



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Devon County Council Fostering Service**

County Hall  
Topsham Road  
Exeter  
Devon  
EX2 4QJ

2nd February 2004

## Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

### The role of CSCI is to:

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

## Inspection Methods & Findings

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

### The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Devon County Council Fostering Service

**Address**

County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QJ

**Local Authority Manager**

Andrea Morris

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01392 382000

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County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QJ

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info@devon.gov.uk

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**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

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

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		2nd February 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		10:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Jim Palmer	071563
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Romana Young	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>	Derek Curtis	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		NA	
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		NA	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Andrea Morris	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

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

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

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

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

**Part D: Provider's Response**

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

**D.2. Action Plan**

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Devon County Council Fostering service provides a the following range of services:

- Respite care for children in need of regular breaks from their families
- Emergency short term placements
- Short or temporary placements
- Long term or permanent placements
- Parent and child placements
- Family care worker placement – a placement scheme for children with complex needs
- Remand placements
- Day care support

The service is offered county wide and is delivered from three locality based offices. A group manager, supported by five locality based practice managers, manage the service on a day-to-day basis. The fostering service is a major childcare resource within the counties range of services for looking after children.

The service has links to specialist health; education; psychological and CAMHS services.

## **PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Inspector's Summary**

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

This report is the first by the National Care Standards Commission under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and therefore serves as an audit of the service against the new requirements, identifying developments needed to meet the new requirements within a reasonable period of time. Any more urgent issues are identified in the report.

The inspectors met with sets of foster carers; four children placed with foster carers, three parents of children placed in the service; two foster carer support groups; one foster carer peer guide group; two locality teams of fostering social workers, placement co-ordinators and administrative staff; one support worker; three practice managers. Interviewed four placing social workers and met with a group of care managers.

A pre-inspection questionnaire and self-assessment form was completed by the manager. The local authority were not prepared to allow the use of the questionnaires for children, foster carers or placing social workers. Therefore the feedback for this inspection was limited and may impact on the findings.

The Inspectors would like to thank all those people who contributed to the inspection for their help and co-operation.

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

**This Standard is met.**

At the start of the inspection this standard was not met, however the service manager produced a revised edition of the Statement of purpose and children's guide. These are comprehensive documents and now meet the requirements of the regulation and Standard.

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

**Standard 2 was met, Standard 3 was not met.**

The service is managed by a group manager and five practice managers, they have a wide range of experience, qualification and expertise, which is recognised and respected. Information held on staff files did not meet the requirements of Schedule 1. A requirement has been made.

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

**Standard 4 was not met, Standard 5 was partially met.**

There are systems in place to monitor the service, however the manager does not have a mechanism for monitoring all events listed in schedule 7 nor have the commission received a report on the review of the quality of services. Foster Carers and staff commented that they felt the management of the service was improving.

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

**Two of these nine standards were met, six were partially met, one was not met**



The foster service is operating at close to capacity, leading to difficulties in matching children, despite attempt to match children with carers who can meet their needs. Carers do not always receive sufficient information prior to placement. The service recognise the need to strengthen the degree of consultation with parents and children using the service.

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

**Six of these nine standards were met, two were partially met and one was not met.** Six staff files were inspected none contained all of the information required under schedule 1. The local authority does not currently have a system in place to ensure that all staff have CRB checks, renewed every three years. Generally staff felt the service to be a fair and competent employer. Foster Carers felt well supported by their link social worker.

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

**Standard 24 was not met, Standard 25 was partially met**

The case records of children are not held by the fostering service, these are held by placing social workers. Records held had gaps in information and several entries were not dated and signed. Placement plans were found to be lacking in detail. A requirement has been made. General records held by the service were found to be well maintained and securely held, not all information is held by the service this could lead to difficulties in monitoring the quality of care by the manager.

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

**This Standard was met**

The office locations used by the service were found to be satisfactory, and there were no outstanding requirements from other statutory bodies.

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

**Of these three Standards two were met and one was partially met.**

Financial arrangements were well established and efficient, one recommendation has been made regarding payments to carers.

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

**This Standard was partially met**

The structure and composition of the panel has recently been changed and meets the standard. Inspectors attended panel and were impressed by the thorough but sensitive manner in which the panel worked with prospective carers and presenting social workers. One recommendation has been made relating to written policies and procedures, particularly relating to quality assurance functions of the panel.

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

**This Standard was not met**

Carers providing short-term breaks commented they did not always receive sufficient information in a timely manner. Placing social workers commented that they frequently did not know of short-term break placements until shortly before placement.

