



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Surrey County Council Fostering Service

**Surrey Children's Service
The Runnymede Centre
Chertsey Road
Addlestone
Surrey
KT15 2EP**

Lead Inspector
Kerry Fell

Key Announced Inspection
4th January 2007 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Surrey County Council Fostering Service
Address	Surrey Children's Service The Runnymede Centre Chertsey Road Addlestone Surrey KT15 2EP
Telephone number	01483 728022
Fax number	01483 776326
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Surrey Childrens Service
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	To be confirmed
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

This report relates to the fourth inspection of the Surrey Fostering Service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

Local Authority Fostering Service managers do not have to register with CSCI, nor do Local Authority Fostering Services themselves have to register with the CSCI as providers. Regulation 10(2) requires Local Authority Fostering Services managers to meet the same fitness criteria that an Independent Agency manager has to meet.

Surrey County Council Fostering Service is a Local Authority Fostering service operated by the Social Services Department. It manages all the following in house fostering functions from temporary placements (emergency, short term, assessment and bridging placements) through to long-term permanent foster care placements, placements for a named child/young person only and specialist carers.

The Fostering Service has two fostering teams. The West Team is based in Runnymede Centre in Chertsey; the East Team is based in the Omnibus Building in Reigate. The family link service offers short term, befriending and respite services to families who have children with disabilities. The family link teams are based in Guildford in the West and in Reigate in the East of the county.

At the time of the inspection 338 households were approved for fostering, offering 593 placements. 473 children and young people were placed at the time of the inspection.

Fostering allowances paid to foster carers ranged between £212.45 and £434.91. Allowances offered depended upon the number of children placed with the foster carer, the age of the children placed and additional allowances were paid for example for the skills gained by the foster carer.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was an announced key inspection for the inspection year 2006/2007, which means that the staff, foster carers, children and young people knew that the inspection was going to take place.

The inspection commenced on 4th January 2007 and feedback was given on 26th January 2007. Mrs Kerry Fell, Mr John Chivers and Ms Ruth Coler undertook the inspection. The inspection ran concurrently with the CSCI adoption agency inspection, and the inspection of private fostering arrangements. Separate reports are available for these inspections.

The inspection process involved a review of records, interviews with a range of staff involved in the day-to-day running of the fostering agency, meetings with foster carers and children and young people and the observation of a fostering panel meeting.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, children and young people, and placing social workers. Data from questionnaires received were included within the text of the report.

What the service does well:

There had been a change to the Head of Family Placement Services (the Registered Manager) with the newly appointed Head of Family Placement Services taking up post in February 2007. The Development Manager had capably managed the service since October 2006. Comments from a range of staff met during the inspection complimented the manner in which they had managed and developed the service.

The fostering panel was thorough and well organised and papers provided to the panel were written to a good standard and contained a good level of detail.

Foster carers met during the inspection were able to identify what steps they would take in order to promote and support any diverse needs. The placement and stability team also had access to an ethnic minorities and asylum seekers support worker who could act as a consultant to the staff and provide support and advice to foster carers.

The profile of children with disabilities had been raised by the fostering agency through the "disability project".

Foster carers spoke highly about the computers for children project in which the children and young people were supplied with computers by the local authority.

The agency won a Skills for Care accolade for their involvement of children and young people. The inspectors saw excellent examples of how children and young people were consulted and included in the development of the service. Contact with relatives, friends and important people in the children and young peoples' lives was promoted.

Sound recruitment and vetting procedures were in place. Strategies were in place to ensure that there were sufficient staff to meet the needs of the foster carers and the children and young people.

The recruitment and retention teams continued to develop their programme for recruitment of a range of foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Action had been taken by the fostering agency to ensure that foster carers received specific training in the administration of medication where required. There had also been improvements in the detail of medical records provided to foster carers.

