



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Archway Care Ltd

10 (b) Lower Courtyard
Hounslow Hall Estate
Newton Longville
Milton Keynes
MK17 0BU

28th June – 02nd July 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?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Archway Care Ltd

Tel No

01908 379400

Address

10 (b) Lower Courtyard, Hounslow Hall Estate, Newton
Longville, Milton Keynes, MK17 0BU

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

H020000333

Name of Registered Provider

Archway Care Ltd

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mr Patrick Michael Griffin

Date of first registration

1st October 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

1st October 2003

Registration Conditions Apply ?

YES

Date of last inspection

25/06/03

Date of Inspection Visit		28th June 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Mr Rob Smith	114335
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Patrick Griffin - manager	

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
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- 6. Records**
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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 Archway Care Ltd. 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.

Archway Care is a small independent fostering agency based in the Milton Keynes area. The agency was providing a total of 16 placements in 11 foster households at the time of this inspection. The agency offered emergency, short and long-term placements, primarily to local authorities in the surrounding home counties and also accepted placements from London boroughs.

At the time of the inspection the agency had a fostering manager and two social work staff in post. Immediately prior to the inspection the director of the agency had resigned and the current manager was now intending to take up the role of director and responsible individual and to appoint a new fostering manager in his stead.

The agency had achieved registration in October 2003 and this was the second inspection under the national minimum standards.

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.)

Standard 1 Statement of Purpose

This standard was partially met with some updating and minor additions to the current statement required. The core of the statement and associated children's information provided a clear and accurate outline of the agency's operation.

Standards 2-3 Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

Both of these standards were only partially met due to the impact of the recent resignation of the former director. The implications of that departure for the agency's conditions of registration remain subject to further consideration by CSCI. On a day-to-day basis however the agency was being run well by the fostering manager who was appropriately experienced and qualified.

Standards 4-5 Management of the fostering service

One of these standards was partially met, the other was fully met.

The day-to-day management of the agency was being handled well by the fostering manager and positive feedback was received from staff and carers to this effect. Some further development of practice monitoring systems was needed, as was a more comprehensive system of feedback from carers, children and placing authorities on service quality. Appropriate attention was paid to notification requirements.

Standards 6-14 Promoting and securing welfare

Five of these nine standards were fully met; four had only minor shortfalls.

Overall the agency's performance under this group of standards was good. Good systems were in place to ensure foster care settings were appropriately safe and of a good physical standard. Appropriate attention was paid to diversity issues by way of provision of training and support for carers and staff and the needs of children transracially placed had been well met.

Matching considerations were well thought through and carers' approval terms were respected, as were their views on the viability of new placements. Due attention was also paid to the impact of new placements on existing foster children and carers. Good introductory processes for new placements were in place.

Clear procedures and guidance were in place for dealing with any emerging child protection concerns and the one recent situation of this nature had been appropriately dealt with by the agency. No concerns about the management of placed children's behaviour were identified and guidance on the management of bullying and unauthorised absences was in place.

The agency provided good support for contact and paid commendable attention to the views of children themselves in relation to contact arrangements. This reflected the overall excellent work by the agency in supporting the voice of placed children when it appeared their needs and wishes were being overlooked by their placing authorities. Children's health and education needs were appropriately monitored and met by the agency and its carers.

Under this set of standards the agency needed to develop clearer guidance and training for carers on health and safety matters. The guidance on the management of bullying needed some expansion and the distribution of information on complaints processes needed reviewing. More attention was also required in the area of expectations and guidelines for carers on preparing children for leaving care and independence.

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

One of these nine standards was exceeded, five were fully met, two had minor shortfalls and one had significant shortfalls.

The agency was particularly strong in its arrangements for support of carers, who were unanimous in their praise of the direct and indirect support offered by link workers and the fostering manager. Carer supervision was regular and effective and a good training schedule for carers was in place. Arrangements for staff training, supervision and development were satisfactory. The day-to-day organisation and management of staff and carers was good and, for the current size of the agency, staffing levels were satisfactory. Carer assessments by the agency had been carried out thoroughly covering all the areas expected by regulations and standards.

The major shortfall under this set of standards was the continuing inconsistency in obtaining, and retaining evidence of, all the expected checks and documentation relating to staff appointments. This is a priority task for the agency to address and was the only requirement from the last inspection that had still to be met satisfactorily. The manager was taking appropriate steps to address these shortfalls at the time of the inspection.

The agency also needed to ensure that, where more than one carer was approved in a household, that all such carers had undertaken a core of relevant training.

Standards 24-25 Records

One of these standards was fully met the other had major shortfalls.

Case records maintained for placed children were of a high standard, well kept and containing all the information required by regulations. Guidance on record-keeping for staff and carers was in place and carer maintained records were regularly checked by supervising staff. Central registers and administrative records were well maintained.

Significant shortfalls were however noted in relation to evidence of past checks on carers previously approved via local authority panels. The inspection also identified that a large number of current carers had not been formally approved by the agency's own panel, largely because of confusion about their status with their original approving local authorities. This situation needed urgent resolution, alongside the updating of relevant checks and clearances for these carers. The checks on more recently recruited carers were complete and CRB checks were up to date for all carer households.

