

inspection report

Fostering Services

Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service

County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8LE

8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 26th
November 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

Wiltshire County Council Fostering Service

Address

County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14
8LE

Local Authority Manager

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Tel No:

01225 713000

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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 ?

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Date of last inspection

19/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		8th November 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Martin Davis	132266
Name of Inspector	2	Rosie Hodgson	
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		Shannon Clarke	

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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 Wiltshire 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 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 Fostering Service is a core component of the Children and Families Branch of the Department for Children, Education and Libraries within Wiltshire County Council. The stated aims of the Branch's work with children in need is to promote the well-being and development of each child throughout childhood by; ensuring secure care, protecting children from harm, respecting and promoting cultural ties and identity and promoting life chances by supporting and enabling parents and extended family to care for their own children wherever possible. Where these aims cannot be met within a child's own family and alternative care is needed, the fostering service aims to ensure that all children looked after by the authority receive the best possible care and attention to meet their individual needs.

Since the last inspection significant reorganisation of the service had taken place. A Service Manager post had been created with responsibility to oversee strategic development of the service and monitor daily operation. A fourth team manager had been recruited thereby increasing the direct access that staff had to management support.

Fostering services are provided by the three family placement area teams and via the Family Support Disabled Children Team. As of December 2003 the service had 141 foster carers with 142 children in placement. The service aimed to increase foster placements to 159 by December 2004, however over this period there was a net loss of 6 foster carers.

The Family Placement Teams are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of foster carers and adopters. They deal with placement requests from fieldwork colleagues, matching individual needs, as far as possible. The teams provide a duty service to respond to emergency placement requests during office hours. Family Placement Officers generally do not hold specialised roles in terms of fostering or adoption, although some staff members had developed specialist expertise in particular areas of work.

The Family Support Disabled Children Team provides short-break foster carers across the county. This team is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of these carers and deal with all referrals for short break services for disabled children.

Wiltshire has developed a payment scheme, which carers are able to apply to join at various points in their fostering career. Access to these schemes is via a competency-based assessment; each scheme has a different fee level, according to the skills and experience of the carers. Over the last twelve months the service had developed a specialist Bail and Remand Scheme successfully recruiting three new carers who offer fostering placements to young people who are either on bail or remanded to the care of the local authority.

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 was the second inspection of the fostering service against the National Minimum Standards. Significant progress had been made across the service with further improvements planned.

Inspectors found that as a result of the re-organisation that had taken place, even after a relatively short period of time, staff were reporting a positive impact upon practice.

The service demonstrated clear plans to continue to monitor practice against the National Minimum Standards and Statement of Purpose. The work outlined to inspectors that is planned in some areas is likely to exceed minimum standards.

12 requirements and 27 recommendations are made. A number of the gaps identified, whilst significant, were not as extensive as previously found. This indicates that the service is likely to continue to improve so that at future inspections it is anticipated that the number of required and recommended actions will be significantly reduced.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard is not met

The Commission received an amended Statement of Purpose. This provided a clear summary of the services available to foster carers and children, however did not account for differences that exist between the mainstream services and those provided by the Family Support Disabled Children Team.

The service had drafted a Children's Guide but this still required considerable work before it could be circulated to children. The inspector interviewed the Children's Rights Officer who had taken over responsibility for the guide and once the planned work is complete the guide is likely to exceed the National Minimum Standards

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

One Standard was met and one not met

Since the last inspection an additional team manager had been appointed and a new service manager level post created. All manager posts were filled. All managers had relevant background experience and were enrolled on appropriate management training. Records indicated that one manager had not had their CRB check updated appropriately.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

Two Standards were met

Clear procedures were found to exist for monitoring and controlling the activities and performance of the fostering service. Significant developments and improvements were

found to have taken place since the last inspection. Managers had audited services and developed action plans to fill any gaps identified. Re-organisation of the service should enable further strategic planning and development to take place.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Four Standards were met, four Standards almost met and one not met

Significant work had taken place since the last inspection to ensure that each carer had an appropriate health and safety assessment in place and in those cases tracked carers were considered to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

The service was found to facilitate and promote contact appropriately. In one case where contact arrangements were complex, inspectors were impressed with the arrangements that had been made.

In the past year three Education for Looked After Children Workshops had been held across the county and 34 carers attended. The manager of the Looked After Children Support Service had recently left and the Principal Education Welfare Officer was in temporary charge. Through case tracking inspectors were able to evidence the support and assistance offered via this team to young people and carers.

Limited placement choice had an impact upon the assessment of a number of the Standards. Preparation training for some applicants to the Family Support Disabled Children Team was considered inadequate.

Significant progress had been made in most teams ensuring that appropriate safe care training and family policies were in place, however gaps were found in the services provided by the Family Support Disabled Children Team.

Health indicators for looked after children were assessed at the last SSI inspection as being good. Inspectors were concerned that where placements are made using a DO1 Placement Agreement there was incomplete medical information and appropriate consents were not provided.

The revised Foster Care Agreement did not comply with Schedule 5. Examples were found of young people being placed outside of carers' approval without the requisite variation being agreed.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

One Standard was met, six Standards were almost met and two not met

The service offers appropriate training opportunities to staff, including access to post-qualifying and external training.

The service should revise its systems to ensure that CRB checks are renewed for all staff on a three yearly cycle.

Unqualified staff had taken over support and supervision responsibilities for some carers under the supervision of the team manager or FPO. Inspectors advised that further training should be provided for these staff, that their job descriptions should be revised and boundaries for their work more clearly established.

Shortfalls in staffing had been exacerbated since the last inspection. As an interim measure sessional workers had been employed to complete some foster carer assessments. Inspectors made recommendations that written contracts should be provided and training needs examined.

Some concerns were identified in relation to the accessibility of the Emergency Duty Service and a recommendation made that the service prioritises the planned development of its in-house service.

Improvements were noted in the frequency and quality of foster carer reviews although some inconsistencies between teams were noted and inspectors recommended that the service should confirm the arrangements for carer reviews beyond the first year of their approval.

Inspectors found that the majority of social workers received appropriate professional supervision however records demonstrated a significant gap in supervision in the Family Support Disabled Children Team and a requirement has been made.

In general records showed that carers received appropriate levels of support and supervision and the majority of carers contacted reported that they were happy with this area of the service. Through case tracking some gaps in the frequency of support/supervision visits were noted. Some social workers remain reluctant to complete unannounced visits to carers. Inspectors recommended that where exemptions to the normal fostering limit apply conditions of approval should specify the level of supervision to be in place.

Records (Standards 24-25)

One Standard was met and one not met

The general quality of recording on case files was found to be of a high standard. Evidence was found that files are frequently audited. Gaps appeared in Module 6 of files so that limited information on children in placement was available to FPO's.

The service does not maintain a Register of Foster Carers in line with Regulation 31 or a Register of Children Placed with Foster Carers as required by Schedule 2.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering service (Standard 26)

This Standard was met

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

Standards 27 & 28 do not apply, Standard 29 was met

Fostering Panel (Standard 30)

This Standard was not met

There is now one countywide panel that meets on a monthly basis in Trowbridge. A panel constitution had been written and panel members had attended a one-day training event. Mechanisms had been further developed to enable panel to feedback on quality and consistency issues.

The panel observed by inspectors was not quorate. The inspector acknowledged that additional independent members had been identified and that this will enable the panel to be established in line with Regulation 24.