The agency recognised that they had not yet achieved the aim of 100% of looked after children receiving annual health checks. However, action had been taken to improve this. Additional specialist nurses had been recruited to ensure that annual health checks were completed as required.

Evidence was available to demonstrate that written confirmation was sent to foster carers following panel decisions, especially where exemptions were made.

The matching and risk assessment tool had been further reviewed and was now being used as a detailed and informative document which identified areas of risk, training and additional support that may be required and how these would be minimised or met. A new detailed health and safety questionnaire better identified environmental risks within the foster carers home, and how these would be made safe or minimised.

The safeguarding training for foster carers had been fully reviewed and was split into three stages. The first stage – "what to do if..." was now a mandatory training session that had to be completed prior to the foster carers attending panel for approval. This was in addition to the mandatory safe care run by experienced foster carers.

Improvements had been made in order to better promote educational achievement. The agency recognised that insufficient Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were in place, although the inspectors observed that these were on file and at the foster carers homes for all of the young people met during the inspection. A PEP co-ordinator was in post and had been working to improve the number of PEPs in place. A child-friendly PEP had also been introduced.

Supervising social workers had completed training, which led to improvements being made to the support and supervision of foster carers.

Foster carers confirmed that they were keeping records of the outcome of contact sessions where appropriate.

A new detailed health and safety questionnaire better identified environmental risks within the foster carers home, and how these would be made safe or minimised. Health needs were also detailed within the matching and risk assessment tool.

The new accounting system that had been introduced at the last inspection had settled in and was allowing more prompt and more accurate payments to foster carers.

The offices in which fostering teams were now located were more secure. The fostering team in the west had moved to a new office, which offered more space, was more confidential, and allowed them access to a range of rooms for meetings. The fostering team in the east of the county had rearranged where they were seated, and although little could be changed about the structure of the open plan office and the storage of the files, the rearrangement meant that they were now sat with people who also worked for the children's teams. Staff stated that this allowed greater confidentiality.

What they could do better:

Where further improvements were identified with regard to increasing the numbers of children and young people who had received an annual health assessment and their personal education plan (PEP), the agency and Surrey County Council had already put in place action to achieve this over the next 12 months, therefore no requirements are made on this occasion.

Although a good range of assistance and advice was available to foster carers, some foster carers commented about the inconsistent manner in which guidance was given to them about grants and benefits. Therefore a recommendation has been made for the agency to ensure that there is better clarity for all eligible foster carers about these benefits and grants.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can

be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Improved detail and prompt receipt of healthcare information and health checks, and the action taken by foster carers promotes the health and development of the children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

Action had been taken to ensure that health information was shared promptly with foster carers, and that where possible the relevant records were made available to them, although it was noted that responses in questionnaires from foster carers identified that at times this information could still be delayed.

Matching tools observed identified any specific health needs, and where appropriate foster carers had received training in the administration and management of medication. This training was ongoing. Records of this training and other training relevant to the health needs of the young person were observed both on the foster carers file and in their annual review.

Evidence was available to demonstrate how the placement and stability team and out of hours support were able to support foster carers and the young people when there were challenges or difficulties with the placement.

Young people met and foster carers confirmed that they had records of their health care, and that they had access to GP's, Dentists and opticians, and access to specialist health professionals, for example Assessment Consultation Therapy (ACT) and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) as required. Foster carers met during the inspection spoke passionately about how they had sought specialist support for the young people in their care when it was needed.

Additional specialist nurses had been employed to improve the percentage of young people who have an annual health assessment – with the aim to be 86% in 2007. The CSCI recognised that action was being taken and therefore no further requirements will be made at this inspection.

Foster carers confirmed that they had received the “red” health record for younger children, or were supporting older children and young people to maintain a health record. Details of medical appointments were also reviewed and recorded at the young persons statutory review.

