

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report
Fostering services**

Pathway Care

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Cardiff
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Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	
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Introduction

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the fostering service undertaken by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations.

The primary focus of the report is to comment on the quality of life and quality of care experienced by service users (foster carers and children in placement).

The report contains information on how we inspect and what we find. This inspection focuses specifically on the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 but also takes into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The report is divided into nine sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection:

1. Summary of findings
2. Policies and procedures / information
3. Management and staffing of the service, (including premises and finance)
4. Provision of foster carers (including fostering panel)
5. Quality of care and safety for children placed
6. Placement of children, parts v & vi of the regulations
7. Records
8. Short term placements
9. Family and friends as carers

CSSIW inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect fostering services at any time. Inspection enables CSSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate, and for IFAs this will include satisfaction that continued registration is justified. It also ensures that all fostering services are compliant with:

Care Standards Act 2000 and The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, whilst taking into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The service's own statement of purpose.

At each inspection episode there are visits to the service during which CSSIW may adopt a range of different methods in its attempt to capture service user's and their relatives'/representatives' experiences. Such methods may for example include self-assessment, discussion groups, case tracking, visits to carers' homes, observation, interviews, and the use of questionnaires. At any other time throughout the year visits may also be made to the service to investigate complaints and to respond to any changes in the service.

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector at a specific period in time. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times.

The registered/responsible person/s is/are responsible for ensuring that the fostering service operates in a way which complies with the service specific regulations. CSSIW will comment in the general text of the inspection report on their compliance. For those regulations which CSSIW believes to be key in bringing about change in the particular service, they will be separately and clearly identified in the requirement section.

As well as listing these key requirements from the current inspection, requirements made by CSSIW since the last inspection, which have been met and those which remain outstanding are included in this report. The reader should note that requirements made in last year's report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with.

Where key requirements have been identified, the provider is required under regulation 42B, (Compliance Notification), to advise, in writing, the appropriate regional office of the completion of any action required by CSSIW.

The regulated service is also responsible for having in place a clear, effective and fair complaints procedure which promotes local resolution between the parties in a swift and satisfactory manner, wherever possible. The annual inspection report will include a summary of the numbers of complaints dealt with locally and their outcome.

CSSIW may also be involved in the investigation of a complaint. Where this is the case CSSIW makes publicly available a summary of that complaint. CSSIW will also include within the annual inspection report a summary of any matters it has been involved in together with any action taken by CSSIW.

Should you have concerns about anything arising from the Inspector's findings, you may discuss these with CSSIW or with the registered person.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales is required to make reports on regulated services available to the public. The report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW web site, www.cssiw.org.uk

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Section one: Summary of findings

Pathway Care is an independent fostering agency which has been in operation since 1996 and operates in Wales and England. There are two branches of the agency based in Wales which are registered and inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). This inspection report refers to the East Wales branch of Pathway Care, based in Cardiff.

The agency completed a self-assessment form (SAF) prior to the inspection, along with a comprehensive portfolio of information to inform the inspection. Questionnaires were completed by staff, seven foster carers, six panel members and one local authority social worker.

The inspection activity comprised of the following:-

- Individual interviews with the proposed registered manager (Head of Practice), one regional manager and one supervising social worker.

- Meeting with the staff team.

- Meeting with a group of foster carers who recently completed a NVQ level 3 in Childcare and Education (six).

- Observation of Disability Group for foster carers (sixteen).

- Scrutiny of last three panel minutes.

- Visits to four foster carers.

- Scrutiny of six foster carers' files and four children's files.

- Scrutiny of the regulation 42 – Review of quality of care report.

- Scrutiny of a sample of child protection and notifications of significant events;

Pathway Care provides a range of placements to meet the diverse needs of children referred by placing authorities; this includes mainstream foster care for children with complex needs, parent and child placements, permanency, sibling groups, children with disabilities and unaccompanied asylum seekers. The South East Wales regional office had most of their referrals from the 10 local authorities that make up the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC).

Through evidence presented for the inspection and discussion with staff and foster carers, the South East Wales staff team presented as suitably qualified, skilled and enthusiastic about the work they undertake. Foster carers spoken to as part of the inspection spoke positively about Pathway Care and its staff and described the agency as being well managed, with good support from the staff team, which included management. Evidence provided for the inspection indicated that Pathway Care (South East Wales) continued to operate in a child-centred, efficient and organised manner.