Standard 26 Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service

This standard was partially met.

The office premises of the agency were generally satisfactory but lacked provision of a private meeting area.

Standards 27-29 Financial Requirements

One of these three standards was fully met two were partially met

Arrangements for payment of allowances and financial advice to carers worked well and allowances were subject to annual review.

Although the manager assured the inspector the financial state of the company was sound this could not be fully assessed, as the accounts for the past financial year had not been finalised by the agency's accountant, hence the failure to fully meet two of these standards. The inspection did not however identify any concerns of a financial nature in the feedback from carers, staff or placing authorities.

Standard 30 Fostering Panels

This standard was partially met.

The agency's panel was appropriately constituted and procedures were in place to govern its operation. The panel chair and deputy were appropriately experienced and the panel carried out its work in a diligent manner. There were however a number of minor issues that needed attention in relation to panel operations.

The roles of the panel chair and deputy needed clarification and the inspector advised provision of training for the panel and of opportunities for members to meet to discuss its operation. The scope of CRB clearances for panel members needed confirmation to ensure Protection Of Children Act List clearance had been obtained. Arrangements for the formal input of medical expertise needed putting in place and the agency needed to consider if the provision of an external decision-maker was still necessary. The decision-making process in relation to deferred approvals needed clarification.

Records of panel discussions and recommendations needed to be put on carer files and the system for issuing of notices to carers needed attention.

Standards 31 and 32 did not apply to this agency

Overall Summary

The agency had made significant progress in relation to the majority of requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection and overall was offering a good quality of service to carers and placed children. Particular strengths were the quality of support offered to carers and the championing of placed children's rights and views. The fostering manager and social work staff were clearly conscientious and fully committed to providing a well run and effective service. The recent departure of the previous director had placed additional pressure on the fostering manager, but the situation had apparently been managed without impact on the quality of service offered to carers and placed children, and steps were being taken to regularise the situation with the appointment of a new fostering manager.

The major concerns from this inspection were the continuing shortfalls in the systems and record-keeping for staff recruitment and the confusion about the status of carers previously approved by local authorities. CSCI will also be further considering the implications of the departure of the previous director of the agency in relation to the agency's conditions of registration.

The inspector would like to thank the staff and carers of the agency for their openness to the process of inspection and to thank the foster children for their contributions in questionnaires and interviews.

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	
12	20 and Schedule 1	FS15	The agency must ensure that all the requirements of Regulation 20 and Schedule 1 are met consistently for all staff working in or for the agency	31/08/03

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	YES
<p>“It is a condition of the registration of Archway Care Limited that Mr Dermot Weir’s involvement in Archway Care (“the Agency”) be limited solely to his involvement as a shareholder in accordance with the terms of the shareholders agreement dated 25th September 2003 and specifically that Mr Weir shall have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·No direct contact with foster carers engaged by the Agency or foster children placed with/or by the Agency; ·No involvement in the recruitment of foster carers for the purposes of the Agency; ·No contact with any local authorities <i>as far as the operation of the Agency is concerned</i>; ·No involvement in the day to day running of the office or offices of the Agency; and ·No involvement in the direction and/or supervision of staff employed by the Agency.” 		
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Inspector	Rob Smith	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Clive Wooldridge	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)	FS1	That the agency revises its statement of purpose to address the shortfalls information noted in the main body of the report under this standard	31/10/04
2	42(1) & Schedule 7	FS4	That the agency ensures that rigorous monitoring of all the areas of practice listed under Schedule 7 of the regulations is maintained and systems are put in place to monitor accidents and disciplinary measures in relation to placed children.	30/09/04 and ongoing
3	11(a)	FS6	That the agency develops more detailed guidance for foster carers on health and safety matters and incorporates training on this subject into the training programme for carers.	30/11/04
4	12(1)(a)	FS9	That the agency expands its current guidance on managing bullying to address settings other than schools	30/11/04
5	18(1) & (2)	FS11	That the agency ensures all placed children and their authorities are provided with relevant information on the agency's complaints processes.	30/09/04

6	11(a) & 16(5)	FS14	That the agency develops clearer guidance for carers on the expectations around preparing placed children for independence and adulthood.	30/11/04
7	20(3)	FS15	That the agency ensures all the information required under Schedule 1 and standard 15 is consistently obtained for all staff working for the agency prior to commencing work and that recruitment policies and procedures are amended to achieve this end.	30/09/04 and ongoing
8	17(1)	FS23	That the agency ensures all approved carers undertake such training as is considered essential by the agency and that information provided to approved carers is amended to make this expectation clear	30/09/04 and ongoing
9	27(2)	FS25	That the agency reviews the files of previously approved carers to ensure that all the information relating to required checks and clearances is consistently obtained and evidence to that effect is maintained on file.	30/09/04
10	28(1)	FS25	That the agency as a matter of urgency clarifies the position of carers previously approved by local authorities and subsequently makes arrangements for their formal approval by the agency's own panel.	30/09/04
11	27(1)	FS30	That the agency makes arrangements for the obtaining of medical expertise to support assessments and panel decision-making.	30/11/04
12	20(1)	FS30	That the agency ensures appropriate CRB clearance has been obtained for all panel members.	30/09/04
13	26(1)(a)	FS30	That the agency establishes systems for properly evidenced scrutiny by panel of information relating to deferred approval decisions.	30/09/04
14	30(2)(g)	FS30	That the agency ensures that a record of the discussion and recommendations of panel is maintained on carers' files.	30/09/04