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

**This Standard was partially met**

The fostering service does not currently undertake to assess or support family and friends as carers, except in exceptional circumstances. This work is usually undertaken by childcare social workers working in district. A recommendation has been made.

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

**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

**If No please list below**

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

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

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

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

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

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

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

**Lead Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Locality Manager** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	42(1)	FS4	It is required that the fostering service manager supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review conducted by her for the purposes of monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and improving the quality of foster care provided.	31/05/04
1	5(3)7(2)c 20(3)d	FS3	You must ensure that all staff files fully meet the requirements of Schedule 1	31/05/04
2	34(3)	FS8	You must ensure that foster placement agreements, covering all matters specified in schedule 6 in place before making any placement, unless made under Regulation 38	31/05/04
3	35(1) 37(3)	FS25	The responsible authority must visit the child in the home, in accordance with regulations 35(1)a, b,c. and regulation 37(3)	31/05/04

### 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	FS6	It is recommended that the use of exemptions needs to be closely monitored to ensure the accommodation arrangements meet the assessed need for privacy and space.
2	FS7	It is recommended that foster carers be equipped with guidance and training to equip them to meet the needs of children from diverse cultural backgrounds. This to include any language or communication difficulties including children with a disability.
3	FS9	It is recommended that the policy to combat bullying and training in bullying awareness be developed by the fostering service.
4	FS12	It is recommended that before a placement begins foster carers be given a full description of possible health needs.
5	FS13	It is recommended that the fostering service provider ensures that clear expectations are made of foster carers for any child that is not attending school.
6	FS13	It is recommended that the fostering service help carers to contribute to the delivery of personal education plans.
7	FS19	It is recommended that staff training opportunities be reviewed to ensure that all staff have the opportunity for professional development.
8	FS22	It is recommended that all foster carers receive regular supervision from a social worker, that the meeting has clear aims and objectives and is recorded.
9	FS25	It is recommended that records of all complaints are held by the fostering service.
10	FS29	It is recommended that the payment system to carers is reviewed to ensure prompt and accurate payment.
11	FS30	It is recommended that written policies and procedures for panel are reviewed.
12	FS32	It is recommended that the local authority review present arrangements for the assessment and review of kinship carers.

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

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

Number of Inspector days spent	13.5
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	NO
Foster children survey	NO
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NA
• 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	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	02/02/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	100

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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



## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors were given a draft copy of the statement of purpose, which does set out the aims and objectives of the fostering service and includes a statement of the service and facilities provided. The inspectors were told by the fostering service manager that fostering service staff will be consulted about this document at a forthcoming County training day and discussion with a practice manager confirmed that it is intended to use the same system to consult staff on an annual basis about the review of the statement of purpose. The fostering service strategy group, which is led by the group manager and attended by an elected member of the council, has also been involved in the development of the statement of purpose. This document has not yet been approved by the elected members.

Both the draft statement and the draft children's guide contain an accurate reflection of the services provided. However, the draft children's guide does not meet regulation 3(3)(c) in that it does not contain the address and telephone number of the National Care Standards Commission. The inspectors were informed by the fostering service manager that, once it has been approved, a copy of the children's guide will be distributed to all foster carers approved by the service and to each child placed with the service (subject to their age and understanding).

The fostering service provider is required to include the address and telephone number of the Commission in the children's guide. (The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, Regulation 3.3 (c).)

Evidence: interview with fostering service manager, interviews with fostering service practice manager and staff, copies of draft statement of purpose and draft children's guide.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service manager's qualifications and experience as detailed to the inspectors exceeds the minimum requirement.

There are five fostering service practice managers who can deputise for the fostering service manager. All hold a professional qualification in social work.

Fostering service staff who undertake recruitment and assessment of foster carers are all qualified social workers.

Discussion with the fostering service manager, practice managers, fostering service staff and foster carers and inspection of documents and pre-inspection materials all show that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation of the fostering service.

Evidence: Service Manager's pre – inspection questionnaire; discussion service manager; practice managers

### 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?

1

Staff file checks showed that all the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 were not met. For example, enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks have not yet been undertaken for staff who were employed by Devon County Council Social Services prior to 1 April 2002, although there was evidence that Police checks had been previously undertaken.

Also, out of six files checked (one of which was the fostering service manager's), only one contained evidence of a check on positive proof of identity, including a recent photograph and documentary evidence of relevant qualifications held as required under Schedule 1.

Evidence: examination of staff files; discussion service manager.



