



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Birmingham Social Care & Health Fostering Service**

1st Floor

31 Dollman Street

Nechells

Birmingham

B7 4RP

27th October, 2004

## Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

### The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

## Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Birmingham Social Care & Health Fostering Service

**Address**

Beechenhurst, 10 Serpentine Road, Selly Park,  
Birmingham, West midlands, B29 7HU

**Local Authority Manager**

Janet Groves

**Tel No:**

0121 464 1101

**Address**

Beechenhurst, 10 Serpentine Road, Selly Park,  
Birmingham, West midlands, B29 7HU

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

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**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

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

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		Commenced 27 <sup>th</sup> October 2004 Completed 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Ann Appleby	135667
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Llynn woods	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>	Claudette Morgan	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>	Neil Arculus	
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> 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.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Mrs Janet Groves	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

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**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

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**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
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- 7. Fitness of premises**
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- 9. Fostering panels**
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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 Birmingham Social Care & Health 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.

Birmingham Social Care & Health administers and manages the in house fostering service, providing family placements for children from birth to 18 years. The Appointed Manager of the fostering service, and 8 Team Managers are responsible for the day-to-day running of the service. A Children's Service Manager and 1 Team Manager, has delegated responsibility for the Shared Care service for children with disability. There are 122 social work staff and 5 co-ordinator posts, supported by 46 administrative staff.

The 10 Team Managers hold respective responsibilities for managing the services, providing a variety of foster placements to meet the needs of Birmingham's multi-cultural families and children. The overall service is delivered by a number of teams with specific remits. These include, the Recruitment Team, Assessment team, Panel team, Long-term Family finding team, Short-term under 10's, Short-term over 10's and EDT carers, Long-term care, Kinship care, Respite Shared Care (disabled children). Three placement teams provide a service to social workers and identify available placements for children within Birmingham's fostering services and external placements.

At inspection of the service, the service had 584 approved foster carers providing care for 796 children and young people Looked After. The above figures are 10% lower than those gathered at the previous inspection.

The service operates from 9 different locations. The recruitment service operates from a central location, easily accessible to members of the public in Birmingham. The 'shop style' frontage of the office is designed to generate the public interest in fostering.

The service operates a competencies based assessment for foster carers and matches children's needs to carer skills. Carer's can progress from level 1 to level 4, dependent on their training, experience, and placement evaluation.

## PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

### Inspector's Summary

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

This was the second inspection of Birmingham Social Care and Health fostering services. The inspection was commenced in October and had to be fitted in around a number of planned initiatives including service development training to core staff. For this reason the inspection could not be concluded until mid December 04.

The service had made a number of changes since the last inspection, but had been subject to considerable amount of inspection and interventions, which had affected the services operation, both positively and negatively. The service had also coped with separation of the Adoption services and further changes in the managers and management structure. Relocation of the teams to different premises, was also imminent following the re organisation of Birmingham's Social Services, inevitably these matters and the extra workloads have affected both development and the moral of staff. Despite this staff and foster carers met were welcoming and positive regarding the inspection.

**Statement of Purpose.** There is a clear statement of purpose and a children's guide is in place some minor amendment would benefit the documents.

**Fitness to Carry on and Manage the Fostering Service.** Overall the service is managed effectively within the resources and structures in place. The Manager of the service and team managers are qualified and experienced and overall provides good strong leadership. The service is monitored and this contributes to development of the service. However, the restructuring of the department and the large number of carers of each service provided, do not work best with management structure currently in place. The ability of the Manager and team managers to ensure children are appropriately placed is limited by the structure and staffing resources.

**Securing and Promoting Welfare.** Overall the fostering agency provides a good standard of safe care for children placed. Carer's homes were warm, comfortable and nurturing environments for children and young people. The promotion of equality is reflected in policy and practice, which in turn is reflected in processes for matching children to carers. There is positive practice in supporting education, leisure, health and contact. Some areas need strengthening including health and safety checks, services to children with disability, development of closer links with the housing department, the process for matching carers and children and the provision of information to carers about children, consultation with children, more support to children excluded from education and support for health care needs. More training for carers to support contact and life story work with children and greater consistency in following up complaints.

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

There are effective recruitment and selection procedures in place, with checks and references completed with some minor shortfalls. There is evidence of regular supervision, appraisals and commitment to appropriate training. Foster carer recruitment, assessments, training and approvals are similarly of a good standard, although the assessments for Kinship carers requires some development. The Panel's recommendations are rigorous and passed to the Operations Manager, who makes the decision to approve or otherwise. Carers and staff reported feeling better supported with respect to training and the provision of regular supervision, but the reorganisation and shortage of staff has affected the work and case loads and the level of support provided to foster carers. The weakest areas identified is poor information supplied by placing social workers, and the process for matching the children to carers to meet long and short term needs, which put pressure on both staff and carers.

**Records.** Overall records were in place, some small amendments are required to the register of carers, staff and children and foster carer agreements. The process for ensuring Placement agreements and are in place and consents to medical treatment and background information being made available are not consistent. These need to be strengthened, as does the process for monitoring the service. Foster carer, children's and staff files require small amendments to meet the standards and the register of children.

**Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service.** The premises and equipment are robust and able to support the service. The premises are easily accessible by public and private transport.

**Financial Requirements.** The fees and allowances are published but are not easily understood by all carers. The Department is reviewing fees and allowances and is intending that shared care carer's are paid fees and maintenance as with other services. Some consideration needs to be given to support for carers requiring renovation and extension to properties to facilitate placements.

**Fostering Panels.** The fostering panel provides rigorous review of cases and good information and feedback to social workers on the assessments and information presented and fully meets the standards.

#### **Short-term breaks**

The respite service has begun to develop with respect to training and support and provides a good service to the children placed.

