

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES
CARE STANDARDS INSPECTORATE FOR WALES

Care Standards Act 2000

INSPECTION REPORT
FOSTERING SERVICES

Pathway Care (Carmarthen)

Capel Dewi Hall
Capel Dewi
SA32 8AD

DATE OF PUBLICATION – 31 March 2007

You may reproduce this Report in its entirety. You may not reproduce it in part or in any abridged form and may only quote from it with the consent in writing of the National Assembly for Wales.

CARE STANDARDS INSPECTORATE FOR WALES

West Wales Local Office
 Meyler House, 1st Floor
 St Thomas Green
 Haverfordwest

SA61 1QP

01437 761300

01437 761312

Name of fostering service:	Pathway Care (Carmarthen)
Contact telephone number:	01267 290033
Registered provider (IFA's only):	Pathway Care RI - David McBride
Manager:	Alison Parsons
Dates of this inspection episode:	26 February 2007 to 2 March 2007
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
Date of previous report publication:	23 February 2006
Inspected by:	Samantha Brace
Other regions contributing to this report:	Not applicable

GUIDELINES ON INSPECTION

INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the fostering service undertaken by the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Regulations.

The purpose of the report is to comment on the quality of the service provided, including the organisation and management of the service and the quality of support delivered to carers and the children and young people who are the ultimate beneficiaries of it.

The report contains information on the process of inspection and records its outcomes. It is divided into twelve parts reflecting the broad areas of the National Minimum Standards. An overall conclusion of the services' compliance with the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations is recorded.

CSIW's inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect fostering services at any time. During each inspection episode or period there are visit/s to the service, some unannounced, in addition to a range of other activities such as discussion groups, self-assessment and the use of questionnaires. CSIW tries to find the best way of capturing carer's, service users' and their relatives'/representatives' views and experiences of the service. At any other time throughout the year visits may also be made to the service in response to changes in the service or to investigate complaints for example.

Inspection enables CSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate. It ensures compliance with:

- Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Regulations, whilst taking into account the National Minimum Standards
- The services' own statement of purpose

Over a 12 month period inspectors will:

- Consult with service users, which in this context means foster carers as well as children and young people about their experience of the service
- Inspect the premises used by the fostering service
- Inspect core processes such as the operation of fostering panels or assessment of carers
- Talk to the manager and staff
- Satisfy themselves that appropriate policies and processes are in operation and that all records are being properly maintained

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector during a specific inspection period. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times; sometimes services improve and sometimes they deteriorate. The Regulations and National Minimum

Standards are very technical and detailed in nature and CSIW does not closely examine all aspects of these standards on each visit.

If an aspect of the service falls short of that required to meet the regulations, CSIW will make requirements on the service to make improvements. The report clearly indicates any such requirements made by CSIW. This will include any made since the last inspection report which have now been met, any that remain outstanding and any new requirements arising from this recent inspection. Where requirements are made, the provider may develop an action plan to show how they plan to make the necessary changes and you may wish to discuss this with them.

The reader should note that requirements made in the previous report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with. The report will also comment on aspects of service that are felt to be positive.

If you have concerns about anything arising from the inspector's findings, you may wish to discuss these with CSIW or with the registered person.

The Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales is required to make reports on registered facilities available to the public. Most reports are public documents and will be available on the CSIW web site: www.csiw.wales.gov.uk

CONTENTS

SECTION		Page
SUMMARY of findings		6
SECTION ONE:	Statement of purpose and Children's Guide	7
SECTION TWO:	Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service	9
SECTION THREE:	Management of the fostering service	11
SECTION FOUR:	Securing and promoting children's welfare	13
SECTION FIVE:	Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and carers	17
SECTION SIX:	Records	20
SECTION SEVEN:	Fitness of premises for use as a fostering agency	22
SECTION EIGHT:	Financial Requirements	24
SECTION NINE:	Fostering Panels	25
SECTION TEN:	Short-term breaks	27
SECTION ELEVEN:	Family and friends as carers	28
SECTION TWELVE:	Placement of children	29

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Pathway Care (West Wales) fostering agency is situated in the village of Capel Dewi approximately four miles from the town of Carmarthen. Pathway Care Ltd has three other regional offices: two located in England, inspected by CSCI and one other in Wales, based in Cardiff, which is subject to a separate inspection by CSIW.

