



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Stoke Social Services Fostering Service**

Civic Centre  
Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
ST4 1HF

21 February 2005

## Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

### The role of CSCI is to:

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

## Inspection Methods & Findings

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

### The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Stoke Social Services Fostering Service

**Address**

Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire,  
ST4 1HF

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

01782 235901

**Address**

Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire,  
ST4 1HF

**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**

13/01/04

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		21 February 2005	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Janet Manders	133244
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Elizabeth Taylor	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Mr. David Clark	

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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 Stoke Social Services 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
- 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.

Stoke-on-Trent was established as a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. It is described in the Joint Review undertaken by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Audit Commission as “overall it has a significant level of deprivation, with high levels of disability and limiting long-term illness, below average life expectancy, lower earning levels and higher unemployment than the average for the West Midlands and England.” In this context the authority provides a Fostering Service as part of its provision of social services for the communities it serves.

The family placement service provides substitute family care for children and young people between the ages of 0 – 17. The service recruits, trains, assesses and approves all foster carers, the service has recently undertaken this work with those family and friends carers who care for specific children known to them. The service provides carers who offer a full range of care; emergency placements, respite, task-centred, long-term, Family Link Respite and Remand Care. Most of the workers are based at Heron Cross House, offering assessments, support and training to foster carers. A Central Placement Team is based at the Civic Centre. Two further teams based in other parts of the city support the Family Link and Remand Carers.

## 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 is the second full inspection of this Service; the previous full inspection took place between 13<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> January 2004. An additional visit was undertaken between 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October 2004 to follow-up on issues raised during the inspection of the Stoke-on-Trent Fostering Service in January 2004. This inspection took place between 21<sup>st</sup> February 2005 and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005.

In addition to the inspection work undertaken within the Fostering Service itself, information was sought from young people placed by the Fostering Service, foster carers and placing officers. Foster carers' views were also sought through visits to six foster carer households and through a meeting with a group of foster carers chosen by The Authority to meet with inspectors and through a meeting with Advisory Foster Carers. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire and a meeting with a small group of social workers. A questionnaire was used to gather views from young people, aged 7+. Young people were also seen during the visits to the six identified foster homes and during a meeting with the Bumble Bee group.

Inspectors found that there were overriding themes throughout the inspection. These are:

- **Some positive progress since the last inspection in terms of the management of the service and looking at ways that the service can move forward.**
- **However, this is very fragile since management is based on temporary posts. The proposed new structure has no timescales attached to its implementation.**
- **There is insufficient staff to carry out the tasks and meet the standards.**
- **There are insufficient carers to meet the needs of children.**
- **Lack of policies and procedures for staff and foster carers.**

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

**This Standard was not met due to a minor shortfall.**

A Statement of Purpose has been developed but needs minor amendments to ensure that it is fully compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, once finalised it needs to be approved by elected members. The Children's Guide is an attractive document but needs to be circulated to all young people.

The Fostering Service must develop policies and procedures, which are relevant to their service.

**Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)**

**Neither standard was met. 1 standard was not met due to a minor shortfall, 1 standard was not met due to a major shortfall.**

At the time of the inspection the Fostering Service was being managed by staff on temporary contracts, with a senior manager due to leave within a few weeks. Consequently, inspectors were unable to have confidence that the level of management would continue. A nominated manager must be appointed, as a matter of urgency and The Fostering Service must inform the Commission for Social Care Inspection of this appointment.

The Fostering Service must ensure that all required checks and CRB clearances are obtained prior to staff commencing employment.

**Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)**

**2 standards were not met, due to minor shortfalls.**

As previously indicated the management of the Fostering Service is fragile due to the number of temporary appointments. The Fostering Service is still not managed by 1 senior manager; this is detrimental to the monitoring and development of the service.

**Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)**

**None of the 9 standards were met; 7 of the standards were not met due to minor shortfalls; and 2 standards due to major shortfalls.**

Whilst inspectors found that young people were well cared for by foster carers, it is of concern that the Fostering Service policies and procedures do not actively support foster carers in their work with young people. A consistent theme throughout the inspection was the lack of policies and procedures and training opportunities for foster carers.

Due to a lack of foster carers, the Fostering Service is unable to match a young person's needs with the skills of foster carers. The high number of exemptions to the normal fostering limit requires urgent attention to ensure that young people's needs are fully met by foster carers.

**Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15 – 23)**

**2 of the 9 standards assessed were met. 7 standards were not met; 2 due to minor shortfalls and 5 due to major shortfalls.**

The line management responsibility for the service is not consistent, which is detrimental to the overall development of the service and the consistent provision of a high quality service. The Fostering Service is currently unable to provide the necessary assessment, training, support and review of foster carers due to a lack of clear strategic management in the service. In comparison with other authorities in the area, the Fostering Service has insufficient qualified and experienced staff to under take the work required. The Fostering Service also has insufficient foster carers to be able to safely and consistently meet the needs of the young people placed.

**Records (Standards 24 – 25)**

**2 of the 2 standards assessed were not met, 1 standard due to a minor shortfall and 1 standard due to major shortfalls.**

There has been an improvement in the standard of record keeping in respect of young people's files since the last inspection, however, the service must ensure that confidential information regarding other young people and foster carers is not kept on other young people's files.

The Fostering Service still does not have accurate registers of young people or foster carers. This not only resulted in difficulties for inspectors preparing for the inspection but seriously impacts on the Service's ability to effectively monitor the service.

**Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service (Standard 26)**

**This standard was met.**

The Fostering Service is presently located in a number of different offices, although the inspectors were informed that the Central Placement team were to be relocated to Heron Cross House in the near future. Inspectors concur with the view that this will assist the development of a quality and consistent Fostering Service.

**Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)**

**1 standard was not met due to a minor shortfall. 2 standards were not inspected.**

Foster carers reported that they usually receive payments in timely fashion. However, The Fostering Service must review the payment of fees to foster carers to ensure that it is equitable and enables the service to attract and retain foster carers.

**Fostering Panels ( Standard (30)**

**This standard was not met due to major shortfalls.**

The Fostering Panel is not appropriately constituted, as it does not have a Chair or a children's social work representative. Not all members have undertaken adequate checks or CRB's prior to commencing as a member of the Panel. The Authority has also made an illegal placement as a young person was placed with relatives in June 2004 but no checks or assessment have been undertaken by the social worker. Inspectors made immediate requirements in respect of these issues.

**Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)**

**This standard was met.**

Young people placed within the Family Link scheme receive a high level of service, with placements being matched and usually well planned. Nonetheless, requirements from the rest of the inspection apply equally to family link foster carers and managers must ensure that this service is not marginalized.

**Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)**

**This standard was met.**

Improvements have been made to this service since the last inspection, with the assessment and support of kinship foster carers having been transferred to the Fostering Service. However, no additional resources have been allocated to allow the work to be undertaken. The worker currently in post who is supporting kinship foster carers is not qualified and is

therefore unable to undertake supervision of these foster carers.

Requirements from the rest of the inspection apply equally to kinship foster carers.

## **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:**

This page is no longer required.

## 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	

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

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

Condition	Compliance	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector** Janet Manders

**Signature** *Janet Manders*

**Second Inspector** Elizabeth Taylor

**Signature** *Elizabeth Taylor*

**Regulation Manager** George Plant

**Signature** *George Plant*

**Date** 29 April 2005

## 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)	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must include all aspects of the Fostering Service and comply with NMS 1.4  Timescale of 31.05.04 not met	01.06.05
2	3 (4)	FS1	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Children's Guide is circulated as required by Regulation 3 (4) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01.06.05
3	3 (5)	FS1	The Fostering Service must ensure that The Fostering Service has a comprehensive set of Policies and Procedures so that the service is conducted in a manner, which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose.	01.07.05
4	10 (1)	FS2	The Fostering Service must inform the Commission for Social Care Inspection the person appointed as the Nominated Manager of The Fostering Service.	01.06.05
5	8 (3)	FS2	The Fostering Service must ensure that the team manager undertakes training as is appropriate to ensure that she has the experience and skills necessary for managing the Fostering Service.	01.07.05

6	20 (3)	FS3 &FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references in the appointment of all staff and that all references and checks are appropriately recorded.  Timescale of 30.4.05 not met	01.06.05
7	43(1)	FS4	The Fostering Service must ensure that all significant events are notified to all relevant agencies without delay.	01.07.05
8	29 (2)	FS4	The Fostering Service must monitor and control all aspects of its service in compliance with Schedule 7.  Timescale of 30.4.04 not met	01.07.05
9	10 (1) (2) (3)	FS5	The structure of the Fostering Service must be reviewed to ensure it is managed effectively and efficiently.  Timescale of 30.07.04 not met	01.07.05
10	33 (b)	FS6	The Fostering Service must ensure that the needs of children and young people, including their need for privacy, are met with regard to the number of people living in each foster carer's home.  Timescale of 28.6.04 not met	01.08.05
11	12(1)(a)	FS6	Where a child has been abused or has abused another child, a recorded risk assessment must be carried out before any decision is made to allow sharing of bedrooms.	01.06.05
12	17 (1)	FS6	Carers and prospective carers must be provided with training on Health & Safety, and with written guidance on their responsibilities in these matters.	01.08.05
13	33(a)	FS7 & FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that it has sufficient diversity of foster carers to enable each young person placed to have access to foster care services that recognize and address her/his needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.	01.08.05

14	17 (1)	FS7	The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers receive training in respect of meeting young people's needs regarding race, ethnicity, religion and culture.	01.08.05
15	Children Act 1989 Schedule 7	FS8	The Fostering Service must address the high number of exemptions from the usual fostering limit. The Fostering Service must provide the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a detailed action plan as to how they will address this issue.  Timescale of an immediate requirement not met.	01.06.05
16	33(b)	FS8	The Fostering Service must ensure that social workers with child (ren) already in a placement are consulted when another child is being matched for that placement.	01.06.05
17	34(3) Schedule 6	FS8	The Fostering Service must ensure Foster Placement Agreements, which are compliant with Schedule 6 are in place in respect of all children in foster placements.  Timescale of 30.4.04 not met	01.07.05
18	34(3)	FS8	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Foster Placement Agreement contains specific reference to elements of matching and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the young person and carer.	01.07.05
19	17(3)	FS8 FS9	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive all information to enable them to appropriately care for the young person placed.	01.06.05
20	13(3)	FS9	The Fostering Service must prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is absent from a foster home without permission.	01.07.05
21	13(1)	FS9	The Fostering Service must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of young people placed with foster carers.	01.07.05