#### **Family and Friends placements.**

The Kinship team is under resourced in respect of support workers and assessment staff. In addition the funding for carers to support the provision of safe and spacious environments for children and carers who are able to give time to children with demanding needs require consideration. The development of pre approval training is still an area to be developed to meet the specific needs of kinship care.

## **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
	11(b)	FS8	The appointed manager must ensure children are consulted and their stated wishes and views are recorded.
	17(3), 15(2) Schedule 6(1) (c) (3)(4)	FS12	The appointed manager must ensure foster carers are provided with all the relevant medical information and permissions.

	35(1) Schedule (6)	FS11 FS31	The appointed manager must ensure Placing social workers or authorised persons make statutory visits to children in placement to check on their welfare and these are monitored.	
	34(3) Schedule 6	FS8 FS24 FS32	The appointed manager must ensure foster carers have placement agreements in place containing all the relevant information and permissions to support a child in placement.	
	11, 33, 34& 38.	FS32	The appointed manager must ensure placements plans for children in kinship care are based on assessments of the children and foster carers needs.	
	38(1) & 11 Schedule 6(1)(b)	FS7	The appointed manager must ensure children placed are matched appropriately.	
	28(5)(a) schedule 5(1)	FS8	The appointed manager must ensure placements are made relevant to the foster carers skills, experience and Panel approval.	
	42(1) &12 Schedule 7	FS22	The appointed manager must ensure child protection procedures are implemented, monitored and comply with local authority practice guidance.	
	22 Schedule 2	FS25	The appointed manager must ensure up to date records are maintained as required by schedule 2	
	17(2)	FS9	The appointed manager must ensure safe caring guidelines are included in foster placement agreements for all members of the family.	
	3(3) &3 (4) CA 26(3)	FS1	The responsible Manager must develop and make available an agreed children's guide.	
	3(1) & (2)	FS1	The responsible manager must complete and make available an agreed statement of purpose which meets all information requirements detailed in NMS 1	
	14 & 17(1) Schedule 6(6)	FS10	The appointed manager must make training, advice, information and support available for foster carers supporting children's contact.	
	16(2)(a) & (3)	FS13	The appointed manager must ensure the educational attainment of children is monitored and education provided for children who are excluded.	
	11(a)	FS14	The appointed manager should provide policy and practice guidance to foster carers preparing children for independence.	

	8(1), 7(b) & 19(a)	FS15 FS17	The appointed manager must provide sufficient qualified staff to meet the needs of the service, including support to teams who have large numbers of unqualified staff. NMS 15.8	
	29(2) & (5)	FS16	The appointed manager should ensure all annual reviews of carers are brought up to date for new and existing carers. NMS16.6	

**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.**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector**      Ann Appleby      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector**      \_\_\_\_\_      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Regulation Manager**      Neil Arculus      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**      \_\_\_\_\_

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3(1) (2) (4) CA 26(3)	FS1	The Manager must ensure the statement of purpose includes information on complaint outcomes and more detail of the specific services,  and the children's guide contains information on advocacy services to children and provides a copy to the commission.  <b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b>	Provide an Action Plan with Time Scales
2	42(1) Schedule 7	FS4	The Operations Manager must ensure the monitoring of the fostering service covers all areas identified and Service Team Managers can evidence supervision of practice.  <b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b>	Provide an Action Plan with Time Scales
3	8(1)	FS5	The Directorate must ensure the management of the fostering service is structured and staffed and has the autonomy, to safeguard and promotes children's welfare.	3/6/05
4	27(2)(a) Schedule 3(a) & 29(3)	FS6	The Manager must ensure health and safety issues are addressed by carers and that annual reviews are strengthened to address privacy and space to meet the ongoing needs of all members of the foster home.	27/6/05

5	34(3) Schedule 6 (d & f)	FS7	<p>The manager must ensure that reassessments of children with disability take place and that equipment and adaptations are provided to support the needs of children, and carers health and safety equipment is provided.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b></p>	20/6/05
6	34 & 35(1) Schedule 6	FS8	<p>The Directorate and Manager must ensure that children are matched with carers, and placement agreements are in place.</p> <p>and the placements are supervised and visited by placing social workers, when foster carers or children make requests.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from previous inspection</b></p>	20/6/05
7	12(1) &17(2)	FS9	<p>The Manager must ensure that child protection concerns are addressed efficiently, and safe caring guidelines are included in placement agreements.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from the last inspection.</b></p>	20/5/05
8	14 Schedule 6(4)&(6)	FS10	<p>The Manager of the fostering service must ensure foster carers are provided with sufficient training to support and supervise contact arrangements for children placed, and contact does not occur without appropriate information and risk assessment.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b></p>	<p>Provide an Action Plan with Time</p> <p>Scales</p>
9	11(b) & 18	FS11	<p>The Service must ensure that children are consulted and supported to represent their views and receive a response,</p> <p>and that they are provided with information and support to make complaints appropriately.</p>	<p>Provide an Action Plan with Time</p> <p>Scales</p>
10	15 Schedule 6 (c) & (f)	FS12 FS24	<p>The Manager must ensure that children placed have medical permissions in place and health care records, and that known medical conditions are monitored to ensure appropriate care.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from the previous inspection</b></p>	20/5/05