15	28(9),	FS30	That the agency ensures that a formal notice of decisions subsequent to initial approval or review of approval is provided to carers and a copy is maintained on their files.	30/09/04
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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	That the agency notifies placing authorities of the change in management arrangements
2	FS1	That the agency considers inclusion of reference to the CSCI role and means of accessing reports in the revised statement of purpose.
3	FS4	That the agency explores options for more formal input from placed children and placing authorities into assessment of service quality.
4	FS8	That the agency reviews the need to continue to provide capacity for emergency placements.
5	FS11	That the agency considers recording on file details of agency information provided to placed children.
6	FS23	That the agency develops more explicit guidance for carers on the supports available to them should they be subject to child protection investigation.
7	FS25	That the agency puts in place a separate central monitoring record covering the notification, management and resolution of child protection investigations involving carers.
8	FS30	That the agency clarifies the respective roles of the chair and deputy chair of panel.
9	FS30	That the agency arranges formal training for the panel.
10	FS30	That the agency reviews the necessity for continuing to have an external decision-maker.

* 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	5
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	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	28/06/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	40

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?
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The agency' current statement of purpose, with a few minor exceptions, covered the areas of information required. The statement needed the inclusion of details of the two social work staff members' relevant experience and to outline the role undertaken by sessional support staff. The statement was however also now out of date, following changes in the management of the agency, in respect of a recent complaint about a foster care and in its references to NCSC rather than CSCI. An updated version was required. The inspector advised that this could wait until the proposed appointment of the new fostering manager but, that as a matter of good practice in the interim, a letter to placing authorities advising them of the management changes would be advisable. The inspector also suggested the insertion of a small section in the revised statement outlining the regulatory role of CSCI and the means by which inspection reports could be accessed.

Feedback from placing social workers indicated a significant level of ignorance of the agency's statement of purpose. The inspector advised that placing authorities be contacted to confirm the arrangements for individual workers in those authorities to have access to this document.

A helpful children's guide was in place and most of the children surveyed indicated they had received a copy. A small number of more recent placements indicated they had not, which suggests a review of the systems for distributing information to newly placed children is needed. The agency will also need to consider production of the guide in different formats should children without reading skills be placed in future.

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?	2
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Due to the recent changes in the agency, with the unexpected departure of the previous director, the fostering manager was effectively covering both the responsible individual and fostering manager roles at the time of this inspection. It was therefore difficult to fully assess this standard against all the criteria.

The manager did have the requisite social work qualifications and experience to carry out his role and was part way through NVQ 4 qualification in management. With his projected move to the role of responsible individual, the manager's past role in running a voluntary sector service should provide adequate experience on business and financial matters to supplement his knowledge of social work practice.

On a day to day basis the inspector judged from observation, and from feedback by staff and carers, that the manager had been providing good levels of leadership and been running the operation of the agency in a competent and effective manner, with a real commitment to the welfare of placed children.

The current manager was intending to fill the effective managerial vacancy as a matter of urgency. As a temporary support for the running of the agency the fostering manager had employed an appropriately qualified and experienced independent consultant to take on aspects of developmental work, as well as advising on the day-to-day operation of the service.

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

As with the previous standard the fact of the current manager covering both the manager and responsible individual roles meant this standard could not be fully assessed at this time. The current manager and past director had however both been deemed fit through the process of registration and all the necessary checks and references were in place in respect of these two people.

The previous director had left under contested circumstances and aspects of her departure, the consequent effect on shareholding and continuing adherence to the agency's conditions of registration were still being explored by CSCI subsequent to this inspection.

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

Discussion with the staff and manager indicated that there had been some level of confusion of roles and responsibilities between the manager and previous director, despite a clear formal allocation of duties and accountability. Further discussion with the current manager indicated a clear understanding of the need to establish unambiguous expectations in this area when the new manager is appointed.

The agency had financial procedures in place although the inspector was not competent to judge their appropriateness. However no concerns had been raised in the course of the inspection by any party about the financial propriety of the agency. Clear information on fees and services was made available to placing authorities, and guidance on conflicts of interest had now been put in place.

A formal structure for monitoring key aspects of service quality, as outlined under Schedule 7 of the regulations, was in place, with responsibilities shared between the manager and responsible individual. Monthly reports were produced on the basis of this monitoring. Overall this was a good system, however, as will be clear from comments later in this report the monitoring of staff recruitment records had not been effective and there were no effective central systems in place to monitor accidents and the issuing of sanctions in respect of placed children.