22	17(1)	FS9	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive training in respect of the use of restraints.	01.08.05
23	14	FS10	The Fostering Service must ensure that risk assessments are made prior to commencement of contact and retained on files of both the Service and carers	01.06.05
24	3 (3)	FS11	The Fostering Service must ensure that all young people are aware of the complaints procedures.	01.06.05
25	34(3) & Schedule 6	FS12 & FS13	The foster placement agreement must include all matter listed in this schedule, including the arrangements for giving consent to the medical or dental examination or treatment of the child, and permissions for school trips and overnight stays.	01.06.05
26	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	FS14	The Fostering Service must ensure that there is a Pathway plan for each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living.	01.07.05
27	17(1)	FS14	The Fostering Service must ensure that foster carers receive written guidance and training regarding the role of foster carers in preparing young people for independence.	01.08.05
28	20 Schedule 1	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that appropriate records are kept of the matters relating to the appointment of staff identified in Schedule 1.  Timescale of 30.04.04 not met.	01.07.05
29	20	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that the method of storing personnel information is robust and ensures the confidentiality of workers.	01.07.05
30	10, 8	FS16	The Fostering Service must be structured in such a manner as to ensure it can consistently provide an efficient and effective service.  Timescale of 30.07.04 not met	01.07.05

31	29	FS16 & FS21	The Fostering Service must consistently review all its foster carers annually.  Timescale of 30.4.04 not met.	01.07.05
32	19	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that there are a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the Fostering Service.	01.08.05
33	27(2)(a)	FS17	The Fostering Service must ensure that, a consistent and thorough approach to foster care assessment is undertaken and that such assessments consider all aspects identified in Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3.	01.06.05
34	17 (1) & 3 (5)	FS18	The Fostering Service must provide both staff and foster carers with written guidance in respect of Whistle blowing.	01.07.05
35	21(4) (a)	FS19	The Fostering Service must provide appropriate and relevant training for its staff, including training on recording for social workers.  Timescale not met.	01.08.05
36	21(4)(a)	FS19	The Fostering Service must ensure that agency staff receive induction training.	01.06.05
37	17(1)	FS22	Foster carer supervision must take place on a more frequent basis, at least every two months.	01.06.05
38	28(5)(b)	FS22	The Fostering Service must ensure that Foster Carer Agreements complying with Schedule 5 are in place on all foster carer's files.  Timescale of 30.7.04 not met.	01.07.05
39	19	FS22	The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers are supervised by a qualified social worker.	01.07.05
40	29 (3)	FS22	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Agency has a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.	01.07.05

41	17(1)	FS22	The Fostering Service must ensure that all foster carers receive information regarding the Service's policies and procedures.	01.08.05
42	17(1)	FS23	The Fostering Service must develop, implement and evaluate a training programme for foster carers, which covers all elements required by the National Minimum Standards.	01.08.05
43	40	FS24	The Fostering Service must ensure that each young person has a separate and confidential file, which only contains information regarding that child.	01.07.05
44	22	FS25	The Fostering Service must record in the form of a register the information specified in Schedule 2.  Timescale of 30.04.04 not met.	01.06.05
45	31(2)	FS25	A register of foster carers must be maintained which complies with all the requirements of this regulation.	01.06.05
46	19	FS29	The Fostering Service must review the payment structure for all its foster carers and analyse the effect this will have on recruitment.	01.07.05
47	22	FS30	The Fostering Service must ensure an appropriate CRB check is obtained on all panel members before they start work.  Timescale not met	Immediate
48	24(8)	FS30	The Fostering Service must take up references and undertake all necessary checks on all members of the Fostering Panel as required by Schedule 1	Immediate
49	24 (1)	FS30	The Fostering Service must ensure that the Fostering Panel is appropriately constituted.	01.07.05
50	38 (2)	FS30	The Fostering Service must ensure that all placements are notified to the Fostering Panel and that all appropriate checks and assessments are undertaken within the statutory timescales.	Immediate

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The Registered Person should ensure that once the Statement of Purpose has been finalised that it is approved by Elected Members.
2	FS1	The Fostering Service should consider the development of albums/booklets about foster carers and their homes to allow children and young people to have some information prior to all placements, including emergency placements.
3	FS2	The authority should reduce the reliance on temporary arrangements to a minimum, and appoint permanent staff to fostering management positions without delay.
4	FS4	The Fostering Service should have an IT system, which supports the monitoring of the service and provides managers with relevant information to assist in the management task and compliance with the NMS and Fostering Regulations.
5	FS9	A policy should be written, and safe caring guidelines drawn up for each foster home, agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the child.
6	FS10	The Fostering Service should ensure that the views of young people and foster carers are considered when making arrangements for contact, to ensure that a young person's needs are met.
7	FS11	The Fostering Service should include young people's views in the review of foster carers.
8	FS11	The fostering service should consider the development of albums/booklets about foster carers and their homes to allow children and young people to have some information prior to all placements, including emergency placements.
9	FS12	The Fostering Service should discuss with the local Primary Care Trusts issues surrounding the difficulty of registering young people with dentists and GP's so that all young people's health needs can be met.
10	FS13	The Fostering Service should establish information systems to collate, monitor and evaluate the educational attainment of children and young people in their care, this should include a Personal Education Plan for all young people.