11	16(2)(b) &(c) Schedule 61(e) 3	FS13	<p>The Manager must ensure the relevant permissions are in place for children to attend school trips and equipment to support their education, and foster carers are provided with support for children excluded from school.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from the previous inspection</b></p>	20/6/05
13	16(5) & 33	FS14	<p>The Directorate and Manager must ensure young people preparing for independence have support for college, and work and their welfare needs are met in preparation, and with suitable accommodation.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b></p>	3/8/05
14	20(1) & (2)	FS15	<p>The manager must ensure that all relevant checks are completed or, can be verified for all staff, including agency workers supplied by other agencies.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b></p>	20/6/05
15	21(1)(b)	FS16	<p>The Manager must ensure that all staff are provided with job descriptions and contracts, and copies are retained on personnel files.</p> <p><b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection</b></p>	20/5/05
16	17(1) &19	FS17	<p>The Directorate and Manager must ensure there are sufficient staff and carers, to provide a service, which meets the needs of children and young people placed.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from the previous inspection</b></p>	27/6/05
17	29(5)	FS21	<p>The manager must schedule all foster carers who have not been returned to Panel after April 2002, to be reviewed by the panel and confirm to the commission this is completed.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from the previous inspection</b></p>	20/9/05
18	28(5)(b)	FS22	<p>The manager must ensure foster carers agreements are in place for all foster carers.</p> <p><b>Outstanding from previous inspection.</b></p>	<p>Provide an Action Plan with Time Scales</p>

19	17(3) & 34(3) Schedule 6	FS25	The Manager must ensure that foster carers are provided with background information and permissions to enable appropriate care of the child.  <b>Outstanding from previous inspection.</b>	20/5/05
20	30(1) & 22 Schedule 2	FS25	The Directorate and Manager must ensure that separate records are kept for foster carers, staff and children and,  The register of children complies with Schedule 2.  <b>Partially outstanding from previous inspection.</b>	20/5/05
21	40(5)(c)	FS29	The Directorate and manager must ensure that foster carers receive payments for the placements of children.	20/5/05
22	11, 33, 34, 38	FS32	The Directorate must ensure that placement plans for children in Kinship placements are based on the assessed needs of children and foster carers.  <b>Outstanding from previous inspection.</b>	20/5/05

#### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS4	The Manager should consider the process and practice to ensure the commission is notified consistently of significant notifications.
2	FS5	The Directorate should consider if the provision of Deputy managers and senior practitioner posts would support management of the large teams of carers and staff.
3	FS6	The Directorate should consider developing contacts with the housing grants service to support renovations and extensions to foster carer properties, which will ensure the welfare of children placed and the families they are placed with.

4	FS7	The Directorate and Manager should consider liaison with the disability services, to ensure that young people with disability receive equal access to pathway planning as their more able bodied peers. Also, closer liaison between area social workers with the disability services to ensure foster carers and the children placed receive suitable support.
5	FS9	The Directorate and manager should consider if the child protection procedures relating to the investigation of allegations about foster carers should be amended to reflect equitable practice with children living with their parents.
6	FS14	The Directorate should consider if the interface between aftercare services, disability services and the fostering service policies could be adjusted to enable a smoother transition for young people.
7	FS20	The Directorate and Manager should consider if the development of a handbook of fostering service policies, practice and procedure would benefit the staff and particularly new staff.
8	FS24	The Directorate may wish to consider if the use of the placement agreement for external placements should be used for internal foster placements for consistency of practice.

\* 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	53
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	27/10/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	397

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?

2

A statement of purpose ratified by elected members is in place and describes the objectives of the fostering service and the services provided to children and families. Information on the support for children's education, health and mental health are included. The statement would benefit by inclusion of information on the outcomes of complaints, and providing more detail of specific services. Alternatively, advising that each fostering service can provide service specific information, with the detailed leaflets recently developed by the services. This would ensure families and social workers have access to more informative detail, regarding the service used.

There is an informative children's guide in place, this would benefit by inclusion of information on the advocacy services available to children. The manager confirmed the department still needed to provide the statement of purpose and children's guide in a variety of formats, for service user's with different languages and communication needs.

Information from person's met and returned questionnaires from children, foster carers and placing social workers, indicates that not all had received copies of the statement of purpose or children's 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?

3

The Operations Manager and the Team Managers of the fostering services are professionally qualified social workers, with a vast range of skills and experience of work with children and families and fostering services. The department has responded positively to the last inspection and is supporting managers without management qualifications to obtain them. Overall the service is managed very well within the limits of resources and those imposed by corporate developments, policies and practice. However, the Managers of the whole service are restricted in their ability to manage the service to deliver the best possible outcomes for children. Evidence from this inspection indicates that the staff and carers are expected to provide a service, when this is clearly not always possible or, meeting with good practice. There is a need for the Directorate to acknowledge, the fostering service may not always be able to provide resources to meet the needs of children, expected by other service managers. The service is under resourced in respect of staffing levels, funding and/or, liaison with other corporate services, in the provision of resources to support the needs of carers and of children. (Refer to NMS 5)

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The appropriate checks and references were in place for the managers of the fostering service. The Operations Manager confirmed that the CRB checks were completed every three years for fostering service staff and carers. Records are kept of these by the personnel section and Team managers. Refer to NMS 15.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

The lines of accountability between Managers of services, their staff and carers are clear in the policies and procedures. However, in practice they are unclear and subject to interventions by Area Teams, three placement teams and three other Directorates. Despite the Managers remaining accountable for their services, this level of intervention and lack of resource weakens the service, as it denies managers the necessary control to ensure a high quality service.

Similarly, the Operations Manager and service Managers are less able to monitor and control the activities of the fostering services. Whilst local authorities are currently exempt from making statutory notifications to the Commission, the Operations Manager had agreed as good practice, the events and notifications would be made. This process still needs to be put in place across the services, as it is clear following the inspection that the commission was not always notified of significant events.

The support teams Managers are completing monitoring of the service regularly. The Operations Manager has oversight of and collates information on medical issues, complaints, child protection and foster carer concerns and through supervision of the managers and meetings held with them. However, not all the monitoring was signed confirming the Operations Manager has oversight or, was available in a format, which can be accessed by inspectors for all areas of monitoring.