Foster panel member's files did not contain all the required information to confirm that appropriate background checks had been completed.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

This Standard was not met

The Family Support Disabled Children Team provides a range of services to disabled children and their families including respite foster placements. Carers and birth families enjoy high levels of autonomy and significant relationships between families were seen to develop.

This team had yet to fully implement safer care training and policies for all its carers. Work remained outstanding in relation to foster carer annual reviews and greater care should be taken to ensure that all placements are made in accordance with a carer's terms of approval.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

This Standard was met

The fostering service placed a high value on the contribution that family and friends can make by being approved as foster carers. Kinship carers were able to access the full range of services offered by the fostering service.

**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:

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	34	FS1	Produce a Children's Guide and provide a copy to each child placed, each foster carer and the Commission	30.6.04
2	21	FS15	Ensure staff receive appropriate supervision	31.5.04
3	28	FS22	Ensure that Foster Carer Agreements include accurate information and all of that set out in Schedule 5	30.4.04
4	24	FS30	Ensure that any Foster Panel has appropriate membership in accordance with Regulation 24	30.4.04
5	20		Ensure that the appropriate checks are completed on all panel members.	30.4.04

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**Signature****Second Inspector****Signature****Locality Manager****Signature****Date**

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	FS1	Produce a Children's Guide to the fostering service and provide a copy to the Commission, each foster carer and each child placed.	29.04.05
2	34	FS8	Before making a placement the department must ensure that a written foster placement agreement has been produced that covers the matters specified in Schedule 6. A copy must be given to the carer at, or before placement	31.01.05
3	28	FS8	Foster Care Agreements must cover the matters specified in Schedule 5	31.03.05
4	34	FS8	A child may only be placed with a carer where the terms of the carer's approval are consistent with the proposed placement	31.01.05
5	34		Where an exemption to the normal fostering limit is agreed the notice sent to the carer must comply with the Children Act 1989, Schedule 7, Sect 63(12)	31.01.05
6	37		The Council must clarify the legal status of those children that it has placed in respite/short-break placements but have not deemed to be Looked After Children	31.03.05
7	35		The service must ensure that permanency plans are made for children within appropriate timescales	31.03.05

8	21		Family placement officers in the Family Support Disabled Children Team must receive appropriate levels of supervision.	31.01.05
9	31		The fostering service must establish a register of foster parents to include the particulars specified in Regulation 31(3)	31.03.05
10	22		The fostering service must establish a register of children placed with foster carers to include the particulars set out in Schedule 2 (1)	31.03.05
11	24		Foster Panel must be established in line with Regulation 24	31.03.05
12	20		The service must ensure that CRB checks have been obtained for all Foster Panel members prior to their attendance at panel, a record of this must be maintained.	31.01.05

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	Amend the Statement of Purpose to reflect the recent reorganisation of the management structure, service developments and practice differences between 'mainstream' services and the Family Support Disabled Children Team
2	FS1	Amend policy guidance in relation to exemptions to the normal fostering limit, variations to approval and the process of carer annual reviews including the arrangements for Foster Panel to sample reviews beyond the first year of approval.
3	FS3	Ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years for all employees, foster carers and advocacy workers
4	FS4	The Service Manager should develop a formal system to monitor the matters listed in Schedule 7 as part of her review of the quality of care provided by the Fostering Service
5		Ensure that applicants to the Short-Breaks scheme run by the Family Support Disabled Children Team attend appropriate preparatory training

6		The service should set out how it intends to prioritise the recruitment of black and other ethnic minority carers to achieve greater accuracy of placement matching.
7		Amend the foster carer annual review forms so that they record child and carer's ethnicity and ensure that where trans-racial placements are made the significance of this is discussed in review reports and support needs identified
8		Family placement duty officers and EDS social workers should have access to all carer profiles, up-to-date lists of carer vacancies, and should maintain a chronological record of actions taken
9		Update the Foster Carers Handbook to reflect the changes made to the process of foster carer annual review and other recent developments in the service
10		Amend policy guidance relating to exemptions to the normal fostering limit and variations to foster carers terms of approval, so that they reflect the service's current practice and so that errors are removed
11		Where a long-term exemption to the normal fostering limit has been agreed Foster Panel should regularly review arrangements and scrutinise the conditions that apply to the exemption
12		The service should consider updating foster carer assessments at regular intervals.
13		Amend practice guidance in relation to safer care policies to outline when these should be reviewed and to confirm that they are to be shared with placing social workers
14		Ensure that all foster carers for the Family Support Disabled Children Team have access to safer care training and develop individual safer care policies
15		Build upon the consultation systems developed by the CRO to ensure that all children placed with foster carers have their views sought
16		The Family Support Disabled Children Team should develop a medication record chart for carers to use to record medication given and refused. This may be used by mainstream carers where appropriate.
17		Provide training for sessional workers if they have no experience of family placement work or have not received training in assessment. Establish clear boundaries around the use of sessional workers, supply appropriate job descriptions and written contracts
18		Where unqualified staff are used to support foster carers they must have an appropriate job description and be adequately prepared and trained for this role

19		Review the Fostering Recruitment Strategy so that clear targets are set against which success can be measured and strategies reviewed so that greater placement choice may be achieved.
20		Prioritise development of the in-house on-call service for all foster carers. Provide appropriate guidance for FPO's and clarify their access to senior manager out-of –hours
21		The Family Support Disabled Children Team should ensure that the training department are informed of carer training needs identified at annual review
22		Clarify the process of foster carer annual review beyond the first year. Develop appropriate policy and practice guidance
23		Disruption meetings should be held after unplanned endings to foster placements
24		Where the frequency of visits to carers by the family placement officer falls below that set out in the Statement of Purpose an appropriate risk assessment should be completed and a written agreement entered in to with the carer. All carers should receive an annual unannounced visit and the date of these visits recorded on annual reviews
25		Family placement officers should receive copies of Placement Plans.
26		Foster Panel members files should contain the relevant checks and references as outlined in the Wiltshire County Council Foster Panel Constitution
27		The system of annual review to be used for carers in the Family Support Disabled Children Team should be confirmed and the Statement of Purpose amended appropriately
28		Ensure that Foster Carer Annual Reviews record the ethnicity of foster carer and child

* 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	10
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	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	8/11/04
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	80

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) |
| 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?	1
<p>Since the last inspection the Statement of Purpose has been revised and presented to elected members for their approval. The Statement sets out the services offered by the whole fostering service including the Remand Fostering Scheme and Short-Breaks services.</p> <p>The Statement of Purpose is well written providing a clear and concise summary of the services offered. It largely fulfils the expectations of NMS 1.4. The Statement will be reviewed on an annual basis and the newly appointed Service Manager has been tasked with auditing the fostering service against the Statement of Purpose in January 2005, this audit should help enhance consistency across the whole of the fostering services.</p> <p>Further work is required to update and amend the Statement of Purpose following the recent re-organisation of the management structure and new practice developments. Inspectors also found that a number of the current practices of the Family Support Disabled Children Team, which provides short-break and long-term carers for disabled children differ from the 'mainstream' fostering teams. Where differences exist, for example in relation to annual reviews and supervision of foster carers, these should be outlined in the Statement after they have been approved by the Fostering Reference Group. Once completed NMS 1.1 – 1.4 will have been met.</p> <p>A draft Children's Guide had been produced following the inspection in January 2004 but had not been made available to young people. Therefore Regulation 3(3) and NMS 1.5 were not met. However an inspector was told that the Children's Rights Officer (CRO) had recently taken responsibility for customising the guide so that it would be attractive and accessible to young people. The CRO was working with a group of young people to develop a magazine style guide and supporting website. Inspectors acknowledge that once completed the guide is likely to exceed NMS 1.5.</p> <p>The fostering service continues to review and update its written policies and procedures. Inspectors found some examples of inaccurate guidance most notably in relation to exemptions and variations. Policy guidance must therefore be amended as required (NMS 1.6).</p>		

