



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Local Authority Fostering Service**

Gloucestershire County Council

Shire Hall

Westgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 2TR

22nd March 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**

Gloucestershire Count Council

**Address**

Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TR

**Local Authority Manager**

Cathy Shea

**Tel No:**

01452 425000

**Address**

Gloucestershire County Council, Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester, GL1 2TR

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

Cathy.shea@gloscc.gov.uk

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

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

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

27.01.03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		22nd March 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Martin Davis	132266
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Barbara Davies	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Cathy Shea	

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

At the point of the inspection it was reported that the Gloucestershire Social Service Fostering Service had a total of 184 'mainstream' registered foster carers and 64 specific carers. A total of 200 children were placed with mainstream carers (108 boys and 92 girls), a further 100 children were in specific placements (51 boys and 49 girls). The fostering service is divided into four major components:

**The Fostering Recruitment Team (FRT)** recruits, trains and assesses prospective carers and has the stated aim of offering support for up to a year post-approval prior to carers transferring to STEPS or APT. This team also includes a children with disabilities post, a supported lodgings post, and it is planned that a respite care post will be developed during 2004/5.

**The Short-Term Placement Service (STEPS)** supports short-term, emergency and respite carers. This team also undertakes re-assessment of foster carers wishing to offer a permanent foster placement to young people in their care.

**The Adoption and Permanence Team (APT)** supports long-term foster carers and recruits, assesses and supports adopters. The combined adoption and fostering functions of the APT may be separated following the recruitment of a fourth team manager.

**The Family Link Service** operates with a large degree of independence from the other three components of the fostering service, it has separate line management and has a different geographical base, and it has developed its own statement of purpose and a specific foster care agreement. Whilst the Family Link Scheme was inspected it should be acknowledged that this aspect of the inspection was limited. In the future inspectors may be able to allocate greater time to inspection of the Family Link Service.

The Looked After Children Service Manager was the person nominated under Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001.

## **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.)

The Gloucestershire County Council Fostering Service was first inspected by the Commission in January 2003. Significant gaps in service provision were identified when measured against the National Minimum Standards. The service responded with an appropriate action plan setting out the remedial action it intended to take. Due to the large number of requirements and recommendations made, the service prioritised some areas of work for 2003/4 and left others for 2004/5. Therefore a number of the gaps identified in this inspection were to be expected.

Significant progress has been made in some areas since the last inspection. The service prioritised foster carer annual reviews and the development of safer care training and policies. In the past year 78% of carers were the subjects of an annual review, a series of mandatory safer care training was organised and presented, and carers have begun to write individual safer care policies. Whilst inspectors found that further work is still required in these areas they acknowledge the considerable work undertaken to date.

In general foster carers reported that they were well supported by the service and inspectors were informed that retention of experienced carers has not been a significant problem. Inspectors were impressed with the level of resilience and skill displayed by a number of the carers that they met and the commitment they displayed to the young people in their care. Team Managers and the Service Manager have a breadth of practice and management experience, the fostering teams have a core of experienced social workers with a wealth of family placement experience.

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

**This standard was not met**

The service now has a statement of purpose, which largely fulfils the expectations of the National Minimum Standards, but inspectors found that it lacked detailed guidance in key areas, including the complaints procedure and procedures for annual review of carers. The service has not published a children's guide. Whilst inspectors were shown evidence that a children's guide is being prepared considerable work remains outstanding and must now be prioritised.

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

**One standard was met and one not met**

Inspectors found that managers have a range of relevant qualifications and practice experience. Each manager is currently enrolled upon appropriate management training; managers have regular meetings and work together to develop services.

Inspectors found significant gaps when measuring the service against its statement of purpose and the National Minimum Standards. Managers should further develop their systems to identify where expectations are exceeded and where shortfalls occur.

Requirements are made in relation to personnel procedures regarding the appointment of managers and social work staff.

### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)**

#### **One standard was met, one almost met**

Clear procedures are in place to identify the person in charge in the absence of a manager, staff were found to be aware of these arrangements.

Monitoring systems, for the service as a whole, should be developed. Inspectors were concerned about the inaccurate information held by the service in relation to variation of carer approvals, poor systems to monitor the quality of carer assessments and implementation of new initiatives.

### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

#### **Five standards were almost met, four were not met**

In the past year the service has provided 'Diversity and Equality' briefing for all carers and a part-time worker has been seconded to the Family Link Team to develop short breaks for children from black and minority ethnic groups. Concerns were raised about the lack of placement choice and the service has yet to develop a system to ensure that where inappropriate placements are made a suitable alternative is identified within six weeks.

Over a fifth of foster carers annual reviews remained outstanding. A number of carers were found to have been inappropriately reviewed by the Annual Review Panel.

Inspectors were concerned that the Single Referral Service had insufficient information on both carers and children when making some placements. Significant concerns were raised by placing social workers and AFO's about the way in which this arm of the service makes placements and inspectors were particularly concerned to find that there is limited consultation with AFO's prior to same day placements.

A number of carers were found to have insufficient information prior to placement, this included background health information. Inspectors were concerned to find that evidence suggested that in some cases Placement Agreements had not been made at the point of placement and did not identify where extra support was required due to matching criteria.

The service provided 'Safer Care' training for all carers in the last year and carers have begun to develop 'Safer Care' policies, however in some teams 60% of carers have not completed these. Where they are in place, inspectors found that these were not routinely shared with placing social workers or with children, they were not updated as required and some included limited information or risk assessment.

Inspectors found evidence to confirm that the service and carers take seriously their responsibility to facilitate contact however information was not always clearly set out in Placement Agreements and the quality of records made by foster carers varied considerably.

Young people reported that they were frequently asked their views by their carers but the majority reported that the fostering service did not seek their opinions. Inspectors recommend that the service develop formal consultation systems to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to influence future service developments.

Positive evidence was found of the service working closely with the education department and attaching a high priority to meeting the educational needs of Looked After Children. Personal Education Plans are closely monitored and findings fed in to individual and service level planning. Inspectors were told that despite recent 'Education Briefings' some schools are concerned with the support provided by foster carers.

### **Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers** **(Standards 15 – 23)**

#### **Five Standards were almost met, four were not met**

On the whole staff were found to be managed and organised effectively. A management system is in place to monitor workloads but inspectors found some evidence that due to staffing problems staff have had to take on additional responsibilities, which has impacted upon their ability to meet core objectives.

Gaps were found in the information on staff files when measured against Schedule 1 and inspectors were concerned that administrative workers are not currently subject to CRB checks. The service must ensure that rigorous procedures are in place to vet freelance and consultant social workers employed for specific tasks.

Some staff were found to carry high caseloads, it was reported that the Fostering Recruitment Team had been unable to transfer carers to the support teams at the appropriate time, and the service had had to employ independent social workers to complete some assessments. This indicates that the service has insufficient numbers of social work staff and a requirement has therefore been made.

The majority of staff reported that they had good training opportunities and welcomed the addition of a fostering training officer post. A new system of annual staff appraisals had been introduced; inspectors found the quality of these to vary considerably.

Foster carers valued the support offered by AFO's and inspectors identified areas of good practice during case tracking where AFO's had effectively supported carers through difficult and challenging experiences. Considerable confusion appears to exist amongst carers in relation to the fee for skills scheme and has led to some resentment and suspicion on the part of carers.

Whilst the Foster Carer Agreement has been reviewed further work is still required. A Foster Carer Handbook should also be developed and procedures developed to ensure that referrals are made to the Protection of Children Act List wherever this is required.

The service offers a range of foster carer training that will be further developed by the foster training officer. The service should consider how it could develop support systems for foster carers own children.

### **Records (Standards 24 – 25)**

#### **Two standards were almost met**

Departmental policy guidance sets out the information to be included on carers files, this should be expanded to cover the information the fostering service should hold on children placed as significant differences in practice were found by inspectors. The majority of files were professionally maintained but a number of the files sampled were not.

Files are stored securely and whilst it is clear that carers and children have access to records little evidence was found of this happening.

Care must be taken to ensure that the outcome of complaints are clearly recorded on carers and staff files.

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

**This standard was met**

Premises used by the fostering agency are appropriate for the purpose.

### **Financial requirements (Standard 27 – 29)**

**One standard was almost met, two standards do not apply**

Foster Carers and AFO's reported that in general payments to carers were unproblematic, however further guidance should be offered to foster carers about the payment for skills scheme.

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

**This standard was not met**

The service currently has a number of foster panels that have different functions. Inspectors found each of these panels to have been established inappropriately despite the requirement made following the last inspection and the advice offered by inspectors.

Foster panels should further develop their quality assurance functions given the concerns identified by inspectors and expressed by some panel members, regarding the quality of reports presented to panel. Foster panels should also be consulted upon when variations to foster carer's approvals are required and involved in reviewing these placements wherever they continue beyond agreed timescales.