The fostering service publishes the fees and allowances for foster carers with the exception of the Shared Care service, which are provided separately for carers. Information contained on questionnaires returned and from carers met, suggests it would be helpful if this information were to be provided in a clearer format, and in other languages for carers who cannot speak English. (Refer to NMS 29).

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

10

**Death of a child placed with foster parents.**

4

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

0

**Serious illness or accident of a child.**

1

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

0

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

0

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

0

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

4

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

1

**Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:**

0

**Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:**

0

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)****The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?**

1

The Operations Manager and Managers of services have clear job descriptions setting out their duties and responsibilities and do not work in other organisations. The Managers were clear about their responsibilities and the delegation of responsibilities. As has been noted previously other corporate services and structures impede the Managers to some degree in ensuring they can fulfil those responsibilities.

Carers and staff met and returned questionnaires from carers and social workers, have identified a lack of clarity and conflict of expectations and responsibilities. Managers of the support teams and support social workers, are having to cope with carers who have children placed inappropriately, children are placed without support workers knowing and inadequate information provided to carers. Carers have received repeated requests to take placements and children have then not arrived, carers have refused placements, when the placement team had information carers should take the referral. This is complicated by the shortage of, and lack of accessibility of staff in the support teams when they are visiting carers. Support social workers are not provided with mobile phones or, a means of regular contact with their offices.

Evidence from this inspection from staff and carers met suggest the Managers, despite working well beyond their allocated hours, are not always readily available for consultation. This is due to other commitments and management responsibilities for supervision, and involvement with meetings or, service development tasks. This year has been particularly difficult due to increased inspection and engagement with training events for all the managers.

Deputising arrangements are in place, with managers covering for each other when leave is taken. The support teams have large numbers of carers to support, with the exception of the Shared Care Service, which has only a part-time Manager in post. The sizes of the services would suggest that full time senior/deputy posts should be in place for all the services. In addition a number of senior social work posts, to support the management structure for carers and staff of the larger teams.

## 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?

1

There was a wealth of evidence from carers and children met during the inspection, records, and questionnaires returned from placing social workers, children and foster carers that overall children are placed in healthy, safe and nurturing environments. Homes are warm and comfortable and maintained to good standards. The foster carers preparation and training covers health and safety. Carer's homes and transport are inspected annually, to ensure standards are maintained and transport is safe, there had been some delays in annual reviews due to staff shortages.

There are areas that would benefit by strengthening of practice, including ensuring more frequent health and safety checks are completed, to ensure damage is addressed; annual reviews considering more specifically, the growing needs for space and privacy of all children and family members. The service would also benefit by developing links with the housing grants department, to support adaptations and extensions to properties as part of the corporate parenting responsibilities. The manager confirmed links had been made with housing for carers supporting children with disability. There were a number of carers who would benefit by support to build extensions or, repairs to properties, particularly in Kinship and Long-term placements. Two of the four kinship placements tracked were in need of this support and the Manager of the Long-term service identified that most of his budget had been spent on supporting environmental factors. Staff met confirmed, there were more whom required assistance to ensure well-matched placements did not disrupt, due to the pressures caused by structural repairs or appropriate space. The Operations Manager confirmed, that most of the service budget provided for exceptional grants had been spent on supporting building alterations.

### Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service promotes the recruitment of carers to reflect the diverse culture, ethnic origins and religious backgrounds of families within the area. The importance of recognising and addressing the needs of children where gender, sexuality, disability, culture, language or ethnic origin require support or, access to further support services, is incorporated into foster carers training. Respect for, and preserving children's backgrounds and how to deal with discrimination is also included in the training. Questionnaires returned from children and those met, confirm that carers do encourage children to retain and develop their cultural identities. Children and young people identified support to pursue religious and language skills and knowledge within the home and community resources. Young people reflected a good range of interests and participation in hobbies and interests.

There has been some improvement in the links developed to ensure disabled children

placed with foster carers receive support for aids, equipment and adaptations. However, this is weakened by lack of pathway planning for disabled children, reassessment of developing needs of children receiving respite support, the provision of health and safety equipment for shared care foster carers and suitable equipment. A more pro-active support and joined up working, between the children's and adult disability services and area social workers, is required to support the fostering service. Similarly, carers met and returning questionnaires reflect a lack of social workers in area teams with knowledge of disability. This affects the services provided to children and young people and the level of support to foster carers.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

Overall, the information from carers and children met and the questionnaires returned by children placing social workers and foster carers show that children are well matched. The records evidenced showed an improvement in the quality of care plans and some core assessments were available on files. However, there are some serious concerns raised in the process of matching children with foster carers, reflected across all the services. There continues to be a shortage of sufficient carers to meet the needs of children for all mainstream services. It is acknowledged that during the course of this year, the process of matching placements has been unusually affected by the reorganisation of the department. Additionally, the authorities overspend has resulted in children being returned to Birmingham from external placements. All of the services appear to have been affected by inappropriate referrals most particularly immediate placements. Foster carers reported feeling pressured and bullied on occasion to take placements despite confirming they had no space or, the match was not appropriate. As previously referred to at NMS 5, the fostering services are not in control of the process required by regulation for them to match children with foster carers capable of meeting their needs. It is to the credit of the foster carers and support teams that they have coped with the problems presented as well as they have. Also, to the credit of the placement teams they have been able to make a majority of suitable matches, based on little or no information, and considerably reduced contact with the support teams.

