



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

WCC Fostering

Adoption Services

Faraday Hall

Lower Hillmorton Road

Rugby

Warwickshire

CV21 3TU

2nd 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

WCC Fostering

Address

Warwickshire Social Services Department

Shire Hall

Market Place

Warwick

Local Authority Manager

Brenda Vincent

Tel No:

01926 451911

Address

Fostering and Adoption Development Team

Faraday Hall

Lower Hillmorton Road

Rugby

Warwickshire

CV21 3TU

Fax No:

01926 413344

Email Address

brendavincent@warwickshire.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

N/A

Date of Inspection Visit		2nd March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Christy Wannop	073698
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Brenda Vincent	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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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 WCC Fostering. 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.

Within Warwickshire County Council Social Services Department the Principal Operations Manager, Brenda Vincent, has strategic lead responsibility for the Fostering Service. She is based in the Fostering and Adoption Development Team in Rugby.

There are five district fostering teams operating in each of the geographical areas of Warwickshire. These teams support the recruitment and preparation of foster carers, assess prospective foster carers, make placement matches and provide ongoing support. There is a Fostering Panel that meets twice a month, once in the north and once in the south of the county.

Warwickshire has developed partnership arrangements with Barnardo's for a remand and short intensive crisis fostering service. Warwickshire also has a "preferred provider arrangement with Pathways Care Ltd and offers a joint panel for this organisation. Warwickshire provides a fostering service to all looked after children within Warwickshire's boundaries.

For recruitment purpose, foster carers are defined, as family and friends, permanency, family link or mainstream, in addition there are special emergency duty foster carers.

The fostering service provides a designated social worker to foster carers, access to complaints and representations and access to the Children's Rights Service. It recruits, assesses, approves, trains, reviews and supports its carers. There is a Payment for Skills Scheme, respite, and sessional support for carers and a sitting service.

Figures supplied for the inspection are not current: October 02 figures detail 49 carers gaining approval, 20 being family and friends' carers and a further 14 mainstream carers. The total number of carers was 276. The majority were mainstream carers at 157, followed by family link and family and friends at 47 and 33 respectively. Four families provide EDT emergency placements. 12 were permanency carers. 298 children had been placed at September 02. 253 had been "looked after for one year or more. Between April 2003 and 31st March 2004, the Fostering Service looked after 477 children at any one time. These 477 children were subject to 1065 different placement episodes during the year.

Warwickshire Social Services is well placed to promote good inter agency links and works to ensure co-ordinated support for children in placement, in relation to their health, education, emotional and practical needs.

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.)

Local authority services are inspected but not registered. The inspection of a local authority fostering service differs greatly from that of an independent agency, in that partnership working with the children and family fieldwork teams is implicit in the management systems and procedures used by all teams of professionals employed within the social services department.

As this is the first time the organisation has been formally measured against the National Minimum Standards, it is expected that there will be a higher number of recommendations made this year, than would be found in subsequent inspections. However the inspection found that the service was working well to promote a good quality and effective foster care provision.

The inspection took place across a two-week period. Three of the five district areas were visited and a selection of carers drawn for study. The Social Services Inspectorate had recently completed an inspection of Children's Services and looked at fostering services in the remaining two districts. The inspector observed the fostering panel, team leader meetings, spoke with a group of foster carers, managers within the service, central training and recruitment section, development officers for fostering and disability and health within fostering; attended training for foster carers, met with the County Councillor with portfolio for children and with the Head of Children's services. The inspector conducted interviews with individuals within the service: carers, children, and fostering and administrative staff. Foster carers and children were consulted through individual questionnaires. Some children's placing social workers were also interviewed as part of the focus on "case tracking" of five foster carers. The views of associated professionals were also canvassed.

Carers and foster children were sent a questionnaire. Thirty-nine children and sixty-three carers responded to Commission for Social Care Inspection questionnaires. Some carers were very positive in their general comments about the service.

Two carers were very disillusioned and unhappy. These views have been incorporated throughout the report.

Questionnaires were sent to social workers in placing children's teams. It was suggested that a team response could be given, or social workers could make individual responses. Six completed questionnaires were received, covering 9 children in 6 foster homes. The majority of comments and responses were positive.

Statement of Purpose

National Minimum Standard 1

This standard was almost met

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide. Information should be updated and more detail included about the range of fostering service provided to children. The Children's Guide is under development and this will be incorporated into the Looked after Children's guide for looked

after children.

The Department has a range of groups that talk to "looked after" children about their services and needs.

Children reported being often asked by their carers for their opinions and views, only one reported never being asked. The majority of children said that something had changed because of what they had said.

Half the children who replied with questionnaires said they had been asked by the fostering service about carers but only eight said they had been asked about how the service could be improved.

Carers who had been involved in development of services through consultation groups had appreciated this.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2-3.

All standards met.

The fostering service is provided and managed by those with appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children. Clear, imaginative leadership and professional relationships at senior level encourage confidence from fostering staff in their managers. The employment of a Foster Care Development Officer has been crucial in enabling some imaginative and direct work with carers and staff to produce desired outcomes.

Management of the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 4-5

All met

The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding conflicts and confusion of role. Warwickshire employs several fostering support staff that are also foster carers. These people currently in post are exempted under regulation 50(7). This conflict of interest in the light of the Fostering Regulations is recognised and no further appointments are being made. Staff acknowledge that the dual role of these people has been a positive benefit to carers and fostering staff and regret the loss of these specifically defined posts.

There is good practice in tracking and analysing the information identified in the development plan and established by the Best Value Review. Analytical and imaginative approach to achieving aims has been established. This approach could be extended to include the matters required under Schedule 7 and Schedule 8, to more easily meet the Fostering Regulations 2002.

Securing and Promoting Welfare National Minimum Standards 6-14

One of these standards was not met, 8 were met.

The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare. There are good relationships at senior level around planning, development and cross agency issues. The organisation supports and values diversity in carers and children. It consults with children.

Policy and procedure is fully in place to guide practice. The challenge is to ensure that this is

effectively translated into practice in carers' homes and at the point at which placement agreements are established. The service must ensure that safe care plans are in place and that issues identified in risk assessments do result in concrete documented plans for carers to support children in their care, whether this is in relation to sexually inappropriate behaviour, self harm, violence, drug abuse or other "risk" behaviours.

The Operational Manager reports that there are quality standards regarding bedroom-sharing arrangements and that staff are guided by additional safe placement agreements to consider these arrangements. It is recommended that the actual bedroom sharing arrangements of children living in foster care within the service is established and include this indicator in the review of the quality of care under Regulation 42.

The service seeks to establish good practice in matching children with carers. Training and workshops are planned and a matching matrix to be introduced.

Children were positive in feedback about feeling "helped" with a wide range of issues in health, education, hobbies and activities and in other areas such as religion, language, and racial and cultural background.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers. National Minimum Standards 15-23

1 standard was not met, 8 were met.

The local authority has a sound pragmatic approach to providing a quality service to foster carers and is responsive to their needs. The manager should consider what elements of this approach could be used to develop the status, recruitment and career processes for employees. Staff at all levels confirmed the difficulties encountered and the impact that short staffing had on the quality of service delivered when it was not possible to recruit to vacant posts. The inspector recognises the difficult national picture in recruiting social work staff. Almost all carers who responded to questionnaires reported that there were not enough social work staff.

The allocated numbers of fostering social work staff and their range of qualifications and experience would be sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation, if fully staffed. 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.

There is excellent practice in recruitment and training of carers and support available to them.

In questionnaires, carers reported their concerns that matching was not always well done, that there is a need for more support from other carers to "share and air" their experiences after difficult placements. A number of carers reported feeling valued for what they did and that the "Payment for Skills" scheme had enhanced their feelings of value. Of key importance to carers was the availability of 24-hour advice. They cited the need for good communication and the need for payments to carers and sorting out payment issues to be viewed as a priority task by Social Services Department staff.

Records

24-25

Two standards were not met.