Questionnaires received from foster carers detailed that 94.8% of respondents felt that they received adequate, good or excellent support with regard to the young person’s health; and 84.6% of children and young people responded within their questionnaires that they were always or usually given support and advice about being healthy.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3,6,8,9,15,30

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Improvements made ensure that suitable foster carers and appropriate matches are provided; a thorough and organised fostering panel and good support systems promote the safeguarding of children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

There had been a change to the Head of Family Placement Services (the Registered Manager) with the newly appointed Head of Family Placement Services taking up post in February 2007. The Development Manager had capably managed the service since October 2006. Comments from a range of staff met during the inspection complimented the manner in which they had managed and developed the service.

The inspectors observed that the risk assessment and matching tool that was in use at the time of the last inspection had been further reviewed, and now appeared a more detailed and useful tool. Those seen during the inspection included evidence about how the needs of the children and young people could be met by the carers that they had been placed with.

Where additional support, additional training or specific risks had been identified, there was evidence within the risk assessment and matching tool as to how these could be met or minimised, and who would be responsible for achieving this.

The foster carers, family link carers and young people met during the inspection felt supported by the fostering agency and were aware of the expectations of the role. Foster carers confirmed that they received training in safe caring and were aware of the importance of mandatory training such as medication administration, and health and safety.

The review of the health and safety checklists and the annual audit of health and safety of the home environment had been made a priority following the last inspection. Members of staff stated that this had been a detailed review in consultation with the supervising social workers.

The inspectors observed that the new health and safety audit form was being used as part of the annual review and as part of the initial assessment for approval. These audits included information about specific identified risks such as pets and swimming pools. Where risks were identified the inspectors observed that action to be taken to minimise or resolve these risks were recorded on the form, and followed up during supervising social worker visits to the home.

Evidence was available on the foster carers' files held by the fostering agency that supervising social workers confirmed that any vehicles used for transporting children and young people had a valid MOT certificate and were insured.

Young people met during the inspection informed the inspectors that they were happy at their foster placement, and that they had their own beds, and although some were sharing a bedroom, they confirmed that they were able to have personal items in their bedrooms.

Foster carers confirmed and were able to show the inspector copies of their foster placement agreement. The inspectors were able to evidence from the matching tool/risk assessment, and from panel papers that consideration was given to how the child or young person's specific needs could be met by the identified carers, and what training or information the foster carer may need to assist them further with meeting the young person's needs.

The inspectors observed from both evidence within the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA) and the training programme that the safeguarding training programme for foster carers had been reviewed since the last inspection. Surrey's Safeguarding Board had approved this training programme. The inspectors were advised that safeguarding training was to be made compulsory for foster carers, with all new foster carers having to

undertake the first part of safeguarding training "What to do if.." prior to their application being made to the fostering panel. All foster carers who had not undertaken this training would be expected to complete this within three months. 17 foster carers attended the training session that was held during the inspection.

A further two safeguarding children training sessions would be made available to foster carers, update one would need to be completed within one year, and update two, which focused upon safeguarding children with disabilities, would need to be completed within two years. However it was noted that family link foster carers would be expected to complete update two as a priority because of the specific needs of the children and young people that they would be supporting.

The Surrey County Council has a recruitment policy and procedure, which was provided to the inspectors. The procedure was drawn up on 30th November 2006 and was scheduled for review on 14th June 2007. A recruitment checklist had also been introduced and placed on individual staff files to demonstrate that the file contained the relevant information and evidence of recruitment checks.

A sample of staff files were inspected and included a range of fostering team staff 2 managers. This sample included a combination of recently appointed and established staff.

Sound recruitment and vetting procedures were evidenced. All files held a range of information including current Criminal Record Bureau checks and Police checks from the individuals' country of origin (where appropriate). A minimum of two written references with evidence of verification was on file along with evidence of qualifications and work history. Other relevant checks and correspondence were held neatly. The files were organised and maintained to a very good standard with information easily accessible.

