

Completed Audit Report: Foster Care Service Arrangements

Annex A

Audit	Background to review	Key findings	Audit opinion (1)	Recommendations for improvement (Priority) (2)
Foster Care Service Arrangements	<p>Surrey looks after on average 800 children per year. 75% of our looked after children are placed in foster care.</p> <p>The audit focussed on the administrative and financial elements of the foster care service. The auditor did not evaluate the standard of care provided nor review the individual files of Children in Care.</p>	<p>There is no foster care service specific risk register to ensure that operational, financial and safeguarding risks are acknowledged and mitigated.</p> <p>A Children's Services Procedures Manual is available on SNet and includes a section on Foster Care. Foster Care team members seemed unaware of the Procedures manual as an information source.</p> <p>Foster carers are required to complete mandatory training in line with the National Minimum Standards. Training records available were incomplete and inconsistent.</p>	Unsatisfactory	<p>Compile a local Fostering Risk Register that identifies relevant issues affecting the service. (H)</p> <p>Foster care staff and foster carers to be provided with training on where to access relevant information. (H)</p> <p>All training courses attended by foster carers should be recorded and monitored by the Training and Development Team. (H)</p> <p>A log of completed training and other exercises should be recorded and maintained in LCS. The service should have a clear policy in place to ensure that all foster carers are meeting the minimum training requirements as required by the National Minimum Standards. (H)</p>

Audit	Background to review	Key findings	Audit opinion (1)	Recommendations for improvement (Priority) (2)
Foster Care Service Arrangements (cont'd)		<p>The Foster Care Training and Development Framework does not include health and hygiene training.</p> <p>During audit testing inconsistencies were noted in DBS records eg 10 checks were incomplete or out of date in the West database; 8 checks were incomplete and out of date in the East database.</p> <p>Audit testing of unannounced visits for a sample of 30 cases found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 (60%) were completed in time; • 5 (17%) foster carers records showed no evidence of any unannounced visits; • 5 (17%) visits were overdue; 	Unsatisfactory	<p>Courses on 'health and hygiene' and 'positive care and control of children, including training in 'de-escalating problems and disputes' should be included on the Training and Development Framework to ensure compliance with the National Minimum Standards. (H)</p> <p>DBS records should be managed centrally using LCS, with the service ensuring that all DBC checks have been completed for foster carers and members of the fostering household aged 16+. (H)</p> <p>Supervision visits, annual reviews and unannounced visits should be managed centrally to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner in accordance with statutory regulations. (H)</p>

Audit	Background to review	Key findings	Audit opinion (1)	Recommendations for improvement (Priority) (2)
Foster Care Service Arrangements (cont'd)		<p>Payments of allowances to foster carers are processed and authorised every two weeks, with one payment in arrears and one in advance. The validity of these payments is dependent on records being maintained on LCS. Where records are not updated promptly on LCS, allowance payments are processed as 'Non Child Related Payments'. The Finance Team Leader confirmed that such payments are processed on the system without any level of authorisation.</p> <p>Foster carers may claim appropriate Extra Identifiable Costs for each placement. The Children's Services Procedure Manual highlights the delegate levels of authorisation; and the Foster Carers Handbook clearly explains the circumstances when claims can be approved. Despite the availability of information inconsistencies in the nature and amounts of claims was observed by the Auditor.</p>	Unsatisfactory	<p>The Finance Team should ensure that all expenses are appropriately authorised. (H)</p> <p>Controls should be reviewed on SRM and software that is fit for purpose should be implemented to manage foster carers' expense claims. (H)</p> <p>Mileage claims should be paid to foster carers at the correct rate of 45 pence (H)</p> <p>Strengthen controls around payments to foster carers ensuring appropriate authorisation. (H)</p> <p>Payments outside of the normal payments system should be discouraged and where necessary must be independently reviewed and authorised. (H)</p>

¹ **Audit Opinions**

Effective	Controls evaluated are adequate, appropriate, and effective to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met.
Some Improvement Needed	A few specific control weaknesses were noted; generally however, controls evaluated are adequate, appropriate, and effective to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met.
Significant Improvement Needed	Numerous specific control weaknesses were noted. Controls evaluated are unlikely to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met.
Unsatisfactory	Controls evaluated are not adequate, appropriate, or effective to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met.

² **Audit Recommendations**

Priority High (H) - major control weakness requiring immediate implementation of recommendation

Priority Medium (M) - existing procedures have a negative impact on internal control or the efficient use of resources

Priority Low (L) - recommendation represents good practice but its implementation is not fundamental to internal control