Records as required are kept in relation to the fostering service and the individual foster

carers and foster children. Warwickshire Social Services Department uses Looked after Children documentation. This provides a basis for the information needed by the foster carer to achieve the goals of the placement. Only one carer visited had a copy of this legal agreement. It is recommended that copies of the referral, matching and placement agreement and other Looked after Children Placement plan and essential information be kept by the fostering service. This should be the "working document" that guides and reviews the purpose, needs of the child and outcomes of work with the child.

The scope of the monitoring under Schedule 7 to be done by the Operational Manager is enormous. Systems must be in place in each district to enable crucial information, particularly in relation to complaints and Child Protection matters to be promptly collated. The local authority should consider how existing data collection and statistical analysis systems can be extended to include Schedule 7 monitoring and Schedule 8 notifications.

Fitness of Premises for use as a Fostering Service.

National Minimum Standard 26

Met

The premises used as offices by the fostering provider are suitable for the purpose. Distinct advantages are noted where Fostering Teams share a building with Children Teams. Benefits identified by staff are communication over payments and placements. Disability access is an issue in Stratford. Each social worker should have access to an available computer as required for the purposes of their job.

Financial Requirements

National Minimum Standards 27-29

All met

The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate.

The adoption of a payment for skills scheme, linked to skills and training and competencies of carers was viewed by all as a positive development. Further review is considered of pay levels for the Family Link scheme.

The service had already identified the difficulties in the notifications of payments system and plans to address the human and technical action required to make this system work for carers, fostering staff, children's team administrators and finance department. This was one of the key themes identified by all throughout the inspection.

Fostering Panels

National Minimum Standard 30

Met

The Fostering Panel is 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. The panel manager is able to produce clear statistics analysing the business of the panels for consideration by the strategic and operational fostering managers.

The Panel Manager is seeking additional membership in order to have representation from parents of children or adults who have been fostered.

The quality function of the panel is further supplemented by the Foster Care Reference Group, which the manager seeks to improve with additional education and health representation.

Short Term Breaks

National Minimum Standard 31**Met**

The family Link Scheme previously variously organised between children's disability and fostering teams, has now been brought completely within the fostering service. Fostering social workers have been identified in the north, south and Rugby to lead on Family Link Placements and a Disability Development officer has been appointed to consider the direction and needs of this service within fostering.

When foster Care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Family and Friends as Carers.**National Minimum Standard 32****Met**

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

The Development plan has identified further work to be done in relation to particular needs and challenges posed by family and friends placements and this is planned.

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 Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 81 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 81(4)(a) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 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 81(3)(a) of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Christy Wannop	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Joan Hawtin	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements 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	The local authority must detail the type of fostering placements available to children as part of the services provided in the Statement of Purpose and ensure full and current information.	1/10/04
2	3	FS1	The local authority must create a children's Guide to Foster Care, to include the address and telephone number of the Commission, and the various routes for complaint and representation, including to the Commission.	1/12/04
3	11, 34	FS6	The local authority should ensure that where risk for children, behavioural, self-harm or Sibs, have been identified through referral and matching processes, that a safe care plan and additional detailed guidance is put in place for carers.	1/10/04
4	19	FS17	The local authority must ensure an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and improve the recruitment and retention of fostering social workers.	1/12/04
5	34	FS24	The local authority must ensure that the foster carer holds a current, accurate placement agreement and for Family Link placements that a placement agreement is in place that meets the requirements of the fostering regulations 2002.	1/12/04

6	42, 43	FS25	The local authority must ensure that all complaints and Child Protection allegations are promptly collated and passed on by team leaders/operations managers in districts to enable the fulfilment of responsibilities under Fostering Regulations for Schedule 7 review and Schedule 8 notifications.	1/10/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The local authority should ensure that the Statement of Purpose is kept under review and that the information currently maintained by the service on its database can be incorporated.
2	FS6	The local authority should establish the actual bedroom sharing arrangements of children living in foster care within the service and include this indicator in the review of the quality of care under Regulation 42.
3	FS8	The local authority should analyse the use of temporary extensions to registration approval as part of Reg 42 quality review.
4	FS8	The local authority should audit the use of electronic and paper/photo foster carer profiles to ensure that children always have advance information about any placement.
5	FS12	The local authority should consider an audit of the health needs of Looked after Children in fostering in order to include this in the matching process and ensure that carers have skills necessary for care and the service has procedures to support safe practice.
6	FS15	The Local Authority should follow up references as required by Regulation 20 with a telephone call to seek verification from each referee.
7	FS15	Reference requests by the local authority should seek confirmation of suitability to work with children/vulnerable people.
8	FS15	The local authority should ensure that sufficient information required to safeguard children, in accordance with Schedule 1, is maintained in relation to independent panel members
9	FS16	The local authority should ensure that every fostering social worker has ease of access to a computer
10	FS16	The Foster Care Reference Group and Fostering Service Manager should make formal links with the Primary Care Trust LAC nurses or Primary Care Trust staff with strategic responsibility for the health of looked after children.

11	FS19	The local authority should ensure that Induction opportunities for social work staff are equably applied across geographical districts regardless of staffing shortfalls.
12	FS22	Understanding of complaints and allegations procedures should be reinforced in district fostering teams in order that the Fostering Operations Manager can be properly informed about the accurate situation.
13	FS24	The local authority should reinforce status of the placement agreement as the legal basis and “working” document to direct and define the scope of work in relation to any placement. This document should be supported with risk assessments, safe care plans, specific management plans for health, contact, behaviour, education where identified.
14	FS24	The local authority should put in place placement plan, general information and placement agreement audits for carers at the time of the annual review.
15	FS24	It is recommended that copies of the referral, matching and placement agreement and other Looked after Children Placement plan and essential information be kept by the fostering service.
16	FS24	The local authority should ensure that confidential information kept by foster carers is stored and returned once the child has moved on.
17	FS24	The local authority should consider a record for daily or weekly recording for carers to prompt information in relation to Schedule 7 responsibilities that will allow the manager to lift essential information clearly.
18	FS25	The local authority should clarify the complaints procedure to include reference to the Commission and to reflect the current titles of Social Services Department staff.
19	FS25	The local authority should consider how existing data collection and statistical analysis systems could be extended to include schedule 7 monitoring and schedule 8 notifications.
20	FS29	The local authority should establish reliable and workable systems for making timely, accurate payments to carers. These systems must work in support of the often unplanned and flexible nature of the fostering task and the priorities within both fostering and children’s teams.
21	FS30	The local authority should include as independent members of the panel, people with expertise in education and child health and who have had experience of having their child, or being themselves in foster care.
22	FS9	Ensure that CSCI are notified of CP strategy meetings

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

Number of Inspector days spent	12
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	2/3/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	74

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

“X” is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.
Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Statement of Purpose includes the majority of information required, with the following exceptions:

- Services provided in relation to the type of fostering placements provided.
- Numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff.
 (Information is not contained within Statement of Purpose about the central Fostering Services Team and other administrative and business support staff.)
- Numbers of foster carers (This is based on Oct 2002 figures)
- Numbers of children for 2003/04. Information is based on September 2002 figures.
- Numbers of complaints and their outcomes for 2003/4. Information is based on Sept 2002 figures.

The manager acknowledges that availability of the statement to children, staff and parents could be improved and plans to summarise the Statement of Purpose for inclusion on the fostering Website. Questionnaire responses indicated that provision of information to placing social workers about the service was not always in place. Two-thirds had not been provided with the service’s Statement of Purpose and half had not received information about the complaints procedure. The Operational manager reports that this information has been distributed to all Children’s Teams and is available on “the browser”, the electronic procedural and information manual for the Social Services Department. Foster carers generally felt well informed and consulted about the service.

The Statement of Purpose is intended to be a “live” and accurate reflection of the service provided and its resources. A requirement has been made to ensure up to date information can be presented.

A children’s guide is not yet available. The "looked after children" consultation group of professionals has routes to various young people’s groups for consultation about the guide. Currently there is a glossy folder “ What’s it all about” of information for young people being “looked after”. It is planned for the Children’s Guide to Foster Care to be inserted in this file. It was reported by a senior manager that young people had specified that information should be in one place.

Policies, procedures and written guidance are consistent with the Statement of Purpose. The inspector had access to computerised “browser” procedures. All staff have access to computers to obtain these.