An inspector attended the Fostering Team West fostering panel during the inspection. The panel attended was formed of a range of social work staff from the Local Authority and the Fostering Agency, foster carers from other fostering services, an independent member who worked for voice for the child in care and an elected member from Surrey County Council. Minutes of the last meeting were made available to the inspector, and a minute taker attended the panel. The minutes were observed to be detailed, and were thoroughly reviewed by the panel prior to being agreed as factual.

The inspectors were advised that the panel members had attended training in November 2006 provided by consultants from British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The inspectors were further advised that feedback from the trainers had been positive about the manner in which the panel worked.

Different types of approvals were heard during the inspection that included foster carers' and family link carers' annual reviews, new approvals and variations to approval.

Papers provided to the panel were observed to have been written to a good standard and contained a good level of detail. The panel members had been provided with the reports prior to the panel and it was evident that the panel members had read these reports and highlighted areas that they had questions about the application and where more information is required.

The chair of the panel made a point to thank the foster carers attending the panel, and to ask the social workers to pass the panel's thanks onto those foster carers who could not attend.

The panel were observed to discuss each case appropriately. Where the panel were not in clear agreement, each panel member was able to contribute to the discussion, before a decision was taken. Where the panel may be split, decisions would be made based on a majority decision. The chair was observed to manage these discussions well, and panel members spoke complimentarily about the manner in which the chair managed the panel.

The Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA) submitted by the fostering service identified the fostering panel and the agency decision makers as having a role in the quality assurance of the assessment process. Discussions with the chair of the fostering panel and the agency decision makers confirmed this as being the case. The agency decision makers stated that they had affected improvements in the British Association for Adoption and Fostering documents panels. The agency decision makers confirmed that they continued to have autonomy over decisions and continued to return paperwork to the panel if not enough information was available.

The panel chair also made comment on the improvement that they had observed in the quality and content of reports passed to the panel for consideration or review, and that the quality of reports continued to be an area for review by the elected members and the Director of Children's Services. The Chair suggested that although currently the Area Team Managers sat on the fostering panels, they may be able to assist the panel better as expert consultants to the panel, a function which was also being undertaken by the Chair, in order to promote the quality assurance process and to reduce any reports being brought to panel that may not be ready. The CSCI would support this suggestion.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- 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.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7,13,31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Consideration is made during the matching process to promote the diverse needs of the children and young people. Education is promoted, and further action is identified to further improve the educational achievement of the children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The agency clearly identified within their statement of purpose that if an emergency placement had to be made, that does not meet the specific needs of the children and young people; then a more suitable placement would be made within six weeks.

The dataset provided to the CSCI identified that 2% of households approved as foster carers were from a dual heritage, Asian or other ethnic group, where as 8.75% of the children and young people placed with the fostering service were of dual heritage, Asian, African, Caribbean or other ethnic group.

From responses to questionnaires 1.7% of foster carers stated that the fostering agency inadequately addressed equality and diversity.

Specific cultural, religious or ethnic needs were identified within the matching documents and in the panel report. Foster carers were also asked to identify

during approval and annual review how they could meet the specific needs of a child or young person placed with them, if there were cultural, religious or ethnic differences identified during the matching process.

Foster carers met during the inspection were able to identify what steps they would take in order to promote and support any diverse needs. The inspectors were advised that the placement and stability team also had access to an ethnic minorities and asylum seekers support worker who could act as a consultant to the staff and provide support and advice to foster carers.

The fostering agency had raised the profile of children with disabilities through the "disability project". The inspectors were advised that fostering agency had moved away from recruiting a separate group of foster carers for children and young people with disabilities, again raising awareness of the needs of children with disabilities during open evenings and recruitment events.

The inspectors found that the family link scheme, which provided short breaks, befriending and day care for children and young people with disabilities, had developed well since the last inspection.

The staff team were very positive about what they had achieved in the past year, and about the support that they had received to achieve this. The family link carer agreement had been reviewed and updated to better meet the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Records continued to be neat and orderly, and the information available to family link carers continued to be informative.

