of information and therefore crucial information is still not available to the team.

Family placement social workers still felt that they were required to undertake tasks that were normally the responsibility of the young person's social worker. This was due to either the high demands on case managers who often saw young people in a foster placement as a lower priority than other cases or because the young person did not have an allocated social worker. The inspector was informed that at the time of the inspection 5 young people did not have an allocated social worker, there was evidence that of those who did have a social worker not all were qualified, this has resulted in incidents when issues have not been pursued as vigorously as required.

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?****1**

As has been highlighted throughout this report, present staffing levels are not sufficient for the team to function properly in its task to recruit, assess, train and support a range of foster carers. Consequently a young person needing a placement does not currently have a choice of placement and may not be appropriately matched or placed with suitable foster carers. Of the foster carers who responded to the questionnaire 83% indicated that they felt there are not sufficient staff in the fostering service to provide adequate support.

Staff informed the inspector that since the last inspection there had been a number of staff who had left, sickness levels had also been high and consequently this put additional pressure on the remaining staff. Whilst there has been an experienced agency worker in post, there were no other contingency plans to deal with staff absence. Both staff and foster carers felt unsupported.

Inspectors believe that the authority does not have sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of the young people it has responsibility for. There is little placement choice and the use of exemptions remains high, with particular foster carers being used extensively, one carer was providing placements for 4 young people, in addition she provided respite placements for 3 other young people. Exemption reports are not always being prepared and presented to Panel.

Whilst the department does have a recruitment strategy this has not been successful in recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the young people who require the service. Since the last inspection 7 months ago, there have only been 5 foster carers approved by Panel, 2 of these were relative foster carers, 2 were support foster carers for carers already approved and only one foster carer was approved to provide short-term and respite foster carer. In light of this information the target of recruiting 25 new carers would appear to be unrealistic with the present level of staffing.

Inspection of the assessments completed on foster carers identified that not all issues required by Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3 are covered during the assessment of foster carers. Inspectors noted that with regards to some assessments, significant areas were not discussed with the prospective foster carers, this was most commonly information regarding how carers would meet young people's religious, racial and cultural needs. Of more concern was that inspectors noted critical issues such as a carer's previous depression. The agency must ensure a thorough and rigorous process is undertaken for all prospective foster carers. Inspectors also recommend that medicals should be undertaken early in the assessment process to ensure that due consideration can be given to any issues raised as the above issue was raised in the medical, but this had not been received until after the assessment had been completed.

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**

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin has sound employment practices and is committed to equality of opportunity.

Foster carers informed inspectors that the provision of Out of Hours support remains inadequate. The advice line operated by other foster carers continues to operate but has not been used extensively by foster carers. In discussion with foster carers it was apparent that further discussion about the function of this service is required so that carers can feel confident in contacting the service.

The department's has policies and procedures relating to insurance for foster carers and pays for foster carers to be members of Fostering Network which provides insurance that covers the cost arising as a result of child abuse claims.

Although the inspectors are aware that policies have been written in respect of both Health and Safety and whistleblowing, neither of these policies were included in the Foster Care Handbook.

There is a system of carer support through named social workers, and management systems have been introduced for carer supervision. Supervision was seen to be undertaken on a regular basis and was more widely accepted by foster carers than at the previous inspection.

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 department offers a comprehensive induction to new staff and this has included child protection training. Staff have the opportunity to undertake the Post Qualifying Award in Child Care and a number of staff were undertaking such training. The agency needs to ensure that the effectiveness of training is routinely evaluated, and the training programme reviewed at least annually.

There is an effective appraisal scheme in operation, which identifies a personal development plan for each worker and progress has been made in providing joint training for staff and foster carers. The inspector was informed that a dedicated part-time training officer is to be appointed and it is hoped that this will improve the provision and evaluation of training events.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

Staff were clear about their responsibilities and felt well supported within the organisation. If support was not available from the line manager, staff were able to identify other sources available to them, for example the Senior Social Workers or where necessary the Business Manager.

There is an established supervision policy and records are kept of each supervision session. However, the staff files seen by inspectors demonstrated that regular staff supervision had been taking place up until April but due to staff sickness regularity of supervision had diminished since this time.

Team meetings are held fortnightly and are minuted, these meetings include the team clerk

and the Panel administrator who are seen as an integral part 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

At the time of the inspection all foster carers had an allocated social worker, although the team manager was still holding a small case load due to the vacancies being carried by the team. He was hopeful that with the appointment of the second senior social worker he would soon be able to transfer these cases.

The Authority has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers, this includes a planned training programme, details of which are included in the Foster Care Handbook. Support meetings are held on a regular basis and often include a training element. Respite care is supported by the family placement team, but is not always available to foster carers when it is required. In those cases where it is appropriate members of the family are often approved as support carers. One young person commented that "I don't like going to stay with different people", which had resulted because consistent respite arrangements could not be organised for this young person. Inspectors hope that the transfer of the newly appointed Senior Social Worker from the Case Management team will improve the links between the teams.