The service has indicated that it may incorporate the functions of the existing panels into one whole service panel to improve consistency and efficiency. The service must ensure that, regardless of these potential developments, the requirements made at the last inspection and repeated here are fulfilled.

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

**This standard was not met**

Inspectors acknowledge that limited time was allocated to the inspection of the Family Link

Team and whilst much good evidence was identified through case tracking a significant number of statutory requirements have been made in relation to the Family Link Foster Carer Agreement, foster panel, and children's guide

**Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)**

**This standard was almost met**

Whilst the Local Authority was considered to be sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing family and friends as carers inspectors found that the assessment of these carers and their support and training needs were not met in the same way or to the same standards as other foster carers. Inspectors were particularly concerned that field social workers have limited support when undertaking these assessments.

## **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**

<b>STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>				
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	3	FS1	The Service Provider must provide information for children about the service in a form which is suitable for them to understand	
2	29	FS6	All carers must be the subject of Annual Reviews	
3	34	FS8	Placements made must be consistent with the terms of carers approval	
4	34	FS8	Foster Placement Agreements must contain references to matching considerations and areas where additional support is needed	
5	12	FS9	A safe care policy must be adopted and adapted for carers individual circumstances	
6	12	FS9	Carers must be provided with full information about foster children and their families to enable them to offer sufficient protection to the child, themselves and their own children	
7	17	FS18	The support role of the Emergency Duty Team and Crisis Intervention Team must be clarified and made known to all carers	
8	28	FS22	Implement a Foster Care Agreement which complies fully with the Requirements of the Regulation	

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

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

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

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	<u>Martin Davis</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Second Inspector</b>	<u>Barbara Davies</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Locality Manager</b>	<u>Ian Godfrey</u>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Date</b>	<u>14<sup>th</sup> July 2004</u>		

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	Ensure that the Fostering Service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose	31.12.04
2	3	FS1	Make the Statement of Purpose available to those listed in Regulation 3(2)	30.09.04
3	3	FS31FS1	Produce a Children's Guide and provide a copy to each child placed, each foster carer and the Commission	30.09.04
4	20	FS30FS15 FS3	Ensure that the requirements of Schedule 1 are met for every employee of the fostering service, this must include independent social workers commissioned to work for the service and administrative workers	31.08.04
5	29	FS6	All carers must be subject to an annual review	30.09.04
6	34	FS8	Placements made must be consistent with the terms of carers approval	30.09.04
7	33	FS8	Ensure that the Single Referral Service has access to sufficient information to ensure that no placements are made unless the service is sure that a placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances	31.08.04

8	34	FS8	Foster Placement Agreements must contain references to matching considerations and areas where additional support is required.	31.08.04
9	34	FS9	Carers must be provided with full information about foster children and their families to enable them to offer sufficient protection to the child, themselves and their own children	30.09.04
10	17	FS12	The fostering service provider shall ensure that each foster parent is provided with appropriate information regarding the health needs of any child placed or to be placed	30.09.04
11	16	FS17	The service must ensure that a sufficient number of suitably qualified people are employed by the fostering service	31.12.04
12	17	FS18	The support role of the Emergency Duty Team and Crisis Intervention Team must be clarified and made known to all carers	31.08.04
13	28	FS22FS31	Implement a Foster Carer Agreement which complies fully with the Requirements Schedule 5	30.09.04
14	12	FS22	Develop policy guidance outlining the circumstances in which a referral to the Protection of Children Act List should be made	30.09.04
15	24, 25, 26, 29	FS30FS31	No foster panel should operate unless it is established in accordance with Regulation 24	30.09.04

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	Add specific detail to the statement of purpose in respect of all the services listed in standard 1.4 and amend errors identified
2	FS2FS16	Team managers should further develop monitoring and quality assurance systems to ensure that the fostering service is managed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care.

3	FS15FS3	Telephone enquiries should be made to follow-up written references. Personnel policy and procedure guidance should be amended to reflect this and other recommendations of the National Minimum Standards
4	FS3	Where concerns are raised by referees the outcome of any investigation of these concerns should be recorded on personnel files
5	FS16FS6F S4	Further formal systems should be developed to monitor and control the fostering service. These should include monitoring the use of variations and exemptions, the quality of assessments and review reports, implementation of safer care and risk assessments, and the frequency of support and supervision visits
6	FS4	Foster carers should be reminded of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest
7	FS6	Annual review forms should be amended to include child and carer ethnicity and the type of placements made in the past twelve months
8	FS6	Inaccuracies in the Review of Approved Foster Carers Policy document should be amended
9	FS6	Ensure that the Single Referral Service has access to information to enable it to accurately assess risk where placements made require children to share bedrooms
10	FS6	Health and Safety checks should be completed on all carer's homes. Where risks are identified the assessment should also outline remedial action required and confirm that this has taken place
11	FS7	The service should provide the Commission with the details of the system they have proposed to develop to ensure that; where children are placed in an emergency and no suitable placement is available in terms of the child's needs as outlined in standard 7.2, that remedial action is taken within six weeks
12	FS8	Ensure that there is adequate consultation between SRS, AFO's and field social workers prior to placements being made
13	FS8	Ensure that a written Foster Placement Agreement is in place for each child
14	FS8	Complete and ratify policy and procedural guidance for the SRS
15	FS8	Ensure that Referral Administrative Assistant have access to appropriate training
16	FS9	Safer Care Policies should include all relevant information they should be shared with children and placing social workers and reviewed regularly and when necessary

17	FS9	Include more detailed information in relation to anti-bullying strategies in the Children's Guide and Foster Carer Handbook
18	FS10	Ensure that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements, including any arrangement for the supervision of contact, should be set out in the Foster Placement Agreement
19	FS24FS13 FS12FS10	Clarify to carers the records the service expects them to maintain and provide support and resources to carers to achieve this
20	FS11	Develop systems to ensure that young people in foster care are consulted upon the performance of the fostering service. This may be achieved through the use of support groups for foster children
21	FS11	Clarify whether additional funding has been secured to develop a Health Project for Looked After Children and develop contingency plans in case the application for funding is unsuccessful
22	FS13FS12	Ensure that AFO's maintain appropriate records of supervisory visits to foster carers
23	FS13	The foster carer's role in school contact should be clearly set out in the Placement Agreement
24	FS14	Pathway Plans should be fully implemented for all children of an appropriate age
25	FS32FS15	Provide training and support for field social workers completing family and friends fostering assessments
26	FS16	Carers should maintain a training portfolio
27	FS20FS16	Ensure that all staff receive regular supervision which includes feedback on performance and professional development
28	FS17	Monitor the effectiveness of the foster carer recruitment strategy and amend as necessary
29	FS18	Ensure that AFO's that offer an out-of-hours service to foster carers have appropriate access to management support
30	FS18	Clarify to foster carers their whistle blowing responsibilities
31	FS19FS20	Ensure that there staff appraisals adequately assess performance and produce a clear training and development plan, including appropriate post-qualifying training for all social work staff
32	FS21FS29	Further guidance should be offered to foster carers about the payment for skills scheme
33	FS21FS11	Confirm the future process of foster carer annual reviews, amend policy and procedures to reflect this and inform foster carers

34	FS22	Foster Carers should be informed of the specific support that they are entitled to if they become the subjects of an allegation or investigation
35	FS22	Ensure that all foster carers receive at least one unannounced supervision visit a year
36	FS22	Provide each carer with a handbook which covers policies, procedures, guidance legal information and insurance details
37	FS23	Ensure that each carer has a training proforma on file and an appropriate training plan included in their annual review
38	FS23	Further develop support systems for carers own children
39	FS24FS9	Develop specific policy guidance on the information on children placed to be included in foster carer files
40	FS25	Implement a system to monitor the adequacy of records
41	FS25	Encourage foster carers and children to access their records, make additions and comments
42	FS8FS30FS31	Foster Panel should be consulted and make recommendations where variations to carer registration and/or exemption to the normal fostering limit are required. Variations and exemptions should be considered temporary arrangements and should be reviewed by foster panel
43	FS30	Foster Panel should develop its quality assurance function and provide feedback to the service on the quality of reports and assessments so as to improve consistency of approach across the service
44	FS26	The Fostering Service should consider identifying an alternative venue for foster panel given the concerns expressed by carers
45	FS32	The support and training needs for family and friends carers should be assessed and met in the same way as for any other carers
46	FS25	Ensure that the outcome of complaints and allegations are clearly recorded on the relevant files

\* 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	YES
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	22/03/04
Time of Inspection	09:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	86

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

The scale ranges from:

- |                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded   | (Commendable)      |
| 3 - Standard Met        | (No Shortfalls)    |
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"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**

At the last inspection no clear statement of purpose was available. Since then the fostering service has developed a statement that has been formally approved by the elected members. This provides the basis for a useful reference guide to all those involved in the fostering service, however inspectors found that the statement lacked sufficient information in key areas.

