



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service

Conway Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
Wirral
Cheshire
CH41 4FD

14th February 2005 – 25th February 2005

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

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service

Address

Conway Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, Wirral,
Cheshire, CH41 4FD

Local Authority Manager

Cath Hogan

Tel No:

0151 666 4696

Address

Conway Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, Wirral,
Cheshire, CH41 4FD

Fax No:

0151 666 5665

Email Address

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

24/11/03

Date of Inspection Visit		14 th February 2005 – 25 th February 2005		ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am		
Name of Inspector	1	Beate Roth	072783	
Name of Inspector	2	Dave O'Connor		
Name of Inspector	3			
Name of Inspector	4			
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not applicable		
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not applicable		
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Cath Hogan		

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
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D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The fostering service team of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council shares a building with a number of other social services teams. There is access to meeting rooms and training rooms within the building, at other social services offices and within community facilities.

The fostering service consists of a service manager who oversees the operation of the service, a team manager, three team leaders, 16 supervising social workers, (at the time of the inspection 4 supervising social workers were employed through an agency and 1 was employed on a temporary basis), 3 support workers (1 was employed through an agency) and 5 administrative staff. The fostering service functions are divided between three teams comprising of family link/mainstream, specialist teenage schemes and family and friends and permanence. At the time of the inspection there were 444 young people being looked after by foster carers. The service works closely with social workers from the children and family area teams, education and cultural services, health and other appropriate agencies.

The core responsibility of the service is to provide a range of placements for children from Wirral who are looked after by the local authority. In order to achieve this the fostering service team recruit, assess, approve, train, support and review foster carers.

The following services are provided: -

- Planned short breaks and family link placements to prevent family breakdown. The aim of this provision is to maintain children in their own families thereby preventing the need for longer periods of accommodation.
- Approving family and friends as carers to maintain children either within their extended family or community links to prevent risk of making these links more fragile or having to place children outside of these support networks.
- Providing a range of placements, for example, short term, medium/long term, teenage, remand and emergency out of hours fostering. The primary purpose being to safeguard children and work with families to prevent, wherever possible, long term care away from home.
- Providing therapeutic fostering to prevent the need for young people to be placed in residential care, to return them from residential care to their families or foster care, to prevent children from having multiple placements in foster or residential care, and to enhance the prospects of the young person returning home.
- Providing permanent placements in Wirral to enable young people to maintain contact with their family and established social networks.

Where there is a need for a foster care placement that cannot be met within Wirral a placement can be commissioned from the voluntary and private sector.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This inspection took place in February 2005. It found that the National Minimum Standards were either met or partially met. Since the last inspection, the service has made extensive efforts to address the issues raised in the National Care Standards Commission's last inspection report. The inspectors were pleased to find that many of the requirements and recommendations made as a result of the previous inspection had been met. The inspectors recognise that at the time of this inspection efforts have been initiated relating to those requirements that remain outstanding.

As a result of this announced inspection, three requirements from the last inspection were found to be unmet; during this inspection eleven requirements (these include the three outstanding requirements from the last inspection) and twelve recommendations were made.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection received a number of foster carers, foster children and young people's questionnaires, during this inspection. This report has incorporated some of the information received; any specific issues of concern arising from these questionnaires were addressed with one of the managers of the service at the time of the inspection.

6 foster carers and the young people they are looking after were visited during this inspection.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

Of the single standard, this was assessed and met the standard.

The statement of purpose for the fostering service is detailed containing the required information to meet this standard.

The inspectors examined the fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff and foster carers, which accurately reflected the statement of purpose.

A children's guide is available. This is given to young people who are 10 years and over. It is understood that work is continuing around making the guide available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.

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

Of the two standards, two were assessed and one met the standard.

The necessary business and management skills to effectively manage the service are in place. Staff have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering. Administrative and social work staff that spoke with the inspectors indicated that they felt very well supported by the manager and that she provides effective leadership and support. The team manager holds a professional social work qualification, although she currently does not hold a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 in management. Sample inspection of

a number of staff files including recruitment and vetting procedures and practices indicate that there has been a significant improvement since the last inspection in relation to required records to be maintained. There are robust recruitment procedures and practices in place that include renewal of police checks every three years.

Management of the fostering service(Standards 4 –5)

Of the two standards, two were assessed and met the standards.

The manager and staff within the fostering service have defined roles and responsibilities and copies of their job descriptions are maintained on their personnel records. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability within the service and staff and carers that spoke with the inspectors are aware of these. Systems are in place for the monitoring and controlling of the activities of the fostering service and quality performance issues. There are plans to continue to review the position of staff recruitment, caseloads and recruitment of foster carers within the ongoing development of the fostering service. The information systems within the fostering service are being reviewed. In terms of quality assurance an integrated computer information system should enhance the process for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Of the nine standards, nine were assessed and five met the standards.

The fostering service is made up of a number of placement schemes that have been developed to meet individual needs and circumstances of children. It is evident from case tracking that there is an emphasis upon carers providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Issues around diversity and equality are promoted. A social inclusion officer is in post and provides opportunities for all the young people including those with a disability to access the range of services available. Information provided indicates that plans are being considered to recruit foster carers from ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds that reflect the backgrounds of children requiring a foster placement. Holistic assessments are undertaken to ensure that children are appropriately matched with foster carers. Looked After Documents (LAC) are used as a planning tool for children placed in foster care, and although there have been improvements since the last inspection in relation to the accessibility of this information, a sample of carers case tracked indicates that not all carers are routinely provided with copies of the LAC documentation when a child is placed or shortly afterwards.

Preparation training for foster carers is provided focussing upon: caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour, recognising signs of abuse and promoting and maintaining a child's self-esteem. Further training courses are available. Further work needs to take place around auditing the training provided to foster carers. In general, management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. However, in terms of complaints and allegations issues were identified in relation to the fostering services having copies of all records pertaining to complaint and allegation investigations including outcomes and actions.

Through discussions with foster carers and supervising social workers there is evidence that children in foster care are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships in accordance with their care plan and placement plan. Children that spoke with the inspectors were clear about their individual contact arrangements. There is evidence that the fostering service is making efforts to ensure that children's opinions are sought

frequently over matters affecting their daily lives.