11	FS15	The Fostering Service must ensure that all staff undertaking assessments of foster carers have received appropriate training in this area.
12	FS16	The Fostering Service should establish a system of evaluating and monitoring workloads, to establish the number of staff required to undertake the tasks required.
13	FS16	The Fostering Service should ensure that they have a system to ensure that the quality of care of out of city placements is appropriately monitored.
14	FS16	The Fostering Service should establish a training portfolio for all its foster carers, which is appraised as part of the annual review.
15	FS16	The system for the annual review of foster carers should ensure that all the relevant information is collated and considered before the review is finalised.
16	FS18	A written whistle blowing policy should be established and copies given to staff of the Fostering Service and carers.
17	FS19	The Fostering Service should provide joint training between staff and foster carers.
18	FS22	The Fostering Service should ensure that unannounced visits take place at least annually and that written records of are kept of these visits.
19	FS23	The Fostering Service should review the provision of pre-approval training, to ensure that all foster carers receive appropriate training.
20	FS23	The Fostering Service should undertake an audit of foster carers skills to ensure that training is tailored to meet any gaps in knowledge or experience.
21	FS23	All training courses should be made available to all foster carers, including those with specific approval.
22	FS23	The Fostering Service should review its training provision at least annually.

\* 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	16
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	21/02/05
Time of Inspection	09:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	122

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

The Statement of Purpose has recently been updated, but requires further amendment to ensure that it is fully compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It does not contain the number of complaints or their outcomes, the number of young people looked after or the number of foster carers who are approved by The Authority, the Statement of Purpose only gives an approximate number. Much of the content of the Statement of Purpose is aspirational, however, the Statement of Purpose must reflect the current situation and must therefore reflect the current situation.

Elected members have not yet approved the Statement of Purpose and this should be undertaken once the Statement of Purpose has been finalised.

The Fostering Service has recently produced a Children's Guide, with the assistance of young people within the service, this is an attractive document, which contains much information to assist young people to understand what it is like to live in foster care, however it does not contain information as to how to make a complaint, only who they should speak to. The Children's Guides have not yet been distributed to young people or foster carers.

The Fostering Service does not have a comprehensive set of policies and procedures as identified by The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. There has been discussion with another local authority for their procedures to be used by the City of Stoke-on-Trent Fostering Service. However, it is imperative that if used these procedures are appropriately amended to accurately reflect the service provided in the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

## 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?

1

At the time of the inspection all management appointments were on a temporary basis and in relation to both the senior managers appointments, both have been made on a part time basis. The Team Manager does not have previous fostering experience and whilst she has an extensive background in children's services and management, this gap is a concern once the Interim Head of Services leaves.

In addition all aspects of the Fostering Service are still not the responsibility of the same line manager, with the appointed manager still not having direct responsibility for the Family Link and Remand Care schemes.

The evidence of the inspection, including feedback from staff, was that the team manager and the Interim Head of Adoption and Fostering were providing positive leadership, management, and staff care. However, since both were working in a temporary capacity only, the continuation of this quality of management must be considered fragile. It is of considerable concern to the inspectors that the current Interim Head of Adoption and Fostering's contract expires in less than a month's time and there has been no decision made as to who will continue in this post. The authority needs to take effective and swift action to secure in post these managers or others of equal quality.

The authority must identify a nominated manager for this service and inform the Commission for Social Care Inspection of the appointment as a matter of urgency.

### 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?

2

Both the Interim Head of Services and the team manager commenced employment prior to CRB checks being applied for. This matter was raised when inspectors completed an additional visit to the Service in October 2004, after which The Authority took the necessary action to rectify this issue.

A number of other areas in the recruitment process of these managers were not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 and National Minimum Standards, including evidence of qualifications, and positive proof of identity. The Authority must ensure that policies and procedures are in line with the National Minimum Standards and that they are

followed on every occasion. The policy must ensure that CRB checks are renewed every 3 years.

## 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

As previously stated the current management structure is fragile due to temporary contracts. The lines of accountability are clear but they do not converge to one senior manager making it difficult for clear and consistent monitoring and control to take place.

The Service has not developed a fully effective system for monitoring the quality of service required by the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 nor of notifying the Commission for Social Care Inspection and other agencies when a significant event occurs, although the team manager for family placement has developed a system of monitoring for her team. Staff reported that the IT system was still not able to provide accurate, reliable information to assist in managing the service. Monitoring of the other parts of the service has not been fully developed, nor is this information centrally monitored. It remains difficult to collect and collate information in a useful and constructive manner. An example of the difficulties is that the Central Placement does not have any information regarding the family link placements and there is no central point for the information to be collated. The family link system still operates separately from the rest of the Fostering Service. The inspectors found it difficult to get an accurate list of current foster carers and the young people placed with them to enable proper preparation for the inspection.

There have been improvements in the monitoring of exemptions to the normal fostering limit, but inspectors remain extremely concerned that levels of exemptions are too high.

All significant events as identified in Schedule 8, including serious accidents and injuries must be notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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

<b>Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Clarity of roles is difficult in light of the lack of permanent appointments. There has been some improvement in the communication between the different services provided in respect to fostering, for example regular meetings are held between the Central Placement Team and the team manager of family placement. However, the Service still does not have a clear and consistent line management structure, with different parts of the service being managed by different Service Heads. Central placement team and the Family Link service have different line managers to the fostering team. This results in different and possible conflicting priorities within the different areas of the team. Inspectors believe that the move of the Central Placement Team to the same building as the Fostering Team will be a great improvement on the management, efficiency and communication within the Service.</p>		