Link carers met during the inspection confirmed that they had been through sound recruitment procedures. Family link carers continued to keep logbooks for each session with a link child, and the inspectors were advised that the family link carers were able to attend the child or young person's review.

Please also see comments with regard to training under National Minimum Standard 23 (Management section).

Improvements had been made in order to better promote educational achievement.

Foster carers spoke highly of the computers for children project in which the children and young people were supplied with computers by the local authority. Foster carers were then provided with support and training to enable them to use the computers with the children and young people, through the adult education programmes. IT system support and training was also provided to enable the foster carers to ensure that the systems remained safe; which included a remote access facility for repairs, fixes and updates to be provided to the system.

The agency recognised that insufficient Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were in place, although the inspectors observed that these were on file and at the foster carers homes for all of the young people met during the inspection. A PEP co-ordinator was in post and had been working to improve the number of PEPs in place. A child-friendly PEP had also been introduced.

The inspectors were also advised of a number of support schemes in place for children and young people, which included funding for specialist tutors and 18+ allowances for young people who remained with the foster carer whilst completing full time education.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10,11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

A number of formats are used to consult children and young people, which enable them to make their views known. Children and young people are supported to maintain contact with relatives, friends and important people.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence was observed on the children and young people's files to demonstrate that contact, where appropriate, with relatives, friends and important people in their lives had taken place. Where there were concerns or restrictions on contact these were detailed within the records and highlighted within the matching tool/risk assessment.

Young people met during the inspection confirmed that they were supported to maintain contact with their relatives, and panel reports also demonstrated how foster carers had been involved in promoting, arranging, and supporting children and young people to attend contact sessions.

Foster carers had received specific training in record keeping, and this highlighted the need for foster carers to maintain records of the outcome of contact sessions. This training also highlighted the importance for foster carers to listen to the children and young people, and made specific reference to the importance of being aware that children and young people may talk more freely about their day, concerns or about their wishes in less formal situations such as while driving in the car or completing household tasks.

Although it was noted that 29.16% of foster carers who responded to questionnaires stated that they felt that the agency was poor at consulting children and young people. Consultation with young people was found to be excellent during the inspection.

Evidence was available throughout the inspection to demonstrate how young people and children were involved in consultation. Some young people advised the inspector that they had been involved in interviews for the post of Director of Children's Services.

Children and young people were consulted about their views as part of the annual review of foster carers, and they were asked to complete the "viewpoint" questionnaire about their experience as a looked after child.

The inspectors were invited to attend a "total respect" training session for members of staff from Surrey County Council. The young people had been trained by NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) to facilitate the training, and run discussion sessions, role-play and tasks during the training event. The inspectors were impressed by the success of the day and the way that the training enthused the highly experienced staff that attended the day.

The inspectors were further advised that children and young people were involved as representatives on the corporate parenting operational and strategy group and had been involved in consultations on the new Green Paper both as part of the response from Surrey County Council and as part of the response given by the Government Office for the South East.

Most children and young people stated that they had a good relationship with their social worker, and could generally talk to them about their needs and wishes.

Surrey County Council Social Care Learning and Development team, a part of the Fostering Agency, had won an accolade from Skills for Care for being the best for the involvement of the young people, specifically with regard to the design and delivery of the "rights of looked after children and young people" to foster carers, and the involvement of foster children in the writing of a song called "a child's right to be heard", with a singer songwriter.

As mentioned earlier children and young people also have access to advocacy through NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

Most children stated within the questionnaires that they knew how to make a complaint, and that if they needed assistance, their foster carers, or their social workers would help.

Children and young people are invited to attend social events and support groups throughout the year; there were also sessions specifically for children who foster (foster carers children).

Awards events were held to celebrate success and achievement and photographs and reports of these events were published in the children and young people's magazine.