There are currently two full time named nurses seconded from a Primary Care Trust who take the lead in terms of health promotion for all looked after children within Wirral Borough Council Social Services Department. The named nurses provide a specific service for all looked after children in collaboration with health visitors, school nurses and community paediatricians. The majority of case files tracked contained information in relation to medical consent and healthcare information is generally maintained within the LAC documentation, although the health details maintained and available to foster carers was found to be very variable. The role and activities of the social inclusion officer is well promoted and appreciated by the young people that spoke with the inspectors. An issue was identified in relation to foster carers not recording medication administered. Foster carers reported the value of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service although issues were raised in relation to the time to be seen from initial referral.

The children/young people who met with the inspectors reported that their foster carers support them with their educational needs. The Looked After Children Education Services (LACES) team promote the educational attainment and school attendance of looked after children. Since the last inspection a virtual school has been developed, the school brings together professionals from different agencies to address matters that can impede and advance matters that can promote educational attainment for children. Issues were identified in relation to a number of children reporting changes of social worker. Dedicated services are in place to ensure that the fostering service is supported in helping young people develop skills and knowledge necessary for adult living.

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

Of the nine standards, nine were assessed and four met the standards.

A sample of staff files indicated that there has been a significant improvement since the last inspection in relation to information required regarding staffing records. There is robust recruitment procedures and practices in place that include interviews, vetting, reference and CRB checks. There are systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads. Staff that spoke with the inspectors indicated that they felt very well supported, and although busy felt that caseloads are manageable. There was evidence in place at the time of the inspection, indicating that the service is deliverable within the resources in place. There has been a significant improvement from the last inspection in relation to review of foster carers registration, at the time of the inspection information provided indicates that 20 carers are overdue an annual review.

There was evidence from the records inspected and staff interviewed that the experience and qualifications of the staff employed to work within the fostering service meets the National Minimum Standards. At the time of the inspection there is a recognised shortfall in the number of permanent supervising social workers and social work assistants, although a recruitment strategy is being implemented to address this aspect. A training plan is in place for social work staff and carers. Social work staff receive an induction to the role of the fostering service when appointed, although a formal induction programme should be devised and implemented.

There are a number of systems in place for working with and supporting carers.

All files inspected contained a signed front sheet of Wirral Borough Council's foster care

agreement. The inspectors were unable to ascertain whether or not all carers have received the most up to date revised agreement format. A list of issues covered during the approval process meets the issues identified in the National Minimum Standards. A small sample of new foster carers who met with the inspectors reported that during the approval process they were given sufficient information to enable them to undertake their role adequately.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Of the two standards, two were assessed and partially met the standards.

Inspection of record storage systems indicates that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure paper and computerised records are held securely. Case files inspected were generally found to be well structured and referenced. Appropriate policies and practices are in place in relation to managing confidential information and the retention of records. Arrangements should be in place to ensure that the fostering service maintains copies of all records pertaining to complaint and abuse allegation investigations including outcomes and actions. As already indicated previously there were some gaps in records relating to Looked After Children documentation.

Fitness of Premises(Standard 26)

Of the single standard, this was assessed and met the standard.

The fostering service's offices are appropriate for their use. The service has designated office space and facilities, including satellite offices for the fostering changes scheme. The service has efficient and robust administrative systems, including I.T and communication support. Plans are being considered to develop computerised information and communication systems for carers to include a designated website.

Financial requirements (Standard 27-29)

Of the three standards, one was assessed and met the standards.

The numerous schemes within the fostering service receive differing levels of allowances and payments according to the stated terms of the scheme. Appropriate computerised payment databases are maintained. Arrangements for carer's payments are to be reviewed and the inspectors are informed that a competency based payment for skills model is likely to be introduced. Consultation with carers and the Foster Carers Committee is ongoing in relation to the proposed review.

Fostering panel (Standard 30)

Of the single standard, this was assessed and met the standards.

During the course of the inspection, one fostering panel was observed. The panel was well organised, with all panel members appearing to have a clear understanding of their role, and responsibilities. The panel was chaired appropriately and there was evidence that all panel members' views are taken into account. It was clear from decision making and recommendations made around future social work practice that the panel performed a quality assurance function.

The panel had access to individuals with expertise in health and educational matters in accordance with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

Of the single standard, this was assessed and met the standards.

The fostering service provides short-term break and family link schemes. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place in relation to these schemes with emphasis on promoting parents involvement.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

Of the single standard, this was assessed and partially met the standard.

A number of the carers provided by the fostering service are carers who are family or friends of the children they are looking after. These carers are assessed and approved in the same way as mainstream foster carers, are subject to the same policies and procedures and have access to the same training and support.

At this inspection the records of training indicate that family and friends who are foster carers, are informed about training events and are in general undertaking training. The two records of family and friends carers inspected indicated that no training had been undertaken since approval.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	29	FS21	Reviews of foster carers must take place at intervals of no more than one year.	10 th December 2003
2	42	FS8 FS24	Foster placement agreements must be in line with Schedule 6.	31 st march 2004
3	35	FS24	Children's case records must reflect he needs of individual children, placement plans must be in place and completed to the standards identified in standard 24.	31 st march 2004

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Beate Roth **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Dave O'Connor **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager Paula Ross **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34	FS8 FS13FS24 FS32	A foster placement agreement that covers all the matters listed in Schedule 6 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 must be available prior to making a placement. The fostering provider must have a system in place for monitoring this.	25 th February 2005
2	17	FS8 FS24 FS32	Fully completed Looked After Children paperwork must be available for all children placed with foster carers.	25 th February 2005
3	12	FS9	The procedure for the arrangements for the protection of children must include contact details for the local authority and the Commission for Social Care Inspection.	25 th March 2005
4	42	FS9	A system for monitoring incidents of physical intervention must be put in place.	25 th March 2005
5	18	FS9	Systems must be in place to ensure that a complete written record is maintained of any complaint or allegation, the action taken in response to it and the outcome of the investigation. A record of this information should be held within the fostering services office.	25 th February 2005

6	17	FS12	Adequate systems must be made in order that all foster carers are provided with the arrangements for giving consent for a child's medical treatment	25 th February 2005
7	17	FS12	Arrangements should be in place to ensure that foster carers are routinely provided with adequately detailed information in relation to the child's health care needs.	25 th February 2005
8	29	FS16FS21	Arrangements must be in place in order that foster carers receive a review of their registration not more than one year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering panel considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than one year.	25 th February 2005
9	31	FS25	Arrangements must be in place to ensure that an accurate and up to date foster carer register is maintained.	25 th February 2005
10	17	FS32	The fostering provider must provide foster carers with training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.	25 th February 2005
11	29	FS25	Where the fostering service is no longer satisfied that the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable, arrangements must be in place to ensure that the person is given written notice of the proposal to terminate the terms of their approval, together with its reasons and invite the person to submit any written representations within 28 days of the date of the notice.	25 th February 2005

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	It would be good practice for the statement of purpose to be signed and dated by the person, who is approving the statement on behalf of the elected council members. This would enable the service to evidence that the elected members have reviewed the statement on an annual basis.