Annual reviews are conducted by the team manager and the 2 senior social workers and are used to provide an appraisal process and includes the views of the child, the carer's own children and the placing social worker. Reports are presented to the Fostering Panel. As previously stated not all reviews have been completed due to shortage of staff.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Supervision of carers has been taking place on a monthly basis, according to the records and feedback from carers. These supervision sessions were recorded but the majority of copies on file were not signed nor was there any feedback from carers. In discussion with some carers they felt that the supervision format was good and they felt well supported but they felt that their views were not always accurately recorded. A few carers felt that even if concerns were expressed they did not always get a response they felt appropriate. Carers expressed frustration about not being consulted about placement issues and felt that were not treated as part of the team. There was no evidence on file or in discussion with carers and staff of unannounced visits taking place as required in Standard 22.6

Issues about the lack of support from case managers featured highly in the responses received from foster carers, with 26% of foster carers stating that they did not receive adequate information regarding the needs of the young person they were being asked to care for.

Foster carers have recently been provided with an updated handbook. Whilst there is a considerable amount of information available to foster carers within the handbook, including information in respect of the procedure for dealing with complaints, many of the recently updated policies and procedures required by the National Minimum Standards have not been included in the handbook distributed to foster carers. The handbook appeared jumbled and poorly organised, additional work is required to ensure that it is a useful source of information for foster carers.

The handbook also no longer includes information regarding how an allegation is investigated.

The manager keeps a record of allegations and complaints so that the information can be evaluated to inform future provision of services. The department has a policy outlining the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register, however, this was also not included in the foster carer handbook.

Not all foster carers have a foster carer agreement, the one that is in place is a generalised document used for all foster carers and does not comply with the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. It does not contain details of the support and training offered to foster carers, the need for foster carers to comply with the policy on child protection, measures of control and unauthorised absence. It also does not contain information on the need for foster carers to co-operate with the Commission for Social Care Inspection during an inspection of the service. The agreement should be amended accordingly and the revised Foster Care Agreement implemented in respect of all foster carers. Such an agreement should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis for each foster carer.

As previously recorded Foster Placement Agreement are also not compliant with Regulation 34 and Schedule 6.

A CD-Rom has been produced which is to be made available to staff but has not yet been made available to foster carers. Consequently foster carers do not have access to the required policies and procedures, this must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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

Two pre-approval training courses have been undertaken in the past year, using the Choosing to Foster training materials, with additional modules covering safe care and sexual health. All foster carers are required to undertake pre-approval training, with the exception of relative foster carers who are being encouraged to undertake this training. This training is comprehensive and includes input from experienced foster carers and their own children. It was disappointing to note that the 'Our Say' group, which provides support and training to the sons and daughters of foster carers, has not been operational since the previous team manager left post.

Post-approval training is not as well developed, but a number of courses have been provided for foster carers since the last inspection, including child protection, health promotion, and autism awareness.

Foster carers are expected to attend at least two training events per year; this is a requirement in order for carers to achieve and keep the fee element identified in the newly introduced fees and allowances scheme. In addition a Training Bonus is paid to each carer household that meets this requirement once the Fostering Panel has accepted the relevant annual review. A small number of foster carers have now received this training bonus.

Each carer's annual review contains an appraisal of training and development needs. At the time of the inspection the authority was hoping to recruit a part time training officer, who will be based within the family placement team and managed by the team manager. It will be the responsibility of this worker to establish a full training programme for foster carers, which covers all areas required by the National Minimum Standards.

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?

3

The department has recently developed guidance on case recording, however, this was only available on CD-Rom and had not been made available to foster carers as part of the foster carers' handbook. Foster carers are expected to keep records on the young people and this is read and signed by the supervising social worker, as part of the supervision process. Foster carers have a secure lockable metal box for the storage of confidential reports and records.

The department's recording in relation to the children and young people placed with foster carers is kept and maintained by the young person's social worker. There has been some improvement in respect of the maintenance of these files since the last inspection, although a number remained disorganised with information difficult to locate. A number of files included a PEP, although the files of the younger children rarely contained a PEP, there was also no Pathway Plan on the young person's file who was almost 17 years old; not all files examined were up to date.

Inspectors saw a considerable amount of work by foster carers to enable young people to understand the reason they are looked after and their background.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service keeps separate records for, staff, carers, complaints and allegations as required, however, there was no accurate record of each young person placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22, Schedule 2 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The register of foster carers contains a considerable amount of useful information, including the names of the young people placed with each foster carer, who the young person's social worker is and whether the foster carer has any vacancies. However, it does not contain all the information required by Regulation 31 as it does not include the date of birth and gender of the foster carers nor does it include the dates on which foster carers have been reviewed. There are some inaccuracies and omissions from the register provided to the inspector.