At the time of this inspection the Carmarthenshire branch of Pathway Care had a total of 66 approved foster carers, 5 applications in progress and 101 children in placement.

This inspection of Pathway Care in Capel Dewi, Carmarthenshire is the third since registration in July 2004. The inspection took place over a number of days in February 2007. Evidence was gathered from the following sources:

- Written information made available to the Care Standards Inspectorate prior to and during the inspection including documentation and procedures;
- Discussions with foster carers;
- Discussion with the registered manager;
- Questionnaire received from representatives of the social work team;
- Observation of a foster carer's support group;
- Direct checking of a sample of records required to be maintained by the Agency;
- Questionnaires completed by foster carers & young people in placement;
- Comments received from placing authorities.

Foster carers continue to speak very positively about all aspects of this agency. All parties who spoke with the inspector see positive outcomes for children and support to the foster carers as the main focus of this agency. Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) continues to increase in size both in numbers of staff and approved foster carers. The staff continue to feel that they work in a positive and supportive environment. The agency has established all the required policies and procedures and many of these have been reviewed and updated since the agency was registered in July 2004. Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) continues to be efficient and well organised.

This agency continues to function to, and on occasion, above National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The full report evidences the success of the agency in promoting opportunities for young people and their commitment to safe caring and protection of children.

One requirement has been made following this inspection: one good practice recommendation is also detailed in the body of the report.

The inspector would like to thank to the management, social work and administration staff and foster carers for their valuable contributions to and co-operation with this inspection process.

SECTION ONE – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE and CHILDREN’S GUIDE

Inspector’s findings:

Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) have a Statement of Purpose which was updated in January 2007 to includes information of new staff, financial support for carers, how the agency addresses and monitors complaints and details of previous CSIW inspections. This document includes all the information as required by Regulation 3.1 (a)(b) and Standard 1.4.

The Statement of Purpose states that the agency prides itself in being able to provide family placements for ‘difficult to place’ children, specialising in:

- ◆ Children with complex needs
- ◆ 0 –12 year olds
- ◆ Sibling groups
- ◆ Mother & baby assessments
- ◆ Planned and emergency placements
- ◆ Assessment and short term, bridging and long term placements.

Through questionnaires and discussions, staff and foster carers stated that they are aware of agencies Statement of Purpose and that they have, in this inspection year, worked within its remits.

Pathway Care provides a child friendly Children’s Guide for two different age groups to all children in placement. During this inspection period the manager once more stated the organisations intention to review the Children’s guides in consultation with young people in placement through their consultation groups.

Although the inspector was aware that Pathway Care had set up a working group ‘Consulting with looked after children and young people’ which had a remit to review the Children’s Guides, at the time of inspection this had not happened. As this issue still remains outstanding a requirement is made from this inspection that the organisation must now undertake a review of the Children’s Guides in line with Regulation 4(a)(b)(c).

The contact details for the Children’s Commissioner and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales are included in the guide on a business card. Pathway Care have a complaints leaflet specifically designed for young people in placement and this lists all the relevant contact number including details of a appropriate advocate.

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
A review of the Children's Guide needs to be undertaken.	01/09/07	4 (a)

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

SECTION TWO – FITNESS TO PROVIDE OR MANAGE A FOSTERING SERVICE

Inspector's findings:

Since the last inspection there has been significant change to the management of the fostering service. The two Founding Directors have now retired from day to day management of the organisation and a Chief Executive Officer was appointed in July 2006.

Ms Alison Parsons remains as Director for the West Wales Region and continues to be the registered manager for the Carmarthenshire office. The role of responsible individual now lies with Mr. David McBride who also holds the post of Director for Quality Assurance.

Both the registered manager and the responsible individual have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to undertake the management of the fostering service in an efficient and professional manner.