2	FS2	The manager of the service should undertake a qualification at level 4 in management or another qualification that matches the competencies required by this qualification.
3	FS4	The responsible individuals job description should include role and responsibilities specific to the overall management and monitoring of the fostering service.
4	FS12	It is recommended that any review of the fostering services integrated computer system also take into account the health care information systems of looked after children in order that appropriately detailed, up to date and easily accessible health care information is held and readily collated.
5	FS12	It is recommended that records be maintained in relation to the administration and non-administration of medication. The medication policy should be updated to reflect the recording systems of medication administered.
6	FS19	It is recommended that the induction provided to supervising social workers and support workers is given a more formal structure and that a list of issues to be covered is documented.
7	FS21	The difficulties in communication with the child's social worker reported by foster carers during the inspection are to be addressed.
8	FS22	The full foster care agreement should be maintained on foster carers files.
9	FS22	It is recommended that the timescales for undertaking supervisory visits by supervising social workers and the child's social worker be incorporated in to the foster care agreement.
10	FS22	It is recommended that all information relating to a complaint about a foster carer be held within the foster carers file.
11	FS23	An audit of the training provided to foster carers should be completed without delay in order that resources can be effectively targeted.
12	FS29	A review of the procedures around payment and payment levels should take place.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	21
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	14/02/05
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	164

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The statement of purpose for the fostering service is detailed containing the required information to meet this standard. It has been developed to include information about the health, education, and therapeutic services that are available to children and young people looked after by the service. It would be good practice for the statement of purpose to be signed and dated by the person, who is approving the statement on behalf of the elected council members. This would enable the service to evidence that the elected members have reviewed the statement on an annual basis.

The inspectors examined the fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff and foster carers, which accurately reflected the statement of purpose.

A children's guide is available. This is given to young people who are 10 years and over. It is understood that work is continuing around making the guide available in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. Some young people informed the inspectors that they had not received a copy of the children's guide. It appears that when young people leave a foster placement the guide is not taken with them. The local authority manager and team manager reported that they would address this issue in order to ensure that all young people who are 10 years and over have access to a guide.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Standard met?

Standard met?

<p>Inspection of pre inspection information submitted, staffing records and discussion with staff involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service indicate that the necessary business and management skills to effectively manage the service are in place. Staff appointed within their role and responsibilities have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering.</p>	<p>2</p>
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The team manager of the fostering service was appointed in August 1990 and holds a recognised professional qualification in social work. Administrative and social work staff that spoke with the inspectors indicated that they felt very well supported, and the manager provides effective leadership and support. It is apparent that the manager is well respected by the staff team. The manager has and continues to undertake training pertinent to her role and responsibilities, although she has yet to begin a qualification at level 4 in management or another qualification that matches the competencies required by NVQ level 4.

A service manager is currently acting up as the responsible individual of the fostering service. This post has been advertised and a competitive recruitment process for the post is currently underway.

The acting service manager has extensive experience as a childcare practitioner and team and service manager for Looked After Children.

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?
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Standard met?

Standard met?

<p>Since the last inspection a number of social work posts within the fostering service have been filled. Agency staff working within a temporary contract have filled a number of these posts. Sample inspection of a number of staff files including recruitment, vetting procedures and practices indicate that there has been a significant improvement since the last inspection in relation to required records to be maintained. There are robust recruitment procedures and practices in place that include renewal of police checks every three years.</p>	<p>3</p>
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Records maintained in relation to staff appointed through an employment agency include information and details relating to their skills and experience, references and CRB checks.

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

The manager and staff within the fostering service have defined roles and responsibilities and copies of these are contained within their job description that is maintained on their personnel records. The current acting service manager has a generic job description that reflects aspects of management responsibilities within the children's service. It is recommended that the job description also include roles and responsibilities specific to the overall management and monitoring of the fostering service.

There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability within the service and staff and carers that spoke with the inspectors are aware of these.

The fostering service has a defined, devolved budget and the acting service manager is responsible for the delivery and review systems of the services financial processes and systems.

There are systems in place for the monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and quality performance issues. The acting service manager indicated that there are further plans to continue to review the position of staff recruitment, caseloads and recruitment of foster carers within the ongoing development of the fostering service.

The inspectors are informed that there are plans to develop a single integrated computer system, although these plans have been delayed. The information systems within the fostering service are being reviewed. In terms of quality assurance an integrated computer information system should enhance the process for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service.

The Responsible Individual should ensure that the CSCI are notified of any notifiable occurrence in accordance with Regulation 43.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	X
Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	X
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4) The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Inspection of pre inspection information submitted, staffing records and discussion with staff involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service indicated that the necessary business and management skills to effectively manage the service are in place. Staff appointed within their role and responsibilities have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering.</p> <p>There are clear lines of responsibility and delegation and these are clearly understood by staff and carers. Arrangements are in place for an appropriately experienced individual to deputise for the service manager in her absence where necessary.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The fostering service is made up of a number of placement schemes that have been developed to meet the individual needs and circumstances of children. The schemes are generally focussed around family and friends, long term, short term, respite, teenage, therapeutic and fostering changes foster carers. Foster care placements that cannot be met within Wirral fostering service are commissioned from voluntary and private sector fostering services.

Prior to approval, there are appropriate arrangements in place for the assessment of prospective carers, their home and any health and safety issues. Prospective carers are provided with training in relation to health and safety as part of the initial preparation training. It is evident from case tracking that there is an emphasis upon carers providing a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Young people and children that spoke with the inspectors, individually and within a children's group, indicated that they felt safe and well cared for within their placements. Individual risk assessments including health and safety assessments of the home environment are on file where appropriate and carer's case tracked had copies of these assessments. There is evidence that the children and carers are appropriately matched according to the child's needs and the carer's skills, experiences and circumstances. Generally, foster carer's houses seen as part of the case tracking exercise were found to be well maintained and presented. One house was in the process of re decoration.

In relation to issues around challenging behaviour, carers reported generally feeling well supported in terms of training opportunities and advice regarding this issue.

Where a child's welfare may be compromised there are appropriate child protection procedures in place.