More general quality systems needed further development to ensure that, in addition to the above monitoring, consistent feedback was received from carers, children and placing authorities on service quality.

Two notifications had been made to NCSC/CSCI since the last inspection. One was in respect of a serious complaint about a foster carer that had subsequently led to a formal child protection enquiry. The final resolution of this investigation was still awaited. The other related to the calling of police to help manage a child's behaviour. The fostering manager was clear about the range of issues requiring notification to the various agencies listed in the regulations.

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

2

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	0
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	1
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	1
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?	3
<p>The day-to-day management of the agency had been well handled by the fostering manager. Vacancies in social worker and administrative posts had previously posed problems of consistency and continuity but the recruitment of two permanent social work staff and the imminent arrival of an administrative worker should ensure a more consistent foundation for the work of the agency.</p> <p>All staff had job descriptions, and roles and responsibilities within the agency were now well understood. There were no formal arrangements for deputising in the absence of the fostering manager but plans for this were due to be put in place once a new fostering manager had been recruited.</p> <p>Feedback from staff, carers, children and placing authorities confirmed the view that the agency was currently being run in an efficient and effective manner.</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

There were clear and effective systems in place via the approval, review and ongoing monitoring of placements to ensure foster carers were providing physically safe and appropriate environments for placed children. Health and safety assessments were carried out initially, and then at annual review of foster households - this included assessment of transport arrangements by foster carers. The foster carer handbook did not have any specific guidance on health and safety matters although the manager indicated work was in progress on this and on inclusion of specific health and safety elements into foster carer training.

The physical environments seen during visits to foster carers were of a good standard and placed children made positive comments about their bedrooms and the private space they were afforded. Good attention was paid to considerations of room sharing and there were clear processes in place for risk assessment should any need to share arise. At the time of this inspection the agency indicated that it would usually only place children where they had a bedroom of their own.

Foster carers were made clear through their agreements and in guidance that they could be visited by CSCI inspectors as part of inspection procedures.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency had an overarching equality policy and statement in place and through guidance to carers placed appropriate emphasis on the promotion of placed children's identity and individual needs. Diversity training had been provided since the last inspection for both carers and agency staff.

Discussion with carers, examination of files and direct feedback from children confirmed that carers were well supported by the agency in nurturing and respecting the cultural and religious backgrounds of children, especially those placed cross-culturally. A good example was the work put into supporting two children from a Muslim religious and cultural background.

While placement decisions rested ultimately with placing authorities it was good to note that for a small agency Archway had three foster households from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which meant that a reasonable choice of placement was available to support good matching on ethnicity and cultural bases.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met? 3

While placing authorities clearly take ultimate responsibility for consideration of matching, on the basis of discussion with carers and the examination of files, the inspector judged the agency was conscientious in its efforts to ensure placements were, as far as possible, well matched to children's needs and carers abilities and resources. A number of detailed matching reports by local authorities were seen on files for the longer-term placements, and even for shorter term placements carers confirmed due consideration was paid to placing children within approval terms and subject to clear discussion, sharing of information and assessment of the potential impact of new placements. Where elements of matching could not be achieved, for example in areas of culture or ethnicity, clear indications were given of the steps that would be taken to address these.

Carers were clear that they could and at times did refuse placements, which, although within approval range, they felt were nonetheless appropriate. The needs of already placed children were taken into account with recorded liaison with their placing authorities seen on files and the direct views of children themselves were sought by their carers, as confirmed in interviews with the inspector.

A number of carers had the admission of emergency placements as part of their approval terms. There had been very few such placements since the last inspection and those that had taken place had presented difficulties. During the inspection the inspector also witnessed the refusal of a number of emergency placement requests due to their inappropriateness for existing foster placements. The inspector subsequently discussed with the manager whether, given the high number of stable long-term placements supported by the agency, the consistent demand for such placements and the difficulty of integrating emergencies into existing households, the agency should simply cease offering emergency placements.

Where feasible a process of gradual introduction for new placements was arranged and appropriate sharing of information with foster carers took place. The agency continues to be appropriately insistent on the provision of full LAC documentation for referred children. A

number of existing carers provided good child-friendly introductory booklets for potential placed children - the agency should consider extending this good practice to all its foster households.

Foster placement agreements were noted to be in place for all children, although the inspector pointed out that, as these were typically supplied by local authorities in the form of standard LAC placement plan sections, the statutory references on this documentation is now out of date. This is beyond the immediate influence of the fostering agency to change at this point in time.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The agency had good clear guidance in place for carers and staff on the protection of children in placement. There was a general child protection policy in place with clear guidance on steps to take if concerns arose, as well as safe caring guidelines. Training on child protection and safe caring approaches was incorporated into the training plan for carers and staff.

The agency continued to develop individual risk assessments for those children with particularly complex or concerning behaviours or vulnerabilities, and, as noted earlier, good attention was paid to the risks inherent in room sharing.