At the time of the inspection Surrey County Council was introducing a system to monitor children and young people's experiences through the Surrey Children and Young People's Rights checklist. A copy of this was provided to the inspectors and was observed to be detailed document.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is **(excellent, good, adequate or poor)**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

None of these standards were assessed during this key inspection.

EVIDENCE:

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1,16,17,21,23,24,25,26,32

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Following improvements made, foster carers received appropriate levels of supervision and support. This and a good training programme ensured that foster carers could meet the needs of the children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors were provided with the updated 2006 version of the fostering agency statement of purpose, and the newly reviewed 2007 draft of the statement of purpose. These documents contained all of the information required under National Minimum Standard 1 for Fostering Agencies.

A range of information was made available for the children and young people, which included written information on Surrey County Councils website for young people and young people and children looked after by Surrey.

The service recognised that the written format of the children's guides did not necessarily meet the specific needs of all children and young people, however the inspectors were advised that the placing social workers would seek to produce specific versions of the guide as required. The inspectors were advised by the voice of the child project officer that more child friendly documents had been associated with the Care zone website but that this website had since been closed and that work was ongoing with regard to setting up other web pages for children and young people.

Children and young people have access to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) as required.

Children and young people receive a copy of "Wazzzup" which is Surrey County Council's magazine for looked after children. The young people are supported to write and edit this magazine. Articles within this magazine include child friendly guidance about questions to ask foster carers before staying with them, what is a Personal Education Plan, what are independent visitors and each document includes information about how to make a complaint.

The inspectors were also advised that supporting social workers had provided foster carers with child-friendly books that could be read with the child or young person to explain why they were being looked after by foster carers.

No concerns were identified during the inspection with regard to the management of the fostering service. Foster carers spoke highly about the support that they received from their supporting social workers and stated that they felt that the team managers were always available to offer assistance.

There were clear lines of management and delegation of tasks. Foster Carer recruitment events advised potential foster carers about the assessment process. Assessments of foster carers continued to be detailed, and included the areas specified under the National Minimum Standard 17 for Fostering Services. The screening interview undertaken by the social worker had been reviewed and updated in March 2006 and had been supplemented by an initial information questionnaire in November 2006.

The recruitment and retention teams continued to develop their programme for recruitment of a range of foster carers. New glossy posters and brochures were in place, and advertising campaigns had been used in public places such as on local radio, public transport and in libraries. Further plans included placing posters and adverts in local hospitals.

Recruitment evenings continued to be successful, and the inspectors were advised that the agency was beginning to monitor access to websites in order to identify trends and possible new areas to focus recruitment.

Supervising social workers had received specific training in the supervision of foster carers since the last inspection. Foster carer supervision agreement had been put in place, and signed copies of these were observed on foster carers' files. Pro-forma records for supervising social workers visits with and without the placing social worker had been developed and were observed to be in use. A separate record was also used to record supervision sessions with foster carers.

Strategies were in place to support the foster carers that included a foster carers executive, support groups, and arrangements for respite. Out of hours support was available to the foster carers, and evidence was available to demonstrate that this has worked well for foster carers and the children and young people when required. Foster carers were complimentary about the support received from the out of hours support service.

A good range of assistance and advice was available to foster carers. Books and lists of sources of information were available, and foster carers advised the inspectors about being able to contact specialist professionals directly if they required support. Some foster carers commented about the inconsistent manner in which guidance was given to them about grants and benefits. The agency is asked to ensure that there is better clarity for all eligible foster carers about these benefits and grants.

The new accounting system that had been introduced at the time of the last inspection had settled in and was allowing more prompt and more accurate payments to foster carers. The inspectors were advised that foster carers had a dedicated telephone line that they could call if any inaccuracies were identified. Foster carers did not raise concerns about the management of payments to them during this inspection.