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?

3

At present there are a limited number of placements available for children. Active steps are being taken to recruit more foster carers. The fostering service manager reported that further work is being undertaken to recruit foster carers from ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds that reflect the backgrounds of children requiring a foster placement.

The fostering service manager reported that if a child is placed with foster carers who do not share the same cultural, religious or cultural background then support is provided to foster carers in meeting these needs.

There have been significant improvements in the number of short term break carers available since the last inspection. This has meant a reduction in the number of children with a disability and their families waiting for respite provision. The minor shortfall in this service continues to be actively addressed.

Additional training is provided to foster carers to support them in caring for a child with a specific disability.

Preparation training for foster carers is provided around meeting the ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious needs of children and around enhancing children's feelings of value and self worth. A further training course is also offered, however the numbers of foster carers who had received this was unclear due to the collation of information around this only being available for the last 12 months. Information around training provided prior to this is currently being collated so as to enable managers to ensure that foster carers who need it are provided with this training.

There are support services available for foster carers and children placed in foster care. Support workers within family placement, respite care and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and support from the supervising social workers are available.

A cultural inclusion officer has been in post since March 2003. The aim of this post is to improve the life chances of all looked after children through better opportunities for leisure, arts and sporting activities. Foster carers and young people interviewed spoke very positively about the support and opportunities provided by the cultural inclusion officer.

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?

2

At this inspection the sample of foster carers and children's files seen indicated that there has been an improvement in record keeping. There was evidence of matching a child/young person with a foster carer who could meet their assessed needs available on all the files examined. Since the last inspection a pro-forma has been developed for recording matching considerations. In discussions with the supervising social workers it was identified that a great deal of preliminary assessment takes place in order to identify appropriate placements for children.

Looked After Children documentation is used to assist matching, in general the files inspected indicated there was an improvement in this area of record keeping since the last inspection. In some of files inspected, these documents were not always fully completed.

Regular meetings are held to consider the needs of children who are waiting for a long-term placement and whether a match with appropriate carers can be identified.

The limited number of foster placements available for children at present has an impact on how effective the matching process can be for children.

The small sample of files inspected indicated that all foster carers had a placement agreement. However, some were not fully completed and did not contain specific reference to elements of matching that were considered when agreeing the placement. 2 had been completed several months after the placement began. In accordance with Regulation 34 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, these agreements must be in place prior to making the placement.

Evidence was provided to the inspector as to how a foster carer was supported to care for a young person placed with a carer from a different racial and cultural background.

The small sample of files inspected and foster carers visited indicated that periods of introduction take place prior to a child's placement.

The questionnaires completed by foster carers and foster carers who met with Inspectors indicated that some carers felt they were given insufficient information about the children they are looking after. The majority indicated the information given was adequate.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Preparation training for foster carers is provided around caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour, recognising signs of abuse and on ways of promoting and maintaining a child's self-esteem. Further training courses are offered around these issues, however the numbers of foster carers who had received this was unclear due to the collation of information around this only being available for the last 12 months. It is important that this information is available as soon as possible so as to enable managers to ensure that foster carers who need it are provided with this training. The service manager and team manager reported that this is to be completed within 3 months.

In general, all the files examined had safe caring guidelines that are specific to each foster placement and fostered children. These guidelines are drawn up with the foster carers and where appropriate with all household members. It is understood that these guidelines are checked with the child's social worker and explained clearly and appropriately to the child. All except one carer had copies of safe care guidelines specific to children placed within the home.

Wirral Borough Council fostering service makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable and this is written in the foster care agreement. A policy on acceptable and unacceptable sanctions that can be used by foster carers is available.

During the inspection a sample of records relating to complaints and allegations were inspected. Some supporting records collated as part of the allegation, investigation and outcome were not readily accessible. It appears that some records (or copies) relating to the outcome of complaint and abuse allegations are not routinely kept within the fostering service offices. In order to ensure that complete records are easily accessible and effective monitoring of the suitability of foster carers can take place, adequate arrangements must be in place to ensure that copies of all records pertaining to complaint and allegation investigations including outcomes and actions are maintained within the fostering service.

The procedure for the arrangements for the protection of children must include contact details for the local authority and the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

A bullying policy and procedure has been developed and is available to foster carers. This identifies the action foster carers are to take to tackle any bullying behaviour identified in the foster placements. Foster carers are now to complete a monitoring form when an incident of bullying has been brought to their attention.

There is a written policy and procedure available around what foster carers are to do if a child/young person is missing from home. This is incorporated in to the foster carer agreement.

Training around acceptable physical interventions is provided to specific foster carers who are managing young people with behavioural difficulties. A system for monitoring incidents of physical intervention was not in place. This is to be addressed.

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

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

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

Case tracking indicated that in general children and carers files contained care planning documentation outlining contact arrangements specific to the child circumstances. Foster carers that spoke with the inspectors are generally satisfied that they are kept updated in terms of contact and changes to contact arrangements. Through discussions with members of the fostering service and carers there is evidence that children in foster care are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships in accordance with their care plan and placement plan. Children that spoke with the inspectors are clear about their individual contact arrangements.

Some foster carers reported not having some Looked After Children (LAC) documentation. Specifically, essential information record 1 and 2 and placement plans. Records and discussion with 2 carers indicated that they had only received LAC documentation shortly before this inspection took place. This issue is also raised elsewhere in this report; it is essential that adequate systems be put in place to ensure that carers are provided with appropriate LAC documentation at the time of being placed with foster carers.

Children that spoke with the inspectors felt generally that they are listened to and that they have opportunities to be involved in care plan reviews. Carers also indicated that they have opportunities to discuss contact issues during review meetings or with the child's social worker where necessary. Issues around contact are discussed within foster care preparation training. During this preparation training prospective carers have the opportunity to speak with an existing foster to discuss a range of issues including contact where necessary.

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**

There was evidence that the fostering service is making efforts to ensure that children's opinions are sought frequently over matters affecting their daily lives. The foster carers spoken to by the inspectors were aware of the importance of listening to the views of the children in their care.

The children interviewed as part of the children's group had all been asked for their views about matters affecting their daily lives, such as their choice of food, activities, clothes, how to decorate their room, and about fostering. The inspectors also examined a sample of children's questionnaires and found that most of the children said that they are asked their views about their daily lives.