## 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**

Service monitoring takes place through a variety of mechanisms, which include team meetings, formal supervision of staff and carers, unannounced visits to approved foster homes by fostering social workers and, in some instances, disruption meetings when placements have broken down in an unplanned way. The inspectors were told that practice managers produce quarterly reports, information from which is used in the six-monthly monitoring reports.

The fostering service manager stated that there is a clear budget monitoring process in place for which reports are produced at regular intervals. It was reported to the inspectors that the way in which information about significant events is reported – to the care manager where a child is involved and to the fostering link social worker where a foster carer is involved - could lead to double reporting or omissions, although there was no direct evidence that this has occurred. It is recommended that the fostering service manager ensures that all necessary information is relayed to the fostering service to ensure that a robust system of recording and review is in place.

It is required that the fostering service manager supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review conducted by her for the purposes of monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and improving the quality of foster care provided.

The outcome of complaint made directly to the National Care Standards Commission is not yet resolved.

Evidence: interviews with fostering service manager, practice managers and staff, pre-inspection documentation.\*

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

**1**

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

0

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

0

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

0

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

0

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

0

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

1

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

11

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

0

<b>Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	1
<b>Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:</b>	X

<b>Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>A job description for the service manager and contract of appointment was not on their file when examined however the inspectors have been told that this has just been received by the service manager and is now in place. The Fostering service manager does not hold a similar position in another organisation.</p> <p>Discussion with foster carers, fostering service staff and managers showed that all were aware of lines of accountability relative to them. Through individual and group discussion, the inspectors found that carers, staff and managers were clear about their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>There are clear deputising arrangements to cover when the fostering services manager is absent – cover would be provided by either her line manager or delegated to fostering service managers.</p> <p>Evidence: Manager’s Questionnaire; conversation with staff and carers; conversation with service manager</p>		

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspectors visited three foster homes during the course of the inspection and also met four foster carers as part of the case tracking exercise and a number of other foster carers at support group meetings and a peer guide group meeting. All the foster homes visited were warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.

The inspectors felt that the use of exemptions needs to be closely monitored to ensure the accommodation arrangements meet the assessed need for privacy and space. The fostering service manager is aware that the issue of shared bedrooms is dealt with differently in different parts of the county. An improved risk management model is currently being piloted in one area of the county. The county risk assessment model for children (RAMISUS) is starting to be used in the fostering service.

Evidence: direct observation; case file tracking; conversation practice manager; conversation service manager.

### Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Issues concerning cultural diversity and equal opportunity are explored as part of the assessment process. In addition both the pre-inspection questionnaire and in conversation with staff and managers, inspectors were told of measures being introduced by the service to increase awareness and knowledge of carers. This includes the creation of a group called "Excellence not excuses", this group aims to include a diverse group of cultures, who are able to provide consultation to the service and to carers. In addition, carers are provided with a booklet, "Why does race matter in Devon".

Despite these measure a number of carers told inspectors that they did not feel well equipped to look after children with diverse cultural backgrounds. Discussions with the Chairs of Panel suggested that focussed recruitment may increase the pool of carers available. Devon does not have as wide cultural diversity as some areas, it is therefore important that the foster care service is particularly pro-active in meeting those needs.

Evidence: Pre-Inspection Questionnaire; discussion staff and managers; discussion chairs of panel; discussion 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

A process does exist for attempting to match children with carers who are able to meet their needs. Service managers were clear that they would not offer placements that were inappropriate or constituted a risk.

Inspectors were invited to attend a team meeting to observe a matching discussion. Evidence from observing meetings and discussions with professionals and carers indicated that whilst the service makes every effort to match the child with an appropriate carer, placements are, at times, made out of expediency rather than to meet the assessed needs of the child. One child discussed at the matching meeting for whom no immediate match could be made, appeared to have a settled placement in an independent fostering agency, but an “in house” placement was being sought. The inspectors heard of instances where the matching process continued after the initial placement and that this was not only in the cases of emergencies. However, in the few homes visited during the inspection no inappropriately matched placements were found. The issues were not so much about the lack of carers per se but more to do with a dearth of specialist carers who were willing to work with young people who exhibited the more challenging behaviours.

At one meeting attended staff commented that on occasions there was insufficient information provided to enable adequate matching considerations to be made.