As a guide to the fostering service the statement should serve as a stand alone document providing sufficient detail enabling carers and others to identify the key services to which they are entitled and the procedures and processes that will be followed. In some areas this has been achieved, for example the assessment process is clearly set out. In other areas there is insufficient detail, for example the process for carer annual review is not set out, and whilst the number of complaints received is recorded the outcome is not.

In some areas inspectors found the information in the statement misleading. In the section titled “Approval Process” it is stated that the fostering panel’s role is to assess the qualities of applicants and determine whether or not they are to be approved as foster carers. Foster Panel should only make recommendations, the agency decision maker decides upon approval status. The agency decision maker should be clearly identified in the statement and their role in the approval and review of carers set out.

The service has begun to develop a summary of the statement of purpose for children in the form of a children’s guide as is required by Regulation 3(3). Inspectors were shown a draft copy but significant work remains to be done before this is completed. There remains in place a generic guide for all looked after children that has been produced by the Children’s Rights Officer, whilst this provides useful information it is not in itself sufficient.

Inspectors found significant gaps in service delivery across the whole fostering service when auditing against the statement of purpose. Inspectors were concerned that this could potentially lead to inequality in outcomes for both children and foster carers. Regulation 3(3) of The Fostering Services Regulations 2003 require the foster service provider to ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose, this was not found to be the case.

The family link scheme has compiled its own statement of purpose to describe the service offered. This at present is only available in draft and is awaiting ratification by the members. The statement of purpose provides most of the detail required but would benefit from including a summary of the local authority complaints procedure and needs to include details of the number of complaints that have been made about the service and of their outcomes. The section of the statement ‘recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing Local Authority Fostering Service

carers' should indicate the frequency at which carers will receive a visit from their link worker. As already reported in respect of the statement of purpose for the mainstream fostering services it is stated that the fostering panel's role is to assess the qualities of applicants and determine whether or not they are to be approved as foster carers. Again, Foster Panel should only make recommendations, the agency decision maker decides upon approval status. The agency decision maker should be clearly identified in the statement and their role in the approval and review of carers set out.

A children's guide is in the process of being compiled for the 'Family Link' service.

## 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?	2
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The Looked After Children Service Manager has a range of relevant qualifications and experience in excess of those required. This manager has over six years senior management experience and has completed phase 1 of the Foundation for Managers Programme, she is enrolled on an NVQ 5 in Strategic Management.

The individual team managers have an appropriate range of management and social work experience and also have extensive family placement experience. Each manager is enrolled on NVQ 4 in Management with portfolios due for submission by April 2005; one manager is currently studying for the PQCCA (Advanced).

The management team have regular meetings and work together closely on both daily matters and service development initiatives.

Inspectors acknowledge the amount of development work that has taken place following the last inspection and the significant work undertaken by managers and their teams. However as stated shortfalls in service delivery were identified when measured against the statement of purpose and National Minimum Standards.

A number of new systems have been introduced over the past year, for example foster carer annual reviews, safer care policies and health and safety checks. Inspectors found that the quality of these reports and assessments differed, some were of a high standard and others not.

The level and quality of support offered to carers also differed, inspectors acknowledge that they found evidence of high quality support in the majority of cases, however some carers reported, and inspectors found evidence, that support fell well short of the targets set in the statement of purpose and National Minimum Standards.

The quality of assessment and review reports sampled also differed; some reports lacked sufficient detail and analysis and were rightly withdrawn by foster panel for further work.

Inspectors would expect many of these gaps to have been identified by managers and remedial action implemented, however only limited evidence of this was found. The panel chair also expressed concern that some of the shortfalls in assessments were not being picked up by the team managers. Inspectors were therefore concerned that in some areas effective leadership of staff and operation was not achieved. In part this is likely to be

attributable to the pace at which change has taken place and the lack of clear policy and guidance around each of these developments. However a recommendation is made that managers further develop their monitoring and quality assurance role.

**Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The agency maintains records of the checks and references that have been obtained for the managers of the fostering service.

Two of the team managers within the fostering service have been employed by the service for some time, two were appointed in October 2002. Each manager has appropriate Criminal Records Bureau clearance. Personnel officers confirmed that these checks are now updated on a three yearly cycle and that a system is in place to monitor compliance with this.

No evidence could be found of a second reference for one manager on their personnel file. It was subsequently confirmed to inspectors that this reference had not been received. A requirement is made in relation to this.

Wherever concerns are raised by referees these should be investigated and the findings considered by the fostering agency. Inspectors were concerned that it appears that this process is not followed in every case.

It was reported following the last inspection that no record was found of telephone enquiries to follow-up written references. The situation remains the same. The service is reminded of the need to follow-up written references and should seek to amend personnel procedures to reflect this.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.**

**Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)**

**There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

From discussions with managers and staff and from pre-inspection information received there is evidence to confirm that there are clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication between managers, staff and carers. Carers interviewed confirmed that they have access to individual managers and the majority felt well supported by them.

Staff shortages and carer recruitment problems continue to blur some of the boundaries between teams. Inspectors found that carers were not transferring from the FRT to STEPS or APT as planned. This has led to social workers in FRT maintaining an ongoing support role and preventing allocation of carer assessments.

A number of new workers have joined the fostering service and whilst they may be experienced social work practitioners they do not all have significant family placement experience. Whilst they are supported to further develop their skills the efficiency of the service is inevitably affected, and managers report that this has impacted upon allocation of work.

In the pre-inspection questionnaire the service manager acknowledged the need to develop monitoring systems in relation to Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 including offences committed by foster children, any involvement in prostitution, and levels of absconding. The service has developed a proforma for foster carers to complete to report significant events but those foster carers that the inspectors had contact with did not appear to be aware of this. Further formal systems should be developed to monitor and control the fostering service to ensure quality performance. Included in these the service should monitor at a strategic level; the use of variations and exemptions, the quality of assessments, reviews, safer care policies and risk assessments, and the frequency of support and supervision visits to carers. The information gathered here should be used to inform future planning.

Appropriate financial processes were in place, the local authority is the sole user of the service. Details of the allowances and payments for skill levels are given to carers upon approval and updated as necessary.

Staff are reminded of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest in the employee handbook. The service must ensure that foster carers are reminded of their responsibility to declare any conflict and this might usefully be added to the Foster Carer Agreement or Handbook.

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

**0**

Death of a child placed with foster parents.	0
Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.	0
Serious illness or accident of a child.	0
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	0
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	X
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	X
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	14
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	2
<b>Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	0
<b>Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:</b>	0

<b>Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>Clear job descriptions are provided for all posts upon appointment. Inspectors found that the level of delegation and responsibilities of the managers along with lines of accountability are clearly defined.</p> <p>In the absence of a front-line manager, managers from the other fostering teams share responsibility for decision-making and staff support.</p> <p>In the absence of the Service Manger the Fostering Recruitment Team Manager would assume day-to-day responsibility for the service with support from other senior managers.</p> <p>All staff spoken to were aware of these arrangements and felt that they worked well when required.</p>		

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Inspectors had the opportunity to meet with a number of individual foster carer's, with groups of carers and with a number of children and young people who are fostered. Inspectors wish to acknowledge the level of skill, commitment and resilience displayed by these carers. A number of the young people that inspectors met were in long-term placements and appeared to have significantly benefited from the security that these placements have provided.

The views of placing social workers and children were sought by pre-inspection questionnaire and via contact during the inspection. Six placing social workers and thirty young people returned questionnaires. A large majority of these felt that individual carers provided a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Where there were exceptions to this placing social workers emphasised how they worked with their fostering counterparts to find solutions. Lack of placement choice was a major concern for placing social workers, they felt that this led to inappropriate placements with children being placed with families who were less able to provide safe and nurturing environments because matching considerations could not be met, here a specific concern was that some children who display particularly challenging behaviour were being placed with carers who did not have the necessary skill base.

Inspectors noted shortfalls in the number and frequency of annual reviews at the last inspection. In response the service prioritised foster carer annual reviews. A revised annual review form was agreed providing much more detailed information, an annual-review panel was convened to deal with the backlog and it was anticipated that 100% of annual reviews would be completed by March 2004.

Inspectors acknowledge the amount of work that has gone in to establishing the system of carer annual reviews, however significant gaps remain. Inspectors were informed that, for the fostering service as a whole, 78% of reviews had been completed. Inspectors heard that the annual-review panel worked well, however as this panel was not quorate it should not have reviewed carers first annual review as it did in five cases.

Inspectors read a number of foster carer annual reviews some of these were of a high standard, providing a detailed summary of significant events. However a number of the reviews did not provide sufficient information, for example not recording the number of supervisory visits or whether an unannounced visit had been made. A number provided no evidence of consultation with child or placing social worker and had an insufficient training plan.

The annual review should be amended further to include child and carer ethnicity and type of placement made, for example long-term, short-term or emergency, so that panel members

can monitor whether placements have been made outside a carers approval. Inspectors were informed that the service recognised the need to review the form and a team manager had been identified to undertake this task.