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The four fostering team managers all have appropriate social work qualifications. They have considerable family placement experience and a background in child care work (NMS 2.1). Each team manager has been enrolled on NVQ Level IV training in management or an equivalent course (NMS 2.2, 2.3). Staff interviewed said that they found managers to be supportive and committed to service development. Inspectors found that the recent restructuring had been well managed, considerable support had been offered to new managers whilst they settled in to their new roles. All three new managers were internal candidates and so they know the service and council well.</p> <p>Senior managers and members of the Fostering Reference Group have worked to ensure greater consistency across the service. Inspectors found that individual manager's had audited their team's performance against the action plan submitted following the January inspection. Progress had been made in all the teams and the inspectors acknowledge the considerable efforts of managers and social work staff to meet the targets of the action plan (NMS 2.4).</p> <p>The appointment of a Service Manager with responsibility for the fostering service should lead to more effective strategic planning. With support from the Head of Service and the Fostering Reference Group the Service Manager will have responsibility for ensuring that the services provided meet the needs of the LAC population (NMS 2.4).</p>		

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

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

Departmental approved systems are in place to ensure that managers are suitable people. Personnel files sampled largely fulfilled the requirements of Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (NMS 3.4).

Since the last inspection personnel procedures had been amended so that guidance states that staff CRB checks should be renewed on a three yearly cycle. On the files sampled by inspectors CRBs had been appropriately renewed, however pre-inspection information indicated that one team manager had not completed a CRB check and had last completed a Police Check in 1999, therefore a shortfall remains (NMS 3.3).

Recruitment process now includes telephone enquiries to follow up written references, evidence of this was found on files sampled (NMS 3.2)

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?

3

Staff and carers interviewed were found to be aware of the internal structure and lines of accountability. The Head of Service had recently written to all carers to inform them of the changes to the management structure. New managers were found to be clear about their roles and had established good lines of communication with their teams and senior managers (NMS 4.2).

The Department for Children and Education, within Wiltshire County Council, oversees the financial procedures and is ultimately responsible for reviewing these (NMS 4.3).

The allowances paid to carers is clearly set out, these were revised in 2003 so that they are in line with the Fostering Network's recommended minimum. The service pays an additional fee to some carers in recognition of specific skills and these rates are published internally. To qualify for these fee-paying schemes a competency-based assessment of a carer's skills is presented to Foster Panel (NMS 4.4).

Since the last inspection the Head of Service had sent a memo to carers reminding them of their responsibility to declare any conflicts of interests, staff contractual information sets out this responsibility and written guidance to Foster Panel members confirms that any potential conflict of interest should be reported to the Chair (NMS 4.5)

Whilst Regulation 42 applies to Independent Fostering Agencies it would be good practice if the Service Manager developed a formal system to monitor the matters listed in Schedule 7 as part of her review of the quality of care provided by the Fostering Service (NMS 4.1).

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

X

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.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

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?****3**

Significant developments and improvements in service were found at this inspection and whilst gaps remain, so that a number of Requirements and Recommendations have been repeated, the strategic response to the January '04 inspection has been largely effective indicating that the service is generally well managed (NMS 5.1).

Managers have clear job descriptions setting out duties and responsibilities; these were last revised in 2003. Managers do not hold similar positions in other organisations (NMS 5.2).

Re-organisation of the management structure has enabled the Head of Service to further delegate responsibility for review and strategic development to the Service Manager. Inspectors were told that the addition of a fourth team manager had improved Family Placement Officers (FPO's) access to management support (NMS 5.3).

Clear and suitable arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the manager is absent. In the first place responsibility would fall to the Service Manager, with additional support coming from the other team managers and if required the Head of Placement Services.

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?

3

Inspectors met with foster carers during case tracking and through group meetings. The inspectors were struck by the level of commitment and resilience displayed by carers and the extent of their knowledge of children's individual needs.

Placing social workers were contacted during case tracking and through pre-inspection questionnaire. The responses received were overwhelmingly positive, where concerns were identified social workers emphasised that they had been able to work with FPO's to resolve problems (NMS 6.1).

Where significant concerns about the quality of care provided by a foster carer are identified a breach of standards meeting is convened. Social workers are able to share information and formulate an appropriate response to the concerns, carers are consulted and any report written will be presented to the Foster Panel that will make a recommendation about future approval.

Carers who have a vacancy that would require any child placed to share a bedroom with another child are no longer made available to the Emergency Duty Service (EDS) and managers informed inspectors that they would expect a risk assessment to be made wherever children are required to share bedrooms.

A health and safety check is completed during the assessment of new carers. Existing carers have their checks updated as part of the annual review. Inspectors noted significant improvements since the last inspection and whilst there were some gaps these were not found to be significant and FPO's were working to ensure that all carers had appropriate checks in place (NMS 6.6).

Written guidance on carers health and safety responsibilities are provided in the Foster Carers handbook (6.7).

Where carers use their own transport they are asked for evidence of MOT's and insurance at annual review (NMS 6.8)

The service informed foster carers of the dates of this inspection and explained why inspectors might contact them. All carers interviewed co-operated with the inspection process, they appeared to be open and honest in their appraisal of the services offered to them and the young people (NMS 6.9), however it is noted that the revised Foster Care Agreement does not state that carers are expected to co-operate with CSCI inspections.

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**

Day two of the foster carer preparation course focuses upon young people's identity, culture and heritage. An inspector observed part of this training during the last inspection and found this to be of a high standard.

In the Salisbury area a FPO from the Family Support Disabled Children Team co-leads preparation training and is able to customise course content to ensure there is a greater emphasis upon disabled children when there are applicants for the short breaks scheme attending. In the other areas this has not happened and staff questioned the extent to which the training would prepare applicants for the short breaks scheme. At the last inspection the manager of the Family Support Disabled Children Team had spoken of developing additional modules for applicants to the short-breaks scheme but this has yet to be developed, a recommendation is made here (NMS 7.3-7.5).

The Wiltshire Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2004-2005 states that 7 out of 277 children/young people in foster placements were identified as black or from a minority ethnic group, whilst Wiltshire has 1 foster family who are identified as non-white. An aim outlined in the strategy is to research opportunities to reach black and ethnic minorities and target these with appropriate advertising and literature. This has generated some interest and a small number of referrals, one family has completed the preparation training and are due to be allocated for assessment however it was felt that adoption would be more suitable for this family. The recruitment of black and other ethnic minority carers should remain a priority if placement choice and appropriate matching is to be achieved (7.2).

One trans-racial placement was tracked. An inspector found some evidence of specific support and training being identified for the carers, this included in-house valuing diversity training and Ethnic Minority Achievement Services. Inspectors were told that BAAF training had been identified but the carer had been unable to attend. In this case the foster carer said that she had found the support offered by the children's social worker to be invaluable. The significance of this being a trans-racial placement had not been discussed in the last annual review and it is significant that the newly revised foster carer annual review form does not require the child or carer's ethnicity to be recorded (7.4, 7.5)

Evidence was found through case tracking of the Family Support Disabled Children Team providing appropriate equipment to short break carers. FPO's in this team liaise with other professionals to ensure that adequate equipment is provided, where there have been delays in accessing occupational health assessments an inspector found evidence of appropriate risk assessments on file (7.6).