In respect of the one child protection allegation that had been made against carers, the agency had taken appropriate immediate steps to safeguard placed children's welfare, in liaison with placing authorities. Appropriate notifications had been made and the agency had fully co-operated with the investigative process. The final outcome of police and social services investigations was still awaited.

Clear and appropriate guidance was provided to carers on the management of behaviour. Training on this issue was also incorporated into the year's training plan. No children raised any concerns about the ways in which they were disciplined and it appeared there was no use of restraint by carers. As noted earlier the agency needs to develop systems for more effective central monitoring and evaluation of the use of sanctions and other disciplinary measures by carers.

Guidance was in place for carers on the identification and management of bullying, however this was very 'school' focused and needed expansion to incorporate potential bullying within the foster household and other settings. A survey of placed children's views on their experience of bullying was not carried out and therefore no percentage figure is offered at the end of this standard. No concerns of this nature were however raised by placed children, either in their questionnaires or in discussion with the inspector.

Appropriate policy and guidance was in place for carers on dealing with unauthorised absences

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

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The inspection provided good evidence from files and from discussion with carers and children that the agency worked hard to support contact arrangements with birth families and others, where this was the child's wish. Examples were noted where the agency had been instrumental, in one situation, in re-establishing contact and, in another, in restricting it, in response to the expressed wishes of the children concerned. Contact arrangements were clearly considered as part of placement planning processes and documented on children's case files.

As a matter of principle the agency did not expect carers to undertake supervised contact responsibilities and such arrangements were set up in liaison with placing authorities to occur on neutral venues, with separate supervising staff, to ensure the interests of carers and placed children were not in any way compromised. No concerns about support for contact arrangements were raised in the survey of placing authorities conducted as part of this inspection.

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
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Foster children consulted during this inspection confirmed that, on a day-to-day basis, their carers were good at involving them and seeking their views on the running of the household and the ways in which they were cared for. The agency formally sought the views of placed children as part of household review processes but had not yet developed systems for feedback on the quality of the agency as a whole. Due to the relatively small number of children in placement the agency had not yet developed a forum for placed children, although this was a stated future intention.

The inspection also provided good evidence of the agency supporting the voice of children, often in the face of opposition or indifference from their placing authorities. This had arisen in respect of contact arrangements, as already noted, and also poor local authority planning for leaving care. The agency had supported children in accessing relevant advocacy and legal advice.

Placed children were, in theory, provided with a range of information on how to make complaints and who to approach, both in and outside the agency, if they had concerns about their treatment. Two placed children did however suggest they had not received this information, and five placing authorities were also apparently unaware of the agency's formal complaints procedures. As a matter of good practice the agency should revisit this issue with

placed children and placing authorities to ensure all parties have access to the necessary information. Consideration could also usefully be given to recording on children's files exactly what information has been provided to them, and when.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency provided good support for the meeting of placed children's health care needs. Care was taken to identify health care needs at the point of placement planning and effective systems were in place for arranging initial and ongoing medical screening.

Foster carer and children's files showed good ongoing attention to health care needs and these were regularly monitored through both care and household review systems. Foster children confirmed that their carers helped them to get regular exercise and follow a healthy diet. Children were typically registered with GPs, dentists, etc local to carers. Children's records in the agency showed good detail on health care needs and how they were being met.

There was good evidence of carers' commitment to meeting more complex health care needs, for example in one case spending lengthy periods supporting children's hospital attendance. Where required the agency was also vocal, and effective, in ensuring specialist therapy and support was provided for children. In one case specialist counselling had been funded by the agency when the placing local authority withdrew its financial support.

The fostering manager was considering arranging input from the local LAC nurse service in Milton Keynes as a source of both advice and training for agency staff and carers and this would be wholeheartedly supported by the inspector.

The position on first aid training for carers was not fully explored during this inspection and will be followed up in subsequent inspections.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency had a clear commitment to supporting placed children's educational achievement and this was backed up by clear guidance and policy for staff and carers. Interviews with children and carers provided good examples of carers acting as eloquent advocates on children's behalf with local schools. Files confirmed carers attended school meetings and encouraged homework. The agency continued to encourage placing authorities to draw up and/or supply copies of children's personal education plans as part of placement planning procedures.

At the time of the inspection all placed children were in full time education of one sort or another and the agency had now, as recommended at the last inspection, put in place clear written expectations of carers should children, for any reason, not be able to attend, or were excluded from, school. A number of the children the inspector talked to were very positive about the encouragement given by their carers and the agency to overcome previous educational problems. The agency had put in place a system for monitoring the educational progress and achievements of placed children.

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

There was evidence that on a day-to-day basis foster carers did put in place appropriate expectations for older children in terms of developing their skills and self-help abilities. However this was not always done in a formal planned way and the foster carers handbook provided only limited guidance for foster carers on the role and work they should be undertaking with children about to leave the care system. The fostering manager recognised this was an area of further development for the agency and hoped to draw on the skills of one of the link workers whose previous experience had been in a Leaving Care team.