The manager has BSc (Econ), a Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) and she has completed the Certificate in Management. She has 19 years' childcare experience of which 13 years has been in the field of fostering. She has 9 years experience in a management capacity.

Mr. David McBride commenced his employment with Pathway Care in September 2002 and took up his post as director for quality assurance and responsible individual in October 2005. Prior to this Mr McBride worked for a local authority family placement team for a number of years.

Discussions with the registered manager evidenced her commitment to her own professional development including any training with regards to changes in practices and legislation.

There were no issues brought to the attention of the inspector in relation to the management of the service as all discussions and questionnaires with professionals and carers' etc. evidenced that there was clarity with regards to leadership and accountability. Comments from staff in particular were positive with regards to effective lines of communication.

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 THREE - MANAGEMENT OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Inspector's findings:

Discussion with and information supplied by staff members and a number of foster carers indicated that they are familiar with the lines of accountability within Pathway Care Ltd. The agency has procedures in place to ensure that confusion and conflicts of roles are not affecting the quality of the service that is being delivered. The requirement to declare any conflict of interest is detailed in the agency's Employees Guidance handbook and is included within the foster carer's agreement. Foster carers stated that the regular support groups held for them with the supporting social workers were one method wherein information is imparted and their views are sought.

The manager is familiar with and applies the requirements of Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, which details matters to be monitored by the registered person. A report (dated January 2007) in respect of this monitoring was submitted to the CSIW prior to the inspection, in compliance with Regulation 42 (2). Evidence was observed that annual reviews are conducted on all foster carers – the agency employs a specific person to carry out this role. All staff have an annual appraisal undertaken, evidence was observed on individual personnel files to support this.

The manager has a clear job description, which details her duties and responsibilities within the agency. There are clear lines of accountability and levels of delegation between herself and the directors of Pathway Care. In her absence, the principal officers or the responsible individual would cover. The organisation are aware of the requirement to inform the CSIW should the manager be absent from the agency for a period of 28 days or more as detailed in Regulation 45.

The agency has proper financial procedures, including a procedure to follow in the event of a financial crisis. Foster carers consulted indicated that they understand the procedures relating to the payment of allowances and they stated that allowances are always paid promptly. Information in relation to charges, allowances and expenses paid to foster carers is available to purchasers of the services.

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 – SECURING AND PROMOTING WELFARE

Inspector's findings:

During discussion/information provided and the viewing of documentation relating to this inspection of Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) the inspector was able to establish that the promotion of the welfare of children placed by this agency is regarded as high priority. Written documentation observed during the inspection process evidenced that appropriate checks and clearances as required by the Children's Homes (Wales) Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards are conducted on all foster carers prior to any matching processes starting.

Discussion with the manager and documentation observed indicated that a comprehensive health and safety check is undertaken on each foster carer's home prior to approval and this is reconsidered as part of the foster carers annual review. Foster carer's vehicles are checked as part of this process and the person conducting the assessment examines documentation to ensure it is up to date.

All carers are issued with a Carer's Handbook that is regularly updated. Discussions with foster carers indicated that they receive regular updates for the handbook. Issues relating to discrimination, promoting health & educational development and concerns relating to allegations and abuse are covered within the foster carers handbook, through training events and at supervision with their supporting social workers. Evidence to support this was observed during the inspection. Individual files inspected included a safe caring policy in respect of particular foster carers' homes. This handbook is currently in the process of being reviewed and the manager is awaiting final verification before new copies are given to foster carers.

Processes are in place to ensure that the staff and carers of Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) value the diversity of young people placed and work to promote equality for them. Evidence was observed that this is accomplished through good preparation & development training programmes and the agency's equal opportunities statement thus ensuring that staff and foster carers are aware of the needs of children in placement. The agency has a training pack on 'promoting and valuing equality and diversity and children's rights' that is provided to all carers and staff. All questionnaires completed indicated that foster carers and staff believe that Pathway Care as an organisation values each child's differences.