A sample group of care managers commented that because the service was operating at near capacity constantly the ability to match children with carers who are fully able to meet their needs was limited. The placement and vacancy figures tend to indicate a greater number of vacancies than in reality is the case, due to inclusion of carers with significantly limiting matching considerations. When matching considerations are made, choice is very limited. This can lead to children and young people being placed at some considerable distance than would be ideal. Another factor, raised by care managers, was the time taken to identify prospective placements; this was particularly the case when respite breaks for carers were necessary. Inspectors were told that placements were frequently not identified until shortly before they were needed, leading to an inability to adequately prepare children and carers.

Of the files tracked, not all children had placement plans in place and several carers told inspectors they did not have placement agreements for each child placed; detailing the child’s needs, how they would be met and any additional support would be provided.

Evidence: discussion foster carers; attendance team meeting; discussion fostering social workers; file case tracking; discussion managers.

**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**

All foster carers receive training in child protection as part of the pre-approval training, they also have written guidance on safe care practice and appropriate forms of discipline in a practice guidance handbook. Not all carers receive adequate information in order to enable them to protect other children in the household at the time of placement.

The service manager does monitor all allegations and follows up all outcomes of strategy meetings with practice managers and link workers.

The inspectors attended a Fostering Panel in which some concerns about a foster carer were examined. After some in depth discussions with a social worker and interviews with the carers, additional training and support was recommended coupled with a reduction in the age of children to be accommodated. In general terms training for carers after initial approval is voluntary.

There is a written procedure for foster carers to use if the foster child is missing from their care (seen in policy and procedures manual given to the Commission)

The local authority was not prepared to allow the use of the questionnaires to be sent to all children and young people old enough to respond. Therefore the inspection was not able to ascertain a percentage of children placed in foster care who had reported being bullied.

The inspectors were told of a 'Safe Care' initiative. Older and experienced carers were being included in the Safe Care arena. A practice Manager told inspectors that they thought more could be done to promote an anti-bullying culture throughout the county and closer links between SSD and education would be advantageous. It was understood that all children over 10 years old in foster care have the opportunity to talk to someone from the Devon Children's Rights.

Evidence: Discussion practice manager; service manager; examination of policies and procedures; observation of foster panel; pre-inspection questionnaires

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

X

%



**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

There are written policies on contact and practice guidance for carers in the practice handbook. Pre-approval training and information evenings emphasize and promote the need for contact.

There was evidence that the fostering service and the individual carers make every effort to maintain links with families where this is in accordance with the care plan. The young people spoken to felt that they were included in the drawing up of the contact arrangements.

Evidence: policies and procedures; discussion foster carers; discussion young people; records

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

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

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

The formal process for consulting with young people is through the looked after child review. Young people are invited to attend and express their opinion, both foster carers and children's right workers may advocate on their behalf. Children are given advice about contacting children's rights workers in both magazine and website information.

The young people spoken to confirmed that they were consulted in the arrangements made on their behalf although there were some contra indications about the arrangements in relation to education. Those spoken to were aware that they could make complaints about the fostering service but not aware of the role of the NCSC in this respect nor had they heard of its existence.

Feedback from some parents of children looked after by the service was that they did not feel involved in decisions concerning the day to day delivery of the service, nor in all cases about the care being provided to their children. The degree of involvement in decision making by parents appeared to vary from one carer to another.

This is an area which the fostering service is seeking to develop further.

Evidence: pre-inspection questionnaires; discussion young people; discussion parents; discussion fostering social workers, managers

**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

All children looked after within the fostering service are registered with medical practitioners, or retain their own. A number of Foster carers commented that frequently pre-placement information is not given to them about medical conditions or treatment. An example was given by one carer, of a sibling group being placed with no medical information. One of the children placed had an inhaler packed in their possessions. The carer had to ask the children for information on whose inhaler it was and how it was to be used. Other examples given were of a young person who was taking Ritalin, and did not have a prescription for several days as no medical information was given to the carer.

All carers are given advice and training in basic first aid on At present it seems that it is left to foster carers to pick up health issues. It is understood that in the near future each foster carer will be linked to a named nurse who will undertake a health assessment on looked after children thus health professionals should be in direct contact with foster children. Apparently there has been some delay in designating key people. The system will be PCT based and this might pose a problem if a child moves areas.

Whilst most young people confirmed that they were given appropriate advice on health one said that he had not been given information on healthy eating.

Evidence; Discussion with foster carers; discussion with fostering social workers; managers; young people; pre-inspection questionnaire

**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

Feedback from foster carers indicated that they frequently felt unsupported by schools, placing social workers and link support workers, when children or young people were excluded from school. Frequently young people are being told they cannot attend school, however they have not been formally excluded, meaning that they cannot be offered alternative education. In situations such as these foster carers said they felt unsupported and had to negotiate with schools on their own. At one foster care support group attended by inspectors, some carers felt confident to raise these concerns with schools, others however felt they did not have the experience or confidence to negotiate effectively on the young person's behalf. One carer gave an example of a young person who had not received any education for a year whilst placed with her, despite her efforts to achieve this.