Inspectors were provided with a draft 'Review of Approved Foster Carers Policy'. This sets the legal framework and establishes the key principles that underpin carer reviews. The practice guidance set out in this document is inaccurate and should be amended. Foster panel does not have a duty to make the 'final decision regarding approval' it should make a recommendation to the agency nominated decision maker, the draft policy states that new and existing carers reviews will be sent to a Review Panel however the service has yet to confirm that this will be the process in the longer term.

All those homes visited by the inspectors were found to be warm, clean and adequately decorated. Arrangements for individual privacy were appropriate. Written risk assessments had not been completed on the environment for all foster homes, and in one instance where a risk assessment had been completed and potential hazards identified, there was no detail of the action to be taken.

Whilst the service does not promote bedroom sharing and would expect a risk assessment to be completed prior to any decision being made as to whether it is appropriate to allow sharing of bedrooms, inspectors were concerned that the Single Referral Service (SRS) may make placements which require sharing without sufficient information to risk assess. Inspectors read the information that SRS held on carers, for some this was limited and out dated, no information was held on accommodation and therefore SRS were totally reliant upon carers informing them of when a child may have to share a room. Similarly inspectors found that for some children the background information available to SRS was limited and therefore did not allow appropriate risk assessment.

Inspectors were not provided with specific statistics but managers estimated that approximately 80% of health and safety checks had now been completed. Inspectors were concerned about the quality of some of the checklists on files, where potential hazards are identified it is important that the necessary remedial action is identified and a record made of when this has been completed.

All carers visited understood the need for them to be visited as part of the inspection and were co-operative with the process.

#### **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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>
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The service emphasised that it aims to meet all needs arising as a result of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. However a limited supply of foster carers means that some elements of matching criteria are inevitably compromised.

Inspectors met with a number of white foster carers who were caring for black children. These carers emphasised the level of support that had been offered to both them and the children placed. Inspectors were told of attempts to identify positive black role models and of specific training and advice offered to one carer to help them develop their own awareness and skills. Carers had been buddied with experienced black carers, and children had been

supported to develop relationships with other black children and adults in the local community.

A part-time worker has been seconded to the Family Link Team from the Shared Care Network to improve the use of short breaks for children from black and minority ethnic groups. This worker has recommended further cultural awareness training for all staff, at the point of the inspection this was being arranged.

Evidence was seen that during child care reviews and supervision visits to foster carers that placement plans and day to day care are monitored to ensure that they remain consistent with the principle goals of each child's placement plan.

Placing social workers and fostering social workers all continue to raise concerns about the lack of placement choice and were concerned that if an inappropriate placement is made in an emergency it is difficult to identify a suitable placement within six weeks as recommended by the National Minimum Standards. A recommendation was made in relation to this following the last inspection. The service's action plan stated that "a system will be developed" during 2004-2005. This recommendation is repeated and the service asked to detail the system that they propose to develop.

Following the last inspection the service planned and provided post-approval 'Diversity and Equality Briefing' training for all carers. Four sessions were held throughout the county during March 2004 at different times of the day to enable as many carers as possible to attend. Valuing diversity training also forms a component of the NVQ Level 3 course to which some carers have access.

#### **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

As reported previously the Single Referral Service (SRS) now has responsibility for making the majority of foster placements. Inspectors were told that the service aims to operate as a 'one stop shop' for placement referrals and alleviate pressure upon the fostering teams.

The SRS has a qualified manager, qualified referral social worker and three unqualified referral administrative workers. Requests for planned placements are made via the Children's Placement Panel that meets every Thursday. Requests for emergency placements are dealt with on a daily basis and any placements made reported to the placements panel. If a young person referred for an emergency placement is a new admission the Field work Services Manager has to be consulted. These processes serve a gate keeping function to prevent children and young people from being inappropriately accommodated.

Inspectors were concerned about the extent to which the SRS is able to make appropriate matches, particularly for same day placement requests. Inspectors found that for some

carers the information that SRS has dates back to 2001. The SRS has not had access to newly completed safer care policies. Inspectors found little information about any other children that might be in placement and little evidence of consultation with the social workers for other children placed prior to additional children being placed. Inspectors acknowledge that SRS workers have access to computerised records but found that they were often forced to rely upon carers for up to date information. Inspectors were concerned that the referral form completed by placing social workers does not require them to specify matching considerations or to make an explicit risk assessment.

Inspectors heard concerns from fostering social workers and placing social workers in relation to the lack of consultation over placements since the creation of SRS. Inspectors were told that fostering support workers are informed of placements after they have been made, this denies them any real input in to placement decisions and again limits information sharing. Some field social workers were concerned that this lack of consultations had led to inappropriate placements and threatens increased disruption rates.

AFO's were concerned by the frequency at which SRS places children with carers that have been placed 'on hold'. In one case a carer was placed on hold for a specific reason yet SRS placed two children who were outside of the carers usual approval. AFO's also stated that following placements made by SRS it can "be weeks before a placement meeting is held", this clearly leaves children and carers in a potentially vulnerable position.

In the pre-inspection information the service identified those placements made outside of a carers approval range and those placements where an exemption to the normal fostering limit had been required. Inspectors identified a considerable number of additional placements (30) that required a variation but were not listed as such and had not had a variation agreed. Inspectors were informed that the SRS apply to the Looked After Children Services Manager for variations that are required for same day placements, inspectors saw evidence of forms requesting variations on case files but these had not been signed by the Looked After Children Services Manager because they had not been presented for signing after SRS had received verbal agreement.

Social work staff raised concerns that where carers are approved for long and short-term placements, short-term emergency placements made by SRS have blocked proposed long-term placements organised by the APT. This appears to be another example of where communication between teams is insufficient and in the inspectors view undermines the extent to which carefully matched placements can be made.

Policy and procedural guidance for the SRS are still being written.

The extent to which referral administrative assistants will have access to professional training is unclear and should be clarified in the services action plan.

Written foster placement agreements seen still do not contain specific information referring to matching and highlighting how any identified gaps will be filled. Foster placement agreements were not found on all carer files. Inspectors clarified what the service expects to find on files in the fostering teams and were informed by managers that this should include placement agreements. On some files where placement agreements were missing the AFO was unable to confirm that a placement agreement had been drawn up.

Inspectors found evidence during case tracking of appropriate additional training, support and information being provided to carers where transracial or transcommunity placements

are made.

Where possible children and young people have the opportunity for a period of introduction to a proposed foster placement. Following placement the situation is continually monitored via the LAC reviewing systems.

**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?**

1

Following the last inspection safer care training has been made available to all foster carers throughout the county. Training was offered in different areas, during the day and evening and at weekends. Foster carers reported to inspectors that this training was valued.

Inspectors were informed that not all carers currently have a safer care policy in place; the STEPs team estimated that 60% of carers do not have a policy. The contents and quality of the policies vary considerably in all the teams, some provide very specific detailed information others contained little specific information and said little about the family composition or routines. Inspectors were concerned that the safer carer policies they read did not include reference to children in placement and any potential risks associated with this. Safer care policies were not found to be shared with and cleared with the child's social worker and had not been explained to children in placement. There did not appear to be a system in place to review or update the policies, either following a new placement or at the carer annual review.

The fostering service makes clear to carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable in the Foster Care Agreement. Behaviour management strategies are discussed during pre and post-approval training. Carers and staff interviewed confirmed that appropriate sanctions are discussed during supervisory visits and following significant events. No concerns were raised through case tracking.

Inspectors were provided with information relating to individual allegations made about foster carers, this demonstrated that the agency investigated these appropriately. The new management information system 'SAFE' is now operational and a monthly monitoring system of allegations and complaints is in place. Letters have been sent to foster carers outlining their responsibility to inform the service of all matters listed in Schedule 8. The Looked After Children Service Manager is responsible for scrutinising this information on a three monthly basis and to feed findings in to annual service development.

Inspectors were told that information is provided for carers in relation to bullying although carers reported that this advice is limited. The draft children's guide provides little information for children and young people on sources of support and strategies to challenge bullying.

The agency has developed a checklist for carers on the questions to consider and the information they should have access to for each child that is placed with them. Inspectors found this to be a useful tool and some carers reported feeling empowered by this to ask questions and demand information. However during case tracking inspectors found that

some carers still had very limited information on children for some time following placement, inspectors found this was particularly the case for placements made via SRS. Inspectors were also concerned that in some cases AFO's also had limited information on file, including basic LAC documents, and so were not in a position to adequately ensure that the placement met the goals of the care plan and ensure that the child placed is adequately protected.

The service makes clear to carers what their responsibility is when a young person is missing from home. This guidance is offered verbally and in writing.