A detailed report about the findings of this inspection can be found below. It is not practically possible for every aspect of the operation of an agency to be observed on each

visit. The absence of reference to a particular fault or issue does not mean that such a fault does not exist. It is the responsibility of the registered persons to ensure that in all respects the agency operates in accordance with the relevant laws, regulations and national minimum standards.

Section two: Policies and procedures / information

<p>Inspector`s findings:</p> <p>The agency had a generic statement of purpose which covered seven regional offices and provided comprehensive information about the services provided. The statement of purpose was reviewed in May 2010. This is supported by a local statement of purpose covering the South East Wales region which was reviewed in March 2011. The agency had included providing placements for children with disabilities in the statement of purpose. It was evidenced during the inspection that the agency provided placements for a large number of children with disabilities. The inspector advised the agency to apply for a variation to their registration during the inspection episode to include providing placements for children with disabilities. Discussions with foster carers and staff indicated that the statement of purpose was provided to foster carers and to local authorities.</p> <p>The children`s guide was reviewed and updated in January 2011 and had actively engaged young people in the process. The children`s guide produced by the agency was child-friendly and provided young people with clear, concise information on the organisation and the people working within it. There was space within the booklet for the young person`s social worker to provide relevant contact details for the numerous people and organisations including the Children`s Commissioner for Wales and the (CSSIW). There were information sheets included within the booklet that allowed the young person to add personal information e.g. likes/dislikes important dates and information. The agency proposes to develop a specific Safe Steps children`s guide in consultation with the young people involved in the Safe Steps programme. Some foster carers reported not having received a children`s guide: these were foster carers with quite young children in placement or children with disabilities. It was recommended by the inspector that the agency develop a children`s guide in a format e.g. a DVD which was more accessible to younger children and children with disabilities.</p> <p>The Head of Quality Assurance, Learning and Development and a Quality Assurance Manager had led a review of the key policies and procedures within the agency. This was completed in September 2010 and circulated via the agency`s intranet site. In addition all social work staff were trained with regards to the updated policies and procedures. The agency had set up a `Quality in Action` group to oversee practice development, consistency across the agency, best practice and to ensure that processes were adhered to. Foster carers who engaged with the inspector indicated that they had a copy of the carer`s handbook and viewed it as a valuable resource. Foster carers confirmed that they received updates for their handbook as and when procedures and practice were revised.</p>

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
It is recommended that the agency develops a children's guide in a format which is more accessible to younger children and children with disabilities.	NMS 1.5

Section three: Management and staffing of the services, (including premises and finance)

Inspector's findings:

Whilst Cardiff is a regional office it is also the company's headquarters and therefore provides the financial and administrative centre for the group of companies known as The Pathway Care Group Ltd.

During the last twelve months Pathway Care (South East Wales) and (West Wales) teams had worked more closely together on an all Wales basis, which has resulted in changes aimed at strengthening the management structure. The Responsible Individual for the Agency was also the Operations Director for all Pathway Care branches. The registered manager had left the agency in June 2010. The post of registered manager was covered on a temporary basis. The Director for Wales was also the registered manager for the West Wales branch. A Head of Practice role had been created to support the Director for Wales. The Head of Practice was in process of being registered by CSSIW as the registered manager for the South East Wales branch. He is suitably qualified and has a wealth of experience within local authority settings. The staff team also consisted of two regional managers, a senior practitioner, eleven family placement supervising social workers (FPSSW), three placement support workers and three administrators. The self assessment form completed by the agency confirmed that all staff were suitably qualified, competent and experienced to undertake the responsibilities delegated to them. The team benefitted from having a knowledgeable, skilled and well established team, with just one change of supervising social worker in the team, since the last inspection. The placements manager and recruitment manager were also based in the South East Wales office but covered both regions. Staffing levels were deemed adequate for the size of the agency. The staffing structure for Pathway Care was well organised in order to provide centralised services across the whole of the organisation: this included personnel with specific responsibilities for quality assurance, finance and accounts, marketing, training and human resources etc.