The inspectors were impressed by the passion of the training and development team. A detailed training programme continued to be in place. This included a programme of training that needed to be completed prior to the potential foster carers going to panel for approval. A safe caring training programme was in place and experienced foster carers led this programme. Foster carers also have the opportunity to undertake training on Surrey County Council's

open programme for social care staff. The inspectors were advised that the number of foster carers attending these courses had increased.

A number of other training opportunities were available and included online courses through the "Foster Parent College" and the opportunity for foster carers to undertake NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care. 15 foster carers had commenced this training in April 2006, with a further 15 planned to commence in April 2007.

Specialist training could be offered to foster carers and their families when requested.

The agency had asked foster carers to assist with a telephone interview of long-term foster carers about training that they wished to attend, and what would encourage them to attend courses on offer. The inspectors were advised that work was continuing following this research to increase attendance at courses. The inspectors were advised that the training programme had been adjusted to allow better flexibility of venue and time for foster carers to attend these courses.

The inspector observed from evidence in records, interviews with members of staff and the fostering panel attended during the inspection that the agency had a policy to place children and young people with family members or friends if this was feasible. The same level of support and training was offered to these carers as all other foster carers.

Foster carers and members of staff met during the inspection talked about the recent review that Surrey County Council had undertaken. Foster carers recognised the changes that had occurred to the teams that they would work with and were supportive of the staff. Foster carers and placing social workers also recognised that some of the teams had vacancies that affected the workloads of the supporting social workers. However, the inspectors were advised about how the agency was recruiting staff to fill vacancies, and how the workloads were being reviewed and managed.

The inspectors did not identify any concerns about the staff level of the agency during the inspection, and those foster carers met, stated that they could access their supervising social worker as required.

Supervising social workers had received training about their role had been undertaken since the last inspection, and there was evidence to demonstrate that staff understood their roles and responsibilities. This was assisted by the pro-forma records that had been introduced since the last inspection (as detailed earlier in the report).

Placing social workers commented within questionnaires and during the inspection that they were not satisfied that they always receive information or

records from foster carers. This was not supported by the evidence observed within the records of supervising social worker's visits with placing social workers, and was not supported by comments made by foster carers about the information that they shared with the children and young people's social workers. Foster carers and supervising social workers also understood what records the foster carer kept with regard to the child or young person, and what would happen with these records once the young person left care or moved onto another placement.

Records of incidents were recorded on the electronic record system "SWIFT" and records of complaints and allegations were held by the agency.

The inspectors were provided with evidence of ongoing life story work, and the inspectors were advised about training that foster carers had attended. Foster carers had also informed the inspector that where they had been unable to attend training, their supervising social worker had provided them with books and other resources that would assist them with starting this work with the young person. Some placing social workers retained responsibility for overseeing life story work undertaken by foster carers.

The inspectors were advised by the children and young people met during the inspection about how they were supported to keep memorabilia and information so that they could develop their own personal history. Some young people also showed the inspector their books and files in which they were keeping important pieces of information and memorabilia.

The locations of fostering teams were now more secure. The fostering team in the west of the county had moved to a new office which allowed them better space to work, was more confidential, and allowed them access to a range of rooms for meetings with foster carers and children and young people. At the time of the inspection an area of a separate office building was being redecorated so as to offer a more young person friendly area for meetings and panels.

Although little action could be taken to make records more secure in the fostering team in the east, action had been taken to move the area in which the team worked, and to ensure that any staff sharing the open plan area also worked with the children's team in order to promote better confidentiality. Staff felt happier with the current arrangements and stated that they were no longer concerned about telephone call being overheard or faxes being read by other members of staff.

Case records for children and young people and foster carers were found to be neat and orderly, and contained the information required. Where paper copies of information were not available, information was either available on the electronic record, or at close hand in other social work files.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	3
24	3
25	3
26	3
27	X
28	X
32	3

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS21	The agency is asked to ensure that there is better clarity for all eligible foster carers about the benefits and grants available.

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