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**

The fostering service expects that a Planning Meeting precedes every admission into care and that children should only be admitted in an emergency where they are considered to be at immediate risk of significant harm. This would usually mean that a Section 47 investigation has taken place. An aim of this process is to prevent children from coming into care inappropriately and to provide the necessary information to allow placement matching.

Prior to offering a placement the Fostering Service would expect details of the child's Care Plan, information from planning meetings, previous assessments, risk assessments, any information relating to court orders, previous placement history and a completed behaviour checklist. Wherever possible pre-placement introductory visits are arranged before any short-term or long-term placement, and an emphasis is placed on sharing available information with the foster carer.

Inspectors commend the matching process for long-term placements. Here the fostering service expects a full Form E assessment, children's profiles are included in the Home from Home booklet that is circulated to all long-term foster carers and adopters. FPO's and child care social workers short-list and interview potential families before making a recommendation to panel.

Where children were placed in an emergency or at short notice some carers reported concerns that they had not received appropriate information. In some cases LAC paper work, including Placement Plans Part 1 and 2 were not received at the point of placement. This leaves carers and children potentially vulnerable and a requirement is made (NMS 8.3).

The family placement duty system is now operating on a countywide basis; this has reduced one element of the FPO's workload. This system is still being developed and some gaps in information exist. At the point of inspection duty officers in the North and West had not received profiles of foster carers from the Southern area, the database used did not record carers ethnicity and no formal system was in place to update foster carer vacancies. These gaps potentially undermine the ability of FPO's to make appropriate placement matches through the duty system and a recommendation is therefore made. It was noted that the Emergency Duty Service also has access to this database, thus the potential limits also apply to placements that are made via this team. Inspectors also recommend that an easily accessible record of actions taken is maintained so that where it takes some time to find an appropriate placement subsequent duty officers can identify the action that has already been taken (NMS 8.3).

The family placement referral form identifies the key information required from child care social workers and in a number of cases this information had been used to develop appropriate risk assessments.

The Foster Care Agreement has been revised since the last inspection but this still does not comply with Regulation 28 and Schedule 5, a requirement is made (NMS 8.4). The majority of Foster Care Agreements sampled did not adequately set out the specific terms of the

foster carers' approval. In one tracked case the age range of children that could be placed was not stated, no up to date FC 12(a) could be found on file and staff were unable to confirm this specific aspect of approval. In this case it appeared that children had been placed outside of the carers approval, a second requirement is therefore made. The Agreement states that carers' approval terms have to be reviewed annually and it refers carers' to the Foster Carer handbook for details of the review process. This section of the carers handbook has not been updated to incorporate the recent changes made to the review process so that the information available to carers is inaccurate.

Written guidance relating to exemptions to the normal fostering limit and variations to carers approval should be amended. The current guidance confuses the forms to be used and states that team managers are able to agree exemptions without reference to foster panel or agency decision maker, this does not reflect current practice and is inappropriate guidance. A recommendation is therefore made.

In one tracked case in the carer's last annual review it was reported that placements were made outside of the carer's approval, the FPO was interviewed and confirmed that an application for a variation had not been applied for despite the placements continuing to be made 'over numbers'. A requirement is therefore made.

In one case where a long-term exemption had been granted the notice sent to the carers did not comply with the Children Act 1989, Schedule 7, Sect 63(12). A requirement is therefore made.

Long-term exemptions to the fostering limit are reviewed annually but not necessarily via the Foster Panel. Inspectors recommend that a condition of any long-term exemption should be a six monthly review of the exemption via Foster Panel and the agency decision maker. The conditions of any exemption should also clearly state the specific support and supervision arrangements that are in place including the required frequency of visits from the FPO and Child Care Social Worker (CCSW). Compliance with these conditions should be monitored at each review.

In a number of cases inspectors found that an abbreviated placement plan had been used (DO1). These do not comply with Regulation 34 and Schedule 6 and therefore a requirement has been made. These forms appear to have been largely used for respite placements that had been made to support birth parents and prevent family breakdown. Currently where this type of placement is made the Council does not consider these children to be Looked After and they do not appear on the Register of Foster Children. The service is asked to clarify the legal basis for these placements. DO1's were also found to be used in some short-breaks placements for disabled children; the DO1 does not include any parental consent declaration and so is particularly inappropriate for these placements where there are often complex medical issues.

In one tracked case inspectors were concerned that appropriate permanency for the children in placement had not been achieved in a timely fashion. Whilst inspectors acknowledged that this was a complex case they felt that the delay was excessive and undermined the children's welfare. A requirement is made.

Inspectors would also recommend that the service ensure that foster carer assessments are updated where carers have been fostering for a number of years. In one tracked case the original assessment dated back to 1986 and whilst a competency assessment was undertaken in 2000 this included limited information.

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**

Inspectors acknowledge the significant work that had taken place since the last inspection in relation to this Standard. Inspectors saw that a programme of safer care training had been developed in most areas to which the majority of carers had been invited and found that FPO's had promoted the use of individual safe care policies and offered support to carers in developing these (NMS 9.1 & 9.2).

The Service Manager said that she expects safer care policies to be shared with placing social workers, updated after each placement and at carers' annual review. Inspectors would consider this to be good practice and if ratified by the service would recommend that policies and procedures be updated appropriately (NMS 9.2 & 9.3).

The Family Support Disabled Children Team had developed safe care training for carers in the South but had provided this for carers in the North, West and Kennet. An inspector was concerned that in one case tracked from this team the carers had CCTV coverage in their home. Whilst a specific protocol governing the use of this system had previously been drawn up, no reference to it was made in the carers' safer care policy and there was confusion amongst staff as to whether CCTV was still being used by the carers. In this case the carers had signed generic guidance rather than developing a specific policy, this was considered inappropriate and a recommendation has been made (NMS 9.3).

The Foster Carer Agreement makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable.

Management systems to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care were in place. Inspectors found evidence of an effective process to investigate breaches of foster care standards with clear policy guidance available in the Foster Carer Handbook. The service had contracted the NSPCC to investigate allegations of abuse in foster care, the Children's Rights Officer (CRO) was seen to be involved when children had made complaints and a team of advocates managed by the CRO had been recruited. The Head of Service meets regularly with the Head of Safer Care to monitor breaches of standards, allegations and investigations and make recommendations as necessary. Since the last inspection the Head of Service had developed a protocol to follow when considering making a PoCAL referral, this protocol had been appropriately applied.

The service has developed a draft policy for preventing bullying within foster homes and included this in the Foster Carer Handbook. This sets out strategies to discourage bullying and the procedures to follow when there are concerns that a child may have been bullied (NMS 9.6).

The service has a written procedure in place that makes clear to carers their responsibility when a foster child is missing from home. This guidance is also included in the Foster Carer Handbook (NMS 9.8).

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

This is an area in which the service is considered to perform well.

The service provides written guidance for foster carers regarding contact arrangements (NMS 10.2).

When considering a potential placement contact arrangements are considered and discussed with carers. Due to limited placement choice in some circumstances children are placed considerable distance from home, in these cases additional support was found to be offered.