Foster carers and staff met, records viewed and questionnaires returned indicate that initial information including medical permissions, educational information and permissions and initial contact arrangements are not consistently in place. At times inaccurate information has been provided, placing children at risk, as medical information was not provided. Alternatively, records evidenced indicated referrals have been made to carers, even though there was good background information, which indicated there was no match to the carer household and skills. Placement agreements are not consistently in place for all children or, Looked After Children's documentation (hereafter LAC). Information was not consistently shared or, there was insufficient background information to enable carers to fully meet children's needs. Carers reported this was the case even when a breakdown had occurred in a previous placement or, children had moved from external placements to Birmingham. Placing social workers, foster carers, returned questionnaires identified when placements did not meet the cultural, religious or linguistic needs of children. The introduction of children to

carers was reported to be increasingly rare. Placing social workers raised concerns with regard to the placement of other children in the household, with no consideration of the needs of other children placed or, the carers ability to meet the needs of all the children. Similarly, carers reported difficulties in gaining any help to move children whose behaviour was not manageable or, was placing other children at risk, resulting on some occasion's with disruption of stable placements. (Refer to NMS 24).

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The fostering service provides pre and post approval training for foster carers on safe care, caring for children who have been abused and managing behaviour. A number of carers returning questionnaires reported they had found the management of behaviour training valuable. Safe caring guidelines are provided for all members of the household. Carers met confirmed they practiced safe care and difficulties which did arise, tended to result from not being informed about possible risks with children placed, or that they were unknown. There was some concern raised about the lack of information and as a result carers felt less able to protect their own children. Carers met were aware of the need to be alert to the bullying of children and could demonstrate a pro-active stance to dealing with any concerns raised by the children. All carers met were clear that corporal punishment was unacceptable and children and carers returning questionnaires confirmed that overall the consequences given for behaviour were fair, with some exceptions. The Managers of services collate information on the number and outcome of allegations and when children are missing, and the operations manager is provided with information as part of the monitoring process. There is a clear policy available to carers with regard to recording and reporting in these areas. The weakest areas were the lack of response by placing social workers were foster carers had reported children at risk. This left carers unable to protect children in their care. Additionally, when there are allegations about carers, the practice in relation to investigation appears discriminatory. Foster carers and children do not appear to be provided with the same consideration of the relationships built and the needs of children and carers for contact, as are accorded to children and their own families.

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

93

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

The fostering services ensure that pre approval and post approval training is in place for carers, to address the importance of contact for children with family and friends. The evidence of this inspection from carers, staff and children met and returned questionnaires raised concerns about the need for more training and support for Long-term and Kinship carers. The importance also of work being completed with children, age appropriately, regarding life story work and the reasons why children were unable to remain or return home. Foster carers were generally clear about the need to maintain contact encouraging telephone contact and letters and providing parents with photographs and school reports etc when this was appropriate.

Three of the children tracked were unhappy about the lack of contact they had, and felt that social workers did not listen to them. This view was supported by a number of responses, from foster carers in returned questionnaires. Foster carers found difficulty in the amount of contact that was arranged at times, and the failure of social workers to consult with them about arrangements for children was at times disruptive. Similarly, they expressed concerns about arrangements for transport and inconsistent escorts, which was 'like sending children off with strangers'. This was of particular concern, as they had no contact telephone number, to check when children were late returning, and when they were not advised children were being returned early. Contact arrangements were often changed at short notice, and carers had felt under pressure to provide contact at their home, when they felt this was not safe. There was no evidence of risk assessments having been completed by social workers on the records inspected. Two children returning questionnaires also complained social workers would not allow them to visit friends for overnight stays or have a sibling visit overnight in the placement.

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

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

Children and carers met and returning questionnaires support the view that consultation with children varies. Carers appear to generally encourage children to express their views and consult with them about their lives. However, inspectors evidenced that, children's stated views and wishes are not being followed up by the fostering service, social workers and reviewing officer's. Also, where records have stated children's views have not been ascertained, as 'they were too young' (at 6 yrs of age). There was no record to indicate this statement had been challenged, or that the children's views were sought at a later stage. Similarly, children reported that despite expressing their views nothing was done. Older children could clearly articulate, where their views and wishes had been completely dismissed, leaving them feeling extremely vulnerable.

Children also reported, that the things they had told people in confidence were reported to parents or others, without their knowledge or wishes. Thus, leaving them in difficult situations and in one instance at risk of harm. Children reflected in questionnaires that the LAC children consultation documents were not useful to expressing their views.

There is little or no evidence that children's complaints are being recorded at the informal stage, with the outcomes reached to the complaints and evidence that these are collated. Information returned on questionnaires identified a number of complaints, which had not received any response. Although, others believed they had a good and swift resolution. Significantly the number reported in questionnaires were more than those recorded as part of the monitoring process. However there were a number of children who confirmed in questionnaires, they had not received information on the complaints service. Children and carers met within the Kinship service had not had information on the complaints or, children's rights service. Further to this carers and children are not using the formal complaints process, despite the failure to receive responses at the informal problem solving stage.

**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**

Overall there is good evidence of improvement in the provision of health care support for fostered children. LAC medicals were being more frequently carried out with Paediatric consultants The Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (Hereafter CAMHS), had dedicated staff to work with looked after children. A drop in clinic for is provided to carers experiencing difficulty with children's behaviour, and a direct referral service, for carers to refer children. Carers are given basic health care information and a form for recording all medication given, and accidents occurring, is now in place. Children are registered with doctors, opticians and dentists. Children met were able to inform inspectors, how their diet and health and hygiene were promoted and questionnaires returned supported this view. This area is weakened by the lack of medical permissions and health care records provided to carers. Carers have reported instances where children were placed at risk, because

initial information was not in place, and having to seek urgent guidance from health visitors. Similarly, inspectors have evidenced when children with serious health conditions have not been provided with a service, despite requests to the paediatric consultant and nurse or visits to their GP.