The agency offers a variety of locations, family composition and experience of carers to enable a child's individual needs to be met. By the examination of documentation on the files of foster carers and young people, and information provided by the staff and manager of Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales), the inspector was able to establish that a careful matching process is conducted on all referrals received. There are clear procedures for the placement of children and the agency uses a placement referral process flow chart and referral matching forms. Staff and the manager stated that ideally all young people referred to the agency have a period of introduction with their potential foster carers prior to any placement being made, evidence to support this was documented within children's files. This period of introduction would not occur if a young person were placed with foster carers in an emergency, however the manager stated that all emergency placements would be on a trial period and would be closely monitored.

Matches are achieved by means of the information that is provided to the agency from the child's placing authority. During the inspection it was established that there is still sometimes a lack of written documentation supplied to the agency to support the match. Evidence was observed however that indicated the supervising social workers are proactive in writing to the local authorities to request copies of essential documentation and the agency are continuing to use a checklist on the young person's file to monitor when the information is provided. Copies of the placing authority entering into a written agreement with the foster carers in relation to the child (Placement Agreements) were seen to be on the files of children placed with carers.

Currently two carers with this agency have exemption notices on their files in relation to numbers of children in placement. Pembrokeshire local authority and the fostering panel have approved all exemptions.

Pathway care have developed a safe care/child protection training pack and ensures that all foster carers receive core training in child protection. The agency has developed appropriate policies and procedures to protect young people from all forms of abuse and neglect. Foster carers and staff awareness of these issues is addressed through induction and on-going development training sessions. Foster carers confirmed that they are aware of acceptable forms of sanctions and questionnaires completed by carers indicated that they had received training in child protection, safe caring and internet awareness. Revised guidance has also been provided to carers for the carer handbooks.

Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) is pro-active in informing the CSIW of any child protection issues. Evidence has been observed that all allegations are immediately referred to the placing authority's child protection team and the CSIW has been kept informed of outcomes. Staff and foster carers are aware of the agency's written procedure for use if a child is missing from home.

Staff have during the last inspection year been provided with guidance on how to deal with a positive Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure for prospective carers and also on the need to interview past partners.

Contact arrangements for children placed are gathered at the referral stage by the agency. Individual arrangements were found to be detailed within a young persons care plan (part of the Looked After Children (LAC) documentation). Social workers are asked by the agency to provide information of any risk involved and the contact supervision needs.

Preparation training for foster carers includes working with birth parents and there is also revised guidance contained within the foster carer's handbook. Discussion with foster carers and questionnaires received confirm that the agency encourage carers to be proactive in the promotion of contact with parents and to support the children in placement if any issues arise. Records of contact were found to be detailed within the reports provided to the agency by the foster carers. Staff commented on the commitment of foster carers to ensuring that contact between young person and their families are facilitated appropriately. The premises of Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) at Capel Dewi have appropriate accommodation available for supervised contact to take place if this is required.

The foster carer's handbook includes information in relation to the agency's commitment

to consultation and how this can be accomplished. Guidance on communication, listening to the child, promoting self-esteem and seeking young people's opinions are addressed in the foster carer's preparation training. Discussions with the manager and documentation viewed showed that the agency has an active 'children who foster' group and minutes of the meeting of this group were viewed during the inspection process. There is also a children's section within the newsletter provided to foster carers.

Foster carers confirmed that they are visited on a regular basis by their supervising social workers and that they are arranged at suitable times to include meeting with the fostered and their own children.

Other examples of Pathway care promoting consultation include a newsletter sent to foster carers 3 x per year, foster carer support groups, seeking feedback after training sessions and evaluation of the foster panel's effectiveness with panel members and supervision social workers. Opportunities for consultation within the staff group include team meetings and managers meetings. Minutes of these meeting evidence the sharing of information with the staff team.

Details of the health care needs of young people are requested by the agency at the time of referral and are passed on to the foster carer. Evidence of this was found to be recorded in the essential information and care plan components of the LAC documentation. Comments recorded questionnaires returned from foster carers and staff stated that information provided to the agency at the time of referral was always passed on.