Despite this shortfall there was ample evidence again of the agency and its carers battling hard to ensure children leaving care received the help and support they were entitled to from their placing authorities, as well as providing more pragmatic assistance in completing housing applications etc. A number of older children in Archway's care were at this point and some lacked any clear Pathway plans provided by their authorities. This had been challenged and pursued by the agency on children's behalf and in one acute case legal advice had been obtained by the agency for a child to challenge her authority's poor leaving care practice. Discussions with carers underlined their commitment to ensuring children were not left in vulnerable positions come their 18th birthdays.

The agency still maintained links with a specialist agency offering support programmes for children leaving care and moving to independence, and the manager said this remained an option, should the need arise, in planning post-18 arrangements with children and their placing authorities.

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? 1

This had been an area of major weakness at the time of the agency's registration and although progress had been made, and underlying systems were now sound, this inspection still identified some remaining shortfalls in recruitment practice for staff.

There were for example outstanding references for the consultant currently assisting the agency, although it is recognised he was not involved in direct social work tasks until references had been received. References are also outstanding for the agency's formal decision-maker. One of the link workers had started before her CRB clearance was through, photographic proof of identity was not being consistently maintained on staff files and telephone follow-up of references had not been consistently evidenced. In discussion with the fostering manager it was stated that the previous responsible individual had taken responsibility for practice in this area and that the manager had only belatedly realised the shortfalls and had now started to address these.

A new checklist for each stage of recruitment had now been put in place, which should aid consistency of the obtaining and recording of information, and staff files had been re-organised to make information readily accessible. These improvements will need to be supported by a much clearer exposition in staff policies and procedures of each stage of the vetting and checking process than is currently the case.

The social work staff of the agency were all appropriately qualified and experienced in children's services, although not widely experienced in the specific area of fostering work. That said this inspection confirmed their current work in supporting carers and children was of a very high standard. Due to the relatively recent recruitment of the agency's full-time link worker staff, the majority of the assessments carried out since the last inspection had been undertaken by appropriately qualified sessional staff. A more rounded picture of the agency's own staff's performance in this area will be possible at the next inspection.

Support workers, who carried out a range of minor supportive tasks to foster carers and placed children, were not necessarily qualified but did not carry out any formal social work tasks. These sessional staff were currently supervised by the fostering manager but it was

anticipated this task may shift to the link workers in future.

Total number of staff of the agency:

3

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

As noted earlier there was evidence of some previous overlap and confusion in responsibilities between the fostering manager and responsible individual. In the absence of the latter management responsibilities had become inevitably clearer, and the planned structure for the future allocation of responsibilities between these two posts, if adhered to, should ensure clarity.

On the evidence of feedback from carers and staff, and from observation during the week of the inspection, it was clear the agency was currently being well managed by the fostering manager, with good oversight of practice and organisation of work, allied with direct input into a number of more critical situations.

A relatively new workload management system for link workers was in place. This appeared appropriate in that it took into account complexity of foster households and ongoing assessments as well as pure numbers. The effectiveness of the system will be better judged at the next inspection. The staff team were provided with appropriate regular supervision and had opportunities for ongoing training and development opportunities.

Administrative systems and support were still in their infancy largely due to long delays in appointing administrative staff. A full-time administrator had now been appointed and was due to start shortly – temporary input had been sought from admin agencies to develop and improve systems in the meantime.

All staff had relevant job descriptions and appropriate staff procedures and guidance were in place governing their employment. There was a clear understanding on the part of link workers, carers and placed children of the difference between the roles of placing social workers and those of agency employees.

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?**

3

With regard to staff in the agency, given the current number of carers, staffing levels were satisfactory to provide a good level of service and support, although if the agency continues to grow this will clearly need to be kept under review.

With regard to carers the agency was still small, with a total of some 11 households on the books. However the number and range provided were able to meet the needs of quite complex children and the agency was regularly approached for potential placements. The manager indicated an intention to expand the number of carers, but not to the extent that the agency lost its current close contact and involvement with all carers.

Assessment processes for potential new carers were satisfactorily organised and assessments adhered to BAAF competency based expectations and therefore covered all the areas under this standard. As noted earlier the majority of assessments since registration had been carried out by contracted external staff prior to appointment of the agency's own staff. The completed assessments seen on file and those in progress were appropriately thorough.

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

No concerns were raised by staff or carers about the agency as an employer, and in fact carers were very positive in their views about the way they were treated and supported by the agency.

The supervision, support and management of carers were well organised and appropriate health and safety and insurance arrangements were in place. Whistle blowing procedures were 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

The staff team was still newly appointed so full evaluation against this standard will be more feasible at the next inspection. However there was a clear commitment to provide updating training to staff, evidenced by the recent training on specific issues such as competency-based assessment training and diversity issues, allied with stated support for broader post-qualifying training in the future. Some of the recent training had been carried out jointly with carers.

A structure for induction and probationary periods was in place and appraisals were due to be conducted annually.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency's staff all had clear job descriptions and a good understanding of their roles and expectations placed upon them. Regular formal recorded supervision of social work staff took place covering relevant areas and, as already noted, an appraisal system was in place. Regular team meetings took place, supplemented by good levels of more informal day-to-day information sharing and discussion within the staff team.