**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 fostering service gives a high priority to meeting children’s educational need, foster carers provide good support for children with homework and finding school, college and work placements for young people. Children and young people report encouragement for extra school activities and leisure interests. Carers met were involved with meetings at school and when Personal Education Plans (Hereafter PEP’s) were in place, carers ensured these were followed. However both carers and young people particularly, reported that they had not received help from social workers with finding work or college placements. Also, additional support was not made available to some children and young people, and carers were not supported to obtain the help required. Three children met reported difficulties in accessing computers to help with school or college work. Two children in Kinship placements had been told they were not entitled to Laptops because it was a kinship placement. Permissions for participation in school trips were not consistently in place. Of particular note, was the number of returned questionnaires from carers, particularly long-term carers, who did not have permission for trips, because children were accommodated. Carers across the services reported frustration at having to seek permission from social workers who, ‘were not easily accessed’, and the restriction this placed on children. There continues to be some concern about the lack of information about education and the transport of children to school, especially when children are placed in an emergency. Carers are not always informed about the school the children are attending and arrangements not made to get them to school.

The Looked After Children’s Education Service, (Hereafter LACES), has been involved in the training of social workers to encourage the initiation of PEP’s, but report the response varies. LACES have developed homework support groups and literacy groups for children to attend at weekends and this has proved effective. LACES report they are still not always informed of children and young people’s moves, but there had been some improvement. Not all children excluded are provided with places or extra support, this depends on the resources available. A Connexions worker has been engaged to work with young people moving from school to college and work and the After Care Service. The educational achievement of children and young people is monitored through LACES and regular meetings are held with the Operations Manager Fostering Services.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

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

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

2

The fostering service ensures foster carers help to develop the skills and necessary knowledge for young people moving to independence and semi-independence. Children and young people are encouraged to gain skills in accordance with their own development and are consulted by the fostering service about their futures. Carers met expressed concerns about the provision of semi-independent accommodation and that made available for children to live independently. Not all Kinship carers met were aware of the After Care Services available to young people and a number of carers with disabled children returning questionnaires and some shared care carers met reported concerns about the lack of planning for young people they cared for.

Managers of the service reported this was a concern raised by them and it was hoped some action would be taken to provide Pathway Planning and ongoing work and educational opportunities. Additionally, the After Care service, expect different standards of carers homes when children move from foster care to supported lodgings. This places undue stress on placements where young people have been for long periods and wish to remain, whilst they finish college or training. Also, when disabled young people are not yet ready to move to more independent accommodation or, residential care.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service has positively worked with the personnel section and developed the procedures for completion of CRB checks and references and recording to reflect the standards more succinctly. The records contained by personnel inspected were in generally in place. Some CRB checks were not available, not all files contained references and information gained at interviews inclusive of staff appointed, or transferring to post in the last year. The assessment team held the personnel files for the sessional form F assessor's used to support the assessment process and had all relevant information was in place. The Form F assessments completed for the Kinship service were contracted to an agency. However, the Manager confirmed there was no arrangement in place, to verify the agency had obtained the relevant checks and references on the assessors provided. Social Work staff who was not qualified were being assisted to obtain qualifications and were supervised by qualified staff. Staff carrying out assessments were qualified and trained in completing assessments and additional training and conferences had been provided to staff.

Total number of staff of the agency:

122

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

11

### 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

Within the service people with appropriate skills and qualifications manage the staff with a clear known structure. The level of management delegation and responsibility is clearly defined and there are systems in place to monitor workloads of the staff. Staff and carers have been provided with more opportunities for training during the last year and encouraged to maintain training portfolios. Not all records inspected contained contracts and job descriptions or, were signed by staff in post. However the staff were aware of their roles and responsibilities and some of the missing information was historical. Unfortunately, there were staff shortages and increasingly support workers were trying to supplement the work not completed by placing social workers. There is a greater need for social workers to work with the support services. Placing social workers returning questionnaires variously reported that they had no idea what the fostering service did, and what support workers were supposed to do. Others were concerned at the staff shortages, and the impact this had on the amount of support available to foster carers and children.

Similarly, administrative support is in place but in the short term team and the shared care teams this was insufficient to meet the needs of the service. Staff reported difficulty in keeping up with the level of paperwork, filing and ensuring that payments were prepared on time, with no room for sickness. Similarly, the Panel team were short on staff to keep up with the level of administration. This was affected by the amount of telephone advice and support that was needed for social workers, unused to preparing information for panel and the timescales imposed. The Kinship Team had been so inundated with Form F assessments the assessments and typing of them had been commissioned out to an Agency. (Refer to NMS 17).

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

The fostering services were short of sufficient staff and carers to meet the needs of children and young people. The staffing level was not adequate to meet the needs of the service. Support workers were carrying case loads of 20-26 carers and children, in the short term and kinship services, the long term team were similarly stretched with an average of 18 carers for each support worker. This had resulted in less frequent support visits and in some cases no support worker being allocated at all. These difficulties were further compounded by restrictions on recruitment and budgets and the shortage of administrative staff. There has been an improvement in the training available to staff and regular supervision was occurring for both staff and carers. Support groups had also been strengthened and had taken place for kinship and shared care carers with some success. The assessment process for carers is clearly set out for mainstream carers. The process for Kinship carers is also provided, however a number of carers returning questionnaires reflected that the process was too long taking two years for some carers. The recruitment service deals promptly with enquiries and refinement of the process in providing initial information, has encouraged the self-selection process. This has reduced the number of carers completing the training and then changing their minds. In assessing qualities and competencies the assessment covers the areas identified in NMS 17.6 & 17.7. The fostering service has insufficient carers in all mainstream services. Additionally there are insufficient Emergency Duty carers to provide a service for the whole of Birmingham. This results in both short term and long-term carers being requested to take placements, and this impacts on the placements already in place. A further concern is the lack of respite carers to provide breaks for short-term carers particularly, and more so for children when there is a disruption and time out is required. Or, when children are unable to go on holiday with carers. Foster carers expressed some distress at having to leave children with carers the children had not been introduced to. Despite the department knowing about the holiday or planned break for some time, there tended to be a last minute emergency respite.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