The manager reported that a parents' summary of the Statement of Purpose would be created following the successful first review of that document in April 2004. This would be the timely point to update the statistical information mentioned above.

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?	4
<p>The manager of the fostering and adoption service has</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CQSW • Diploma in management Studies (Open University) • Has worked in the last five years as Permanency Co coordinator for Warwickshire and was appointed to present role as Principal Operations Manager (Fostering and Adoption) in July 2003 <p>There is one Children's Operations Manager and one Fostering Team Leader in each of the five districts within Warwickshire. (Rugby, Nuneaton, North Warwickshire, Stratford and Leamington/Warwick.) The Operations Managers manage Fostering and Children's Service Teams. One or more of these staff deputise in the absence of the Principal Operations Manager.</p> <p>Fostering managers have management training opportunities. The department offers team managers the opportunity to do the Certificate in Management through its partnership agreement with Coventry University.</p> <p>The inspection process showed that the service was organised, managed and staffed by people who were interested, motivated and resourceful.</p> <p>The manager reported that effective cost centre management arrangements were in place.</p>		

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Regulations 2002 in relation to staff is in place. Four staff records were sampled and inspected at the Human Resources head quarters in Leamington Spa.

The manager is aware of the need to follow up two written references, including the person's most recent employer, with a telephone enquiry. There was evidence on staff files that some Team Leaders were doing this in the districts. The inspector suggests that this is the most appropriate person to make these personal contacts. Confirmation of suitability could be made to Human Resources via e-mail.

Human Resources intend to renew CRB checks every three years. Advice was given about retention and portability of CRB checks.

Records are kept of checks and references.

There is a front sheet of information required by the Social Services Department. It is recommended that this be extended to include Schedule 1 information and National Foster Care Association Code of Practice for safe recruitment. Reference requests do not specifically seek verification of suitability to work with children. Recommendations are made later in National Minimum Standard 15.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Manager and staff roles are clear. The Manager has representation on Children's Services Group (CSG) and is supervised by the Assistant Head of Children's Services for Quality with overall responsibility for the service and the Chair of the Fostering Panel. The Head of Children's Services is the Decision Maker for the service and chairs the CSG. The Manager chairs Fostering Operational Manager meetings; Fostering Team Leader meetings and Foster care Reference Group.

There are proper financial procedures. There is a financial handbook for foster carers. There is monthly budgetary forecasting arrangements and cost centre management. Information is provided about

- Charges for each of its services
- Statements of the amounts paid to carers through its Payment for Skills Scheme

The manager reported that unit costing of the service is available and can give information about cost of placement, NVQ and training etc.

Carers, managers and staff are informed of their responsibility to declare conflicts of interest at induction and in the foster carer agreement. Warwickshire County Council has an additional policy.

Warwickshire has identified an independent fostering "preferred provider", Pathway Care Midlands Ltd with whom it will seek placements. It has a service level agreement with Barnardo's to provide short-term emergency placements and remand fostering placements. The Commission inspects and regulates both of these independent Fostering Agencies. Barnardo's Albion Court project remains unregistered.

West Midlands Child Care Consortium pre-placement agreements are in place with all independent fostering agencies with which Warwickshire makes placements.

The Fostering Service collates appropriate notifications, though there may be a lapse of some weeks before receipt by the Commission. Notifications under schedule 8, while not statutory for local authorities, have been made. There is a communication chain, which starts with carers and ends with the Principal Operations Manager for Fostering.

There have been some delays and omissions in receiving these. Notifications are issued finally by the Operational Manager for Fostering.

It is suggested that District Fostering Team Leaders should coordinate these and take responsibility for making timely notifications both internally and externally to the Commission.

Timely notifications are particularly important in relation to Child Protection issues so that CSCI can attend Strategy meetings where appropriate. The Commission has not been invited to any strategy meetings involving Warwickshire children in foster care, despite an agreement between Association of Directors of Social Services and National Care Standards Commission.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:	29
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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.	1
Serious illness or accident of a child.	5
Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.	0
Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	0
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	1
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	14
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	13

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
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Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0
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Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The manager has a job description, which details responsibilities, level of delegation and lines of accountability. There are clear arrangements to identify which Operations Manager is in charge when the manager is absent.

Service Performance within the Social Services Department, including fostering, is reviewed by the Health and Welfare Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Council, against the DoH Performance Assessment Framework Indicators. The Manager reported that the Social Services Inspectorate has awarded “2 stars” to Warwickshire, stating that Children’s services are serving most people well.

There has been a “Best Value” Review of Family Placement in 2000 and subsequent audits of the Fostering Service against the UK National Foster Care Association Standards for Foster Care and National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2002. Compliance with both sets of standards are reviewed and monitored by Children’s Services Group (CSG)

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The suitability of the foster home, its size, and number of bedrooms is addressed during the recruitment and selection of foster carers. It is inspected annually by the fostering social worker. Annual unannounced visits have been introduced. Foster homes visited were warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to reasonable standards of cleanliness and hygiene.

Each child had its own bed. The service has additional internal standards about sharing bedrooms. The service managers are pragmatic about the necessity of asking foster children and Looked after Children to share bedrooms. The service is not aware of how many Looked after Children at any time are sharing a bedroom. A recommendation has been made to audit this as part of its quality assurance under Regulation 42.

There was sufficient privacy and space. Children with specific needs arising from disability had equipment and adaptations required. Districts keep a store of useful equipment. Child safety barriers and equipment are fitted.

The Social Services Department has funded or made loans to carers offering a permanent placement to child to extend their property. The service is considering supporting a "people carrier" or vehicle scheme.

Safe care is promoted through training and a policy is in place. The Principal Operations Manager for Fostering reported that safe care plans should be in use. No carer visited had an active safe care plan in relation to a child in placement, though one had need. There is "positively me" training for carers. A requirement has been made.

The home environment is free from avoidable hazards. Fire blankets and smoke detectors are provided. The service uses a checklist to ensure that basic areas of risk are prevented. This is updated annually and reviewed through annual performance review process. Foster carer preparation and training covers broad health and safety issues. Carers are provided with written guidelines about their health and safety responsibilities.

The service ensures that foster carers' vehicles are safe. Risk assessments should cover transport arrangements for individual children where this has been identified as an issue. Foster care agreements are updated at annual review and require that carers may be interviewed or visited as part of the Commission's inspection process. This requirement is to be incorporated into the Foster Carers "handbook".

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The fostering service arranges care that meets children's gender, religious, ethnic origin, linguistic, cultural, disability and sexuality needs. Recruitment materials are translated into 5 different languages.

Carers from ethnic minority backgrounds are encouraged. It was reported by staff that some might not get any placements; this may be due to narrow age approval category rather than lack of black children to place. Refugee children are accommodated in foster care and specific interpretation and translation services are sourced from the County Council when needed. Nuneaton has a local task group to progress race/ethnicity/recruitment with small community groups. The issue of recruitment and the use of black and ethnic minority carers are considered by the Fostering team leaders meeting on a regular basis. The inspector attended one such meeting during the inspection.

There is a REACCH manager based in the Children's Planning Section employed by the Social Services Department to ensure that the needs of black and ethnic minority Looked after Children have their needs met in placement.

This worker reviews the circumstances of all children from black and ethnic minority groups to ensure that their racial, cultural, linguistic and religious needs are met.

The Social Services Department has district based Race Equality Development Officers, an Asylum Seekers project, Translation and Interpretation Service, all mobilising around the needs of specific carers with specific children.

Foster carer and social worker training covers promotion of children's self worth and confidence, respecting ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. Anti discriminatory practice is encouraged.

Support and services for children with disabilities in the form of physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, community nursing support, education, leisure and health, are accessed through the local authority and Primary Care Trust. A specialist post has been created looking at the extension of placement choice to children with a disability and to review and develop policies and services.