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

4

The agency had effective systems in place for supporting and working with carers as exemplified by the following:

- there was a good programme of training on offer;
- regular two weekly formal recorded supervision was provided by link workers when children were in placement, allied with considerable additional direct and telephone contact and support as required;
- an effective out of hours duty system was in place and much praised by carers;
- a detailed carer handbook was provided;
- membership of the Fostering Network was provided by the agency;
- a regular bi-monthly forum for foster carers to meet and discuss issues was in place;
- respite care opportunities were made available as part of the standard arrangement with all carers and additional practical sessional support could be arranged as required;
- reviews were being conducted regularly and effectively and all annual household reviews were being scrutinised by the Panel;
- link workers were very supportive to carers in their dealings with placing authorities and external agencies.

Overall carers and their placed children were full of praise for the time and effort spent by the fostering manager and link workers, not only in supporting them but also in ensuring placing authorities and other agencies carried out their responsibilities appropriately. Particular effort had gone into appropriately supporting the carer household that had been subject to the recent child protection allegations.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?**

3

There were good structures in place for regular supervision of carers, as already noted. Two-weekly formal recorded supervision was undertaken by the allocated link workers for each foster household when children were in placement, and monthly contact when there were not. Supervision records were well-maintained on carer files and covered appropriate areas. Occasional unannounced visits to carer households took place.

Foster carer agreements were in place for all carers and covered the areas required by regulation. As already noted under the previous standard, effective arrangements were in

place for providing a range of practical support to carers.

Information on procedures for dealing with complaints, investigations and any subsequent immediate steps required to safeguard children's welfare was available to staff and carers. The inspector felt however that more explicit information could however be provided on the supports available to carers should they be subject to investigation. Systems were in place for central monitoring of complaints and investigations.

Good records had been maintained of the one child protection investigation instigated since the last inspection. These records confirmed the agency had acted appropriately and had paid due balanced consideration to the safety of the children involved and the needs of the carers.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The agency provided appropriate pre-approval preparation training for prospective carers and had now put in place a good programme of roughly bi-monthly post-approval training for the current year, covering topics such as safe caring, working with diversity, and managing behaviour. Systems were in place to evaluate the quality and usefulness of training provided.

The agency was clear in its expectation that all approved carers should attend the training provided and was looking at ways to ensure that delivery methods were flexible enough to ensure carers working full-time could attend courses. This was needed, as it was evident that where two carers were approved there was a tendency for only one carer to attend the majority of the training. The agency was also advised to consider identifying a core of essential training at which attendance from all carers was regarded as mandatory and to make this explicit as part of foster carers agreements. Annual reviews provided a forum to monitor carer training and development and identify and follow-up on any outstanding training needs.

Due to the small numbers involved, additional support for birth children of carers still at home was considered on an individual basis, but their views were taken into account as part of annual review processes. Occasional large scale social events were held to which all carers and their children, both birth and foster placements, were invited.

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?

3

Case records for placed children were very well maintained by the agency and covered the areas required by regulations and standards. Guidance on record-keeping and file contents was in place for staff and a system for regular file audit was in operation. Appropriate information on placed children was obtained and collated by the agency to ensure carers were fully informed about children's backgrounds and the purpose and intended duration of placements.

Foster carers were provided with clear guidance on the records they were expected to maintain on placed children and on ensuring they were stored appropriately. These were checked during carer supervision. Carers were encouraged to help children understand and come to terms with their past experiences through life story work and through collection of memorabilia and personal scrapbooks.

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?

1

The agency appropriately maintained all the central records and registers as required by the regulations. Separate files were maintained for carers and placed children and staff were provided with guidance for the upkeep of these.

Carer files were generally very well maintained and contained the required information, however in examining the files for longer-established carers, who had effectively 'transferred' across from previous local authority approval the inspector noted a number of gaps in the original vetting and checking information. For example there were gaps in references, in evidence of clearance from agencies such as probation and the NSPCC and the relevant sections of the Form Fs had not been consistently filled in. While the period in which these carers were recruited fell outside of the responsibility of the agency itself, a renewal of outstanding checks would ensure the files of **all** carers contained the appropriate range and depth of information as required by the regulations. The manager agreed to take this forward in conjunction with the following issue. The files for more recently approved carers contained

all the required information and CRB checks were up to date for all carer households.

Further examination of the files for the 'transferred' carers highlighted that at no stage had they been subsequently formally approved by the Archway fostering panel, although annual reviews had taken place. Discussion with the fostering manager confirmed that it appeared that these carers were still technically approved by, and 'on the books' of, the local authorities who had initially approved them, which, under regulations, precludes Archway from also approving them. Files showed evidence of the agency writing to the relevant local authorities to resolve this situation earlier in the year, but it appeared no responses had been received. This situation needs urgent resolution to ensure all the carers used by Archway have gone through formal approval by the Archway panel. The manager was advised that if he continued to receive no response from the local authorities concerned CSCI should be informed.