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

3

The fostering service is still developing employment practices and policies, to meet the devolution from corporate practice required by implementation of the National minimum standards, but have made good progress. A new supervision and appraisal package has been put into place and is working in practice. Training for foster carers and staff have increased with support to achieve social work qualifications and NVQ 3. Support groups are taking place, although there is still a need to seek more accessible venues as there is for in house training for foster carers. Health and safety policies are in place and legal liability and professional indemnity insurances are in place for staff and carers. A whistle blowing policy is in place and made known to staff and carers.

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

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

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

3

New staff are provided with induction programmes and in-service training is in place. Staff reported they had had the opportunity to attend some training and conferences and this had been positive. The appraisal and review scheme was just commencing and staff were considering the individual training needs. Evaluation of the training provided was taking place and the venues with a view to improvements. A number of events had been attended by area social workers, fostering support workers and carers. These appeared to have been valued for the range of views and experience brought by the different roles.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

2

Staff met confirmed they can access policies and procedures on the IT, systems and the managers had full sets of corporate policies and procedures in place. However, not all staff was fully aware of the policies relating to the fostering services and not all staff were completely IT literate. However, the staff met did confirm that colleagues or managers were a good source of guidance and they did feel they would be able to access policies if necessary. The service would benefit by the provision of a handbook, which is localised to the fostering service and provides a ready access and guide to practice. Staff in contact with children and foster carers, are supervised and regular planned supervision is in place. Team meetings are held regularly and attended by all team members.

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

The fostering service has a strategy for working with and supporting carers and reflects all the elements identified in NMS 21.2. The devolvement of corporate services and shortages in staffing, have affected this structure of support. The role of the support worker is less clear and inspectors evidenced where some carers have challenged support worker decisions. Similarly, they have reported that lack of support and clear communication has been problematic as they value the support provided by support workers with the placements they have. There has been delay in producing annual reviews but most of these were not completed. However, not all foster carers have been returned to Panel post the implementation of the national minimum standards. The systems for communication with children's social workers are still inconsistent. Some social workers are good at returning calls and communications even if there is a delay, others are less so or 'completely impossible' according to one carer. For some children there is no allocated social worker and children and carers have to rely on different duty social workers when they need to contact the area team.

**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**

The fostering service has made some good improvements in respect to the provision of post approval training for carers. Foster carer agreements have been revised and clarify the expectations of carers and the local authority. These were not consistently in place for all foster cares, the shared care agreement, and some short-term carers and in kinship files contained old versions of the agreement and have not been renewed. The Handbook for foster carers had been revised and was due to be provided to foster carers in the near future.

The supervising social workers meet regularly with carers within the limits of the staffing resource. Foster carers file contain the supervision notes and the new file format ensures information is easier to trace. The shared care, carer's files had improved markedly in respect to recording. The fostering service provides a 24-hour call out service, with a member of the support team available until 12 midnight. After this time a Fostering service Manager can be contacted by the Emergency Duty Team. Some carers were still under the impression that the emergency duty team was their only means of support after 5.00pm. There are still difficulties in the prompt payment of monies to carers. (Refer to NMS 29). The Birmingham Foster Carer Association provides a 24-hour support to foster carers and support when required in work related matters for carers. In addition the association organises some training for carers when this is requested. Close Liaison is maintained with the fostering service in this respect.

The information on making complaints is available, but not all carers appear to have information. (Refer to NMS 11). Foster carers and staff are provided with information and independent support regarding allegations made. Systems were in place for managers to monitor allegations made and the process of investigation. There is clear guidance regarding the removal of carers from the foster carer register, decisions are subject to consideration by the Panel and Operations Manager.

**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?****3**

The fostering service has a well designed pre approval and induction training programme for its foster carers that makes good use of both staff and existing foster carers. Although, both foster carers and support team staff met and returning questionnaires reported they felt there was a need to be more involved in the training of newly recruited carers. The recruitment team had also recognised a need to work more closely with the support services during recruitment. The provision for the children of applicants has been developed and now includes a younger age group as well as children between 7-11 years. This training although in its infancy appears to have worked very well for children based on the feedback. The Kinship Team have continued to be under resourced with staff, and not had the opportunity to develop induction training, appropriate to family and friends carers and their children. However, the support social workers have developed support groups for family and friends carers and include training and information giving during the sessions. Carers met reported they found the support groups useful and informative. The team have also managed to arrange access to training for a number of the kinship carers which has been reported as valuable in returned questionnaires. One comment was that 'having had the children for 3yrs I now understand why they are behaving the way they are'. Additionally, this team have provided a number of conferences and training events to social workers about the needs of kinship carers and the process of assessment and approval.

The post approval training opportunities have improved and the number of placements for carers wishing to complete NVQ level 3. Foster carers have complained about the lack of local venues, and training not being available at weekends or evenings for those who work. Alternatively some carers met have shown a reticence to undertake training believing they have been carers so long they do not need to train. They also felt that some of the training was repetitive and therefore they did not wish to attend. The establishment of training portfolios may well reduce this reticence and assist carers and support workers to identify relevant training.