The regional manager interviewed said that Pathway Care had a clear strategy for staffing ratios and ensured that they maintained an acceptable staff/carer ratio, which was usually a 12:1 ratio (each FPSSW managing a maximum of 12 pieces of work – foster carers and form F applications). Temporary absences of staff (e.g. maternity or long-term sickness) were covered wherever possible by replacement staff. Staff reported that their caseloads were manageable and were highly satisfied with the support from management. However, the majority of the staff were of the opinion that there was not enough dedicated administrative support, particularly for the social work staff within the team.

The agency had procedures in place to monitor that the service was being managed efficiently and effectively. In addition the agency had a number of effective forums for consulting with staff, carers children e.g. staff meetings, supervision and appraisal, carer supervision, their annual reviews and support groups and at children's reviews and in their support groups. Additionally a Carer Retention Group made up of carer and staff representatives and management met to share views on regional service delivery. A report of the review of quality of care dated January 2011, undertaken by the Head of Quality Assurance and the member of staff responsible for Learning and Development was submitted to the CSSIW.

This report summarised the work undertaken by the agency in the previous year and identified gaps and emerging patterns and trends across the service. The regulation 42 report provides information under the headings prescribed in Schedule 7 of the regulations and made reference to consultation undertaken by the agency and some changes implemented as a result of the impact of that consultation.

Staff files were not examined at this inspection. The agency had an effective system for ensuring that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for both staff and carers were renewed every three years. All social work staff were registered with the Care Council for Wales.

Through discussion with staff and information provided for the inspection it was evidenced that staff received regular, good quality informal and formal supervision. The agency had introduced a new staff appraisal system which staff said was linked with performance related pay and a scoring system, which some staff said they found challenging. Staff meetings were scheduled on a regular basis with all staff attending. Minutes of staff meetings were recorded and kept appropriately. The inspector attended a team meeting as part of the inspection.

Pathway Care has a training team which covers all seven regional offices and has responsibility for staff, panel and carer training. The agency is an accredited "Investor in People." A significant investment is made by the organisation to maintain good practice and high standards of care. A wide range of courses are provided for staff and foster carers to develop their professional knowledge and skills. Training is provided both internally and externally. Partnerships have also been formed with some local authorities and shared training occurs. All training courses are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness and suitability. All training requirements are co-ordinated through the Training and Development Coordinator and approved and reviewed in conjunction with the Directors. One member of staff is being funded and supported by the agency to undertake a part time social work degree.

The South East Wales region shares its office space with the centralised staff for the whole of the Pathway Care organisation. The building is situated on the northern outskirts of Cardiff with good access to the M4 and A470. It is accessible to wheelchair users. Designated parking is available under and at the rear of the building; spaces were seen to be limited at busy periods. Open plan office space is provided on two floors and there is a large ground floor room used for meetings and training purposes. Kitchen and toilet facilities are available on both floors. A number of smaller rooms are also available for multiple uses. All visitors are admitted via a buzzer system and are required to sign in and out of the office.

The office space has adequate facilities for ensuring safety and confidentiality of information. All records were stored securely in lockable filing cabinets. Archived records were stored at offsite premises.

All foster carers consulted said that they had secure, locked storage facilities for confidential information to be stored: this ranged from a lockable filing cabinet to a lockable bedroom.

This was monitored by the FPSSW and reinforced during the foster carers' supervision. The agency had ensured that secure arrangements were in place for panel members, which had been a concern at the previous inspection. All panel information is now provided on an encrypted memory stick and it is envisaged that information for panel in future will be paperless. There had been a breach of data protection which had been managed by the agency in a professional and appropriate manner.

Pathway Care Ltd has a dedicated finance department that managed the payment systems. Financial records were not requested as part of this inspection process. The manager had stated in the self assessment form that the agency continued to be financially viable. The agency's accounts were last audited in March 2010 and the manager said that no recommendations were made.