Equipment is provided and the foster homes are adapted, where needed. Districts hold their own equipment stores. Two carers specifically suggested that the Social Services Department should support carers financially with purchase of larger "people carriers". They thought this was very necessary equipment where two or three children are placed into a family. This is already under consideration by the fostering service. The Manager reported that there was support for looking into a vehicle scheme for foster carers. Talents, interests and hobbies are encouraged. There is an award scheme for rewarding individual effort and achievement of Looked after Children, the Rob Barradell Achievement Fund. There is a policy on the recruitment of gay and lesbian foster carers.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The matching process takes account of the child's care plan and recent assessments of the child, family and carers. The manager acknowledges that this is one area where quality of evidence of this process could be improved, along with more placement choice generally. There has been a recent internal audit of the matching process under UK National Foster Care Standard 4. A development plan is in place. New matching guidance and procedures are in the process of being written.

A matching matrix is used for long-term placements and the Looked after Children Independent Reviewing Officers' role has been enhanced to ascertain the suitability of placements. There is a new matching matrix that has been created and is intended for use with all placements including emergency and short term.

Placement referral forms (used by placing social workers to make electronic referrals or completed by duty fostering workers for immediate placements), contain information relevant to finding the most suitable "match" for a child. The form specifically requires information about the skills, levels of ability and experience required of potential carers. Once a placement is made, fostering workers complete a "Referral Outcome" sheet monitoring choice and quality of the eventual match. End of placement meetings also draw on information relevant to the outcome achieved or not and relevance of the match to this outcome.

Foster placement referrals and Looked after Children agreements refer to elements taken into account when matching and identifying support needed to compensate for gaps in the match between child and carers. Placement decisions consider ethnic, religious, cultural, religious and linguistic needs. Translation and interpreting services are available through the county council. The Manager would like greater choice of placement for children with disabilities. There is a development plan for this.

The placing authority supports trans-racial or trans-community placements by providing additional training. The REACCH manager makes contact with each placing social worker for every child from an ethnic minority, to ensure that placements support children's needs.

Foster carers are informed through the foster care agreement that corporal punishment is forbidden along with other forms of humiliating treatment and punishment. This is also contained in the carers' handbook and in policy.

Introductions take place where practicable so that the child can make informed decisions about the placement.

Children should receive carer profiles and an excellent example of such a profile was seen.

One child spoken to had not seen the profile for the carer and specifically reported that this was needed. The Fostering manager reports that carer profiles are available electronically.

I.e.: in a format that could be attached to an e-mail and printed out by placing social workers for use in an emergency or short notice placement when a traditional “photo album” style profile would be hard to get hold of. A recommendation has been made to audit their use.

Where a suitable carer cannot be identified for a child needing an emergency placement, temporary extensions to approval are made. These enable a carer to look after a child outside of the original category of registration and are approved by the District Operations Manager and (usually later) ratified by the panel.

Staff reported that these extensions to approval category were usually done with the child’s interests in mind.

Three of the six placing officers who responded in questionnaires said that they were not informed about additional children being placed in the foster home, with concern expressed about the impact of this on the child already placed. One respondent commented that the fostering service did not inform them, the foster carer did.

The Manager acknowledges that inability to find the right match for a child means that existing children in placement may need to share bedrooms. One young person slept on the sofa, the social worker was definite that this was the child’s preferred choice to an overnight placement with an unknown carer. There is a policy to guide use of extensions. The number of temporary extensions is included in the statistics collated by the panel Administrator. Managers should audit their application as part of the Reg 42 review of the quality of the service. Concrete information about child centred arrangements and reason for placement should be given on the form in addition to the prompt for the placement.

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?	3
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Fostering Social Workers have a role of critical importance in ensuring safe care for children through their assessment, recommendations, review and support of foster carers.

There was evidence of training for carers in working with children who have been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour, recognising abuse and boosting self-esteem. There is a written policy on safe caring.

The manager reports that each home has safe caring guidelines and that these have been cleared with the placing social worker and are understandable to the child. No guidelines specific to children placed were seen in foster carer homes. All understood the safe care boundaries within their own home. A requirement has been made under an earlier National Minimum Standard.

The manager monitors and coordinates information on the circumstances, number and outcome of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care, as part of responsibilities under Schedule 7. Reporting systems are in place. A protocol agreed by Social Services Department and National Care Standards Commission has not become embedded in

practice. (National Care Standards Commission invitation to Child Protection strategy meetings) The Manager reported that the information is now contained within the newly launched Area Child Protection Committee guidelines “Blue Book”. The manager has identified that monitoring of allegations and outcomes of investigations is an area for improvement and this is to be done through the Fostering Operations Managers meeting.

Appropriate responses to allegations and complaints were seen to have been taken. There is a policy and procedure in relation to bullying. New information is currently being circulated to children about bullying. Instances of bullying are recorded.

Children’s questionnaires did not specifically ask for information about bullying, but no child raised this independently as an issue of concern for them in foster care.

Foster carers receive training in managing bullying behaviour and its results. Foster carers should have full information about the foster child and his/her family in order to protect the child and any other people for whom they have responsibility. Placement referral forms seek information about children’s behavioural needs or SIBS experiences. Some foster carers in questionnaires reported that they had not had sufficient information about children particular needs in relation to health, sexual awareness and parental violence. Safe care plans and specific guidelines were not in place for individual children for whom protection was an issue. A recommendation has been made elsewhere.

The service is considering training for carers in physical intervention. Two children reported being restrained but that they had not been hurt in the process. It is recommended that the provider of this training has been accredited by BILD and is fully aware of the DoH guidance on permissible forms of control and the recently published guidance found on http://www.bild.org.uk/physical_interventions/accredited_organisations.htm.

There is a new multi agency procedure for use if the foster child is missing from home. The manager reported that this policy and procedures were developed through multi agency strategic partnership arrangements.

The manager monitors when and why children go missing as part of Schedule 7 responsibilities.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service has procedures to ensure that contact arrangements are established, monitored and reviewed. Consideration is given to contact on the initial referral when suggesting an appropriate carer for a child.

The service seeks the views of young people and children in determining contact arrangements. This is done at the time of creating the placement agreement. There is a policy on enabling Looked after Children to have short periods away from the foster home with friends.

Foster carers are trained in issues and have skills relating to maintaining contact. The child's social worker is responsible for risk assessment and supervision arrangements before the fostering service allows any contact to take place, unless a court order exists to direct contact.

Arrangements for supporting and supervising contact are detailed in the foster placement agreement. Only one carer visited had a copy of this agreement. The fostering service provides for supervised contact carried out by some senior foster carers and sessional workers. Training is available for carers who supervise contact and may have to report on quality of contact to the courts.

Carers are reimbursed for any additional costs incurred in supporting contact arrangements. Carers record outcomes and impact of contact on the child in recording. This is fed directly to the child's social worker by fostering social workers as it arises or at formal Looked after Children reviews 6 monthly and in foster care written contributions to that review.

Many carers reported that they had direct contact with children's families. Almost all carers felt it was very important to support and be involved in contact with families.

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?

3

Foster carers receive training and information about the importance of listening and responding to the views of children. The Social Services Department part funds the Coventry and Warwickshire Children's Rights and Advocacy Service.

The service asks for the views of children and young people about matters that affect them on a regular basis. This is done across children's services through Leaving Care Group and the Looked After Children group. The inspector spoke with one young person who sat on this group. Social Services Department had formally consulted with young people in the Looked After system as part of a strategy to make improvement through management actions. Children are encouraged to give their views at end of placement and foster carer reviews. Examples of action taken as a result of listening to children's views are: use of carer profiles, requests for a change of social worker procedure, Overnight Stays away from Placement Policy, young person's saving policy, care leavers help line, and a birthday allowance for 18 year olds.

The Family Link scheme may develop a specific leaflet aimed at children with a disability using the service using symbols and visual images. Communicating with Children with Disabilities is a specific focus of a training course for foster carers.

Children are informed about their right and routes of complaint to Social Services Department, Children's Rights and Advocacy Service. This information is contained in the information currently distributed to Children who are "Looked After". Children over the age of 10 are also given a copy of the Social Services Department children's complaints video. Twenty of the thirty-one respondents to the children's questionnaire said they had been given a guide to fostering.

The Children's Guide to Foster Care should also contain information about route of access to the Commission and a recommendation has been made under National Minimum Standard 1. Nine young people reported they had not been informed how to make a complaint. Twenty said they had not been informed how to contact the Commission.

Parents' views are obtained through the Looked after Children procedures and via reviews.

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?