Foster carer preparation training stresses the importance of foster carers helping a child to maintain appropriate contact and discusses the skills required of carers. These skills are then assessed through the Form F process and FPO's use this information when making placement matches.

Complex contact arrangements were working successfully in one tracked case. Evidence was found of financial and practical support being offered to the family to enable these arrangements to be maintained. The carers clearly recognised the value of contact and had worked hard to maintain this. Where contact arrangements faltered or broke down FPO's had consulted with CCSW's and sought to re-establish contact arrangements.

LAC reviews take place in the majority of placements at the appropriate frequency. Contact arrangements are discussed and amended if necessary; carers reported that they felt their views were listened to.

Foster carer daily recording sheets include a section where carers are requested to record information about contact, these sheets are copied to the placing social worker so that they are informed of the outcomes of contact arrangements. Some placing social workers reported that they did not always receive this information and a recommendation is made.

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**

Evidence was found of the fostering service formally seeking carers' views regarding specific issues, for example the role of Family Placement Support Workers, use of support groups and carer training needs. At the time of the inspection it was noted that the Assistant Director, a Councillor and the Head of Service were holding a series of meetings with carers to seek their views, although there was some concern that carers from the Family Support Disabled Children Team had been given little notice of this and so would be underrepresented.

Feedback through the pre-inspection questionnaires showed that 76% of children who responded felt that their foster carers regularly asked for their opinions and views on all matters affecting them, however 100% reported that they had never been asked by the fostering service for their views. Inspectors were told that the CRO had developed systems to seek the views of children on specific issues using a variety of methods. An inspector was told that funding had been secured to develop a children's management board which will be supported by a dedicated participation officer to work with and represent all children who are looked after and it may therefore be anticipated that at future inspections children will report that the service has consulted them. The CRO acknowledged that younger children and disabled children are currently underrepresented and a recommendation is made that the service develops systems to encourage their participation.

All children who are fostered receive information on how to make a complaint and additional information will be available once the Children's Guide has been produced. The CRO or an advocacy worker may become involved when a complaint is received and maintains records of the outcome of complaints.

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**

The last SSI Inspection concluded that the health indicators for children were good. This report highlighted the Mainstay Project as an area of good practice. The majority of Mainstay members work in the local CAMHS team. The SSI found that this project had been instrumental in preventing placement breakdown and ameliorating the harmful effects that this may have upon a child's health and development.

A positive area of practice noted at the last inspection was the support and guidance offered to carers through the Long Term Carers Discussion Group in the Kennet and Salisbury area. This group was facilitated by a senior family therapist from the local CAMHS team, had been running for a number of years and was valued by the carers who explained that it afforded them with an opportunity to discuss specific concerns but also to explore more general themes and to learn from one another's, often quite extensive, experience. At this inspection an inspector was able to attend a support group in the north of the county, this group is accessed by carers via training that provides an introduction to attachment issues. The group is co-facilitated by FPO's and a child psychiatrist from the local CAMHS team. The inspector was equally impressed with this support group and carers described it as providing an invaluable service that has helped to enhance placement stability (NMS 12.1).

Inspectors were informed of a recent development that will establish CAMHS nurses in resource centres across the county who will act as the referral point for looked after children who need to access mental health services. A nurse had been appointed to post in the Salisbury area but in the north negotiations were still taking place with the local PCT.

Since the last inspection foster carer diary sheets have been amended adding a section in which carers are expected to record children's health information. This information should help to enable carers to fulfil their responsibilities to supply information to LAC reviews (NMS 12.8).

The Foster Carer Handbook outlines carer's responsibilities meeting Standard 12.6; it provides clear procedures governing consent for a child to receive medical treatment. Carers visited generally felt that they had adequate background information, including health information, for the children placed. However where placements are made using the DO1 no parental consent is provided and potentially limited information given to carers. Some carers reported that following placement they had to wait for basic LAC information and so were left, temporarily, with incomplete information (NMS 12.3).

Inspectors were concerned that medication records maintained by foster carers may be inadequate particularly where a child has complex health needs and has been prescribed a number of different drugs, in the main this will relate to Family Support Disabled Children Team carers but will apply to some 'mainstream' carers. Inspectors recommend that a recording sheet be designed for these carers to record medication given or refused. This should reduce the risk of medication errors and in an emergency will provide a concise record that can be transferred with the child.

Areas of good practice were identified in the Family Support Disabled Children Team. Here

the child profiles written by parents provided specific guidance on daily needs, likes and dislikes in a personal and sensitive way, carers had been provided with additional specific guidance relating to medication issues and specific training had been provided for carers to meet a child's individual, and in many cases very complex, health needs.

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?

3

The fostering Service is part of the Department for Children and Education which was formed in April 2003, integrating the former Education Department and Children's Social Services.

Since the last inspection the manager of the Education for Looked After Children's Support Service has left. Currently this post has not been filled; the Principal Education Welfare Officer has temporarily taken direct responsibility for this team. It is planned that two ½ time manager's posts will be created; one will take a business management lead to ensure statistical information is collected and monitored.

In February an education steering group development day was held. Fieldwork managers, social workers, personal advisors, teachers and councillors were invited. Foster carer training was identified as one priority area. Three Education of Children Looked After Workshops have been held across the county, 34 foster carers attended (13.2).

The Principle Education Welfare Officer is currently gathering information relating to Looked After Children's school attendance, the number and quality of PEP's. Analysis of this will be fed in to the steering group and action plans developed (13.6).

Four personal advisors and two educational psychologists are attached to the Education for Looked After Children's Support Service. Through case tracking an inspector found evidence of the support that is offered to both children and foster carers. One foster carer reported how effective a personal advisor had been in helping to liase with a school where a particular problem had occurred. Personal advisors can attend family placement meetings so that integrated planning can be made (13.2-3).

The Principle Education Welfare Officer is a member of a South West Regional Benchmarking Group. This enables comparisons to be made with similar authorities and for good practice to be shared.

The foster carer's role in school contact is agreed at the initial planning meeting and detailed in the placement agreement, further guidance is offered in the Foster Carer's Handbook. FPO's monitor educational matters during supervision visits and there is an expectation that carers record information on diary sheets that are shared with placing social workers (NMS 13.4 – 5).

Evidence gathered through case tracking confirms that financial support is available for out

of school activities including school trips.

Inspectors noted that an internal review of placements found that on average children looked after were placed 30 miles from their home area. Whilst inspectors do not know how this assessment was made it illustrates the clear potential for limited placement choice to have a negative impact upon educational outcomes for some young people in foster care.

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

Leaving care procedures are included in the Foster Carer Handbook that sets out the services that will be offered to young people as they move towards independence. This sets out the role that foster carers are expected to take and how young people will be encouraged and supported as they become involved in decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan NMS 14.1 & 14.5).

Staff from the Leaving Care Team are expected to become involved at the LAC review prior to a young person's sixteenth birthday. A Pathway Plan will be developed detailing how the young person will be supported towards independence and adulthood. Carers are considered partners in this process and young people are encouraged to remain with, or in contact with their carers. The service undertakes to provide financial support to enable young people to remain with their carers whilst they prepare for independence. The Leaving Care Team plan to run a rolling programme of workshops to which carers are invited. However the pre-inspection information received indicated that this programme of workshops has been interrupted by changes in team management of the Aftercare Service.

Inspectors noted that in a number of cases the service has adopted a flexible approach, converting carers to supported lodgings providers to enable young people to remain in placement in the longer-term.