Foster carers spoken to were clear about payments and funding for equipment. Foster carers commented that they received their payments on time. Some foster carers said that payments levels should be reviewed as they had not had an increase in payments for some time. However, the foster carers said that this did not deter them from remaining with Pathway Care. One foster carer who attended the Carer Retention group had written to the Chief Executive suggesting payments should be revised and anticipated a positive response.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)

Inspector`s findings:

At the time of the inspection the SE Wales regional branch of Pathway Care had 137 approved foster carers, all living in Wales offering a maximum of 305 placements. Pathway Care has a thorough and timely recruitment process from initial enquiry through to approval at foster panel. This is supported by comprehensive procedures for staff. Additionally, Pathway Care has an excellent web site which provides clear information for people interested in fostering and includes a short video of foster carers talking about their experience of fostering with Pathway Care. The agency also has a dedicated recruitment officer, a post which is shared with the West Wales office to offer a more consistent service across Wales. He works closely with the Agency Marketing Manager and has used a variety of media to attract carers.

All initial enquiries about becoming a Pathway carer are responded to efficiently and promptly by a specialist call centre service. The agency has developed a bilingual information pack and DVD to explain the stages involved in becoming a carer; this includes real life accounts from foster carers and children who have been fostered. It also stresses the impact of fostering on foster carer's own children. A timely process for considering expressions of interest is in place and includes a home visit from the Recruitment Officer to discuss more detail about the role and responsibilities of the foster carer. On receipt of the completed application form the assessment process commences which will include the preparation training. At the time of inspection there were sixteen applicants undertaking the assessment process and/or awaiting approval as foster carers.

Prospective foster carers are required to attend a three day mandatory preparation to foster course . Both applicants were required to attend. The course is facilitated by the Pathway Care Training department. The course included training on Child Protection, Attachment Issues, The Legal Framework, Contact Arrangements, Children With Disabilities, Understand and Managing Challenging Behaviour and Moving Children On. Foster carers said that the training provided a sound foundation for them and was an integral part of the assessment process. Discussions with and information received from foster carers emphasised the importance of this training as it highlighted the realities of the fostering task for potential carers. On-going training to meet any individual needs was considered and provided as and when identified via supervision and annual reviews of carers. Following completion of the course, a competency based report was written by the course facilitators on the prospective foster carers. This formed part of the overall assessment in respect of suitability and competency to foster.

Pathway Care were in process of developing a 'buddy' system where experienced carers mentor foster carers through the assessment process and when they are newly approved.

Pathway Care provided parent and child placements, where the foster carer provided a nurturing environment, but does not assess the parenting capabilities of the parent. Through discussion with foster carers and questionnaires it was apparent that some foster carers providing this service had undertaken some parent and child training. However, the inspector on reading one foster carer's file could not find evidence of the foster carer having undertaken specific training in this area. The manager said that it was an expectation that the foster carers attended specific parent and child training.

Pathway Care had recently introduced the Parenting Assessment programme, which can be commissioned by the local authorities. It was managed by a specific member of staff based in the West Wales region but also covered the South East Wales region. A FPSSW had been identified in the South East Wales region to support any foster carers approved for the Families First Parenting Assessment programme. The inspector was informed that one parenting assessment foster carer had been approved in the South East Wales region, but currently they did not have a placement. The FPSSW said no other children would be placed with this foster carer if a placement was made under the parenting assessment programme. The lead worker undertakes assessments of the parenting capacity of the parent in the parent and child placement. The service will be delivered by a team of specifically recruited parenting assessment carers, who will be differentially assessed, supported and trained and will have no other 'looked after' children in placement. Specially trained foster carers undertaking these placements will contribute to an assessment being undertaken through their observation and monitoring of a parent and child in placement. Foster carers recruited for parenting assessment work will be provided with additional training to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge needed for the task required.

Foster carers were assessed using the new BAAF Form F1. This included all the required elements of assessment including evidence of all checks on all household members: staff also said the new format encouraged more analysis. On average between 12 and 14 visits are made to complete this assessment. Foster carers interviewed said that the assessment process undertaken with them had been very thorough, but necessary.

Before going to panel the applicants were visited by the Team Manager, who has direct supervisory responsibility for the assessing social worker, to ascertain their satisfaction with the process and the report. The assessment was also ratified by the quality assurance team.