At one support group attended, an educational welfare officer, with responsibility for looked after children, talked to foster carers about her role and how she may be able to offer support to carers.

The manager told inspectors of strategies being introduced, to raise foster carers awareness

of the importance of educational attainment. The foster care service is also represented on a strategic management group, aimed at ensuring corporate responsibility for any looked after children that are excluded from school. Despite these measures, “informal exclusions” remain and for those young people there is frequently no structured occupation during school hours.

Some foster carers told inspectors that funding for some school activities, notably residential trips away from school, could not be met out of the allowances they receive. As a result some children are denied the opportunity to attend certain activities. The manager told inspectors that a supplementary payment linked to a progression scheme has been introduced, the intention is that carers can use this as a savings scheme to pay for expensive school trips. She did agree to circulate a reminder to all carers about the payment scheme. When unplanned changes of placement occur, special one off payments may be made.

Foster carers do attend school events and actively support children, as is appropriate within the care planning for individual children.

Evidence: attending foster care supports groups; discussion with carers; young people, foster care support workers; managers.

**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?**

3

The service manager told inspectors that the service have developed a training package for foster carers to raise their awareness of issues surrounding leaving care for young people. This package has been developed by a care leaver’s team within the county. Foster care support groups also provide an informal source of advice for carers.

The care leaver’s team manager also attended a recent foster care strategy group meeting, in order to develop links between the fostering service and the care leaver’s team.

Evidence: Training Plans; Discussion managers; Staff teams; Foster Carer support groups. Managers pre-inspection questionnaire

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

1

Devon County has a written recruitment policy, this follows good practice guidance, however none of six staff files held in the HR section at County Hall, randomly selected for inspection held all of the information required in schedule 1 of the Foster Care Regulations. Information not held on staff files, included; CRB checks, recent photograph, two written references, full employment history, application forms for current post held. Evidence of qualifications. There was no evidence that written references were supported by telephone verification.

The is no system in place for renewing CRB checks at three yearly intervals.

Staff files checked all had copies of job descriptions and all but one had a copy of the contract of employment. Where this was missing, there was evidence that this was being remedied.

All social work qualified staff, held a recognised qualification; the inspectors were told that all other specialist professional advisors to the service hold appropriate qualifications.

The requirement made under NMS 3 covers the areas commented on in this section.

Evidence: Staff Files; Discussion manager

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

54

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

X

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

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

There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability, staff and carers told the inspectors that they understood the structure, and lines of accountability. The county service has an office base in Exeter, Totnes and Barnstaple, each locality office has at least one practice manager, each of whom report to the Group Manager for foster care who is based in Totnes.

The monitoring of staff workloads is carried out in supervision. The service has a nominal case allocation of between 20 and 22 carers per social worker. There are disparities across the county. These disparities are being reviewed and it is envisaged that these will be addressed by a realignment of locality boundaries.

Some cases are currently being carried by practice managers. Inspectors were told this was as result of staff shortage and would be rectified by a recent appointment which was about to start. The service has recently appointed two additional support workers and a third staff member is currently seconded to that role. These support workers are not qualified social workers, however they each hold a caseload. The inspectors were told this was an additional level of support, rather than allocating cases to un-qualified staff. It is unclear whether these caseloads are also allocated to social workers in addition to their nominal allocation of 20 to 22 carers. Some foster carers told the inspectors that they did not have allocated link workers; the manager told inspectors that all foster carers had allocated link workers.

All social workers working in the fostering service were clear about the relationship between the child's social worker and themselves.

Administrative systems and back up to the service was efficiently organised.

Evidence: Discussion with foster carers; foster care social workers; support worker; managers; training schedules; supervision schedules; records held.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

**The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.**

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

The manager told the Inspectors that there were adequate staff resources to meet the needs of the fostering service, additional funding had been allocated to the service. This additional funding had provided the additional support worker roles being introduced. Feedback from care managers using the service described the service as operating at maximum capacity, and their being insufficient time for foster carers link social workers to attend all placement planning meetings, and other meetings required. They also commented that there appeared to be difficulty in recruiting carers with the right skills, in sufficient numbers, in the right location. This has already been commented on standard 8 of this report.