Inspectors were advised support workers do consult the children of foster carers during supervision visits, if they wish to see the support worker. Foster carers identified concerns about the impact on their own children and families when children from abusive backgrounds were consistently placed. Also, when children who were not matched were placed or, presenting behaviour could not be coped with, and they were not assisted to move the children constructively. (Refer to NMS 9).

Annual reviews do include appraisals of training and development needs and courses are evaluated at the end of each course.

## 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?

1

There had clearly been improvement in the provision of information on children's files and provided to foster carers. Those met reported there had been a period of improvement but this had been less so in recently. Children's files were still found without LAC plans in place and placement agreements were not in place on the files, including review minutes and core assessments. Where they were in place a number were not signed and medical and health information was found only on one file. Foster carers met and returning questionnaires confirmed that the lack of background information had a serious effect on their ability to care for the children. Numbers of carers had had children taken to the door and been handed a paper and the social worker had left. The information on the paperwork only contained the name of the child. The fostering support teams do ensure information they obtain is passed to carers and do endeavour to ensure information is provided to carers.

The placement agreement for external placements has recently been revised; there are some small amendments required including CAHMS service access, medical and educational permissions, arrangements for visits to the child and support for children with disability and arrangements for termination of the placement. Positively the agreement does include information on minimum clothing and pocket monies. This agreement could be valuably used to provide information for Birmingham foster carers.

Foster carers store information securely and a new recording policy has provided a more effective process for recording information including, concerns, contact and medical information and incident reporting.

### 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

There had been an improvement in the make up of files and support teams had clearly worked to change all files over to the new filing policy. However, not all files were separated and information was found on staff files relating to other members of staff. It was not possible to track the outcome of one disciplinary issue. Similarly, children's files contained information relating to other children and some foster carers files contained information on children. Foster carer information had not been kept separately on files, where two carers were assessed in a household as identified at NMS 25.2 & 25.6. The register of children placed was incomplete and significantly out of date. The register needs to include all elements identified by schedule 2.

There was evidence of monitoring of files and file audits were in place. Information held by

carers on children placed was returned to placing social workers, written guidance on the retention of files is in place and children were aware they could access their files. There are good procedures in place for the management and storage of confidential information known to Panel members and the system for recording allegations and complaints is now in place.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			796
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	56.70	<b>Maximum £</b>	270.34

## 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 premises of the fostering services are readily identifiable and accessible to members of the public. There are efficient IT systems and equipment is robust for the demands of the service. Records are secured in lockable filing cabinets and entrance is fitted with keypad locking systems. Due to reorganisation a number of the services were due to relocate to other premises.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The foster service is part of the children and families services provided by Birmingham Social Care and Health. As a local authority function, financial viability is accepted and inspection not required.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Fees and allowances are published, however carers reported that this was still not in an easily understood format, and for non-English speaking carers, it would be useful if provided in other languages.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The fostering service has transferred payments to carers from the financial services department to some of the support teams. Carers reported this was a great improvement. Unfortunately, this had not been implemented for the Kinship carers. Although the system for payments had improved inspectors evidenced payments were still being subject to long delays, in one case 6 months. In addition the shared care carers were subject to payments, which were not equitable with those of other carers for maintenance or fees. This had been recognised and the Directorate were costing the payments of appropriate fees. Managers support workers and administrative staff reported occasions when they had been unable to access resources for carers, due to unpaid bills and firms refusing to supply the equipment. This caused carers a good deal of embarrassment. Similarly, foster carers reported not being paid or reimbursed for clothes and equipment for children despite being requested by social workers to obtain them.

## 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?

4

The Panel processes and procedures are in place and fully meet the standards. Information packs sent to social workers guiding them on presentations to the panel and the process of feedback to social workers and managers is of a high standard and this is supplemented with telephone communication and support. Notes of appreciation are sent out for well-rounded assessments and notes of concern where there needs to be improved practice. Pro-forma's detailing the matters the panel needed to consider are also provided with good strong guidance from the Chairs. The fostering service is commended on these initiatives.

Membership of the panel included medical expertise and input from education, with a previous foster carer or foster child. Training was available to panel members.

The Panel Team was monitoring the Panel processes and the range of carers and children referred to contribute to the oversight of the service.

## 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
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The shared care respite service is still developing and has currently one and half social workers and a half time manager are in place. There is a large amount of development work still required and also a shortage of respite carers to meet the needs of the service. The service would benefit by the provision of a full time manager or deputy to take the service forward, and continue the good work achieved. (Refer to NMS 5). The policies and procedures were being revised following the revision of mainstream policies and procedures. The need to adjust procedures to meet with the specific needs of children placed for respite and the carers was essential to development of the service. However the filing and recording policy was being implemented.

All staff and foster carers were clear that the care of children and responsibility for them remained with the birth parents. Carers met clearly had good working relationships with the parents and the children were obviously very happy in the placements.

## 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?

2

The assessment of the family and friends carers, supported by the Kinship team, are commissioned out and completed and signed off by an agency, due to the volume of referrals. The quality of pre approval training or information provided to the carers is not identified clearly in the assessments. There is no clear indication of how the carer and child relationship has been observed and the needs of children long and short term has been addressed. This process also does not support engagement with the Kinship Team and provide an understanding of the additional support or training needs the carers may have post approval. The Manager confirmed that this had been recognised by the team and that the provision of staff to complete the assessments within the team would be an improvement. Kinship Carers who had participated in training and support groups reported finding these valuable. There is evidence at this inspection that foster carers are disadvantaged financially, by having to reduce their work hours to support the children placed, due to the complexity of behaviour. There appears to be no process in place to ensure that full assessment of the children, is linked the time the carer needs to support the children and payment of fees. Similarly the long term needs of the children and foster family in relation to space within the home. (Refer to NMS 6).

**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 27 October 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary



Comments were received from the provider

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, 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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