Pathway Care provided a specialist service for young people between the ages of eight years and sixteen years called 'Safe Steps'. The service is designed for young people who have challenging behaviours and complex needs. The service is managed in partnership with Marlowe Child and Family Services and Pathway Care. It is an innovative programme which provides placements in a residential placement to stabilise behaviours and establish routines and boundaries. Once young people were assessed as able to function in a fostering environment a transition to specialist fostering placements with Pathway Care foster carers was undertaken. The lead worker for 'Safe Steps' is based in the West Wales office but can be accessed by children in placement in the South East Wales region. The inspector was aware of one such placement having been made from the South East Wales region very recently. When carers were recruited for the Safe Steps programme they undertook an additional three sessions with carers, to ensure that they understood the parameters and the specific demands and skills necessary for that service.

The two Pathway Care Welsh regional offices shared a joint fostering panel which met every month. All panel members are provided with a comprehensive induction pack and received an induction session with the panel manager/advisor. Each panel member also received an annual appraisal. Since the last inspection panel had received training on the new Form F, Welsh Foundation Standards, Children with Disabilities, Parent and Child placements and MIND. Panel were also informed of any legislative changes. Panel was not observed at this inspection as sufficient information was provided via pre inspection documentation and questionnaires completed by six panel members which confirmed continued compliance with the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003.

All applicants attended the panel for their assessment applications and some had attended with their children, who had expressed a wish to support their parent's application.

Following panel, foster carers are issued with a notice specifying their terms of approval. Carers who are providing placements for children with disabilities do not do currently have this included in their terms of approval. The inspector recommended that foster carers expressing an interest in providing placements for children with disabilities should be scrutinised by panel to ensure that they are suitable to undertake this specialised area of work. Where agreed by panel this should be included in their terms of approval.

Documentation on individual files and discussion with staff and carers evidenced that training for foster carers is considered throughout the assessment process. Opportunities exist for approved foster carers to undertake National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and they are supported in this with monthly workshops. The inspector met with a group of six carers who were being presented with certificates having recently completed their NVQ Level 3 in Childcare and Education. These carers said that they had received tremendous support from the staff in Pathway to achieve this award. Carers' training needs are routinely reviewed during supervision and annual reviews. A wide ranging training programme is provided for foster carers including Child Protection, Safe Care, Recording and Reporting information, First Aid and record keeping to name but a few. Training to meet any individual needs is provided as and when identified e.g. ADHD, autism, transracial placements, working with adolescents etc.

Foster carers visited as part of the inspection said that they received fortnightly visits from their FPSSW's. Other support provided included regular telephone contact and availability of staff. The way in which Pathway Care supported its carers was highlighted as a particular strength of the agency.

An out of hour's service was provided by the regional staff team on a rota basis. The inspector attended a team meeting which evidenced that staff had a comprehensive knowledge of the foster carers and current placements. This meeting was used to update any issues that might be an issue for the staff on call. Foster carers stated that they were aware of the out of hours on call system that was available to them and that when they had needed to use it they had found to be easily accessible.

Support groups were held bi-monthly in geographic regions. A joint support group was held once a year in a central location. Pathway care held a Carers conference for the first time on, an all Wales basis, which was well attended. As a result of feedback from carers it is intended to make this an annual event. A working party of staff and carers will be responsible for organising the next event. Three young people were involved in the conference and it is envisaged that young people will be asked to act as key note speakers again at the next conference. Other specialist groups meet which include the 'Men who foster' group, the 'Children who foster' group and the support group for children in placement (LAC). The inspector attended a Disability Support Group attended by sixteen foster carers who had a child with a disability in placement. This was an excellent forum for providing debate, advice, information and presentations that are specific to support carers looking after children with a disability. Carers involved with the Safe Steps programme and Parenting Assessment have access to an additional and specific support group that focuses on the challenges they face.

Evidence was provided that foster carers were reviewed annually. Thorough reviews are chaired by the quality assurance team; The first review is held at the carer's home and presented to panel. Subsequent reviews are held at the Pathway Care office; these will only be presented to panel if a change to the foster carer's terms of approval is required. The supervising social workers carries out the annual health and safety check of the carer's home, pets and transport to inform the review and completes a report about the carers for the review. The views of the carer, their children, the child in placement and professionals involved with the child are also sought via questionnaire to inform the review.