3

The fostering service has some links with and is knowledgeable about specialist health services in its area. Placements take into account how a child will continue to access specialist health services. There are newly appointed Primary Care Trust dedicated nurses for Looked After Children.

Before a placement begins, the service has a description of health needs for each child and arrangements for governing the consent to medical treatment are in place. These are standard sections within the Looked after Children documentation used by the service. The quality of information depends on the knowledge and information available to the placing social worker. Policy directs social workers to use the Fostering Network's medical consent "cards".

Where the Looked after Children documentation has identified health needs or medication issues, additional information should be sought and where necessary a specific health plan put in place for the child. This is relevant for some children with disabilities, complex physical health needs, mental health issues or those children on regular medication e.g. Ritalin type. Draft protocols have been drawn up with Primary Care Trusts relating to invasive health procedures. Moving and Handling procedures are also being worked on.

Children have access to their own records dependent on age and understanding. The manager reported there is to be a Health Strategy within procedures for Looked after Children.

It is recommended that the Manager should audit the health needs of the children to ensure that responsibilities under regulation 15 are being met and the service is able to secure the services needed by the current range of children.

Children's health records are kept within the child's main file. The Independent Reviewing Officer tracks health needs through the 6 monthly LAC review.

Training in health and hygiene and first aid is given, this includes health promotion and communicable diseases. Carers have first aid qualifications and are trained in "Eating well for "looked after" Children.

The manager reports that there is a CAHMS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) steering group and development officer in place. Projects are running in the north and south of the county to offer advice on permanency issues and to "fast track" Looked after Children referrals for services. Some district managers spoke of the need for easier access to CAMH's services.

There is a Young person's Substance Misuse project available to carers and for direct work with children. There is a county wide sexual relations and teenage pregnancy project. There is a Sex and Relationships Education policy and guidelines in place. During the inspection, over 500 copies this were being distributed to carers.

Joint training with carers and fostering social work staff is planned.

Children are supported by carers to be

- Registered with a GP or dentist
- Taken to health, dental and optical, appointments
- Able to access services required.
- Given dietary, personal hygiene, health promotion support.
- Advocated on behalf of.

Foster carers report on child health needs for the planning and review process and are aware of the need to report accidents and illnesses to the Manager using special forms.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service prioritises education. There is a TELAC initiative. (The Education of Looked After Children) with dedicated teachers to support children in foster care. The Education of Children in Public Care Strategy has led to 4 dedicated classroom practitioners funded by the LEA. (Local Education Authority) foster carers and service staff spoke highly of the positive impact these workers had had with children. Carers identified the risks of breakdown of a placement if children are not in full time education. The TELAC service makes sure that children have structured occupation during school hours. Referrals are made to the Children's Panel to consider issues relating to educational access or process for individual children.

Carers report on educational needs and progress for the planning and review process. They actively support Personal Education Plans, where these are in place. The service provides transportation to allow children to remain in existing schools. Warwickshire Social Services Department promotes use of computers in carers' homes and there is the Care Zone initiative, website information for young people.

Arrangements for birth parent and foster carer responsibilities for attending school meetings, parents' evenings etc are detailed in placement agreement and care plan. Carers encourage attendance at school, provide uniform and equipment, support homework, and finance for attending school trips and after school activities.

The Children's Planning Team within Social Services Department collates information about educational attainment and exclusion for children in their care. There is a representative from education on each district Children's Panel. Foster placement agreements identify financial responsibilities for all school and educational costs.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a policy and guidelines for carers in respect of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living.

Foster carers are trained and supported so that they can carry this out. The Manager reports that specific new training is to be commissioned in 2004.

The service ensures that carers understand that they need to provide these opportunities for all children to learn independence skills according to age and development. This is particularly relevant for children with learning difficulties.

The service consults with young people about their futures and encourages active involvement in deciding their "Pathway Plans". There is a Leaving Care Development Officer, who works with supported lodgings developments. Foster carers work with Connexions service and district Leaving Care services. Young people spoken to were aware of their plans towards independence and the professionals supporting them. Personal allowances are paid to promote self-development. Written guidance to carers makes it clear how this cash is to be used.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a written recruitment and selection process for appointing staff. This is based on good practice as defined the National Foster Care Association Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval training, management and support of foster carers. Fostering Network Form A10, a competency-based tool for assessment has been introduced.

Prospective employees are interviewed and references are checked. Referees for foster carers are currently spoken to, either on the phone or are interviewed, as recommended by NFCA code of practice.

Recommendations have been made under this standard that also relate to National Minimum Standard 2 with respect to verification of suitability of Social Services Department staff.

It is not clear what recruitment records and information is kept in relation to independent panel members.

Records of checks and references are kept. Human Resources intend to renew CRB checks every 3 years.

Social work staff have appropriate professional qualifications, (DIPSW/CQSW) and have a good understanding of foster care. NVQ 3 in Working with Children and Young people is well supported and promoted to all carers. The department offers team managers the opportunity to do the Certificate in Management through its partnership agreement with Coventry University.

Interviews and observations during the inspection evidenced knowledge and skills in understanding of childcare law and good practice, child development, communication, complaints procedure, promoting equality and diversity, inter agency working, health and education.

Staff have experience of family placement work and foster carer and have been trained in assessment, most recently by the Principal Operations Manager and Foster Care Development Officer.

Educationalist, psychologists, therapists are not employed directly by the service.

Other professional staff have relevant professional qualifications and training to work with children and young people.

Unqualified fostering social work staff are directly supervised by qualified staff who are accountable for their work. Senior foster carers and family support workers are largely drawn from existing foster carers and continue to foster. This is in contradiction to the Fostering Regulations 2002 and as existing staff / carers' leave, they are to be replaced by non-carers with suitable skills from a range of backgrounds. Carers felt strongly that they had a particular role to play BECAUSE they were still fostering and could bring a unique perspective to their work as employees of the Social Services Department. 7 new staff have been recruited within 12 months.

Total number of staff of the agency:	52	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	13
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Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There is a management structure map that shows clear lines of accountability. Managerial responsibilities are delegated appropriately to people who have the right skills, qualifications and experience. There is a Fostering Service Development Plan, approved by Children's Services Group that has been developed through consultation with district teams. The manager has a system of workload management that can prioritise and assign tasks. Staff reported that when district fostering teams were fully staffed this worked well. Some carers spoke of the isolation they felt without a secure service from an identified fostering worker. Work is allocated at district fostering meetings. The work allocation process matches staff skills and competencies to the needs of service users and providers.

Staff referred to Warwickshire as a very "human" employer, one staff reported bullying and others reported non- equal opportunities issues in relation to their access to a proposed advanced "level 4" pay scheme.

The Manager can ensure assessments, approvals, and reviews of carers happen effectively. Fostering applications and assessments are tracked against UK National Timescales for approval. This is monitored at 6 monthly intervals. The Central Fostering Services Team collates statistics about all aspects of the recruitment process and the manager can use these to develop the service.

Warwickshire is a member of the West Midlands Child Care Consortium and has pre placement and individual placement agreements with all independent fostering agencies used.

Staff are supervised by and can consult with qualified and experienced staff. The Foster Care Development Officer has a quality assurance role and reported her availability to district teams for advice and support.

Staff and carers have ongoing training and professional development. Carers have a

training portfolio, which evidences their skills and competencies for the Payment for Skills Scheme. This is audited at a Carers' annual performance review by the Fostering panel.

There is administrative back up, office equipment and infrastructure to enable staff to work, as they need. Not all social workers have access to a computer. A recommendation has been made.

Some provision is made for workers who have a disability, but some office accommodation is not accessible for people with disabilities or carers with buggies!

There is clerical support. Two team administrators reported staffing for their role to be satisfactory.

Enquires from prospective carers are dealt with by the central recruitment team who manage the recruitment process to the point of application, including a highly detailed and focussed system of information giving and seeking. Applications are handed over to the districts following initial visit and issue of reference requests. Requests for fostering services are also dealt with promptly. Each district operates a duty system in the afternoons but the duty officer is available in the morning for emergencies or same day placement requests.

The service has access to County Council legal services, medical advice through the Primary Care Trust's recently appointed Looked after Children nurse, educational advice from TELAC workers and the educational advisor on the District Children's panel.