While managers felt that there were sufficient staff/carers with the right skills/experience the general feeling around the county was that the highly skilled carers were not always in the right place at the right time. The inspectors were told of shortfalls of qualified workers and experienced carers in some parts of the county.

Staff recruitment and retention, has not been an issue within the foster care service. Many staff have several years experience and their knowledge and experience is respected. Recent retention incentives introduced elsewhere in the social services department were commented on to the inspectors. There is no evidence at present that this may lead to a disincentive in the fostering service, but staff did express some concerns that it may.

Evidence: discussion with placing social workers; staff; managers.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The fostering service has clear policies and procedures for addressing staff concerns, most staff were generally satisfied with the fairness and competence of the service as an employer. There are adequate processes in place for resolving grievances and complaints from staff and carers.

The service does have a whistle blowing policy, it is unclear how well this is understood.

Evidence: policies and procedures; pre-inspection information; discussion staff

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

**There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

The service does undertake regular supervision of staff and all staff have an annual appraisal. Training opportunities exist within the range of training available to all social services staff. However there is limited opportunity for staff, to undertake more specialist training specifically aimed at foster care services.

There are regular service development days held, attended by all staff within the service, these provide professional development, and address strategic issues for the service.

Managers indicated that budgetary constraints had an effect on specific training for social workers in fostering.

The service is introducing a programme of joint training for foster carers and staff in the near future.

Currently there is not a formal induction programme for newly appointed staff

Evidence: Discussion managers; observation of training programme; discussion staff.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)****All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Supervision to social workers within the service is provided by Practice Managers, who in turn are supervised by the Group Manager. All staff providing supervision have been given appropriate training. There was evidence that supervision was taking place regularly.

All staff also are given an annual performance appraisal, at which target are discussed and set.

Regular team meetings are held in each location, minutes are taken of these meetings.

Evidence; Examination of supervision records; team meeting minutes; pre-inspection information; discussion staff and managers.

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

Support for carers is provided through link workers, peer guides, peer group meetings and other specialist support groups the latter two calling for an additional time commitment whereas link worker support is on an individual basis and usually takes place in the carer's own home. A view was expressed that some support groups tended to be 'cliquy' and not always as welcoming as they might be. An 'after hours' telephone service provided by some peer guides provided a valued support for new carers in some parts of the county.

Further support may be offered by the county emergency duty system. Some experienced carers spoke of the difficulty in obtaining help out of normal office hours.

The role of the supervising social worker is clear and is understood by foster carers. Several foster carers commented that they valued the support provided, by their link workers.

The role between the child's social worker and the foster carer was also understood. The inspectors were told that communication between some foster carers and children's social workers could be improved, these difficulties including returning telephone calls, difficulty in gaining information about the child and in some cases no social worker allocated to the child. This issue is addressed in requirement 3, discussed in Standard 8.

Evidence: Discussion foster carers; peer guide group meeting; team meetings.

**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**

All foster carers have a written agreement, which outlines the expectations the service will have of foster carers. This agreement also outlines the expectations foster carers should have of the service.

The inspectors were told that all foster carers are allocated a named, qualified social worker, to provide professional support. In addition two unqualified support worker posts have recently been created and a third post is being covered by a secondment arrangement. The inspectors were told that this role was to provide an additional level of support to foster carers. Each support would hold a small case load, they would in turn be supervised by a qualified social worker. This may be the practice manager, as previously discussed in

standard 16. Arrangements for the supervision of foster carers, varies within each of the locations. There is some confusion within the fostering between regarding the roles of the support workers. Some foster carers and fostering social workers, hold the view, that some foster carers, will be supervised by unqualified staff; the manager's view being that this is an additional support role.

Supervising social workers meet foster carers on an irregular basis, but will visit if requested, a substantial degree of contact is by telephone. Records are maintained of any visit, the frequency of visits will be determined by individual circumstances relating to individual children placed.

Practice managers have started to undertake unannounced visits to foster carers, pre-inspection information indicated that not all carers received an unannounced visit during the last year.

Foster carers are given written practice guidance and advice on how to complain should they feel it necessary. This advice includes information on how allegations of improper conduct by a foster carer will be managed.