Wherever possible Pathway Care promotes the use of carer's family and friends to provide respite care to maintain a 'normal' family life for the child. These persons are assessed using the F2 assessment process. Respite can also be provided by other carers to support a placement.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
All foster carers undertaking parent and child placements should undertake specialist training before a placement is made.	NMS 23.1

Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed

Inspector`s findings:

Pathway Care provides a diverse range of placements. As stated in the previous section Pathway Care ensures that foster carers are well supported in providing safe and nurturing environments for the children they care for.

Pathway Care has developed an outcomes for children system which takes account of the 'Children First' and 'Every Child Matters' objectives. Two representatives from the SE Wales region contributed to a company wide working party led by the quality assurance team to develop a new outcome focused recording policy for staff and carers.

The new outcomes for children model places greater emphasis on the joint responsibilities of both the placing authority and the fostering agency to ensure that every child's needs are clearly identified at the point of referral to inform the matching process and that the outcomes for the child are closely monitored and evidenced. Pathway Care has a robust system for matching and reference to this is made in section 6 of this report. The registered manager has contract compliance meetings with a number of the placing authorities.

Risk assessments were completed in respect of every child either by the placing authority or by the agency. There was evidence in the files examined that individualised safe care plans were in place. There were clear procedures for the placement of children and part of the assessment process focused on the provision of suitable accommodation. Comprehensive health and safety checks were undertaken during the BAAF Form F assessment to ensure the home and immediate environment were free from any potential risk of injury or harm. Health and safety checks were re-visited during the foster carers annual review process. Foster carers confirmed that they had undertaken training in health and safety training as part of the assessment process and that health and safety training is also provided on a yearly basis, as required.

Staff and foster carers indicated that they never felt under pressure to provide a placement to young people: no placement would be made unless the agency felt they could meet the child's needs. The Inspector was provided with examples where, when the placement was planned, young people had been able to meet with their proposed carers prior to a placement commencing.

The agency had appropriate policies and procedures to help protect young people from all forms of abuse and neglect. Information provided on the SAF indicated that the agency had updated policies and procedures on Child Protection in September 2010. Foster carers and staff received Child Protection training as part of core training. Discussions with foster carers and questionnaires completed confirmed that they had received training on Child Protection which was updated every three years.

Pathway Care has a robust system for notifying CSSIW of any child protection issues and other notifiable events as prescribed in Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003. The Head of Practice commented that there were as in previous inspections, inconsistencies in the response time to concluding child protection investigations raised by Pathway Care with some local authorities, which can lead to a great deal of anxiety for foster carers and their families.

Foster carers confirmed that they were familiar with the Agency’s policy on acceptable measures of control and discipline and the agency’s procedure to follow when a young person goes missing from home.

Carers were offered independent support from Fostering Network if they were subject of a child protection investigation, within five working days. Where appropriate, carers who have been subject of an allegation were reviewed and/or reassessed by Pathway Care.

The agency had revised their policy on Complaints in September 2010. Records maintained by Pathway Care indicated that the agency had received four concerns / formal complaints in the last year which had been investigated appropriately. Records maintained by the agency evidenced that all concerns and complaints are taken seriously and are investigated, working closely with placing authorities and outcomes are recorded. Once a complaint investigation has been concluded the management team will reflect on it as a matter of good practice and share findings with the wider team, particularly on any lessons learnt.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section six: Placement of children parts v & vi of the regulations

N.B. Use of this section of the report will apply primarily to inspections of local authority fostering services and the duties and responsibilities covered in Parts 5 and 6 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 only. It may need to be used for inspections of independent agencies where a local authority delegates certain duties to them under Regulation 40.

Inspector`s findings:

The SE Wales Pathway Care region worked primarily with the ten local authorities that make up SEWIC. Examination of files evidenced that child specific contracts (Individual placement agreements) in line with Regulation 40(5) of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 were now being provided by the Welsh placing authorities. The All Wales Pre Placement Agreement included the required Regulation 40 (4) delegation agreement which local authorities prefer to use. The registered manager advised that no additional responsibilities have been delegated to Pathway Care by any local authority.

When seeking a placement the local authority will initially trawl the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) to identify availability of suitable carers. If there is a likely match with a Pathway Care carer referrals are usually made by email, fax or telephone. Local authorities require placements within their boundary unless the child's needs for safety require otherwise. Discussion with staff indicated that a careful matching process is conducted on all referrals received and this can be evidenced either by forms used in some local authorities tendering process or the matching form and risk assessment developed by Pathway Care.