The children's guide was produced in consultation with looked after young people and covers a range of issues such as health and education and how to access different professionals. The guide details the complaint process and how to access an advocate. The children interviewed as part of the inspection were aware of whom to approach if they needed to make a complaint. There was evidence that young people are aware of advocacy services available for them.

A referral can be made by a social worker for a young person to see an independent visitor

There are two children's involvement officers. One officer works specifically with children who have physical and learning disabilities. The children's involvement officers ensure that young people are kept informed about local and national issues affecting young people in care. The children's involvement officers are involved in a number of projects to enable the views of children and young people to be heard on a range of issues in different forums within the Borough Council. The work being undertaken to encourage children and young people to make their views known at statutory reviews is particularly important given that it was reported at the last inspection that around 50% of looked after children attend these meetings.

Some young people interviewed and who returned questionnaires reported a number of changes in social worker and delays in social work visits. The local authority manager reported that a number of social work posts have recently been filled with permanent staff following a successful recruitment drive and that this has resulted in agency workers moving on. This lack of consistency in worker and visits reported by some young people will hopefully be addressed by this.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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There are currently two full time named nurses seconded from a Primary Care Trust who take the lead in terms of health promotion for all looked after children within Wirral Borough Council Social Services Department. The named nurses have been in post from November 2003 and provide a specific service for all looked after children in collaboration with health visitors, school nurses and community paediatricians. The nurses indicate that there is currently a process of change underway from health assessments currently being undertaken by community paediatricians to named nurses undertaking health assessments of school age children, with plans for trained health visitors to undertake health assessments for pre school looked after children.

Named nurses have been involved in providing foster carers with training regarding health promotion issues; funding has recently been secured to enable the nurses to provide keep fit sessions for foster carers. The nurses indicate that health care assessments for 11 to 18 year olds also routinely involve mental health screening where issues identified can be referred to mental health services.

Foster carers are provided with information regarding a child's health care needs via the LAC documentation, although case tracking indicates that the depth of health information is very variable. This aspect is recognised by the named nurses. Information provided at the time of the inspection indicates that of the 670 current looked after children 60 have received a health assessment from the looked after nurses from September 2004. The nurses indicate that during the assessment process they are building up and collating health care information of looked after children. The nurses did indicate that they rely on their own databases and do not have access to the department's SWIFT computer database. It is recommended that any review of the fostering services integrated computer system also

take into account the health care information systems of looked after children in order that appropriate and up to date health care information is held and easily collated.

The majority of the foster carers of the children case tracked have information in relation to medical consent, although two children placed with carers did not have medical consent completed on LAC documentation and one carer did not have Essential Information Record (EIR) 1 and 2 documentation in respect of a child placed with them.

Foster carers that spoke with the inspectors are clear of their role and responsibilities in terms of ensuring children's health care needs are promoted, including issues around ensuring children are registered to receive appropriate medical, dental and ophthalmic treatment. Carers did indicate that whilst the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is a valuable resource, there are issues around the length of time before a child is seen from initial referral. Foster carers are provided with a rolling programme of first aid training.

Foster carers provide safe storage facilities in relation to medication administered where appropriate and carers have access to the department's medication procedure. However, it is not evident that records are being maintained in relation to medication administered to children, the written procedure should also be amended to ensure that adequate records are maintained in relation to the administration and non-administration of medication.

A cultural inclusion officer was appointed in March 2003 and contributes to the health promotion of looked after children by providing opportunities for leisure, arts and sporting activities. It was pleasing to note that the majority of children and young people that spoke with the inspectors were aware of the inclusion officers role and had taken up many of the varied and well publicised opportunities for activities etc. There is a strong emphasis for children with disabilities accessing these opportunities and initiatives. Statistical data is collated and analysed for trends in relation to the activities/initiatives provided and the take up of these. All young people in care above a certain age are provided with a free swim pass.

The service manager indicates in her pre inspection questionnaire that the service would benefit from improving liaison with the Housing Department in relation to adaptations for children with special needs. The Commission would welcome this area of improvement.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The children/young people who met with the inspectors reported that their foster carers support them with their educational needs. All said that they have a quiet area to study.

The Looked After Children Education Services (LACES) team have the remit of promoting the educational attainment and school attendance of looked after children. LACES provide support and advice to carers in educational matters.

Each of the files examined contained a personal education plan. LACES have been liaising with the fostering service around providing further training to carers around their role in formulating and developing these plans.

Information around the roles foster carers play in promoting the educational achievement of children/young people they are caring for was not sufficiently detailed in the foster placement agreements on some of the files examined. The practicalities of educational attendance, particularly around issues such as parent/carer meetings and school trips were not clear.

The fostering service has information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of looked after children and young people in their foster care services and to demonstrate school attendance.

Since the last inspection a virtual school has been developed. The virtual school brings together professionals from different agencies to address matters that can impede and to advance matters that can encourage the educational well being of looked after children.

The changes in social worker reported by some young people and foster carers cannot provide a positive effect on children's educational plans.

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
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Wirral Borough Council Social Services Department has a designated Leaving Care team for all looked after children/young people. The team currently comprises of two team managers and seventeen staff including a connexions worker (working 2 days per week) and a mix of qualified social workers and leaving care advisors. The team has designated administrative support systems in place.

Referrals to the team are made when a young person reaches the age of fifteen and half years, a leaving care advisor is allocated with a needs assessment and pathway plan devised and implemented in collaboration with the young person, foster carer and other stakeholders. The Leaving Care Team provide the carer with a skills audit tool with the intention that this audit is undertaken with the participation of the young person. Subsequent involvement from the Leaving Care Team is consistent with individual needs assessment and pathway plans. The Leaving Care Team benefits from a having an equivalent full time specialist social worker that works with young people with disabilities in partnership with adult services where necessary. The inspector was informed that there are plans to recruit two senior practitioner posts to the team, which will allow for greater flexibility in relation to the delivery of the service. Monthly allocation meetings are held and at the time of the inspection, there are three referrals that the team is not in a position to allocate.

A drop in centre is available for young people three days per week. The centre provides further opportunities for young people to discuss issues or anxieties with a leaving care worker.

The Department developed a sub group last year to discuss issues relating to preparation to adulthood. The team manager of the fostering service was a member of this group. As a result a number of foster carers were provided with training around preparation for adulthood. Carers from the teenage foster care scheme that spoke with the inspectors were satisfied that they received appropriate support and training in relation to this aspect. The foster cares handbook contains written information regarding independence, leaving care and expectations of the carer.

The inspector was informed that there might be future funding available for a Children's Involvement Officer to be attached to the team. This area of development would be welcomed.