As noted earlier good records had been kept regarding the child protection investigation about one of the foster households. The manager was advised that to supplement the ongoing recording of this situation, once the outcome is clear a separate summary write up should be completed for holding on the carers file and on a central monitoring file.

Some further points relating to information on carer files are raised under standard 30.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	16		
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	10		
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	2		
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	3		
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	0		
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	333.12	Maximum £	666.24

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?

2

The agency's office was located within a business development site on a farm on the outskirts of Newton Longville. The office was appropriately equipped and serviced and satisfactory security measures were in place. The office is currently leased for a one year term and appropriate insurance cover was in place.

The office comprised one large open plan area, which although offering ample space for staff, did not provide a separate room or office for more confidential meetings such as staff supervision or case discussions. While this problem was in part addressed by the fact that all staff were rarely in the office, and also that a room in the local community centre could be booked for planned meetings, if/when the agency expands and more staff come on board serious consideration will need to be given to alternative office arrangements that provide facilities for confidential meetings.

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?	2
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The previous year's accounts for the company had not been finalised at the time of this inspection so the overall financial viability of the agency could not be fully assessed. The manager however assured the inspector that the overall financial situation was sound. The manager was asked to submit the accounts to CSCI, when they are complete, for further analysis.

As far as could be ascertained from discussion with staff and carers, due attention was being paid to matters of VAT, income tax and national insurance contributions.

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?	2
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This inspection did not identify any concerns about the financial propriety of the agency based on feedback from placing authorities, carers and staff. The company accounts are subject to audit by an accountant but, as noted above, this process had not yet been completed for last financial year. The company's financial procedures were not inspected on this occasion.

The agency provided clear information for potential placing authorities on fee levels and associated services. Placed children's files contained copies of contracts with placing authorities detailing basic fee levels, services and, where relevant, any enhanced fees and services being supplied by the agency.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There were clear and effective systems in place for setting and paying foster carers allowances and other incidental expenses. Foster carers spoken with confirmed payments were made regularly and promptly. Detailed written information on financial matters was included in the information provided to carers.

A system was in place for annual review of allowance levels and an increase had been made for this year.

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? 2

The inspector was not able to observe a fostering panel as part of this inspection programme and therefore judgements are based on interviews with staff and panel members and on examination of panel meeting records.

The chair and deputy chair of panel had extensive experience in child welfare work, the agency's panel was appropriately constituted and had a reasonable range of knowledge and experience in relation to fostering services. Appropriate levels of independent membership had been achieved. The panel was however relatively new and had met infrequently over the last year. The inspector advised therefore both formal training for the panel and the provision of regular opportunities for the members to meet to discuss panel operations. Written procedures were in place for panel operations.

The discussion with the chair and deputy chair showed some confusion about the understanding of their current roles on the panel, i.e. they both thought they were the permanent chair. This confusion needed prompt resolution by the manager.

The panel currently lacked representation from anyone specifically experienced in education matters or child health and the inspector would support the manager's intention to approach relevant professionals in the Milton Keynes area to try to address the shortfall. This will however necessitate some readjustment of the panel membership to avoid going over approved numbers. The panel also did not have ready access to formal specialist medical advice in relation to carer assessments and reviews or potential placement considerations. This also needed addressing.

CRB clearance had been obtained for all panel members, however the inspector noted that one clearance certificate indicated a check against Protection of Children Act list information had not been requested. The inspector advised a recheck of all CRBs obtained to date for panel members to ensure a full check had been requested. The problem would have appear to have arisen at the agency's CRB umbrella body. The manager indicated an intention to seek CRB registration for the agency in its own right to ensure greater direct control over this process in future.

The agency currently made use of a wholly independent decision-maker who did not work for the agency. This arrangement had been made to address concerns noted at the last

inspection, however the inspector queried whether this was still required given that there was now scope to have a decision-maker within the agency who did not sit on the panel.

Minutes of panel meetings showed that appropriate attention was paid to scrutinising and challenging assessments and review reports, although newer members of the panel had, unsurprisingly, yet to find their full voice. It was good to note that all annual household reviews came to panel, which is over and above the expectations of the standards. On occasion it appeared that panel approval had been given pending the receipt of outstanding information or the clarification of areas of concern. It was not clear from records how this outstanding information was subsequently assessed or by whom in coming to final decisions on approval. The agency needed to establish a clearer and better evidenced system for finalisation of such pending decisions.

Administrative processes around panel meetings appeared to work efficiently and will be aided by the appointment of the agency administrator.

Foster carer files did not currently contain any details of the panel's discussion related to initial approvals or reviews. This needs to be held on file in future and a simple adjustment of panel meeting minutes structure will facilitate this. Similarly foster carer files did not include a formal notice of terms of approval following initial approval or review as required by regulations. The manager was intending to produce this in the form of a certificate in the future.

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?	9
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This standard was not applicable to this agency.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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This standard was not applicable to this agency.	
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PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

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 28th June – 02nd July 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

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

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

YES

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 08th September 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Archway Care Ltd 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 Archway Care Ltd 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.