All referrals for placements with this agency have been made through a local authority. Pathway Care is able to offer a choice of locations, family composition and experience of carers to meet a child's individual needs. Their recruitment strategy is geared to attract carers to meet local authority need. There are clear procedures for the placement of children and the agency use a placement referral process flow chart and starter pack. On completion of placement the agency sends a letter to education, health and the Local Authority where the carers live to inform them of the new placement. Staff commented that placement would not be offered unless the agency was confident that the placement was a suitable match and they meet that child's needs.

Contract compliance meetings are held periodically between local authorities and the Regional Director to discuss issues regarding the placement and to ensure the individual placement agreement/contract is being adhered to.

The Head of Practice said that Pathway Care has clear arrangements with local authorities about the termination of placements to include timescales and notifications in accordance with the All Wales contract. The agency prides itself on stability of placements. However, concern was expressed that the short term nature of the placement strategy adopted by some local authorities, where they will only place for a six week period was undermining foster carers attempt to provide a secure and stable environment for children and young people.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section seven: Records

Inspector`s findings:

Pathway Care Ltd (east Wales) had written policies relating to case recording, access to information and the Data Protection Act. Foster carers had access to copies of this documentation within the foster carer handbook.

Pathway Care had implemented a new agency wide database CASSI. The CASSI system was being embedded and the agency were in a transitional period of importing placement and carers data into the system, which meant that some information was recorded in the files and some on CASSI. The agency was confident that the next phase of development for CASSI would significantly improve the agency's ability to improve information systems.

Separate files for each foster carer and young person were in place in addition to information on CASSI. The inspector examined both the information on CASSI and the files of six foster carers and four children/young people. It was observed by the Inspector that some information was recorded on one system but not on the other, which could lead to confusion of which was the most up to date information. The inspector recommended that there was a period of consolidation to ensure that all the information was accurate and up to date.

The Head of Practice said that there was an ongoing difficulty in ensuring that LAC documentation was received by the agency, particularly when emergency placements were made. Pathway Care had a structured approach to ensure that any outstanding information at the time of placement was clearly identified and requested from the local authority in a robust manner. Evidence that key documents had been requested from the local authority was in place on all the files that were examined. A system was in place to ensure that files were audited by managers and missing documentation was identified. However, on the files examined where an audit had been undertaken although a section was available to record when any information had been received, this was not completed.

Records of supervision visits confirmed that unannounced visits were being made to carers at least on an annual basis.

A register of foster carers was located on the agency's database, which was updated, reviewed and maintained by the administrators on a monthly basis following panel recommendation and the agency's Decision Maker's approval.

Foster carers said that they maintained daily diaries in respect of children placed.

The manager stated that systems are in place to ensure that any documentation held by carers is returned to the agency at the end of a placement or when the carer's approval is terminated. The agency is aware of the legal requirements in respect of retention of records in line with the requirements of Regulation 22 (2); Schedule 2 and archiving systems are in place.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
Ensure when files have been audited that any documentation received after the audit is clearly evidenced, recorded and dated in the file. Ensure that information is placed on paper files and CASSI to ensure all accurate information is recorded.	NMS 26.3 NMS 26.3

Section eight: Short term placements

Inspector`s findings:

Pathway Care as part of their registration were able to include provision of short breaks to children with disabilities. This service is currently on hold as there was only one carer providing the service who has since left the agency after the placements had come to a natural end. The manager said that this was a service area that Pathway wanted to develop. The agency recognised the differences in providing short breaks to long term placements, most significantly that parental responsibility remains with the child's parents.

Placements were available to provide foster carers with respite with other approved foster carers or with specific family members or friends who had undertaken a BAAF F2 assessment to care for specific children. The registered manager said that the Form F2 assessment was under review, but as a minimum a short life history of the F2 carer was required, two personal references were sought, local authority checks and CRB checks were undertaken. An assessment of their relationship with the child and the care arrangements were included in the Form F2 report.

Carers who could provide short breaks to children not known to them were assessed using the full BAAF Form F1 Competency Based Assessment process.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section nine: Family and friends as carers

Inspector`s findings:
Not applicable to this fostering Agency.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source