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

X

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

Inspectors drew evidence for this standard from discussion with young people, their carers and social workers. Inspectors also had the opportunity to read case files, speak to social workers in the fostering team and had contact with a number of birth parents. In the majority of cases the arrangements for contact appeared to be clear to all parties.

Contact is a core component considered when arranging placements and efforts are made to ensure that placement location does not threaten contact arrangements. However inspectors were repeatedly told that due to limited resources children and young people are sometimes placed at considerable distance from their family and community making contact problematic. Inspectors also heard that where this is the case considerable efforts are made to ensure that contact is maintained and extra finances made available to facilitate this.

Inspectors found individual foster carers to understand the importance of contact and found examples of foster carers working hard to establish positive relationships with birth family members. Where difficulties had arisen carers described the support they received from their support workers to resolve these problems so that contact arrangements were maintained.

Limited information on contact arrangements were found in placement agreements, whilst the frequency of contact was usually set out, other guidance was missing. The fostering service must ensure that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements, including any arrangement for the supervision of contact, should be clearly articulated in the Foster Placement Agreement.

The records that foster carers keep on the outcome of contact arrangements also varied. Inspectors found that some carers kept detailed logs of daily events; others appeared to keep very limited records. In some cases inspectors could not find evidence that carers were recording the outcome of contact arrangements and feeding this back to the placing social worker in any formal way. Some placing social workers questioned the lack of information provided by some carers. Following the last inspection it was recommended that the service provide carers with the appropriate resources to enable them to maintain full records of contact. The service planned to develop good practice guidance and briefings for carers, this work remains outstanding and the recommendation is repeated.

**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**

During discussions with foster carers they demonstrated a clear commitment to consultation with the children and young people in their care. One of the pre-approval training sessions focuses upon listening to young people and this is reinforced with written information. The Children's Rights Officer had also arranged 'Total respect' training for carers and staff. 68% of young people who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that their carers often asked them for their opinions and ideas, a further 32% reported that they were sometimes asked.

The Children's Rights Service includes a Young People's Looked After Network (Y-PLAN). Whilst this service canvasses the opinions of all looked after young people to ensure that their views are represented within decision making processes, young people reported through the pre-inspection questionnaire that whilst over 90% had been asked about the quality of care provided by their foster carers less than 30% could recall being asked their opinion of the fostering service as a whole.

The majority of young people spoken to were aware of Y-PLAN but did not feel that it represented them. The service does not currently run support groups specifically for young people in foster care, various carers and staff said that they felt the addition of these would be a positive step and that consultation would be improved. The service acknowledged in the pre-inspection information that it does not have formal systems in place to consult young people on the running of the fostering service.

Within the foster carer annual review system there are consultation forms for young people and placing social workers, however inspectors found that these were not always used and that some fostering officers did not know that they were available. Some confusion also seemed to exist amongst Foster Panel members over what information should be included in reviews. Thus a potentially important method of consultation has not been maximised.

A new post has been created to support foster carers who care for children with disabilities and a specific support group established. Over the coming year the service aims to establish a joint working party to develop procedures to ensure that the views of children who have communication difficulties are established.

All young people and their carers are provided with information about the complaints system. All young people have access to the Children's Rights Officer and carer's, staff and young people reported examples of changes made following investigation 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?**

1

The service provides appropriate written guidance to carers. This sets out the framework for good practice and covers; health education, the importance of routine checks, encouragement for older children to take responsibility, allocation of responsibility for ensuring procedures are followed, parental involvement and consent for treatment, administration of medication, registration with a GP and the need to maintain continuity of services where appropriate.

A bid has been made to the local Primary Care Trust for additional funding to develop a Health Project for Looked After Children; this would include a designated health care post to track and monitor health care. Inspectors found evidence that in the absence of this specific project the service struggles to review the health needs of Looked After Children. The Children in Special Circumstances Group has focused upon Looked After Children and has emphasised the need to develop better communication systems to ensure that health needs are met. The service should clarify in its action plan whether additional funding has been secured and the contingency plans in place should funding not be available.

Independent Reviewing Officers have access to the Child Health System and so are able to access very basic information from a child's core health care records. This would include immunisation details and referrals made for specific services.

Inspectors were told that referrals to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) remain problematic. The 'fast track' system for Looked After Children is no longer available. There are plans to appoint a primary mental health nurse who would have responsibility for filtering and tracking CAMHS referrals, but this development has not been confirmed.

During case tracking inspectors found that some carers had limited background health information on children placed. Here significant gaps were found in the LAC information. Inspectors would question the extent to which AFO's were able to challenge this, as LAC information does not appear to be routinely copied to the fostering teams.

In all tracked cases carers had made appropriate arrangements for routine medical treatment. Carers were found to be assertive in requesting access to specialised services where they were considered necessary and committed to ensuring that appointments made were kept.

The service has provided guidance to foster carers on their role and responsibilities in relation to children's health and well being, this includes a statement that carers should keep a written health record for each child. This guidance was only issued in January 2004; inspectors would question the extent to which it is followed. Some carers were found to maintain adequate health records whilst other kept very limited information. It is important that the guidance issued is expanded upon and that the service monitors both the quality of carer records and the extent to which carers supply information about the child's health needs to the planning and review processes. Inspectors acknowledge that the supervisory visit record now includes a heading on health monitoring but in practice inspectors found that

both the form and this particular section were not always completed.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The service provided four mandatory education-briefing sessions for foster carers in February 2004. These were designed in line with the National Minimum Standards and were designed to help carers to fulfil their responsibility to meet a child's education needs. During case tracking inspectors found a number of examples of good practice where carers and others have supported children and teaching staff to promote positive outcomes.

The Social Service Department has forged a close working relationship with the Education Department and the recent appointment of a Joint Head of Children's Services across Social Services and Education should help to improve strategic planning. Inspectors met an Assistant Education Officer who has a responsibility for Looked After Children. This worker monitors Personal Education Plan's via contact with child care social workers prior to LAC reviews to ensure that all LAC have an appropriate plan in place.

The Education Department has developed a value added scoring system to monitor the progress of Looked After Children and has developed training for primary and secondary school teachers. A support group has been established for young people who are refusing to attend school; in the last academic year there were 3 permanent exclusions of Looked After Children and 31 fixed term exclusions. 86% of Looked After Children had an attendance of over 92.4%, this compares favourably with the general school population.

As with health records, inspectors found the quality of education records maintained by carers to vary considerably. Similarly the extent to which supervisory social workers monitor educational matters is difficult to assess as the recording form for supervisory visits were not always found to be appropriately completed and in some cases were not found on foster carer files at all. The extent to which carers are able to contribute to the planning and review process is therefore, in the view of the inspector, potentially compromised.

Parental responses, link workers and carers associated with the family link scheme consistently described the arrangements for supporting children in education. The responsibility of liaising with schools remained with the child's permanent carers. Any need for carer involvement was agreed as a result of direct negotiation between parents and carers. Inspectors did not find foster carer's role in school contact to be clearly laid out in all placement agreements. Inspectors were told that through consultation exercises schools have raised general concerns about the role foster carers play, concerns have included carers not attending parents evenings, not ensuring that homework is completed, not ensuring children reach school on time, and generally holding low expectations of Looked

After Children's potential to succeed academically. Many of these issues are likely to have been discussed in the recent briefing sessions but it is essential that the service set out how it will continue to monitor the situation and challenge any concerns identified.

Evidence from case files confirms that financial support is available for extra-curricula activities. Placement agreements did not always identify where financial responsibility lies for school related costs however inspectors understand that a scheme of delegated decision making identifies who can approve the level of departmental expenditure for particular purposes.

Support systems are in place for children who are not in full-time education although inspectors did not have the opportunity to scrutinise these through case tracking.

By April 2004 it is planned that each young person in foster care will have access to a personal computer.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

**The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

A review of the leaving care provision has taken place since the last inspection, a new Countywide Leaving Care Service managed by a multi-agency board is due to be in place by April 2004. Foster carers were invited to a consultation day in January 2004 and there are plans for a foster carer to become a member of the operational management group. A two-year Project Manager post has been created to lead service developments and to audit the service against the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum Standards.

During the inspection individual examples of good practice were identified, these included young people being supported in their foster placements beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday whilst continuing to develop the skills required to live independently or semi-independently. A recommendation was made following the last inspection that Pathway Plans should be fully implemented for all children of an appropriate age, the service informed the Commission that this work is ongoing and therefore the recommendation has been repeated.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

1

There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures which follow good practice in safe guarding children and young people, however aspects of these procedures should be updated to fulfil the expectations of the National Minimum Standards, for example confirming that references should be verified through telephone contact and that CRB checks are to be renewed every three years. Personnel officers are trained; they have a sound knowledge of the procedures and oversee the recruitment process.

All people are interviewed as part of the recruitment process and an adequate record of interviews was found on file for newly appointed applicants. However there is no evidence that telephone enquiries are made to follow-up references.