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Information received during the inspection and during visits to foster carers' homes indicated that generally all young people were being provided with a safe environment to live in, however concerns were consistently raised regarding the lack of privacy afforded to young people.</p>		
<p>Examination of files indicated that no written risk assessment had been completed regarding young people sharing a bedroom, although the referral form does request information as to whether a young person has been sexually abused. This is especially concerning in light of the high number of young people who have to share a bedroom with another young person. The referral form and the assessment of risk requires further development to ensure that all parties are fully cognisant with any risks involved in a placement.</p>		
<p>Health and safety assessments are undertaken as part of the assessment of foster carers and are reviewed as part of foster carers annual review, however, in light of annual reviews not being completed in a timely fashion inspector's were unable to confirm that such health and safety issues had been reviewed in respect of all foster carers. As foster carers do not have a handbook they do not have clear written guidance regarding their health and safety responsibilities.</p>		

### 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
<p>Information sent out to prospective foster carers and the pre-approval training they receive, emphasises the value placed on diversity and the promotion of equality. Nonetheless, during the inspection it was evident that it was difficult for the service to consistently recognise each child's full range of needs due to the pressure to find placements.</p>		
<p>One young person seen by inspectors is of dual heritage but was placed with white carers. The foster carers had received the appropriate information to provide appropriate skin and hair care for him, but there had been a considerable delay in them receiving the appropriate payments. Training in issues of race, ethnicity, religion and culture were not generally offered to carers. It was of surprise to inspectors that The Fostering Service did not have any foster carers of different ethnic origin, therefore a number of young people are placed transracially. The Fostering Service must develop recruitment strategies to address this gap in provision.</p>		

The Central Placement Team informed inspectors that the Fostering Service did not have any foster carers who could meet the needs of young people who have a physical disability. This was disputed by workers from the family link team, who believed that there was not an understanding, amongst staff working in the Central Placement Team as to how the needs of young people with disabilities can be met.

Inspectors noted that the service provided by the family link team appeared to meet the needs of the young people well.

**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

Inspectors have considerable concerns about the authority's ability to provide matched placements for young people. Most placements are now made through the Central Placement Team who complete assessments to consider the needs of all the children and young people in the household, including those of the carers' own children prior to the placement being made. Nonetheless, inspectors found that there is little or no opportunity to match a young people's needs with the skills of foster carers due to a shortage of foster placements. Young people generally have to be placed with whichever foster carer has a vacancy. A number of young people are placed with foster carers who already have young people placed above the normal fostering limit.

Inspectors were pleased to note that improvements have been made in respect of the process of granting exemptions to the normal fostering limit and that the Assistant Director monitors and reviews the number of exemptions. However, inspectors remain extremely concerned regarding the high level of exemptions used by the Fostering Service.

Whilst there have been improvements in ensuring that relevant information is available at the point of referral, it is considered that there are still frequent problems in obtaining information other than basic details. Carers reported that they frequently did not receive all relevant information regarding the young person placed, especially in advance of the placement being made, to allow them to consider whether they can appropriately meet the young person's needs.

The Placement plans used do not give any indication as to the consideration given to matching the young person's needs or, if a placement is made outside a foster carers approval range, how any gaps may be met.

It is unusual for a young person to have the opportunity to meet foster carers prior to placement and for planned introductions to take place, although where possible placements do take place.

**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

Foster carers were aware through training of the need to practice safe caring however, each foster home does not have safe care guidelines that are based on a written policy. This policy needs to be developed and each foster home's guidelines agreed with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the young person.

As previously reported foster carers commented that they are not always provided with full information about the young people they care for or their families, to ensure that they are able to protect the young people, or other young people they care for. It is essential that all involved with the placement of a young person appreciate the importance of such detail for the care and protection of the young person and of the foster carer household.

Inspectors were concerned to note that after an initial assessment had been undertaken a recommendation was made for services to be provided to address a young person's sexualised behaviour, however, records state that there were no provision for this within Stoke on Trent and therefore this work was not pursued. This is not consistent with information given to the inspectors. The Fostering Service should ensure that all social workers are fully aware of all services available to young people. Where there are real gaps in the Service's ability to meet a young person's needs this must be fully discussed at a review and an alternative strategy to meet the young person's needs agreed.

The new Foster Care Agreement, which had been revised in February 2005, contained basic information about measures of control. Foster carers spoken with were aware that they were not permitted to use corporal punishment. However, records indicate that some foster carers are using restraints to deal with challenging behaviour; inspectors are concerned that not all restraints are acceptable. The Authority must ensure that all foster carers receive appropriate written guidance and training in respect of restraint of young people.

The Children's Services has developed a comprehensive policy in respect of anti-bullying/anti-harassment for looked after young people. This policy is also relevant for foster carers in identifying how carers can counter bullying.

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

X

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

2

Evidence gained throughout the inspection found that foster carers valued young people's contact with their families and where this was appropriate encouraged and supported such contact. However, inspectors were informed that contact is often arranged with little discussion with foster carers or consideration for the needs of the young people.

Written risk assessments are not undertaken prior to contact commencing, this could put carers and the young people at risk.

**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

The Fostering Service has developed a number of strategies in order to establish effective consultation with children and young people on broader issues linked with young people and fostering. These include a Children's Panel, which has representatives from all Looked After Children and The Bumblebee Group for those in foster care.

At an individual level young people are rarely given the opportunity to express a view prior to placement because the majority of placements are made in an emergency, although where possible introductions do take place.

Young people are encouraged to attend reviews and complete consultation booklets, but a large number reported to inspectors that social workers only sometimes asked their views.

Young people's views are not sought as part of foster carers reviews and consideration should be given to incorporating young people's views in such reviews.

Many young people did not know about the complaint's procedure or how to access it and were not aware of the Commission for Social Care Inspection; however, this should be improved with the distribution of the Children's Guide.