Evidence: discussion foster carers; support worker; fostering social workers; pre-inspection information.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>All prospective foster carers are given pre-approval training, prior to being approved as foster carers. Choosing to Foster' and other training initiatives continue to be used during the pre-approval period.</p>		
<p>After approval carers felt that continued training was dependent upon the enthusiasm of the carers. There was evidence that the service was encouraging those who were keen enough to progress through levels two and three with a view to taking more complicated cases. The foster care progression scheme is competency based and requires foster carers to develop specialist skills.</p>		
<p>Foster carers linked to specific services such as remand foster care or the family care worker scheme receive additional training relating specifically to that role; this training may be provided, by members of the youth offending team or workers within the family care worker scheme.</p>		
<p>Evidence: training records; pre-inspection questionnaire; discussion foster carers; discussion staff and managers.</p>		



## 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?	1
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The case records relating to children are not held by the fostering service, but are held in district social services offices. Of those files seen by inspectors, information was not clearly presented in the file, hand written records were frequently not legible, there were substantial gaps in information held in relation to schedule 6. The gaps in formation held included; legal status of child; religion of child; incomplete contact arrangements; in some instances no placement plan, in others placement plans with no clear identification of health, educational or social needs and how the foster carer was to assist in meeting these; Foster placement agreements not signed by carers, link worker or practice manager; SS(9) not signed by team manager; medical consent forms not signed and dated. Frequent entries not signed and dated. (NMS 24.4)

The local authority does have a policy concerning client access to records; these files are included within that policy.

There is little evidence that the fostering service has sufficient information on the background and history of each child to assist foster carers in supporting children to come to terms with their past. (NMS 24.6)

Children's files looked at indicated that in some cases statutory visits and reviews of the arrangements for looked after children at not being held with schedules that meet the foster care regulations. A requirement has been made.

Evidence: Children's case files; discussion foster carers; discussion fostering social workers

**Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

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

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

2

Separate records are held on each area specified in NMS 25.2. These are not all held by the service provider however. Staff records, are held by the human resources section in County Hall, records of complaints are held by customer services, management information regarding complaints and outcomes is provided for the group manager.

All confidential records are held in securely, there is a policy on access to that information. The fostering service holds a register of carers, which is updated on a weekly basis, a register of children placed is also held by the service provider.

The local authority has a written policy on the keeping and retention of records.

The staff records examined in County Hall did not hold all of the information required under schedule 1, this was made a requirement under NMS 3.

The complaints records held by customer services, makes it difficult for the service manager to adequately monitor complaints and allegations and to establish trends and patterns and take appropriate management action. This is made subject of a recommendation.

The figures listed below show a greater number of children left placements, than were made. This would indicate an overall reduction in placements. The manager has told the inspectors that snapshot figures taken on 31/12/02 showed 398 children placed and a further snapshot taken on 31/12/03 showed 381 children placed. A validation exercise is being carried out on the figures; the inspectors are advised that the number of placements ended figure is confirmed as accurate.

The variation in weekly payments reflect the range of carers, and the tasks and skills they are required to demonstrate.

Evidence: records examined; discussion manager.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>	421
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>	416
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>	584
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>	19
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>	23
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	89.53
<b>Maximum £</b>	453.74

## 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

The premises used by the service provider and visited in the course of the inspection met the standard. A range of meeting rooms, offices and secure storage facilities for confidential records were seen across the county. Much of the IT equipment had been renewed and the staff made no adverse comments about their equipment or office space most of which was in reasonable decorative order.

All office locations used by the fostering service have adequate security systems in place, and all manual records and computer records had security measures in place.

The inspectors were told that each office stood alone and that in the event of a failure in one location, information held in another location could be drawn upon. The inspectors did not discuss what would happen in the event of a total system failure.

Evidence: direct observation; discussion admin staff; placement co-ordinators; manager.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Fostering Service has an allocated annual budget, which is agreed within the social services directorate budget. The service manager is able to present bids for additional funding, and additional money had been found within the current financial year to fund additional posts within the service. The budget is monitored regularly and financial reports are made available to the service manager, to enable appropriate management action to be taken.

There are contingency plans to enable the continuance of the service in financial crisis.

Evidence: pre-inspection information; discussion with serve manager.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service operates within the local authority finance regulations. There are clear guidelines for carers staff and managers. This is subject to scrutiny by the local authority auditors, and is regularly monitored by management accountants.

Payments to carers and costs of service are published and subject to regular contract monitoring.

Evidence: financial policies and procedures; budget monitoring reports; discussion manager.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

A number of foster carers told inspectors that there were difficulties with the payment system to carers. One carer told inspectors of three occasions in which over payments had been made. The local authority had then written repayment of substantial sums, either in a one off payment or as a regular deduction from regular payments.

The payments are published and should be agreed prior to placement, this does not happen on every occasion. Inspectors were told that these errors occurred most regularly, with short term or respite placements. Responsibility for making the payments lies with the placing social worker, not with the fostering service. Difficulties in communication, between district and foster carers may have contributed to this difficulty. This may be reduced if payment of carers was managed within the fostering service.