Inspectors found evidence that the requirements of Schedule 1 are not met in every case. On one staff file only one reference was found, this was not from the most recent employer, when inspectors queried this it was confirmed that only one reference had been received. Whilst all social work staff had an appropriate CRB check inspectors found one case where the department's internal procedures had not been followed after a disclosure from the CRB. Administrative staff are not currently the subject of CRB checks, inspectors do not consider this appropriate given the extent to which these workers may have access to sensitive confidential information and direct contact with vulnerable young people for example as part of reception duties. Inspectors also found one example of a referee raising concerns about an applicant's fitness, no evidence could be found that this had been followed up with the referee or considered by the interview panel.

All social work staff in the fostering service hold an appropriate qualification. The majority have considerable family placement experience. All have a working knowledge of the Children Act, Working Together and the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families. A number of social workers who have recently joined the fostering service have limited family placement experience, these workers reported feeling well supported and believed they would be provided with appropriate training opportunities to develop their skills in assessment and support of foster carers.

Inspectors found little evidence of training and support offered to field social workers when they are required to complete fostering assessments for specific placements. Concerns were raised by fostering social workers and the field social workers themselves, in regards to the

quality of these specific assessments. Inspectors read a number of specific assessments and identified significant gaps in these.

A number of freelance and consultant social workers have been used by the service to undertake foster carer assessments and training for both carers and staff. In some cases the department has previously employed the workers, but this is not always the case. The evidence seen by inspectors suggests that the requirements of Schedule 1 are not met for each of these consultant social workers; the processes in place at the moment appear ad hoc and are largely determined by individual manager's. Thus for example, one worker was found to have been employed in one team on the apparent assumption that another manager had completed the relevant checks but limited evidence of these were in place.

<b>Total number of staff of the agency:</b>	29	<b>Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	2
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There is a management structure with clear lines of accountability that are known and understood by staff. Individual managers are experienced child care practitioners who have a range of appropriate qualifications and skills. The department is currently attempting to recruit a fourth team manager with responsibility for permanent/log term fostering and specific carers. This will replace the current arrangements whereby one team manager oversees both long-term fostering and adoption arrangements. The inspectors welcome this move and feel that the new arrangements will further enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the management structure.

The service operates a workload management system that attempts to ensure that tasks are prioritised and allocated appropriately. In the past twelve months the service has prioritised foster carer reviews and safer care policies. Evidence was seen of individual managers developing systems to monitor progress in these areas. Due to staffing shortages in STEPS it has not been possible to transfer some carers to this team from the FRT at the appropriate time. This has led to social workers in the FRT carrying a large support case load and preventing new assessments from being allocated, thus work that would normally be prioritised through the workload management system has not been completed.

Shortfalls were noted at the last inspection in relation to foster carer annual reviews. Significant progress has been made in this area. Limited management systems have been developed to monitor the percentage of carer reviews completed. Inspectors found some evidence of individual managers developing their own systems to monitor assessment, approval and review practices, however inspectors found gaps in recent assessment and review reports which do not appear to have been identified by these systems

Gloucestershire Social Service Department is part of the SWAP scheme whereby local authorities exchange information regarding independent fostering agencies. The Single Referral Service that has responsibility for identifying out-of-county placements holds this information.

Staff reported receiving appropriate levels of supervision from their team managers, in

specific situations external specialised advice has been available to staff. Some gaps in recorded supervision were identified, by inspectors, including that of the Looked After Children Service Manager. Records of supervision indicate that departmental expectations are not always met; discussion appears to focus on casework issues and does not cover the other issues that the agency itself expects. Inspectors found limited evidence of feedback on performance and professional development issue within supervision.

Staff and carers reported having access to a range of on going training and appropriate professional and skills development, this includes internal and external courses, and inspectors were shown evidence to confirm this. A dedicated full-time fostering training officer has now been appointed to the Training Department and takes a lead in developing and delivering foster carer training. It was reported to inspectors that staff take up of the Post Qualify Child Care Award has been low, and inspectors could find no evidence of individual carers training portfolios during case tracking.

An administrative review is planned for 2004/5. Individual social workers did not raise specific concerns about the level of administrative support. Additional Information Technology equipment has been purchased for social workers. Some managers told inspectors that greater efficiency would be achieved through provision of laptop computers enabling staff to work from a variety of sites.

Procedures are in place to deal with enquiries from prospective carers through the FRT, carers reported that these systems work well. The Single Referral Service now co-ordinates placement requests, communication problems have been identified with fostering officers not consulted upon same day placements made by the SRS.

A range of advice is made available by the agency to carers including childcare, medical, and educational and other professional and legal advice. These services continue to be developed and a number of new initiatives have been identified in the last year particularly in regards to education and child health.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

Inspectors found evidence that there are insufficient numbers of staff to meet the needs of the fostering service. At the point of inspection records indicate that 16 carers did not have an allocated support worker. Whilst interim measures were in place with the relevant team manager nominated as contact person, the service offered to these carers is not commensurate with the statement of purpose.

At the time of the inspection one post was vacant, this was a temporary post covering maternity leave. The service was also seeking to recruit an additional team manager and inspectors were told that interviews would be held on 29.04.04. Inspectors were told that an average caseload for a social worker within one of the support teams is 25 carers; these workers also have other responsibilities including training and support groups. One social worker in the FRT supported 13 carers preventing appropriate allocation of carer assessments. Inspectors were also informed that the service has found it necessary to

commission independent social workers to undertake foster carer assessments and training being unable to allocate these internally.

Inspectors were told that the agency is currently considering transferring responsibility for assessment of family and friends carers to one of the fostering teams, whilst this is likely to enhance the quality of these assessments, unless additional posts are created, this will further stretch services and undermine the quality of service delivery.

55 carers responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, of these 76% felt that the fostering service was understaffed. During case tracking a number of carers said that they have been left without an allocated support worker for significant periods.

The fostering service has a core of very experienced staff that have worked within the service for a considerable number of years. The organisation reports that it has lost few carers to the independent fostering agencies in the area. Retention of carers and staff does not appear to be a problematic area.

The service has a recruitment policy and strategy in place. This indicates that the service considers that whilst it has sufficient internal numbers of foster placements there is not an appropriate geographical spread, it identifies two areas as having insufficient numbers of carers and plans a recruitment strategy around this. It further highlights gaps in long-term services particularly for older boys and sibling groups and in placements for children with a disability. The effectiveness of this recruitment strategy should continue to be monitored.

The assessment of foster carers follows a well-established process. The service now uses a competency-based framework for its foster care assessments. Timescales for assessment are in line with national recommendations and clear information is available to applicants on the assessment process.

Inspectors read a number of foster care assessments; some of these were detailed and analytical and covered the issues listed in standard 17.7. Other assessments were less detailed and in the inspectors opinion lacked important information, this included not contacting previous partners and offering no explanation for this, not taking up employers reference despite an applicant working with children, assessments with only one personal reference and not following up and analysing specific information. In particular extra support should be offered to field social workers if they are to retain responsibility for family and friends fostering assessments

#### **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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>1</b>
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Staff are employed by the Local Authority that has well-established employment policies and practices.

Carers are able to access out-of-hours support via the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and the Family and Placement Support Service. Carers reported that the EDT can be difficult to contact and are often unavailable to offer immediate advice, a number of the carers interviewed said that they had no knowledge of the Family Placement Support Service. The majority of carers reported that they would contact their fostering support worker if they required support out-of-hours. They said that their support workers had given them their

home and mobile telephone numbers. Whilst it is clear that these carers appreciated being able to contact their support worker, inspectors were concerned that a two tier system could potentially develop if other carers do not have access to their support workers out-of-hours. Inspectors would also question the availability of management support to these social work staff out-of-hours.

Ongoing support and supervision of carers is provided by their allocated fostering worker. Some managers have developed specific monitoring systems to ensure that carers receive monthly visits from their allocated worker. The caseload management system is used to identify caseload priorities and can help managers to identify where there are shortfalls in the level of support due to competing demands.

The Local Authority has its own 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier Health and Safety Policies to which staff are expected to adhere. In November 2003 Health and Safety in Foster Homes training was provided for adoption and fostering social workers. This outlined health and safety responsibilities, provided guidance on the health and safety checklist that is now completed for all foster homes, and identified how health and safety in carer's homes could be improved.

The Local Authority has an established whistle blowing policy that is made available to all social work staff. It is still unclear whether foster carers are aware of their responsibility, the service could consider adding this information to the Foster Carer Agreement.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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Staff interviewed reported that there is now a formal staff induction process in place, and new staff felt that this provided a useful structure to their initial introduction to the fostering service and their new role.

The majority of staff questioned reported to inspectors that they receive appropriate training opportunities; these have included joint courses with foster carers. Take up of post-qualifying training still appears to be a low priority, particularly the PQCCA. It was reported at the last inspection that it was hoped that a new system for staff appraisal would improve the assessment of need and participation of staff in ongoing training and development. Little evidence was found to support this.