**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

Young people's health needs were generally well met by foster carers, with carers ensuring that young people are registered with local primary care practitioners. Nonetheless, foster carers reported difficulties in registering young people with NHS dentists and with GP's. Inspectors would recommend that the Fostering Service should have discussions with the local Primary Care Trusts regarding these matters.

It was of considerable concern to inspectors that on a number of files examined, the delegation of consent to routine medical treatment and immunisations had not been completed. Information regarding young people's health was scantily completed if at all on most files examined by inspectors.

Foster carers are requested to report accidents and illnesses to the Fostering team to ensure that these are appropriately recorded. This duty is referred to in the Foster Care Agreement.

Inspectors were pleased to be informed of the development of Yellow House, which provides psychological support to workers and foster carers caring for young people, in addition to direct work with young people. This positive move was offset by problems, which have developed with CAHMS, again this should be discussed with the appropriate authorities.

**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 clearly understands the importance of education for Looked after Children and actively promotes it. Foster carers were seen to work closely with schools to support young people in their education. One young person who was involved with the Youth Offending Team had a good education and work experience plan, however, most files examined for this inspection did not contain Personal Education Plans.

The Social Services Department supports existing educational placements where possible, including providing transport, to and from school, where this is necessary.

The Fostering Service does not have a foster placement agreement format, relying on LAC placement plans which does not include information as to where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including uniform, school trips and equipment.

Young people have been assisted in their education by the provision of computers by The Fostering Service.

**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 Leaving Care Team had only just become involved with young people placed with foster carers and therefore there was no evidence of Pathway Plans on file and foster carers were left without clear guidance as to their role in supporting young people into adult hood. Inspectors were concerned that one young person who would reach 18 in the next couple of months was still uncertain as to where she would live once she reached the age of 18, even though she had lived with her present foster carers for a number of years.

A Leaving Care policy should be included in the Foster Care Handbook and should include clear guidelines as to what is expected of carers in terms of preparing children for independence, as required by this standard.

## 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

There is a clear written recruitment and selection procedure for the authority, which has been updated to include the need to follow up written references by telephone, however, evidence on file indicates that these procedures have not always been followed in a consistent manner.

All staff files contained CRB's but due to the format, in which they are recorded, do not include the date that they were received and whether they are at an enhanced level. The format for storing this information must be changed so that this information is available. Examination of files indicated that a record of qualifications is not kept on file in respect of most staff, nor are written explanations of any gaps in employment sought for all workers.

There is a high number of agency staff on the team, these files are kept by the Fostering Service Team manager, who undertakes necessary checks. In respect of both agency and permanent staff confidential information relating to other members of staff were found on files.

Most staff had recently undertaken training in respect of assessing foster carers, though there remains a need to ensure all staff completes this training.

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

14

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

5

**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?**

1

Issues surrounding the different management arrangements have been discussed in previous standards and the main area for work in relation to this standard is still the establishment of a clear and unified structure for the service.

In discussion with staff and managers, inspectors found differing views as to the workload of the Family Placement team. Inspectors recommend that an assessment of workloads be undertaken, so that there is a clear expectation of the work undertaken by The Fostering Service. This would then inform managers as to the number of staff required for the service to undertake required tasks.

Whilst there are systems in place to monitor assessments, approvals and reviews, inspectors are aware that not all foster carer reviews have been undertaken within the appropriate timescales.

The Fostering Service must check the Commission of Social Care Inspection reports before making a placement with a fostering agency. The proposed foster carer's assessment report, and most recent foster home review, should also be checked in order to protect children, and promote effective management.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

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

1

It is apparent that the authority does not have sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of the young people in the care of Stoke-on-Trent, who need a Fostering Service. This is a situation, which is common to many local authorities to a greater or lesser degree. However, this cannot be improved without sufficient staffing. In comparison with other local authorities inspected in this area within the past year, the Fostering Service in Stoke-on-Trent has insufficient staff to assess, train, support, supervise and review foster carers. The high numbers of temporary, agency and unqualified staff presently employed within The Fostering Service further exacerbates this situation.

22 of 28 foster carers who returned a questionnaire to the inspectors commented that they felt there was insufficient staff within The Fostering Service to provide adequate support. Foster carers spoken to by inspectors during the inspection confirmed this view.

Inspectors were informed that the Fostering Service has appointed an external contractor to recruit and assess 10 foster carers in an attempt to meet some of the unmet need within the authority.

Nonetheless, the Fostering Service must develop a recruitment strategy which aims to recruit a range of foster carers to meet the needs of the young people for whom it to provide a service, this must pay particular attention to how the needs of young people from different ethnic and racial groups can be appropriately cared for.

Inspectors noted that applicants are requested to sign an “Agreement to non-disclosure of information” as part of their application; this includes a reference to Foster Placement (Children’s) Regulations, which no longer exist and was replaced by the Fostering Services Regulation 2002. The form should be amended accordingly.