In the future it is hoped that greater time can be allocated to this area of the service so that a more accurate assessment of the services provided to young people who are approaching independence can be made.

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

At this inspection, the inspector noted a number of developments in line with the requirement and recommendations of the last inspection. Personnel records were inspected and staff interviewed. In the inspectors view personnel files were of a good standard, they were clearly structured and there is an effective monitoring system in place to maintain these records.

The staff files and computer spreadsheets inspected showed that a system has been developed to ensure that CRB checks are reviewed every three years for staff, however pre-inspection information indicated that for 7 members of staff this had not happened. The system should therefore be reviewed and updated checks completed. Copies of qualifications were held on the files inspected. The inspector also saw that a system of following up telephone enquiries had been put in place, in line with NMS 15.3.

An inspector heard from the manager in one area that CRB checks are triggered for foster carers at the annual review. This inspector saw that this has meant that at least one carer had waited to have their CRB check initiated. This carer had not yet completed their application for a CRB check. In other areas a spreadsheet had been developed that is used to alert FPO's a month before checks are due, an inspector advised that a month's notice is not likely to provide sufficient time for completion of checks. In another team no formal system had been developed. Each team should develop a system to give FPO's suitable notification that a carer's three yearly renewal of CRB is due. This system should extend to advocacy workers recruited via the Children's Rights Officer as no update system had been developed by this team

The inspector heard from FPO's and the training department that a number of staff had gained their PQ1. Staff also reported that they were able to access other training to keep them up dated in their work.

Due to staff shortages the service has employed sessional workers to complete foster carer assessments. Whilst these workers were all experienced practitioners the majority did not have family placement experience and had not been trained in foster carer assessments. The service should consider providing appropriate training or identify additional safeguards to ensure that the assessments completed are appropriate. Inspectors have suggested that

additional safeguards should include clearly setting the boundaries around the use of sessional workers (NMS 15.6).

Since the last inspection unqualified staff have been used to provide support to some carers. Whilst inspectors found evidence that these staff carry out their functions under the supervision of qualified social workers who are ultimately accountable for their work, it was noted that qualified social workers had limited contact with the carers involved and were not directly observing unqualified workers practice. In one case an inspector found that supervision notes indicated that an unqualified worker had not been adequately prepared for the task of supporting newly approved carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:	27	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	X
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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

An inspector heard from FPO's that the new management structure is providing consistency across the service.

Staff newly appointed into management positions confirmed that they had received training in supervision and are booked on to management training early in 2005.

Managers indicated that in the light of staff shortages they have developed systems to prioritise tasks and workloads.

An inspector noted on foster carer files that there were records in the form of certificates of the training they had received and found that carers are responsible for maintaining a training portfolio.

An inspector was told that administrative staff back up has increased since the last inspection so that each team has at least one dedicated administrative worker. Administrative staff indicated that this has improved their ability to support the teams in their work. Computer systems have also developed and increased, so that all staff have easy access to computers and laptops, as well as mobile phones.

An inspector observed that work had been done within the teams to improve procedures so that carer's annual reviews are completed within appropriate timescales and within an acceptably uniform fashion. New annual review forms have been piloted and revised. Bring forward systems have been put in place to ensure that review dates are highlighted monthly. The inspector noted some slippage in the dates of these reviews and recommended that FPO's are given more than a months notice of annual review due dates.

Job descriptions for family placement support workers had not been updated to reflect their new role in supporting and supervising foster placements. No specific job description had been produced for sessional workers and they did not have written contracts or conditions of service.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

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

The inspectors heard about the shortfall in staffing levels that has been exacerbated since the last inspection by staff leaving and moving into management positions. The inspector's saw that despite recruitment drives it has not been possible to fill a number of these vacancies. In discussions with management the inspectors heard that interest had been expressed in the current recruitment for family placement workers. Staff were hopeful that vacancies could soon be filled.

The service has had to employ sessional workers to complete initial foster carer assessments and extend the role of Family Placement Support Workers to include supervision and support of foster carers. Whilst, with the additional safeguards that have been recommended, inspectors considered this to be an appropriate contingency plan, inspectors considered this to be symptomatic of a service that does not have an adequate number of staff. These contingency arrangements would be considered inappropriate if they were to continue in the longer-term. Whilst it is noted that the concerns identified at the last inspection that were attributed to staff shortages were not found to have been repeated, staff recruitment must be prioritised or else there is a risk that this standard will be unmet at the next inspection and statutory requirements and enforcement action may become necessary.

The inspector heard and observed that despite staff shortages and high workloads, staff in the fostering service are strongly committed and have high morale.

In the past twelve months 12 new carers have been registered but 19 carers have left. Amongst the 19 who have left were some very experienced and highly valued carers. Concerns remain regarding the extent to which any choice of placement can be offered and therefore the ability to match appropriately is limited. The service has successfully recruited carers to the Remand Fostering Scheme and has developed a recruitment strategy. The strategy targets the recruitment of carers for sibling groups and teenagers, single carers and carers without young children, where currently it has identified a shortfall of placements. The strategy does not set clear numerical targets against which its success can be measured.

The service uses a BAAF Form F Competency assessment of all new applicants and a competency assessment for carers who wish to apply to one of the fee-paying schemes. In assessing carers the service follows NMS 17.7. Inspectors were impressed with the quality of assessments read. Carers interviewed and those that responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that they found the assessment process to be relevant, professional and sensitive.

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**

An inspector heard from a number of foster carers that the out of hours, EDS service does not provide a responsive service that they can rely on at times of stress. An example was given where a carer had waited for 3hrs to get through to the service. The in-house out-of-hours service reported at the last inspection had not been developed due to funding problems, however a limited service had been offered to remand and other specific carers. Given the ongoing concerns reported by carers regarding the EDS, inspectors recommend that in-house service should be prioritised and appropriate policy and guidance developed which should include the access that on-call staff will have to senior managers.

An inspector noted that the Review process for foster carers has been improved since the last inspection in Salisbury. New paperwork has been developed and a proper bring forward system put in place to ensure reviews are completed within the year. An inspector noted that there is some slippage here.

The council has the requisite public liability and professional indemnity insurance and whistle blowing responsibilities appeared to be well understood by carers and 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?****3**

An inspector spoke to the Staff Development & Training Officer, responsible for both staff and carer training. This inspector heard about developments within the NVQ 3 & 4 for carers and saw that there is a comprehensive programme in place for 2005. Carers spoken to during this inspection confirmed that they are undertaking the NVQ. For some carers this has been a long drawn out process as they struggle to fit the training into their busy lives. For others it has been a quicker process. The inspector heard from staff that training was arranged to fit in with carer's commitments. Carers in the south of the county indicated that training in Salisbury is easier for them to attend.

An inspector noted that with the new development of unqualified staff working within the fostering service, there should be underpinning training to develop skills. This was discussed with the training officer who indicated that specific BAAF training could be accessed by these workers.

The new staff appraisal scheme identifies the training and development needs of staff involved in fostering work. Staff confirm that they are attending specific training in response to needs identified at their recent appraisal.

With the ongoing development of policies across the fostering service it will be important to ensure that training programmes reflect these policies. (Standard 19.6).

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****1**

As reported in Standard 16 written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of family placement support worker's had not been updated and written contracts not provided for sessional workers.