The content and quality of staff appraisals (PARs) were found to vary considerably, in the inspectors view some of these did not adequately assess performance, identify training needs and produce clear action plans against which progress could be assessed. It is acknowledged that PARS is a new system and that managers and staff are still familiarising themselves with this, inspectors also accept that managers had to complete a high number of PARS in a relatively short period alongside other competing responsibilities.

The Looked After Children Service Manager has co-ordinated a series of staff briefings during team meetings to ensure that staff are informed of changes in child care legislation and related policy, this includes the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The newly appointed foster care training officer based in the training department will have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of courses provided along with the individual team managers and service manager.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

All staff are supplied with an appropriate job description setting out their duties and responsibilities. Policies and procedures are available to staff, some remain dated but the service has embarked upon a process of updating these.

The service expects staff to have formal supervision on a monthly basis. The system of staff appraisals has recently been reviewed and the PARS system introduced. Specific gaps in these systems have already been reported including a lack of recorded evidence of monthly supervision for key staff and incomplete staff annual appraisals.

Staff confirmed that team meetings and team discussions are regularly held and minutes for one off the teams were seen.

**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

Records and discussions indicate that there is a strategy in place for working with carers although this is not documented. A recommendation was made in relation to this after the last inspection and the service intends to develop a policy document during the forthcoming year.

A number of carers raised concerns about the payments for skills scheme. Some reported that they believed they had developed the skills of Level 3 carers and were concerned that this had not been recognised by the department and that consequently they were not being paid at Level 3 rates. Confusion also existed amongst carers as to whether the level of payment received related solely to the skills of the carer or in part to the needs of the child placed. Other carers believed that a quota system is operated so that whilst they may have the skills they are prevented from progressing through to Level 2 or 3. Some carers indicated to inspectors that they had considered applying to local IFA's as they had become disillusioned with the payment for skills scheme. Further clarification should be provided to carers on the payment for skills scheme.

The service is in the process of setting up additional foster carer support groups throughout the county. Carers interviewed were enthusiastic about this development and these groups should provide an appropriate forum for discussion of carer concerns including those relating to the payment for skills scheme.

Significant progress has been made in the area of foster carer annual reviews since the last inspection. These were prioritised by the service and now 78% of carers have received an annual review. The process for annual reviews in the longer-term has yet to be confirmed. Written guidance should be provided for carers and staff to outline this process once it has been agreed; this should clarify any role that foster panel may play in sampling carer reviews, and what processes will be followed if the review indicates that a change to a carers approval is required.

Carers were clear about the role of their AFO and valued the support offered.

It was reported to inspectors that communication between AFO's and their fieldwork counterparts has suffered since the SRS has had responsibility for making placements. Both AFO's and field social workers are concerned that placements are made without consultation between fostering and fieldwork teams. Inspectors heard of a number of examples where placements made raised significant concerns for both field social workers and AFO's.

**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**

In the majority of cases carers are supervised by an appropriately qualified AFO. However at the time of the inspection records indicated that 16 carers did not have an allocated support worker. Inspectors were informed that a number of these were withdrawing from fostering and that the remainder had only a team manager as contact link.

Evidence was found during case tracking to confirm that the support offered to carers is generally of a high quality. Further evidence was found to confirm that AFO's monitor carer practice and encourage practice developments in a sensitive and consistent manner. Evidence of unannounced visits were found on some files, inspectors acknowledge good practice in a particular case where an AFO visited a carer unannounced at a weekend to ensure that they visited whilst a child was in placement. On other files no evidence of unannounced visits could be found and on some carer reviews the relevant section had been left blank.

The service has yet to develop its own specific foster carer handbook. Carers do receive a nationally produced publication on approval but this obviously does not detail local practices services and expectations. The service intends to publish and distribute a carer handbook within the financial year 2004-5. The lack of a service handbook contributes to some of the confusion and misunderstanding that appears to exist within the foster carer network

Since the last inspection the service has produced a new Foster Carer Agreement. In developing this, the service has clearly referred to Schedule 5 however in the inspectors view the agreement does not meet the requirements of this schedule. The support arrangements provided by the department should be more clearly set out to include the proposed frequency of support visits and arrangements for out-of-hours support. The section on reviews should be amended to reflect the fact that foster panel make recommendations to the agency decision maker, and not decisions, on approvals. This section currently infers that all reviews will be presented to foster panel but inspectors were informed that this is not the case, this should also be amended. The agreement should also set out the procedure for making representations rather than referring to a leaflet that will be provided.

All foster carers automatically become members of The Fostering Network and are therefore eligible for the services this provides. Their support worker makes carers aware of their membership and this is also referred to in the new Foster Carer Agreement.

Some carers continued to raise concerns about payments they receive. Particular concern was expressed about the delays that some carers have experienced in receiving payments at the start of a placement but also problems of over payment where payments have continued after a child has moved on. Whilst these problems did not appear to be widespread they clearly caused some carers considerable inconvenience and anxiety however inspectors were satisfied that the service had taken action to rectify this and subsequently no recommendation is made.

Foster carers have access to the Corporate Complaints Procedure and are provided with written information about this, however insufficient detail is included in the Foster Carer Agreement. Following the last inspection a working party was established which considered the role that Foster Panel should play when allegations are made against foster carers. It is planned that a series of briefing for foster carers will be held throughout 2004-5 to increase

their awareness of the complaints and allegation processes. These processes should be set out in the Foster Care Handbook, that is currently being developed, and in particular inspectors would recommended that the provision of support that will be made available to carers who are subject of an allegation and investigation should be detailed.

Records of allegations, the investigations and outcomes, are maintained and inspectors were provided with a summary of these. These showed that incidents were thoroughly investigated. A specific Complaints and Allegations Panel was set up to help process complaints and investigations. The service must ensure that such panels only make recommendations on approval status and take care to ensure that they are appropriately established.

Inspectors found evidence that where appropriate the service removes carers from the register, policy guidance in relation to this area of work has been developed since the last inspection. However there is no specific policy guidance available to the fostering service in relation to making a PoCAL referral; the service indicated that this would be developed. Details should be added to the draft Complaints, Serious Incidents and Child Protection Concerns involving Foster Carers policy.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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All carers receive pre-approval training; this is delivered by AFO's and includes input from experienced carers. Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers there is an expectation that they both attend this training.

The service has separate programmes of training for Level 1, 2 and 3 Carers. NVQ's for foster carers have now been launched, 10 carers have taken up places and a further 10 identified for the next intake although no date has been set for this. A number of carers raised concerns about lack of access to NVQ's, currently only Level 3 carers will be enrolled.

Four mandatory courses were arranged for carers in the past year these were:

- Safe Care/Development of Safe Care Policy
- Foster Carer role and responsibilities in relation to Education of Looked After Children
- Foster Carer role and responsibilities in relation to Health of Looked After Children
- Valuing Diversity and Promoting Equality.

The service expects a Foster Carer Training proforma to be on each file, inspectors found this to be patchy and where they were found on file they were not always accurately completed.

The mandatory safe care training for carers was supported with the development of individual safe care policies. Not all carers have developed these policies yet and inspectors have already noted concern about the quality of some of the policies sampled.

Carers raised concerns about the level of support offered to their own children. Carers reported that whilst some AFO's ensure that they have contact with their children and explore the impact that fostering has upon them, others have very limited contact with their children. The majority of carers were concerned that their children received no formal

recognition for the significant role they play when their family fosters. This appears to be the cause of some resentment.

Whilst there is an expectation that a training plan is included in the foster carer annual review this was found to be limited in a number of the reviews sampled

The effectiveness of training is reviewed on an ongoing basis and the foster care trainer will have responsibility for formally evaluating this on an annual basis.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Whilst the National Standards do not expect two separate, duplicate, children's records to be maintained by a local authority, where the fostering service does maintain children's records these should comply with the National Standards and the department's own written policy. This policy should establish the purpose, format and content of files and should clarify what is kept on carer and children's files.

The department's policy allows for limited information on children currently in placement to be included in Section 6 of carer's files, however this policy guidance (Departmental Recording Policy for Adoption and Fostering Teams) does not set out what should be included in this section and inspectors found considerable difference in practice. Team Managers stated that they would expect to find basic LAC information including Placement Agreements, EIR and Assessment and Action Records along with LAC Reviews to be in this section of files. Inspectors found very little information on current placements in some files, in a number of cases Placement Agreements were not found on file and the AFO could not confirm that a Placement Agreement had been made. In other cases where an exemption or variation was required no evidence could be found on file to confirm that this had been granted. Inspectors queried this with AFO's and found that some variations had not been applied for where needed.

Foster carers were aware of the basis for their current placements, they knew the intended duration of the placement, where this was clear, understood the purpose of the placement and the child's legal status.

Inspectors found examples of carers encouraging children to reflect upon and understand their history. There were also good examples of formal life story work being undertaken. Carers described AFO's offering guidance and support in these areas but had received no written guidance.