The manager keeps a separate record of complaints & allegations, however, these were not well organised and it was not always clear as to the outcome. Improvements must be made to this recording to enable the manager to analyse the information from such investigations to enable improvements in the service to be made.

Records are kept securely in locked filing cabinets in the team room, staff personnel files are kept at the Head Office.

Foster carers, parents and young people have access to their files, however, there was no evidence of this on young people's files or that they had made additional comments. Parents and young people should be actively encouraged to see and contribute to their files. Foster carers are encouraged to complete review documentation and have sight of other reports written for their annual review and where appropriate can record their dissent from any comments.

The inspector observed confidential information in respect of a young person on a foster carers file, this information was not required by the foster carer and must be removed.

The record of young people placed, and of foster carers, provided to the inspectors was not entirely accurate.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			115
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			16
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			16
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	108.49	Maximum £	298.28

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
<p>The premises are also used by the other children's social work teams within the Borough of Telford and Wrekin, this allows closer working relationships between the teams. The premises used in the different areas for the operation of the fostering service appeared appropriate for their purpose, however, staff reported that they frequently experience difficulty in identifying suitable room space for meetings.</p> <p>The offices are clear about the opening times and staff did not report any difficulties with access. Access to the public is restricted in the office area of the building, by the use of security keypads on doors.</p> <p>Files are kept in metal filing cabinets, which inspectors were informed were kept locked, unless staff required access. The department has also developed a secure storage facility within the building for the storage of archived files.</p> <p>The premises are appropriately insured and a security system is in operation. As previously reported a new IT system has been installed, however, at the time of the inspection the system had not been fully implemented, consequently not all information was available to the family placement team. The system is secure and appropriate measures are routinely undertaken to ensure that all information stored on IT systems is safeguarded.</p>		

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 assessed in relation to local authority fostering services. However, in discussion with the Manager and Business Manager, inspectors were informed that they felt the service was not adequately funded to enable it to fully meet its obligations. Inspectors would concur with this view.

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 assessed in relation to local authority fostering services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

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

No problems were reported to the inspectors in respect of the allowances and fees paid to foster carers, with carers stating that monies were paid regularly and promptly. However, carers did comment that the payment of additional incurred expenses was often unreliable and was dependant on the young person's social worker as to how long it took payments to be processed.

The new system of fees and allowances is now operating well and although it had considerable teething problems appears to be better accepted by foster carers. There is a commitment by The Authority to decrease the discrepancy between the fees over time. The foster carer handbook includes detailed information regarding allowances and fees and this is updated on an annual basis.

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
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<p>Written policies and procedures are in place in relation to the functioning of the fostering panel. The panel members had an appropriate range of skills and experience, although at the time of the inspection the panel did not have a representative from the family placement team as the previous member is now team manager and acts in an advisory capacity to the Panel. Panel members better understand the issues around conflict of interest and the inspector observed case management staff declaring an interest in cases and where appropriate leaving the Panel whilst matters were discussed.</p> <p>Individual files have been collated in respect of Panel members and these included all necessary checks, except for the file in respect of the member employed by the Education Department. Discussions and appropriate arrangements must take place with the Personnel section of the education department to ensure that all necessary information is available and has been checked.</p> <p>Whilst the services procedures indicate that foster carers who have had an allegation or complaint made against them can attend Panel, there is still considerable reluctance for this to happen. New applicants also do not attend Panel. The inspector was informed that it is intended that further training is to be undertaken by all Panel members before the procedure is fully implemented.</p>		
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Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Short-term breaks are provided by the fostering service. Issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report. This service benefits from a dedicated worker based in the family placement team. It is hoped that this will improve the service to foster carers providing short term breaks for young people.	0
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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?

0

The Authority has a dedicated worker to approve and support kinship carers. However, in light of the increasing number of placements being made, the workload of the worker is becoming unmanageable, especially in light of the distances involved in supporting some carers. Consideration must be given to how the support for kinship carers can be improved. A requirement in respect of staffing levels in the family placement team has already been made as part of Standard 17.

Feedback from one family carer related to poor support from an unqualified case manager who had little direct contact with the children or her. She also stated that she felt she had to take the lead on avoiding drift and as a family carer felt her knowledge and skills were not taken into account. Training and support was an issue as she felt she was not told about what support she could expect. Potentially a foster carer for other placements is likely to be lost.

Other issues relating to this aspect of the service have been incorporated into the findings throughout the report.

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 21st June 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 22nd October 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of TELFORD & WREKIN FOSTERING SERVICE 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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