An inspector saw on staff supervision notes that regular management supervision was in place for the majority of staff who come into contact with foster carers. Staff confirmed that they are receiving regular supervision and that these sessions are planned in advance. However significant gaps appeared in the supervision records for one member of staff in the Family Support Disabled Children Team, here there was no record of supervision from 5th March 2004 until 26th July 2004.

Inspectors noted that the supervision notes were very succinct in one team whilst in others they were very detailed. Practice could be reviewed so that greater parity may be achieved.

Recent staff appraisals were inspected. Staff confirmed they had all received appraisal by their line manager. In Salisbury area team this was the first time that many of the staff had received formal appraisal and staff reported that this had been a valuable process.

Team meeting minutes were inspected. These show that meetings are regular. Staff confirm that they had attended fostering development days and reported that these had been useful. Staff told an inspector how beneficial they had found these days.

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

The strategy for working with foster carers is set out in the Foster Carer Handbook and is in line with Standard 21.1. However this information needs updating to reflect recent service developments including the new Crisis Support Team, Remand Fostering Scheme and role of CAMHS nurses in resource centers.

The role of the supervising social worker has been clear historically. However, with the development of the new unqualified posts, it would be important under NMS 21.5 to detail roles and responsibilities to avoid confusion.

Annual review reports were inspected. The inspector saw that these forms had been revised since the last inspection. Beyond the first annual review, it is not clear how many of these, and at what frequency, they will be taken to panel. The Service Manager confirmed that a system would be developed by which Foster Panel will sample review reports. Once confirmed appropriate written guidance should be developed.

The inspector heard from carers, FPO's and CCSW's that there is a good system of communication between these networks.

Carers reported that when placements do break down, there are rarely any disruption meetings to learn from the experiences. The inspector saw that in this way, children can

move from foster home to foster home without a clear picture of patterns being illuminated and a recommendation is therefore made.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

An inspector saw on the majority of fostering files inspected that there was regular visiting to the foster home by the supervising social worker. In busy foster homes there is a record of weekly telephone contact as well as regular visiting. In quieter, more established placements, the carers are visited regularly. Carers spoken to during the course of this inspection further confirmed this. Carers spoke highly of the support they receive from their supervising social worker.

Case recording in one file indicated that a carer, where an exemption to the normal fostering limit applied, had not been visited for a period of 5 months, no assessment indicating that a reduced frequency of visiting was appropriate could be found and the manager had not agreed such a reduction. Where it is anticipated that the frequency of visits will fall below that outlined in the Statement of Purpose inspectors would recommend that an appropriate agreement including a risk assessment should be completed and signed by FPO, carer/s, and manager.

As reported some carers are supported and supervised by unqualified staff. It is important that these workers have an appropriate induction in to their additional roles, receive relevant professional training and have the limits of their role and responsibilities clearly set out.

The Foster Care Agreement had been amended following the last inspection however it still fails to meet the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services regulations 2001. The Agreement does not set out carers approval in sufficient detail and does not state that carers should co-operate reasonably with the Commission. The Agreement also refers carers on to policies and guidance set out in the Foster Carer Handbook, however a number of these are out of date and therefore this is inappropriate.

Records of unannounced visits are recorded on carer supervision sheets, inspectors saw evidence that unannounced visits are made in the majority of cases, however one FPO had not made any unannounced visits. Inspectors recommend that a record of unannounced visits be included in the foster carers annual review so that this can be monitored by managers and panel.

Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints is widely available, complaints and representations are recorded by the service and monitored.

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**

An inspector heard from carers that they enjoyed the experience of their pre-approval training. They confirmed that this training also gave them the opportunity to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers. Carers confirmed that childcare and reasonable expenses could be claimed to enable them to attend any training.

The inspector heard from training staff that their attempts to run training across the service had been thwarted by poor attendance. The inspector heard that a number of training events had been cancelled due to poor up take. Training staff told the inspector that they had tried to run local courses, at weekends and evenings in order to facilitate attendance by foster carers, but that attendance was still poor. This is clearly an area that the service is working to improve. It may be that the new review system of updating the training team will bring benefits here. It will be important in the future that annual reviews clearly identify where carers have not attended recommended training and the subsequent action that will be taken.

An inspector was told that the new review format for carers will enable training staff to be updated with information about carers training needs although as the Family Support Disabled Children Team had yet to use this format the training needs of this group of carers had not been reported to the training department

The Family Support Disabled Children Team should now prioritise safe Care training for all their carers.

The service does not currently run support groups for foster carers own children although they have recently consulted carers about the need for such a group but only received interest from two children. The service should continue to explore how the support needs of this group of children can best be met.

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 that details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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At the last inspection, inspectors were concerned about the quality and content of some case files. This is an area that has improved significantly, all the files read during case tracking were well maintained, and written entries were legible, clearly expressed and comprehensive.

Internal guidance establishes the format of carer's case files and allows for information about children in placement to be included in Module 6. The Service Manager expects this module to contain relevant LAC paperwork including Placement Plans 1 and 2, Essential Information and Review reports. On a number of files sampled this information was not in place, Placement Plans were missing and in one tracked case the carers were also unable to show an inspector the Placement Plan, although the child care social worker later confirmed that a plan had been agreed. Without this information it would be difficult for FPO's to monitor the extent to which placements are meeting individual need and a recommendation is therefore made (24.2).

All the carers spoken to appeared to have a clear understanding of the child's legal status, the intended duration and the purpose of the placement. Carers appreciated that they had a crucial role to play in encouraging children to reflect upon and understand his/her history. Inspectors found that carers were maintaining ongoing life story information for children (NMS 24.4).

The fostering service takes steps to ensure that confidential information held by foster carers is maintained in a suitably secure fashion, this has included providing lockable cabinets for some carers. This should continue to be monitored by FPO's as inspectors were concerned that in some of the cases tracked information may not have been stored in an appropriately secure manner (NMS 24.8).

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?****1**

The service has written procedures for staff on keeping and maintaining foster carer and other records, this was last updated in 2003. There is an expectation that files will be audited as part of the annual review process, evidence of this was seen on the case files read by inspectors.

Records were stored appropriately within the area teams.

Foster carer case files include a record of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcome.

The Foster Carer Handbook sets out the access that carers have to their case files. Evidence was found during the inspection that carers have been able to access their records appropriately.

Case records for children are maintained by the fieldwork teams, these records were not inspected as part of this inspection.

Whilst the service records all the information required by Regulation 31 across its databases this is not in the form of a Register of Foster Parents. This information must be drawn together so that it is easily accessible.

The service does not have an appropriate register of children placed with foster carers as required by Regulation 22 and Schedule 2. The information provided to the Commission regarding placements was found to be inaccurate, a child had been recorded as being in placement with a carer when in fact they had never been placed, children placed from home in respite placements are not entered in to the looked after data base and are not recorded as being fostered yet they are placed with foster carers. A requirement is made that the service must establish an appropriate register of children placed with foster carers

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

142

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

481

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:

12

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

18

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

108.50

Maximum £

367.29

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

All premises used by the fostering service are accessible to all workers during normal office hours. Facilities are available outside of office hours that enable groups and courses to be run. Staff reported that they were generally happy with their office accommodation.

IT facilities have improved significantly since the last inspection so that all FPO's and managers have easy access to a computer terminal. A limited number of laptops have also been made available so that FPO's are able to work from different locations. The family placement duty system now has an IT system that links all the teams.