This is subject of a recommendation.

Evidence: discussion foster carers; fostering social workers; managers.

## 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

The inspectors attended one panel and interviewed two chairs of panel.

The fostering panel attended was well managed and business like. The Chair and panel members were sensitive to the nervousness of interviewees.

The notes provided for the panel members were informative and presented in an acceptable format. The members of the panels included occupational therapists, educational psychologists and other independent professionals and non-professionals from a range of backgrounds, however, there was no medical advice included. Though medical advice can be sought. One chairperson stated that it was difficult to get suitable male representatives for the panel.

An independent foster carer from a neighbouring county was a member as was an elected member of the county council. A panel chairperson confirmed that all members of the panel were subject to a CRB check and each had attended a one day training course. The panel members were selected by invitation followed by interview. It was not established if any members of the panel had themselves been in foster care or if they were parents of a child in foster care.

A chairperson confirmed that she met, albeit informally, with another chairperson of a similar panel with a view to maintaining a measure of consistency across the county. There was no evidence of a formal quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process.

A panel chairperson confirmed that the panel was not shared by any other agency but that could be a feature in the future. She stated that she had attended the one day training event that had majored on procedural matters rather than fostering as a skill. One panel chair said that the panels would deal with approvals, re-approvals, changes of approval, de-registrations, and would make recommendations about practice issues where necessary. The panel could ask for an annual report, which would include the outcomes of the recommendations made.

The chair confirmed that dissenting views would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. When asked what would happen if the panel was split, or a consensus could not be reached, a chairperson said that the matter would be taken to the Assistant Director.

There is no formal written procedures covering such a disagreement.

Chairs of panel do provide information to the service provider regarding the range of carers

and their ability to meet the needs of children, there is not a formal process for panel to provide a regular report on the quality of assessments and to provide a quality assurance function. This does happen informally however.

A recommendation has been made.

Evidence: Direct observation of panel; interviews with chairs of panel; panel policies and procedures; discussion manager.

## 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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Most short term breaks for children with a disability are subject of separate contract arrangements with another service provider. However the local authority fostering service does provide respite care for both families and other carers. Feedback from placing social workers was that because of shortages of placements and carers with vacancies, these arrangements are frequently not made until the very last moment, not allowing for adequate preparation of either the child or carer.

In these cases carers should receive adequate time to prepare and the same level of pre-placement information be provided for them as for any other placement. This is subject to the same requirement as standard 8.

Evidence: Discussion care managers; discussion foster carers; discussion team manager.



## 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.

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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The assessment of kinship carers is not usually undertaken by the fostering service and is usually undertaken by child care social workers working in district. This may lead to assessment being undertaken by staff who lack experience in assessment work. All such assessments are presented to the foster care approval panel.

The manager told inspectors that support to kinship and specific carers is not usually undertaken by the fostering service. There are implications for resources if the service is to undertake this work. This is subject of a recommendation.

Evidence: Manager's self-assessment questionnaire; discussion manager.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

N/A

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

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

**PART D**

**PROVIDER'S RESPONSE**

**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 02/02/04 to 25/02./04 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Regarding Standard 16 and Standard 22: our comment regarding the apparent confusion over allocated link workers is as follows:

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring that all Devon foster carers have an allocated link worker. At the time of the inspection, shortage of qualified staff in post meant that some carers were temporarily allocated to practice managers to oversee. Once staff appointments are made, this situation will be rectified. Where support workers undertake work with carers these tasks are undertaken on behalf of and under the supervision of a qualified member of fostering staff (practice manager/social worker).

Work in progress as a result of the inspection:

As a result of the inspection, CRB checks are being initiated for all members of the fostering service and will be repeated at three yearly intervals. Liaison with HR colleagues will seek to address the remaining inadequacies in the staff files.

The draft statement of purpose has been shared with fostering service staff at the recent County Day, and will now be forwarded for ratification by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (elected member).

We accept that, notwithstanding the inaccuracies mentioned above, the report gives an accurate representation of our current position in relation to the implementation of the National Minimum Standards. Action plans have been drawn up and are enclosed with this letter, which address the statutory requirements and good practice recommendations covered in the report.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

YES

**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 12<sup>th</sup> May 2004 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

Action plan was required

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I Andrea Morris of Devon County Council Foster Care Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

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

**Or**

**D.3.2 I Andrea Morris of Devon County Council Foster Care 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.