Inspection of the assessments completed on foster carers identified that not all issues required by Standard 17.7 and Schedule 3 are covered during the assessment of foster carers. Inspectors noted that with regards to some assessments, significant areas were not discussed with the prospective foster carers, this was most commonly information regarding how carers would meet young people’s religious, racial and cultural needs. In addition reports often did not contain appropriate or robust analysis of the information presented. It is hoped that the recent work undertaken with Shelagh Beckett will ensure that that all assessments are robust and analytical. Inspectors were pleased to note the useful comments received from The Fostering Service’s medical advisor.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	
<p>Staff commented that they found the present team manager supportive and that supervision took place on a regular basis. It was felt that the team manager had been instrumental in assisting the team to work together to address issues within the Service. Inspectors noted an improvement in staff morale since the visit to the Service in October 2004, however, this will be easily eroded if clear decisions are not made in respect of the management and staffing of the Service.</p>		3
<p>A Whistleblowing procedure that is available and known to all staff and foster carers is still required.</p>		

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	
<p>Staff reported that there has been limited opportunity for them to undertake training relevant to their role in The Fostering Service. The only training provided by the department in the last year has been the recent training in respect of the assessment of foster carers.</p>		1
<p>Agency staff reported that they had not received an appropriate induction, when they commenced employment within The Fostering Service. The department should consider developing a standard but flexible induction programme and all staff, including agency staff, should receive adequate induction, commencing within 7 days of starting work, and completed within 10 weeks.</p>		

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)****All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Staff do not have access to appropriate policies and procedures, as these are not yet in place within the service. A requirement regarding this issue has been made under a previous standard.

Staff reported that they felt well supported by the managers, they receive regular supervision, which is seen as crucial to the effective working of the team. However, there have been occasions when issues have arisen that the team manager of the family placement team has been unable to deal with due to her lack of fostering knowledge. Nonetheless, staff informed inspectors that on all occasions the manager has been proactive in seeking the appropriate advice. Regular team meetings take place with all staff within the Fostering Service.

Staff at all levels were aware of lines of accountability.

**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**

Support to foster carers is seen as an important role for supervising social workers, however, team members acknowledged that in light of the changes in the team, shortage of staff and pressures to undertake other tasks, foster carers do not always receive the level of support they require. Nonetheless, foster carers generally spoke positively regarding the support they receive.

The department has developed 2 new strategies for supporting foster carers. Regular surgeries held by the Head of Service have proved a useful tool for foster carers to express their views regarding the service, giving them a feeling that the Fostering Service values their views. In addition a team of advisory foster carers have been appointed. Whilst this team was in place when inspectors visited in October, further progress has been made in clarifying their role. However, further work is required to ensure that all foster carers are aware of the team's role.

Foster Carers have access to out of hours support through the Emergency Duty Team. Foster carers commented that in light of the other pressures on this service, the response they received was not always timely or helpful.

A welcome development since the last inspection is that kinship foster carers now have a named link worker.

Whilst there is a system for undertaking reviews of foster carers, the inspectors were informed that this needed to be radically overhauled to ensure that it is an effective and efficient way of reviewing foster carers approval. Inspectors agree with this view as there is a need for reviews to be undertaken by someone other than the supervising social worker and the views of all other parties must be sought and taken into consideration.

Whilst there remains a lack of understanding from young people's social workers regarding the expectations of foster carers, there appears to be an improvement in the working relationship between the district and family placement teams.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**1**

The Foster Care Agreement was revised in January 2004 and whilst it is a useful document and includes additional information, it is not fully compliant with Schedule 5. Minor amendments are required to include an agreement by foster carers to comply with the authority's child protection and unauthorised absence procedures. Whilst the agreement refers to the need for foster carers to comply with inspections, the current Foster Care Agreement refers to the National Care Standards Commission and should be amended to reflect the current body, the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The Foster Care Agreement states that supervision should take place twice annually. Inspectors are of the opinion that for supervision to be effective this level of supervision is not adequate and must be reviewed as a matter of urgency. Whilst the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 do not state a frequency for supervision, inspectors believe that the present level of supervision does not offer adequate support to foster carers, with the additional danger that crucial information will not be discussed and passed on. In addition inspectors were informed that some foster carers have only received formal supervision once in over a year.

Inspection of files identified that unqualified social workers have supervised foster carers this is not permitted. Whilst inspectors are aware this has only occurred on a small number of occasions, the department plans to use an unqualified worker to support kinship foster carers. The department will therefore have to reconsider its plans for supervising this group of foster carers.

Whilst the manager keeps a record for monitoring purposes of allegations against foster carers, the Fostering Service does not have a policy, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

There was no evidence on foster carer's files that unannounced visits had been undertaken.

Inspectors were informed that some policies and procedures had been issued to carers, however, this appeared to have been on an ad hoc basis. There remained a need to ensure all relevant information is made available to foster carers, the standards require that all foster carers upon approval, receive a handbook which covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. This must be updated on a regular basis.

**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?**

1

There is an understanding within the team that there is a need for pre-approval training to be updated to appropriately meet the needs of foster carers in Stoke-on-Trent. In discussion with workers it was a concern to inspectors that the Family Link team felt that the generic training was not appropriate for their foster carers. Whilst there may need to be some consideration as to adapting the training to the needs of the family link carers, the majority of the training would be essential to all foster carers.

Due to the changes in the family placement team, the ability of the team to provide appropriate post-approval training for foster carers has diminished as the team now feels that they do not have the appropriate skills to provide the training. Consequently no post-approval training programme has been drawn up for the forthcoming year. Foster carers spoke about previously receiving an annual training catalogue, they found this valuable in that it enabled them to prioritise training and make necessary arrangements. However, the majority of the sessions were planned to take place during the day on weekdays. This excluded some carers from being able to attend.