Foster carers are provided with information on health care needs of looked after children through preparation and on-going training programmes. The manager stated that all foster carers are expected to attend first aid instruction as part of the core training package and foster carers consulted during this inspection stated that they had received this. The agency ensures that all young persons are registered with a Doctor and that they have access to a dentist and optician to ensure that routine checks are undertaken. Specialist health services are accessed as required. During this inspection year the agency have developed a girls group to focus on health issues and are in the process of introducing a children's health report.

Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) has a no smoking policy for foster carers who are caring for young people under the age of two years, or who have been diagnosed with asthma.

Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) makes to clear within its Statement of Purpose, foster carers handbook and placement agreements, their expectations of the foster carer in relation to their educational responsibilities. Through discussions with the manager, staff and the foster carers working for this agency, it is evident that a high priority is given to meeting the educational needs of the young people in placements. The agency and foster carers have been highly successful in finding school placements within local communities for the young people and pre-inspection documentation indicated that there were no current exclusions from schooling.

Written documentation of the educational needs of a young person were found to be recorded within LAC documents, Personal Education Plans (PEP) and the placement agreements that are kept on the young person individual files. Evidence indicated that young people are encouraged with all aspects of their education by the foster carers.

Evidence was also observed to confirm that foster carers are pro-active in attending parents' evenings and having regular contact with the school. Pathway's newsletter regularly acknowledges the achievements of individual children in placements.

The foster care handbook includes updated information and guidance in relation to preparing young people for adulthood. Training material for foster carers on promoting independent living has also been produced. The family outreach worker within this organisation provides support in this area. No pathway plans or information on preparation of adulthood was examined during this inspection 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 FIVE – RECRUITING, CHECKING, MANAGING, SUPPORTING AND TRAINING STAFF AND CARERS

Inspector's findings:

This section of the report asks for the fostering agency to demonstrate that it is able to recruit, manage and train suitable staff and foster carers to work with children and young people in such a way, as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers together with their range of experience and qualifications are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the agency.

Pathway Care have been able to evidence that the retention of staff remains high and there has been very few staff changes in the past year. One staff member who worked as a therapist has left and they have employed one outreach worker. Since the last inspection there have been no changes to the staff recruitment process.

All details of the agency's policies on working practices, grievances, equal opportunities, complaints and health and safety etc were contained in the relevant handbooks for staff and foster carers. Some of these policies and procedures were currently being reviewed and updated.

Supervising social workers were all social work qualified and had a variety of experiences in working for children's' services.

The staff files were not examined as part of this inspection process, however on previous occasions they were seen to be well organised and contained all the information and checks as required by Schedule 1 of the fostering regulations such as CRB, references and a full employment history together with recent photographic evidence.

Evidence was observed that regular supervision was taking place together with training development plans and appraisals.

The principal officers, who have successfully completed a 6-day introduction to management and supervision training, provide supervision to the supervising social workers. Information from staff confirmed the value of supervision in that it was an opportunity to discuss all issues related to both professional and personal issues. Supervision was provided formally and on an ad hoc basis when requested.

Supervising social workers and family outreach workers were complimentary with regards the support they received and that they felt valued by the agency. However several supporting social worker stated that there were communication difficulties in relation to the changes in the company directorship and that the lack of communication around this had caused them to feel unsettled.

An area of good practice identified by the inspectors was the manageable caseloads held by the supervising social workers. From information provided by the agency it was noted that social workers did not have more than 12 foster carers to support which included any assessments of potential carers. Social workers and the foster families acknowledged the benefit of this themselves.

Training is provided both internally and externally with the expectation that some training

is provided jointly for both supervising social workers and foster carers. Partnerships have also been formed with some local authorities and shared training occurs.

The training co-ordinator for the organisation attends some staff meetings and carer support groups to enable her to identify and monitor training needs. The monitoring of the quality of the training provided by external providers was also undertaken by the co-ordinator who would evaluate feedback from attendees.

All potential new carers applying to the agency were contacted by a supervising social worker. Several foster carers indicated that one of the reasons for deciding to work for Pathway Care was due to the way in which the agency responded quickly and efficiently to their application. Pathway Care had a very thorough recruitment process from initial enquiry through to approval at foster panel. At the time of inspection there were 5 prospective carers undertaking the assessment process.