The extent to which carers maintained ongoing recording for the children in placement varied. Some kept detailed records which were read and signed by their AFO's during supervisory visits, these records provided valuable reference material when carers were preparing information for reviews. These carers also felt that their records would afford them with a level of protection in the case of a malicious allegation or complaint being made. In other cases records kept were limited. The service should strive for a greater level of consistency between carers and consider including written guidance in the foster carer handbook to establish the minimum standard expected by the service.

All carer's tracked maintained records in a suitably secure fashion, they were aware of the confidential nature of the information disclosed to them and took care not to share this inappropriately. Some carers remained concerned that field social workers do not disclose all relevant pre-placement information to them; here carer's have challenged this with the support of their AFO.

**Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

Separate records are maintained for staff, carers and children. These are in a permanent form and are stored in the County Council archives when they are no longer required but can be accessed on request. Guidelines exist for staff on the keeping and retention of files and there is a procedure for storage and managing confidential information.

Policy guidance states that it is the AFO's responsibility to ensure that files are appropriately maintained. All entries are expected to be legible, signed and dated. In the majority of cases this guidance was followed and files were of a good standard. However inspectors were concerned with the quality of some of the files they sampled, in these records weren't always legible, they weren't signed and sometimes not dated and not filed in a chronological or systematic way. On these files little evidence could be found of support/supervision visits taking place and it was difficult to determine placement history.

The action plan presented to the Commission following the last inspection indicated that the service intends to develop a system to monitor the adequacy of records during the coming financial year 2004/5. It is important, given the gaps reported, that this is prioritised.

Records of checks and references conducted on carers are kept on record.

All records were found to be stored securely and there is a departmental policy on access to records.

There is no evidence that carers and children are encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments including any disagreement with what is written. The service accepted the recommendation made for encouraging user access following the last inspection and prioritised this for action in 2004/5. This information might usefully be included in the children's guide and foster carer handbook.

The customer relations officer holds records of complaints and investigations are co-ordinated by child protection teams. Comprehensive reports are made following investigations in to allegations and inspectors read a sample of these, this included reports by independent consultants commissioned to lead investigations. During case tracking inspectors found that whilst the investigation was thorough the outcome of the investigation was unclear. In one case a carer had been exonerated of blame but this was not recorded on file and no evidence could be found to confirm that the carer had been appropriately informed, in writing, of the outcome of the investigation.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			200
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			321
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			346
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			22
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			13
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	103.53	<b>Maximum £</b>	292.16

## 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 Social Services premises including those used for all the main functions of the fostering service are accessible to all workers during normal working hours.

The premises used by the service do have an equipped base from which staff can work and access to IT equipment has been further improved in the last year. Staff reported that they have adequate desk and storage space.

There are facilities for the secure retention of records. Appropriate measures exist to safeguard IT systems with all workers having individual log-in details. Appropriate security systems are in place.

The County Council has insurance arrangements in place to cover all of its premises.

The mainstream foster panels currently meet at the County Hall, the surroundings are austere and carers reported to inspectors that they find these intimidating. AFO's were concerned about confidentiality issues when meeting with carers prior to and following panel.

## 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?
This standard does not apply	9

### 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?
This standard does not apply	9

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

Carers receive an allowance and fee, depending upon their skill level, for each child in placement. These allowances are well publicised throughout the service.

As detailed previously some carers raised concerns about the prompt payment of fees and allowances at the start of placements, others were concerned that payments continued following children moving on. These problems did not appear to be widespread but caused considerable inconvenience where they occurred. The new management information system 'SAFE' is now in place, this is linked to the payments for foster carers system and should enable AFO's to further monitor foster carer payments. It is anticipated that this system will therefore further reduce the cases over and under payment.

Carers reported that there were delays in assessments of skills level and were left feeling that whilst they were operating at a particular skill level they were not necessarily paid appropriately.

## 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

In the past year five separate panels have been in operation, these have covered Mainstream Foster Approvals (2), Carer Reviews, Complaints and Investigations and the Family Link Scheme, the lines between these panels are blurred in one case inspectors found that a fostering application had been presented to the complaints and allegations panel instead of to a mainstream panel. An inspector was able to attend the mainstream foster panel which currently deals with the bulk of carer assessments, inspectors were informed that in the future the service may chose to operate with this as the only panel.

No business should be conducted by a foster panel unless at least five of its members, including the person appointed to chair the panel, or the vice chair, at least one of the social workers employed by the fostering service and at least two of the independent members are present (Reg 25(1)). Inspectors found that none of the panels had been appropriately established, they have not been quorate and therefore have acted illegally. Panels lacked sufficient independent members and foster carer representatives. Two of the panels had identified an adult who had been in care themselves and a County Councillor the others had not. The two mainstream panels have members who have education expertise but no members with expertise in child health. Panel do have access to the agency medical advisor on health matters.

The service has provided appropriate written foster panel procedures and terms of reference, these come in to force on 1.04.04. These set out the membership required, the functions of panels, the decision making process including where there is disagreement, the protocol for panel members, guidelines for prospective and approved carers attending panel and the procedure for ensuring turn over of panel members. This guidance identifies the agency decision maker as the Head of Children's Services.

The terms of reference clearly state the checks that are required for panel members prior to their appointment, these checks are in place for most panel members however inspectors were informed that there was no evidence of a CRB check for one member and that for others these were still being processed, some members had not yet returned the confidentiality agreement.

The terms of reference state that panel should receive a quarterly report on situations where foster carers have been granted temporary variation to their normal approval. In the inspectors view panel should play a key role in recommending variations and exemptions to the normal fostering limit and not just be informed of the situations where this has occurred. Variations and exemptions should be considered a temporary measure, a review date

should be set and panel consulted if an extension is required.

The mainstream Foster Panel is divided into two, the Tuesday Panel and the Thursday Panel. These are chaired by the Looked After Children's Service Manager and inspectors were satisfied that this meets the criteria set out in Regulation 24(2), although a good practice development would be to identify a suitably qualified but more independent chair. An inspector had the opportunity to attend the Thursday panel, and whilst this was not quorate it operated in a professional manner and identified appropriate areas where further clarification in assessments and reviews were required. In the inspectors view a number of the reports presented to panel lacked sufficient detail and analysis of information, the Chair confirmed that she agreed with some of these observations. It is important therefore that the panel develops its quality assurance function to provide feedback to the fostering teams on the quality of reports presented to panel. The service has recognised this and has set out the basis of an annual foster panel report that will perform this aspect of panel's quality assurance function.

Inspectors have noted that foster care applicants who attend panel are not given feedback following panel. Whilst inspectors acknowledge that panel does not make decisions, in the inspectors view it would still be appropriate for the panel chair to discuss the recommendation that panel will make with applicants and assessing social worker. This feedback would serve to fill the gap between panel and decision-making and in the majority of cases would offer reassurance to applicants. In the inspectors experience this is generally accepted good practice elsewhere.

## 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
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The Family Link Service has 106 carers all of whom have an allocated support worker. 10 carers are currently being assessed and 32 children are waiting for placements.

A Family Link Reference Group has been established; this includes parent and carer representatives and meets quarterly. The statement of purpose has been ratified by this group but has not yet been presented to councillors.

The service is in the process of developing a children's guide that will be available in Makaton.

Annual reviews are completed by Family Link Social Workers and presented to the Family Link Panel, which meets six weekly. This panel is not quorate; it does not have appropriate independent members or agency social workers.

The service is developing a recruitment strategy and is considering introducing an incentive payment for carers who recommend friends to the service and a reward for long service.

The Family Link Foster Carer Agreement should be reviewed, as it does not fulfil the requirements of Schedule 5.

During case tracking inspectors found that when children were placed with a family link carer outside of the terms of their approval, no variation or exemption had been applied for. The service must ensure that systems are in place and followed to ensure that appropriate permission is sought for exemptions or variations.

As previously reported, the scheme's practice is in line with standards in that parents remain central to the promotion of education needs.

## 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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Inspectors found evidence through contact with a range of people to indicate that the Local Authority is sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing family and friends as carers. Systems are in place to encourage family and friends to offer placements and increasingly the authority is encouraging the use of residence and adoption orders to secure greater permanence for young people living with family and friends.

Family and friends assessments are currently completed by field social workers. As reported earlier these workers do not feel that they have the relevant skills or expertise to complete this work. Inspectors were informed that the authority may transfer responsibility for family and friends assessments to the fostering service, whilst this may help to integrate these carers in to the mainstream fostering service it will have significant workload implications for the current fostering teams.

Family and friends carers do not have access to the same quality of support and training as other foster carers. They are not allocated an AFO as support worker and are not routinely invited to training provided for other registered carers.

**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 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

YES

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 11<sup>th</sup> August 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I Cathy Shea of Local Authority 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 Cathy Shea of Local Authority 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.

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