Foster carers reported they had fortnightly informal support groups. They also receive regular Newsletter and there is an annual questionnaire from the Family Placement Team, which asks their views of the service.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Inspectors examined a number of young people's files during the inspection. These were kept by the young person's social worker. Most files were well organised and up to date, although there were some significant exceptions to this. Inspectors also found examples of extremely good practice in respect of the recording of young people's needs and how the department intended to meet them.

Most files contained appropriate LAC documentation and Care Plans. However, it was of concern to inspectors that on a number of files there was confidential information regarding other young people and on some young people's files there was confidential information regarding foster carers. Such confidential information must be removed.

There appear to have been an improvement in the information provided to foster carers with most carers and file containing LAC documentation. As referred to earlier some foster carers felt they did not have full information about the children placed with them. Others stated this was not the case and that they received the information they required.

Foster carers visited clearly demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the importance of supporting young people to understand their history.

All carers were seen to store information in a secure manner with the service having provided carers with metal locking boxes to keep confidential information.

<b>Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)</b>			
The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>		<b>Standard met?</b>	1
<p>At the time of the inspection the service did not have records as required by Standard 25.2. Neither the register of foster carers or of young people placed with foster carers is compliant with the standards. Nor were they seen to be accurate.</p> <p>The Foster Carers' Register did not comply with Regulation 31, as it did not contain the date of birth or gender, and in some cases did not have the correct name of each foster carer, nor did the register contain the date of review of the foster carers' approval. Neither is there a record of children placed which meets the requirements of Schedule 2.</p> <p>These deficiencies in recording information resulted in difficulties in the service providing accurate information to the inspectors to enable proper preparation for the inspection. Such poor record keeping must impact of the efficiency of the management system.</p> <p>The manager has developed a system for recording and monitoring allegations and complaints received.</p> <p>The Manager was seen to view and sign foster carers files.</p>			
<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			135
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			289
<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>		X	<b>Maximum £</b>
			X

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

As previously stated the Fostering Service does not have a central base at the present time, however, most of the functions of the Service are undertaken at Heron Cross House. These premises were appropriate for the work undertaken by the service, but as previously indicated the inclusion of all parts of the service in the same building will be an additional benefit. Inspectors were informed that it is hoped this will happen in the near future as it is planned that staff from other services will be relocated.

There has been some improvement in staff access to computers, but in some offices staff have to share 1 computer between 4. All computer systems are security protected and backed up by a central team.

Staff continued to report that there remained difficulty in obtaining accurate management information, due to inadequate data collection and systems.

The insurance is included as part of the city council's overall insurance policy.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	9
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This standard is not inspected as part of an inspection of a local authority Fostering Service.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	9
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This standard is not inspected as part of an inspection of a local authority Fostering Service.

**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 majority of foster carers reported that they received payments in a timely fashion. However, some foster carers reported difficulties regarding over and underpayment of allowances. Nonetheless, these foster carers commented that the finance department were usually helpful in resolving any of these difficulties.

The number and complexity of payment schemes currently used within the City of Stoke-on-Trent is confusing. Only approximately 25% of foster carers within Stoke-on-Trent receive payments in addition to the basic fostering allowance. This is out of step with most other authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies in the area and is likely to contribute to Stoke-on-Trent's inability to attract and retain foster carers.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

1

At the time of the inspection the Panel was not appropriately constituted, the vice-chair presently chairs Panel, as the Panel does not have an appointed chair and there is no children's social worker appointed to sit on Panel.

It was of considerable concern to inspectors that CRB checks had only recently been undertaken in respect of all Panel members, and in the majority of cases there was no evidence that they had yet been returned. Nor had other checks required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 been undertaken.

At the Panel observed by the inspectors, one matter considered by the Panel was not quorate, as the only social worker present was also presenting the case. This had to be pointed out to the Panel chair by the inspectors.

Inspectors also noted that The Authority had made an illegal placement in that a young person had been placed with relatives in June 2004 but appropriate checks had not been undertaken or an assessment undertaken of the suitability of the relatives to provide care for the young person.

Inspectors were also concerned that a number of foster carers had been approved subject to outstanding checks being completed.

## 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?
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From information gained by inspectors during the inspection, this service appeared to provide good support to family link carers and that young people placed with foster carers were well matched. It was pleasing to note that arrangements for respite carers for a child had been made a month or so in advance of the event. This had enabled introductory visits to take place prior to the child residing with the respite carers.

However, it is crucial that this valuable service is seen as part of the overall Fostering Service and that all other requirements from this report apply equally to this Service.

It remains a concern to inspectors that this service is not line managed by the Head of Fostering and Adoption.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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One of the kinship foster carers interviewed by inspectors during the inspection highlighted the conflict of interest and pressures caused by court proceedings, when the case manager undertakes the assessment of the foster carers. Inspectors are therefore pleased to note that this responsibility has now been transferred to the Family Placement team. However, with the additional responsibility for the assessment and support of these kinship foster carers there has been no real increase in the resources to the team to undertake this work.

Kinship foster carers reported that the support they have received since this change has improved, although inspectors noted that there is a considerable amount of work required with kinship foster carers to ensure that they are fully aware of their duties as foster carers. The worker appointed to support kinship foster carers is not qualified and is therefore unable to undertake supervision of these foster carers. A requirement has been made in respect of this issue under Standard 22.

There was written evidence to show family members were given prior consideration when workers were assessing the need to place a child outside their family home.

All other requirements from this report apply equally to this Service.

**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 21, 22, 22 & 24 February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

A copy of the Providers comments and action plan are available at the Area Office, where these have been submitted.

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

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

Action plan was required

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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S0000055018.V202282.R01

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