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

As identified in standard 3 a number of social work posts within the fostering service have been filled. Agency staff working within a temporary contract have filled a number of these posts. Sample inspection of a number of staff files indicate that there has been a significant improvement since the last inspection in relation to information required to be maintained on file. There is robust recruitment procedure and practices in place that include interviews, vetting, reference and CRB checks. There are systems in place to ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years. Records maintained, including proof of identity was maintained on sample files inspected.

Records maintained in relation to staff appointed through an employment agency include information and details relating to their skills, experience, references and CRB checks. Unqualified staff involved in assessments are appropriately supervised by an experienced and qualified colleague where necessary.

Total number of staff of the agency:

30

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

As identified previously in this report there is a defined management structure within the fostering service with clear lines of accountability that is understood by staff and carers. There are appropriate levels of management delegation in place.

There are systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads. Staff that spoke with the inspectors indicated that they felt very well supported, and although busy felt that caseloads are manageable. There was evidence in place at the time of the inspection indicating that the service is deliverable within the resources in place. The service manager indicates that there is to be a management review of the flow and volume of work within the fostering service in order to determine future appropriate staffing arrangements.

There are structures in place in relation to the assessment, approval and review of carers. In relation to the review of foster carers registration there has been a significant

improvement following the last inspection in reducing the numbers of outstanding annual carer reviews. Information provided indicates that at the time of the inspection 20 carers are overdue for an annual review.

Appropriate systems are in place in relation to fostering agencies in order that contracts clearly specify appropriate monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure compliance.

Systems are in place to provide staff and carers with ongoing training and skills development. Foster carers that spoke with the inspector did indicate their satisfaction with the training opportunities provided. The fostering service has reviewed the arrangements for carer's payments and the inspectors are informed that a competency based payment for skills model is likely to be introduced. Foster carers are being kept updated regarding this issue. The management of the service recognised that the intention to introduce a revised payment structure has caused some anxiety for carers. The inspectors are assured that ongoing and open consultation with carers and the Foster Carers Committee is to continue in relation to this aspect.

Foster carers that spoke with the inspectors have a good understanding of the role of children's social workers and their supervising social worker. Appropriate administrative support is in place and staff have access and copies of grievance, disciplinary and associated 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
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There was evidence from the records inspected and staff interviewed that the experience and qualifications of the staff employed to work within the fostering service meets the National Minimum Standards. At the time of the inspection there was a recognised shortfall in the number of supervising social workers and social work assistants. 5 positions were being filled by agency staff and one position was being filled by a temporary member of staff. The local authority manager and the team manager reported that steps are being taken to address this shortfall by advertising for permanent members of staff. Some questionnaires returned by foster carers indicated that they do not think there is enough staff within the fostering service.

There was a sense throughout the inspection of there not being enough foster carers available to meet the demand for the children who require a placement. This was confirmed by members of staff interviewed. Having foster carers with exemptions to enable them to care for more children than they were originally approved for, for a time limited period is also indicative of this. The business plan for April 2004 – 2005 indicates that a main objective is to reduce the numbers of children placed in each family to no more than three in accordance with The Foster Care Regulations. At this inspection there were 34 carers with exemptions.

Since the last inspection the fostering service has been re-organised with three team leaders in order to better facilitate recruitment. A discussion with supervising social workers and their immediate managers within the fostering service indicated that there are and have been great efforts to attempt to recruit foster carers. There are a number of projects underway to recruit foster carers for specific groups of children where it has been identified that need is greatest. Records indicate the approval of a number of new carers since the last inspection.

There has however been an increase in the number of children needing a foster care placement.

6 supervising social workers were interviewed. All reported that they consider that their workload is fair and that they have sufficient time to undertake the tasks allocated to them.

An examination of a sample of assessment reports of foster carers and the preparatory training indicated that the assessment process covers the issues outlined in the National Minimum Standards. New carers interviewed were positive about the assessment process.

The fostering service manager reported that on average it takes 4 – 6 months to recruit new foster carers. Some of the foster carers interviewed during the inspection reported that the approval process takes too long.

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

A range of staff were interviewed in relation to this standard indicating that staff have manageable caseloads, receive formal regular supervision and generally felt that the manager of the service is very supportive. Staff receive an annual key issues meeting with their line manager where overall performance, training and development issues are discussed.

There is robust recruitment, employment practices in place for staff and carers, with corporate and local written procedures in place covering all aspects of the service. Staff and carers that spoke with the inspectors are aware of the departments whistle blowing policy and procedures.

Foster carers interviewed and a number of returned foster carer questionnaires indicate that foster carers are aware and utilise the department's emergency out of hours service, although some carers report issues around the availability of the support provided through this service. The service manager acknowledged this aspect and indicated that there are plans for an additional worker to be recruited to the out of hours service.

Foster carers from the fostering changes and therapeutic fostering scheme gave positive views about the out of hours management and support available.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

An examination of the records of training available and a discussion with the team manager and a staff development officer indicated that a variety of training is provided.

A discussion with 6 supervising social workers indicated that their training needs are identified in appraisals, supervision and at team meetings. They considered that good training opportunities are provided both in-house and through accessing external training events. The staff interviewed considered that they are kept informed about changes in legislation and practice.

The 6 supervising social workers interviewed were involved in different aspects of fostering service work. All considered that value is placed on their professional development by the local authority.

The fostering service team manager indicated that induction training is provided to fostering service staff. New staff interviewed gave varying accounts of what constituted their induction and on discussion with the team manager the induction did not appear to have a formal structure. It is recommended that the induction is given a more formal structure and that a list of issues to be covered is documented. The progress in covering the matters identified within the first 10 weeks of employment can then be assessed within the supervisory process.

Training programmes reflect the policies of the fostering service. Opportunities are provided for foster carers and fostering service staff to receive joint training.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The 6 supervising social workers interviewed were clear about their roles and responsibilities. They informed the inspectors that they feel supported in their roles. They reported that they receive monthly supervision and that a record is made of this and agreed actions reviewed.

Team meetings are held on a regular basis. These provide a forum for discussing the operation of the team and new developments.

The records of employment seen contained a contract of employment and clearly defined job descriptions. These contained the appropriate information.

The inspectors observed that the policies and procedures for the service are readily accessible.

An appraisal scheme (key issues) has recently been re-introduced to Wirral Borough Council staff.