Employees, sessional workers and consultants have contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service. The manager reported that she was considering the role for a member of the Primary Care Trust with the Foster Care Reference Group.

Fostering and children's social workers communicate and work effectively together. Ideally they are based nearby and managers recognises the positive outcomes for achieving solutions to common difficulties (such as with care payments) where team leaders can make easy and timely contact with their counterparts in children's teams.

Staff confirmed they had access to grievance and disciplinary procedures, details of services offered, equal opportunity policy and health and safety procedures.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The manager identified 52 staff, full and part time involved in the fostering service. This does not include administrators and support staff. Thirteen staff have left over the past 12 months, 7 have been appointed. Staff at all levels spoke of the difficulty of recruiting social workers to work in fostering. There were various reports of vacancy levels from 18% to 30%, these being concentrated in some geographical districts. A requirement has been made, though the inspector acknowledges the national difficulty in recruiting social work staff.

Two of the three teams visited had staff vacancies. Agency staff are used. Staff shortages mean that not all foster carers have had a named fostering social worker. Teams with low staffing have struggled to maintain support for carers. Carers in this position spoke positively of their appreciation of these efforts.

The Social Services Department has a plan to promote retention of staff by introduction of a "level 4" social worker tier. This was viewed as discriminatory by some fostering service staff. They reported that they do not have equality of opportunity to practice some specific skills identified as essential for progression. Morale appeared mixed, with some staff highly motivated and positive and others sceptical and "cut off" from the aims and objectives of the service, though not from what they identified as the crucial role of supporting foster carers. Senior managers reported an awareness of these issues for social workers and were hopeful that the department would make arrangements that would enable satisfactory resolution of this "level 4" proposal, to be inclusive of the skills and working practices of the fostering teams.

There seemed to be a disparity between the success the service has had in recruiting and retaining carers and that of the staff employed in fostering social work, some of which reported a narrowing role and a concentration on bureaucratic tasks. This was not a predominant but important message.

Retention of carers is encouraged through support, training and services. The Marketing and training Manager has developed a specialist service that is excellent. There is a recruitment policy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children for whom it provides a service. The Marketing and Training Manager also manages the NVQ centre, which provides NVQ 3 in working with Children and Young people for carers.

"Time to care" is the marketing strategy, launched in 2000 that drives recruitment.

There are seven sectors linked to space, stars or planets.

These sector descriptions are not used beyond the initial recruitment stage. There is a clear assessment process.

Qualities and competencies are assessed against a range of indices as defined in Fostering Network A10 form. The Manager states that consistency is maintained through the culture of workload sharing arrangements between teams. Recruitment and training is coordinated centrally and assessment and support provided by districts. The manager reports effective communication between this central unit and the district teams.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service provides out of hours management and support services for carers. The Emergency Duty Team provides a support telephone line for carers.

There are named fostering social workers for all foster carers, dependent on staffing shortages. Carers are managed by their fostering social worker and receive formal recorded supervision, have annual performance reviews and a range of supports such as out of hours Support Line and EDT. (Emergency duty team) The Foster Care Development Officer reviews, monitors and communicates across all management structures and lines of accountability. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff, which covers all legal requirements.

There is a whistle blowing policy known to all and a confidential reporting code for staff and foster carers.

Insurance arrangements for foster carers are well organised. The service has negotiated a workable and ethical arrangement for prompt payment of claims. This is seen as a positive solution to a previously difficult issue.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service has a training and development plan for all staff, through induction, post qualifying and in-service. This is informed through staff annual performance reviews. There is professional induction for staff “ Making the Links”, covering policy and practice relating to fostering. There were reports from social workers of variance between offices as to how extensive or “protected” this induction was depending on staffing shortages in the office. Effectiveness of staff training is evaluated, reviewed and updated annually.

Feedback forms from foster carer training are sent by the Central Fostering Services Team to the fostering social workers and issues should be raised and recorded in formal supervisions alongside the learning logs. The Foster Care Training Strategy Group audits the effectiveness of training. Programmes of training are linked to assessment and carer need and are task based. Training reflects the Statement of Purpose and policies of the service.

The service pays subscriptions to Fostering Network, which provides insurance and legal advice.

Joint training is held between fostering service staff and carers. Two places for fostering social workers are to be made available on each course aimed at carers. More places are not available on actual courses offered because of high take up by foster carers. A one-day “taster” is offered detailing the general courses within level one and level two of the training programme. Fostering social workers talked about the need for them to understand the content of courses on offer so they would know which course to promote with carers.

The Foster Care Training Strategy Group is a quarterly meeting of staff and carers of all levels. This reviews and commissions foster carer training. All districts have representation and there is two-way communication. Fostering social workers jointly run the preparation training and, with manager approval, can facilitate specific level one and level two training courses. The inspector observed level 2 Child Protection training being delivered by two fostering social workers. 13 carers are undertaking distance-learning training. Carers spoke highly of the quality of the training received and the Central Marketing and Training Manager has a clear strategy for promoting the quality of the training offered.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Staff have job descriptions and person specifications and access to policies and procedures. All staff have recorded management supervision. Supervision is regular and planned in advance.

Team leaders appraise fostering staff. Fostering social workers spoken to were positive about the support they received from their line managers.

Staff attend regular staff meetings.

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?****4**

Working with carer strategies include:

- Arrangements for training and development (Foster care performance review, NVQ newsletter, district newsletters)
- Encouragement for self help groups (Warwickshire Foster carer group attended by senior managers within the Social Services Department, District Skills Sharing groups and social events)
- Supervision (written contract in place)
- Support services (Fostering Network membership, Advice and mediation service, Information and advice)
- Assistance in dealing with other services, e.g. health and education
- Out of hours support (Out of Hours Support Line, EDT)
- Respite care (carers can have 2 weeks paid leave a year, Jupiter scheme)
- Arrangements for reviews
- Provision of computers for children in placement

The Foster Care Development Officer issued a questionnaire “ How Well are you Supported?”

The Children’s Planning Team has undertaken analysis of the response.

The role of the supervising social worker is clearly understood. Annual review reports are called Foster Home Performance Reviews and are prepared and available to the fostering panel. Placing social workers are asked for their views of the service provided by individual carers. This is “chased “ by panel.

Discussions with social workers highlighted some areas around which communication focused: carer payment accuracy and authorisations, chasing of information, referral information quality, practicality of some systems underpinning the essential work of the fostering service. As all are employees of the same organisation, It is for the service to establish the route for effective problem solving in order to secure good working relationships and workable solutions. The potential forum for monitoring this is through the district Children’s Service Groups. Different arrangements are in place in each district for formal and informal communication links.

Information is shared with carers at regular supervisions and through the quarterly newsletter. Website pages are being developed on the Warwickshire Website and Care Zone is being introduced for looked after children and young people. There is an NVQ newsletter.

The manager has identified that the end of the placement process was one area for further analysis and action.

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?

3

Foster care agreements are understood by carers and make clear expectations of carers, agency and local authority. A range of foster carer agreements were seen on files. A new Foster Home Agreement has been introduced which meets the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2002. This is to be introduced and updated at each annual review.

Each carer is supervised and managed by a qualified social worker. The supervising social worker is responsible for informing in writing and ensuring acceptance of all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. There is a Cause for Concern procedure used when a carer breaches any of the NFCA fostering standards. All foster carers are given a copy of these standards on approval. Three breaches of standards would prompt a performance review by a team leader from another team. Recommendations for repeat or further training are made.

On approval, carers receive a handbook covering policies, procedures, legal information and insurance details. This is referred to as the Induction Pack/ Portfolio Pack. Supervising social workers meet regularly with carers. Meetings are recorded on carers' files.

There is now a clear expectation that there will be one at least unannounced visit each year to their home. These are monitored through file auditing and monitoring sheets.

There are practical working systems in place to ensure that carers have:

- Out of hours management support
- Prompt payment
- Insurance cover
- Support for foster care associations
- Respite care where appropriate
- Access to social work support

Complaints and representations information is available. Complaints are monitored, recorded and outcomes are evaluated by the manager as part of the Schedule 7 monitoring. The manager reports "Allegation, Complaints and cause for Concern" policies need to become embedded into practice. Child protection allegations are recorded along with complaints information. The inspector found complaints and allegations recorded in carer files that had been dealt with but not referred on through the Schedule 8 reporting.