There are facilities for the secure retention of records. Arrangements are in place to safeguard IT systems, workers have individual log on details. All offices are alarmed and were considered to be suitably secure. The County Council arranges insurance cover for all its premises.

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 does not apply.

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 does not apply

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**

Every foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses covering the cost of caring for children. These allowances have recently been revised and are now in line with The Fostering Network's recommended minimum. Fee paid schemes have also been established. These payments are made in recognition of carers' skills. Policy guidance is issued which details the rates payable, what allowances cover and the arrangements for discretionary payments that may be made by managers. Carers reported to inspectors that fees and allowances were paid on time.

At the last inspection some carers reported a problem with overpayment of allowances. Whilst the payments system has not changed no carers reported this as a problem at this inspection.

Inspectors found positive evidence of the service working flexibly with carers to ensure placement stability; this included their approach to payment of allowances.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

At the last inspection significant concerns were identified and a number of statutory requirements made. The service has responded positively. There is now one countywide panel that meets on a monthly basis in Trowbridge. A panel constitution had been written; this clearly sets out panel responsibilities and processes. Mechanisms had been developed to ensure that panel can feedback on the quality of assessments presented and other related issues. Panel members had received training facilitated by an outside consultant and the panel chair confirmed that further training will be offered in the future after new independent members have been appointed, although no date or agenda had been agreed.

An inspector had the opportunity to attend one panel, this had a limited agenda but previous minutes that were read indicated that panel generally had a very full agenda. The inspector was told that at times it can be difficult to accommodate all relevant business and in at least one case an urgent report could not be fitted on to the agenda and had to wait for a subsequent panel. The service is aware of this issue and continues to monitor the situation, the panel chair suggested that panel may need to meet more frequently and will diary additional dates that can be used if necessary.

Panel had not been established in accordance with Regulation 24. Whilst an ex-foster carer of another local authority had been appointed to panel as an independent member she had not fostered in the last two years, therefore the panel observed was not quorate and a requirement is made. The inspector acknowledges that other independent members had been identified and interviewed, these included a person who has previously been placed with foster carers, once checks are complete these members will join the panel.

The service's foster panel constitution sets out the checks that have to be completed on panel members, the Chair takes responsibility for these. Significant gaps were found in the information on panel members files. CRB checks were missing from four files, no written references were found, panel members had not signed any agreement and files did not record the start and end of tenure dates. Whilst for council employees there may be evidence of some of the checks elsewhere in the department at least one CRB related to an independent member. A requirement and a recommendation are made.

A member of panel has expertise in education but as yet the service has been unable to identify a panel member who has a background in child health. The panel chair confirmed that whilst panel can access medical expertise it would be positive if the panel included a member with a background in health.

The panel observed was found to operate professionally; the Chair encouraged discussion and managed decision-making when panel members were not in agreement appropriately. Individual panel members have considerable experience of family placement work and of direct work with children. The inspector was concerned that the panel did not explore some issues in reports which the inspector considered key, for example the panel did not identify that children had apparently been placed outside of a carer's approval range without a variation being applied for. However in general the panel was seen to be effective and through observation of the decision making process the inspector found panel members prioritised safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.

The panel now has responsibility for monitoring the quality of assessments presented and

the type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children. The panel chair confirmed that an annual report will be produced that will comment upon these issues and that individual feedback will be offered to social workers and managers on an ongoing basis.

The service has yet to formalise the system by which the panel will monitor the outcome of carers' annual reviews. It is committed to establishing a system by which the panel will sample reviews past a carer's first annual review but the system and related guidance has yet to be agreed and produced.

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?

1

The Family Support Disabled Children Team provides a range of services to disabled children and their families including respite foster placements. The children have severe or profound disabilities, mostly learning disabilities, but some children have physical disabilities and complex health-care needs. A particular feature of this scheme is the significant relationship that develops between the foster carer and a child's parents, many of these placements continue for many years. The service encourages high levels of autonomy so that carers and parents will often negotiate placement dates within limits set by the service.

Since the last inspection efforts have been made to integrate this team within the fostering service as a whole. The team manager is now a member of the Fostering Reference Group and FPO's from the Family Support Disabled Children Team are invited to fostering development days. This is an ongoing process and is likely to take some time before an appropriate level of integration is achieved.

The manager of the Family Support Disabled Children Team told an inspector that he felt that some of the recent service developments were inappropriate or would require customising before being used by his team. He felt that the system of appointing an 'independent' FPO to complete carers' annual reviews was inappropriate because of the need for the person leading the review to have a clear understanding of each child's disability and health needs. He also reported that with only three FPO's to cover the whole county 'independent' reviewing would be difficult to achieve.

The manager also reported that he felt that the new carer annual review form was inappropriate and his team had not started using it, one consequence of this is that the training department had not received feedback on these carers training needs. The manager said that the expectation of monthly support visits that is set out in the Statement of Purpose is inappropriate for many of the carers in his team as many provide limited respite placements, in these cases assessments are made by FPO's and the manager may agree to reduce the frequency of visits to a minimum of quarterly.

The manager said that he intends to raise these issues via the Fostering Reference Group but at the point of inspection the service had not ratified the decisions and subsequently amended the Statement of Purpose.

Significant recorded gaps were found in the frequency of supervision for one FPO within the Family Support Disabled Children Team. Safe Care training had not been provided for carers in the North and many carers had not personalised safe care policies. Whilst file audits had taken place, significant information was still missing from a file tracked so that it

was not possible to establish the carers approval range and the inspector found that a variation to approval had not been sought where required.

At future inspections it is hoped that greater time can be allocated to the inspection of the fostering service offered by the Family Support Disabled Children Team.

The inspectors heard about the imaginative use of 'Short Breaks' within the fostering service to prevent family breakdown. In the south of the county in particular this is a well-developed service, often provided to give families a break so that they can continue to care for their children.

Whilst the inspectors applaud this development, it was stressed that systems should be in place to protect these children in the same way as other mainstream arrangements. The legal status of these children must be clarified and proper structures put in place in line with the LAC system.

The inspectors heard about a 'thriving' support group run specifically for 'Short Break' carers.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service places a high value on the contribution that family and friends can make by being approved as foster carers. 14 children were placed with relative/friend carers. Systems are in place to encourage the consideration of family and friends as carers. Managers confirm that CCSW's and FPO's are encouraged where possible to explore this type of placement.

The kinship carers tracked reported that they were given a high standard of support by the fostering team with regular visiting, telephone support, financial back up as well as attendance at the long-term support group. Although there is no specific Kinship support group, this carer reported that she and her husband gained valued support from other mainstream carers. The family confirmed that they had received both initial and on going general training. In this way the inspector saw that there was no discrepancy between the service provided for this Kinship carer and carers who are mainstream.

Inspectors heard from Kinship foster carers that they are often struggling with difficult contact issues and in a unique and stressful position between their family and the department. This was acknowledged both by the family placement team and social workers. The children's files inspected also reflected this. Difficult contact issues were sensitively handled.

The inspector saw in children's files and by speaking to children in this Kinship placement that a good standard of services were provided to help them with their difficulties. These services took the form of play therapy, sessional work, family support work, activities and specific help at school. In this way these children received similar services to other children placed in mainstream fostering placements.

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 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 26th November 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

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 17th January 2005, 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 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 Wiltshire County Council Fostering**
Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate
representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above
date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to
comply with these.

Print Name _____

Signature _____

Designation _____

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I [redacted] of Wiltshire County Council 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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