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

There are a number of systems in place for working with and supporting carers. During office hours foster carers can approach their link worker or any other member of the family placement team for support and advice. Out of office hours foster carers can contact an emergency duty social worker. Some carers reported that the support received from the out of hours service has not been beneficial. Up until recently there was only one social worker managing the out of hours duty service after 12pm. A further social worker is now deployed. In addition to the emergency duty social workers, foster care co-ordinators are available to provide support until 10pm. Some supervising social workers provide foster carers with a contact telephone number to use in an emergency. It was discussed with the local authority manager and the team manager that the out of hours support should be regularly reviewed given that issues with out of hours support have been raised by foster carers. Consideration also needs to be given as to how to make the support available more equitable.

Separate support groups are available for kinship carers, mainstream carers, teenage carers and for foster carers providing therapeutic support. Here foster carers meet up and can receive support from other foster carers. Training is provided at some of these sessions. Representatives from the family placement team attend the support groups.

There are foster carer committees and foster care co-ordinator meetings which are attended by a representative from the family placement team. These meetings enable foster carers to voice their views about the service being provided to them from social services. A few foster carers were unclear about this provision. The team manager reported that she would address this. A newsletter is produced by foster carers 4 times a year and gives information and advice to colleagues.

Support is provided to foster carers around education matters by the Looked After Children Education Service. Leisure provision is organised by the Cultural Inclusion Officer, support around emotional and physical health issues is provided by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and the Looked After Children's nurses.

There was evidence from the foster panel and from an examination of records that reviews of some foster carers have not taken place on an annual basis. Steps have been taken to address this.

Supervision is provided to foster carers by a supervising social worker. The foster carers interviewed were aware of the role of the fostering service supervising worker as were the supervising workers themselves.

A number of foster carers reported difficulties in communication with the child's social worker as they often experience delays in social workers returning telephone calls. This issue was also raised by a foster care co-ordinator who met with the inspector. The local authority manager reported that she would address this issue.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

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

All files inspected contained a signed front sheet of Wirral Borough Council's foster care agreement. The foster care agreement was altered following previous inspections and the inspectors could not ascertain which foster care agreement, carers had signed and whether it covers all issues in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001. The foster carers visited had an agreement that covered all the relevant issues. The full foster care agreement should be maintained on foster carers files.

Looked After Children documentation regarding the placement plan provides the basis for the placement agreement. The small sample of files inspected indicated that all foster carers had a placement agreement. However, some were not fully completed and did not contain specific reference to elements of matching that were considered when agreeing the placement. 2 had been completed several months after the placement began. In accordance with Regulation 34 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, these agreements must be in place prior to making the placement.

The issue of uncertainty amongst foster carers as to who can give medical consent and consent to school trips arose again at this inspection. Placement plans inspected did not always contain this information. A clear placement plan provided before the beginning of a placement would no doubt address this matter.

Supervision is provided to foster carers by the supervising social worker. Since the last inspection staffing difficulties have resulted in some carers not receiving regular visits from supervising social workers. All carers currently have a supervising social worker allocated to them, however, the team manager reported that the work loads of some supervising social workers needs revision as the current allocation of work would preclude regular visits to the foster carers they are supporting. The team manager and local authority manager reported that work around this is currently taking place and that steps are being taken to recruit more permanent staff.

It is recommended that the timescales for undertaking supervisory visits by supervising social workers and the child's social worker be incorporated in to the foster care agreement.

The foster carers for the therapeutic foster care placements receive a higher level of support and supervision due to the needs of the children that are placed with them. There is a small group of foster carers providing these placements. They have their own monthly support groups, there is group supervision and respite care is provided between the therapeutic foster carers if this is needed. Monthly supervision is provided by a mental health clinician or the family placement link worker. 6 weekly planning meetings are also held. Three foster carers who provide therapeutic foster care placements commented positively to inspectors on the support they are receiving from this service.

Since the last inspection a handbook containing information relevant to the role of foster carers such as departmental policies and procedures has been made available. The foster carers visited and the small sample that met with the inspectors reported that they have found the handbook easy to use and informative.

Information around the complaints procedure is provided to foster carers. The foster carers interviewed were aware of how to make a complaint. Records of complaints made are kept

within the fostering service and at the Quality and Complaints Unit. The quality and complaints manager and officer informed the inspectors of how this information can be used to inform service provision. Evidence of this was available at the inspection. The documentation in relation to a sample of complaints were examined. These had been responded to within the timescales indicated in Wirral Borough Council's complaint procedure. Information pertaining to one complaint could not be located during the inspection. It is recommended that all information relating to a complaint about a foster carer is held within the foster carers file.

In general, management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care.

During the inspection a sample of records relating to complaints and allegations were inspected. Some supporting records collated as part of the allegation, investigation and outcome were not readily accessible. It appears that some records (or copies) relating to the outcome of complaint and abuse allegations are not routinely kept within the fostering service offices. In order to ensure that complete records are easily accessible and effective monitoring of the suitability of foster carers can take place, adequate arrangements must be in place to ensure that copies of all records pertaining to complaint and allegation investigations including outcomes and actions are maintained within the fostering service.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>A list of issues covered during the approval process meets the issues identified in the National Minimum Standards. A small sample of new foster carers who met with the inspectors reported that during the approval process they were given sufficient information to enable them to undertake their role adequately.</p>		
<p>A discussion with a staff development worker, team manager and an examination of the records of training available for foster carers indicated that there is a range of training on offer. This covers the training identified in the National Minimum Standards.</p>		
<p>At this inspection a system for identifying which foster carers have had which training and when has begun. However this information is only available for the last 12 months. It is important that this information is available as soon as possible so as to enable managers to ensure that foster carers who need it are provided with this training. The service manager and team manager reported that this is to be completed within 3 months.</p>		
<p>At the time of the inspection some foster carers were undertaking a National Vocational Qualification in child care and a small number had obtained this qualification. Support systems are available to enable foster carers to undertake this qualification. This includes access to an assessor, additional training and distance learning.</p>		
<p>The staff development officer, family placement team and foster care liaison officers meet in order to identify training needs and to look at what factors need to be addressed to enable foster carers to attend training events. There was evidence of flexible times of training and flexible venues being offered. The inspectors consider that further consideration needs to be</p>		

given to these issues given that their discussions with foster carers indicated that foster carers are not attending training due to transport problems and due to the time the courses are available. The team manager reported that consideration is also currently being given to different training methods, such as training on compact disc and video.