This is an issue for fostering social workers and team leaders.

Independent support is available to carers during any investigation concerning them.

Records of allegations of abuse are kept and monitored.

There is a clear policy about the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed from the register. All requests to resign are presented to the panel for formal termination of approval.

Warwickshire are clear that notifications are made to POCA where foster carers' approval

has been terminated on grounds that mean that they are not suitable to work with children and young people. This has happened recently and a system for ensuring notifications are made is to be established with Human Resources section of Social Services Department.

There is a recruitment and retention strategy for all staff. This is reported to the Children's services group.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>Nine preparation sessions called "Skills to Foster" run each year, during the day, evening and weekend. This a competency based training. Foster Carers co work with social work colleagues to run the groups.</p>		
<p>Post approval training includes distance learning and on line opportunities. All carers are required to attend Core Training within two years of approval. Courses are identified as Stage 1 or Stage 2 in a training calendar that was introduced 1994. These courses provide the underpinning knowledge for the NVQ 3 in Working with Children and Young People. NVQ is well established and the NVQ centre has achieved "Good Practice" status by City and Guilds. A mentor award is also offered, to encourage carers to further train to support colleagues through NVQ. Carers also act as assessors.</p>		
<p>Additional specific training is available for carers with children with disabilities and a specific "Skills to Foster" Induction is being considered for Family Link carers. Training includes: Child Protection, Promoting equality, making Placements Work, caring for other people's children. Advancement through the Payment for Skills depends of the portfolio approach, which includes evidencing of training and skills achieved and identified through the competency appraisal. The Fostering Team Leader signs carers' portfolios and portfolios are presented to panel at review.</p>		
<p>Carers keep their own "Learning Log". This is a focus of their formal supervision. There is a two year training programme which offer courses in challenging behaviour, "positively me", eating well, first aid, permanency, men in foster care, HIV/Aids/ SIBS, attachment, separation and loss, TeLAC, pathway planning and skill sharing, although some of these courses may run more frequently according to demand. Trainers used are appointed by the Fostering Services Team who maintains a training providers list. Carers are invited to attend courses during each of the three "terms" or periods of training.</p>		
<p>Training is carried out to maximise carers' attendance at different venues and times on weekdays, Saturdays or over two evenings. Reasonable childcare costs and expenses are paid to facilitate attendance. Training is given in identified key areas before any child is placed. (Health and safety, child protection, first aid, safe care) Specific consideration is given to the support needs of sons or daughters of foster carers. Groups have run in the past. Conferences/workshops have been held. Choosing to Foster has one session, which is directed to the children of foster carers. There are procedures for Working with Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers. Further training and workshops are</p>		

planned.

The carers' annual review includes appraisal of training and development needs and is documented in the review report. Evaluation of training is done at the end of each course. The District Team Leader receives copies of the attendee's evaluations along with a register of attendance and a copy of the carers' learning log for that course.

There is a central database of all training undertaken and reasons for non-attendance. The Manager reviews effectiveness of training annually. This is included in the annual report of the operation. Foster carers are members of the Training Strategy Group. Government Minister Jacqui Smith commended Warwickshire's Foster Carer Training Programme at a Quality Protects Conference in 2003. Partners from independent agencies can access Core Training and the NVQ programme, though Warwickshire's own carers have priority.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Files of carers and children were sampled as part of a case tracking approach.

Carer records were satisfactory and information required by Schedule 3 was in place. A file audit sheet has been introduced following the Laming report. This should lead to an improved quality and quantity of information accessible on carers' files, many of which are over-full. A new section to record allegations and complaints has been created.

A case record is maintained for each child by the placing social worker. This is the child's main Social Services Department file. The Fostering Team holds some information on children placed, but relies on the placing social worker to maintain most information. There is a Looked after Children policy on recording. Placement agreements are kept on children's files.

Carers' files sometimes had review information about children placed, but not reliably a copy of the placement agreement. Neither carers nor social workers routinely had copies of all the essential information detailed in the fostering regulations.

The fundamental legal significance of the foster placement agreement as defined in Schedule 6 did not appear to be understood. Placement agreements should be "live" documents that form the basis of all reviews of the foster care arrangement in relation to a specific carer and a specific child.

Only one carer was able to produce a placement agreement. It is recommended that copies of the referral, matching and placement agreement and other Looked after Children Placement Plan and essential information should be kept by the fostering service in order for the placement to be well reviewed and supported.

Staff and carers reported that relevant information had been available to child and carer. Foster carers are trained and have skills in helping children to understand and to keep reminders of their history. They are provided with equipment to record significant life events.

Carers have sufficient information about the child to help them do this. The manager reports that carers have experience in compiling albums for Looked after Children. Specific training

is given in “ Making Placements Work”. Consultants are available to assist with SIBS and race/ ethnicity issues. The Asylum Seekers Project can provide support and advice to foster carers who care for unaccompanied young people.

Carers store information securely in lockable boxes provided. Carers were found to hold significant quantities of historical information in their homes about children who had moved on. Just as there has been a useful audit of the recording held on social work files in response to the Climbie enquiry, it is suggested that the annual review would be a timely occasion to ensure that information held by carers gives them the legal authority to care for children and the essential information they need to do the job. This would allow the social worker to safely remove and store or destroy outdated confidential information.

There is a policy on case recording. Carers are trained in recording.

Daily reports are a blank sheet and do not prompt detail of medication, accidents, contact with family/ placing social workers visits under Reg. 35 etc. Less than half of the sample of five carers reported maintaining any regular recording about the children in their care, though all spoke with obvious knowledge and empathy about them. Both carers and social workers spoke with feeling about the excess of paperwork required by the organisation, particularly in relation to accounting for expenses for each child. Schedule 7 requires managers to monitor compliance in relation to each child, foster placement agreement and care plan for the child. Recording of events in the life of a child and carers is a crucial way of doing this. Carers should be assisted to present an accurate, specific, measurable account of the work they do so that the Manager can effectively monitor compliance.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Manager oversees records of:

- Staff

(This information is maintained in Leamington Spa by The Human Resources department.)

- Carers

(Computerised and paper records form the register. Information is held about foster carers living in Warwickshire approved by other Independent Fostering Agencies and local Authorities)

- Children

(Computerised (Care First) and paper records form Register.)

- Complaints Information from districts collated by manager

- Allegations Information from districts collated by manager

- Accidents Held in each District and only passed on if serious

The manager monitors the quality and adequacy of records under Schedule 7 responsibilities. The outcome relies on district Team Leaders having a systematic approach to collating this information. This did not appear to be established.

Missing children are monitored through a computerised record system maintained through Children's Services Group and individual managers.

Confidential records are stored securely. There is a policy on access and retention of files. Warwickshire adopts best practice and retains carer's files for 25 years. The computerised records system has a back up facility for data. The database has various uses within the service. It is suggested that the manager's responsibilities for Schedule 7 monitoring could be served by increased range of information contained on this database.

Records are in a form that can be passed on if child moves placement, leaves care or if references are requested about a foster carer or member of staff. Records of children and foster carers are permanent, private and secure and can be seen in compliance with legal requirements by the child, parents or carers.

Carers should be assisted to maintain children's records as required and to dispose of out of date confidential information.

There is a policy on managing confidential information that is known to panel members, specialist advisors and staff. Carers receive information about this in their Induction pack, Foster Care Agreement and Record Keeping for Foster Carers policy. All staff, panel members and carers sign confidentiality agreements.

Records are clear, legible, non-stigmatising and factual.

Warwickshire uses Looked after Children documentation. There is an Integrated Children's System project for which all managers had high hopes.

Children and carers are encouraged to access their records, make changes, record dissent and personal statements. The Social Services Department has a well-established procedure for service users to access information.

Records are kept on carer, child and staff files of allegations and complaints. Separate records are also kept on carer files, which should bring together data on allegations and complaints. Not all files seen had identified complaint or allegations as such in this section, though there was evidence from social worker general recording that appropriate referrals had been actioned.

Not all social workers have a computer for their sole use.

The manager reports that the use of IT is to be developed, that data on allegations and complaints needs to be more systematically analysed. The complaints procedure on the "browser" refers confusingly to the Inspection Unit and Chief Inspector.

The box below contains information for the period April 2003-Dec 2003. Some information was not readily available for inclusion.

28 placements of Warwickshire children have been made with independent agencies or in other local authority fostering schemes.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			304
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			1200
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	68.53	Maximum £	252

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

There are five district office bases in addition to the Rugby based Fostering Development officers and the Central Fostering Services Team. Office premises vary in their accessibility, space and suitability for the purpose. Access for people with physical disability is a problem in Stratford and at Faraday Hall. Administrative staff reported that they had staff and equipment necessary for the job. Staff requested individual voicemail and a computer for each member of staff who needed one. There is an internal e-mail communication system. CAMS IT back up service is available.

There is:

- Secure retention of records in a lockable room
- Appropriate measures to safeguard IT system
- Appropriate security system

Premises are suitably equipped. Offices are not child friendly and are not designed to be. Training takes place in other venues.

The manager reported there to be adequate insurance for premises and contents.

The manager acknowledges that improved disability access is needed in some areas and the Departmental Accommodation Strategy is addressing this.

Family Support teams may be placed alongside Fostering Teams or be integrated within some other Children's Services teams. Each area has a provision for the Family Link Service, different in size and scope in each area. Some teams share office space, others have split sites. Staff identified positive outcomes from close association with children's teams.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Warwickshire County Council Financial Services manages the financial aspects of the service. The Children's Services Manager reported excellent political steerage and the largest increase in funding for children's services and within that the largest portion to Fostering.

The Manager states there is

- Cost centre management.
- Regular budgetary reporting with support from finance section.
- Financial auditing
- Procurement and contracting arrangements.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service is steered by the financial principles and standards of the County Council and scrutinised through internal council arrangements by the County Council's Financial Management Services and the Welfare Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There are financial procedures to be followed by all staff at all levels.

The manager reported the accounts are maintained and properly audited by a registered accountant. There are monthly budgetary forecast arrangements and cost centre management operates.

Charges for services are published and the manager reported that the cost of each placement can be further broken down into unit costs relating to training, support etc. Foster carers and social workers reported problems with the payments system to carers that results in inaccurate and/or undecipherable payslips.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a policy on fostering allowances. Warwickshire has adopted and implemented a "Payment for Skills" Scheme. The amount paid to a carer is linked to their competence and skill level rather than to the difficulties presented by a child. Carers must evidence their skills through the portfolio of competency approach. Carers on level one can progress to level two. Level three requires a commitment to being permanently available for placement. Carers reported that this level was unpopular. All staff and carers supported the Payment for Skills scheme. One carer visited (for Family Link) had received less in payments than under the previous scheme. Current levels are well publicised and provided annually to each carer. Information about how to access payment and expenses is given to foster carers before a child is placed.

The inspection found grave problems with the accuracy of payments to carers using the Care Pay systems for Payment for Skills. The manager reports that Care Pay arrangements need to become embedded into practice and has identified that further work is needed to bring together the deputy team administrators from children's teams, with children's managers and fostering team leaders. People from all areas of the fostering service reported this a major problem. A recommendation has been made.

The manager, carers and social workers reported that management of authorisation of payments to carers and monitoring could improve. There is a new system to retrieve overpayments. Carers were strong in their request for a simplified payments system. Fostering workers supported the confusion faced by carers in trying to decipher Care Payslips. Carers are also required to keep financial accounts of the money they administrate on behalf of children. Social workers are required to audit these accounts and some saw this as a bureaucratic exercise, whilst recognising the need for accountability.

The manager reports there are: Payment for Skills to carers, Care Pay- a financial statement of earning to carers, a Foster Carers' Financial handbook and prompt payment to carers/ updated carers' payslip.

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?

3

Policies and procedures are in place. These have been written with support from the County Council's legal department. The Panel's decision maker is Simon Lord, Head of Children's Services for Warwickshire. The Chair of the Panel is Chris Hallett, who is also the Assistant Head of Children's Services for the Social Services Department, with Strategic Lead for Quality in Children's Services across the county.

Procedures cover:

- Decision making in cases of disagreement.
- CRB checks and suitability of panel members.
- Access to medical advice.
- QA function in relation to assessment, consistency, feedback, problems, thoroughness and rigour.

Panels receive management information about outcome of foster carers annual reviews. The Marketing and Training Manager for fostering sits on the Panel and has accurate and informed views to contribute to the decision making of the panel in its review of carers. The panel informally monitors the range and type of carers available in comparison to the needs of children in relation to three broad categories. A recommendation has been made about auditing the needs of children passing through the service to ensure that fostering resources are directed in the right area, i.e. mental health support, health of Looked after Children and specialist provision.

Independent members of the panel may have some health expertise but are not drawn from that profession. The education member is a nursery school teacher. A recommendation has been made. The Chair of Panel reported that reference could be made to a consultant locum paediatrician for advice and similarly to an educational advisor. The manager states that the panel seeks to recruit an independent member who has been in care or is the parent of a child who has been in care.

Warwickshire's is an established panel with wide representation and training is provided for the panel. An annual report is produced. There are joint panel arrangements with Pathway Care. The panel operates twice a month, once in the north and once in the south of the county. The inspector attended a meeting of the South Panel.

The Chair reported that an increasing and significant part of panel business was hearing

temporary extensions to approval, often retrospective. A recommendation has been made to audit the need for these and improve the quality of information coming to the panel about them.

The Fostering Service Team leaders received an excellent report of statistics from the manager of the panel, Dawn Davies. This report was an excellent analysis of the business of the panel, highlighting activity within each district in relation to temporary approvals, applications, resignations, and extensions to the usual limit of three children with a carer.

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?	2
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Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and educational needs. Requirements of carers reflect the short-term nature of the placement and differ from those expected of long-term placements.

Family Link is a specific service that has been variously operated by children’s disability teams and fostering districts, offering a shared care arrangement to families of children with a learning or physical disability. Carers offer short-term care to a particular child with whom they are linked. Regular planned stays take place. Guidelines and procedures written in 1997 are now out of date and where those placement agreements are in use, do not meet current requirements. A requirement has been made under National Minimum Standard 24. Looked after Children documentation is now to be used and supplemented as needed, as with any foster placement. Children are within the Looked after Children review system. There is a Foster Care Disability and Health Development Officer recently appointed to a 2-year post. The Development Plan identifies that choice of placement needs to be improved. New procedures are under development and payment levels being reviewed.

Two Family Link carers commented that they did not consider themselves foster carers.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

LA Services are sensitive and pro active to pre existing relationships when assessing and approving carers who are family or friends of the child.

Support and training needs are the same as for other foster carers, though staff reported it could be difficult to convince carers of this.

In 2002 a significant proportion of the total of new foster carer approvals were of people acting as Family and Friends carers. Such carers have equal access to training and payment as all carers. The manager acknowledges that there is scope for improved joint working between fostering service and children's teams in relation to the particular issues raised by this type of care. Joint training is planned to facilitate this. A Family Group conference is to be developed as a strategy for including extended family members.

The manager states that the assessment approach needs to incorporate risk assessments, analysis and needs.

The department requires all carers to keep records, both care and finance. Social workers reported that pursuing this with family and friends' carers could become a bureaucratic chore. The inspector would like to see consideration of imaginative evidencing for carers for whom record keeping was an issue, either through literacy difficulties or for other reasons. The same imaginative approach is already used when accessing essential training, as some carers were reluctant to attend formal training with other carers. Staff reported that distance packs were available and training was given one to one by fostering social workers.

There is an "Adaptations for Carer Property" policy. One carer expressed the hope that the department would consider the cost of an extension to house a family of grand children as an investment in their future, rather like an inheritance and not seek to reclaim it on death or move of the 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 1st March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The Principal Operations Manager for Fostering submitted comments about factual accuracy and some queries about content. Changes were made to the report.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>	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	<input type="checkbox"/>	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 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	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ 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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