Training is provided both in-house and from outside agencies depending on the training need. Experienced foster carers are involved in contributing to the training provided. In undertaking training foster carers have the opportunity on some courses to train with social workers and family placement workers. Foster carers reported that they are asked to evaluate the training provided. The foster carers interviewed also reported that the training events available are well publicised by the family placement team.

A family placement worker is working on setting up a support group for the children of foster carers. This will take place over the summer holidays, feedback from this will be used to inform future provision of these support groups.

As already indicated not all foster carers have had reviews within the 12 monthly timescale. Given the quality assurance function of the review process in terms of training, it is important that all foster carers have a review within the prescribed frequencies.

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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There is a written policy on case recording available. In general, the files examined contained the relevant information. As already indicated there were some gaps in records relating to Looked After Children documentation.

In general foster carers reported having received sufficient information to enable them to care for the children they are looking after. Foster carers interviewed knew of the child's care plan and the reasons why they needed to be looked after.

Induction and follow on training covers the importance of information relating to the child's life history for their emotional development. The foster carers visited, in general were aware of the importance of recording significant life events and retaining memorabilia.

The foster carers visited at this inspection were storing records securely. The fostering service provides carers with a lockable box. It was identified that some information relating to a child had not been returned to Wirral Borough Council following the end of the placement. This was brought to the attention of the team manager to address.

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
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Inspection of sample record storage systems indicates that there are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure paper and computerised records are held securely. A sample of case files inspected indicate that the team manager signs case records in order to monitor the quality and accuracy of case records and provides staff with appropriate support and supervision where necessary. Case files inspected were generally found to be well structured and referenced.

Appropriate policies and practices are in place in relation to managing confidential information and the retention of records. Appropriate systems are in place in relation to records about allegations and complaints including details of investigations and outcomes, although as stated in standards 9 and 22 inspectors found that some records were not readily accessible.

A children and foster carers register is maintained although during the course of the Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service

inspection it was noted that some of the information contained in the registers was not up to date. A number of carers who no longer provide foster care remain on the list and a number of addresses were found to be inaccurate.

Carers are notified in writing of fostering services decision to de register a foster carer, although the inspectors noted that of the two recent panel decisions to de-register the carer, only one letter to a carer detailed the reason why the decision had been made and the timescale for the carer to appeal against the decision.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	X
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 £	X
Maximum £	X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering services offices are appropriate for their use. The service has designated office space and facilities, including satellite offices for the fostering changes scheme. The service has efficient and robust administrative systems, including I.T and communication support. The inspectors are informed that plans are being considered to develop computerised information and communication systems for carers to include a designated website. A number of carers do have computers installed in their homes and thus have access to the departments corporate website.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that records including computer records are stored securely.

During interviews a number of social work staff raised issues regarding the suitability of the Conway Street building. Whilst this aspect is appreciated by the inspectors, in accordance with these standards the building is suitable for its purpose. Social workers interviewed raised an issue regarding the allocation of parking. It is understood that the fostering service does have an allocated three car park spaces within the building, and additional car parking spaces are available off site. Given the difficulties this is causing for workers it is recommended that the availability of parking be further considered.

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?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

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?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

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

The numerous schemes within the fostering service receive differing levels of allowances and payments according to the stated terms of the scheme. Carers receive agreed expense allowance payments where appropriate. Carers that spoke with the inspectors indicated that payments are received on time and any mistakes quickly rectified. Appropriate computerised payment databases are maintained.

As discussed previously the fostering service has reviewed the arrangements for carer's payments and the inspectors are informed that a competency based payment for skills model is likely to be introduced.

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

During the course of the inspection two inspectors observed one fostering panel. The observations by inspectors led them to conclude that the panel was well organised and conducted itself in an appropriate and professional manner. The panel was well chaired and there was evidence of all panel members' views being taken into account. It was clear from the decision-making and recommendations around future social work practice that the panel performed a quality assurance function.

The panel met the regulations in terms of the number and role of the individuals present.

A medical advisor was present at the panel to provide medical expertise. There was also an independent member available to provide advice around educational matters.

The inspection of previous panel minutes indicated that there is clear decision making which is fully recorded.

Panel members reported that the paperwork for all applications being considered is forwarded to panel members in advance of the panel. Panel members have been made aware of the procedure around the storage and management of confidential information.

The inspector was advised that training is provided to panel members around their role and any changes. It was discussed with the panel chair that training should be provided to a new panel member around relevant childcare legislation and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations.

Prospective foster carers are invited to the panel. The inspectors observed that this was managed sensitively.

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?

3

The fostering service provides short-term break and family link schemes. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place in relation to these schemes with emphasis on promoting parents involvement.

Information provided during the inspection indicates that four children are currently waiting to be matched for a placement within the short breaks scheme. The number of short break carers has reduced from the last inspection. The inspectors are informed that a targeted recruitment drive is to be shortly instigated focussing upon the demands and delivery needs of the current service provision.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Just under a quarter of the carers provided by the fostering service are carers who are family or friends of the children they are looking after. These carers are assessed and approved in the same way as mainstream foster carers, are subject to the same policies and procedures and have access to the same training. Each carer has access to a named supervising social worker that undertakes supervisory visits and is available for support.

A discussion with staff involved in the assessment, approval and support of family and friends who are carers and an examination of records indicated that there is a recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friends as carers in the assessment and approval process. The importance of children being cared for by individuals who have a significant link to them was clearly acknowledged in the small sample of records examined at this inspection.

At the last inspection it was reported that the review reports seen and a discussion with family and friends who are carers indicated a low take up of training. Supervising social workers reported difficulty in getting these carers to access training. The training records had also not been collated so it was difficult to form an overall view. At this inspection the records of training indicate that family and friends who are foster carers, are in general undertaking training. The two records of family and friends carers inspected indicated that no training had been undertaken since approval. In one case this was 12 months and in the other 8 months. The inspectors were concerned that the fostering panel had recommended that training be provided following the approval of a foster carer.

The two records of family and friends carers inspected contained looked after children documentation that had been completed in February 2005. This is several months after the placement had been made. This information must be made available either before or at the beginning of a placement in order to ensure that carers have access to the relevant information that is needed.

There are guidelines for the placement of children in an emergency with a relative or a friend. These guidelines cover the matters detailed in Regulation 38 of the Fostering service Regulations 2002. A sample of files examined indicated that this procedure is being followed.

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 the 14th February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

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

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 26th April 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name Cath Hogan
Signature Cath Hogan
Designation Acting Service Manager
Date 26th April 2005

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Wirral Fostering Service am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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