A very thorough competency based fostering assessment was expected to be undertaken by the supervising social workers that were detailed and involved interviews, references, medical and CRB checks to be undertaken.

All potential carers were expected to undertake the mandatory 3-day preparation to foster training pre-approval. The programme provides a sound foundation for the foster carer and is an integral part of the assessment process. Discussions with new foster carers emphasised the importance of this training as it highlighted for potential carers the realities of the fostering task. Carers felt that if any prospective carer had any doubts about whether fostering was the right profession for them they would generally make that decision during this initial training.

Training for foster carers was considered throughout the assessment process with continued evaluation of training needs via supervision and annual reviews. Training incorporated a wide range of issues from refresher training in child protection to safe care, attachment disorder, first aid and record keeping. Training to meet any individual needs were considered and provided as and when identified. A number of foster carers had already completed or were undertaking their NVQ level 3 training in health and social care.

Foster carers were supported in attending training that was organised at such times that enabled them to take and collect children from school. It was stated that for carers who had very young children who were not in school, alternative arrangements would be made for childcare support.

Other support provided for foster carers included regular contact and supervision with their supervising social workers, access to a well-documented handbook, which is in the process of being revised and regular support groups. More specialist support groups have also being set up, such as the 'Men who foster' & the 'Children who foster' groups. Foster carers stated that they were also 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.

During this inspection information was provided from the case files of 4 foster carers and children placed that were case tracked, together with additional information received from questionnaires completed by carers.

Information contained on the files was again comprehensive, well structured and in keeping with the information specified in Schedule 3. Panel recommendations and approval status was evidenced on files alongside carers' agreements; health and safety checklists and safe care assessments.

Information received from foster carers was consistent with regards to the support that they received. All carers spoken to informed the inspector that they saw their supervising social worker at least fortnightly and received regular telephone contacts. Carers generally felt that this was a specific strength of the agency.

Carers also felt well informed by the agency and no significant issues with regards to training or the placement of children was raised with the inspector.

The inspector concluded that the way in which the fostering agency supported its carers was one of its strengths and again an area of good practice.

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 – RECORDS

Inspector's findings:

Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) have written policies for case recording and information in relation to access to information and the Data Protection Act. Copies of these are contained within the foster carer handbook.

Separate files are held within the offices at Capel Dewi for each foster carer and each child in placement. These files were found to be well organised with dividers and were indexed to allow easy retrieval of information.

Inspection of a sample of children's files indicated that Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales) is pro-active in obtaining relevant documentation in relation to children placed through the agency: however some files had incomplete LAC documentation available. Letters that are sent to the placing authorities from Pathway care to request missing documentation were observed. The inspector saw evidence of individual file audits being undertaken on an annual basis.

Life story work is addressed within the foster carer's handbook and discussions with foster carers continued to confirm that they are aware of the importance of keeping appropriate memorabilia in relation to the young person in their care. The agency have introduced 'life story packs' which contain a camera, photo album, keepsake box, CD case, pencils, stationery and a calculator, all contained within a large backpack. These are being distributed to all children placed with Pathway carers and are designed to provide tools to gather and store 'life work' for the child whilst in placement.

Discussion with the manager indicated that foster carers write placement reports in respect of every child in placement: these are provided on a monthly basis with the exception of long term placements where they are written every three months. However on the inspection of some files copies of these reports were seen to be provided outside the recommended time-scales. Discussion with the manager confirmed that reports should be written up and signed off within 2 weeks. It was recommended that the manager and staff monitor the production of written reports from foster carers and they stipulate appropriate time-scales for their production and endorsement.

All information in relation to foster carers and children is securely stored in locked cabinets on the premises of the agency. All carers consulted stated that they had secure, locked storage facilities for confidential information to be stored. Some carers indicated that this facility was provided by themselves and that the supervising social workers were aware of the arrangement.

The manager stated that systems are in place to ensure that all relevant documentation is returned to the responsible authority at the end of a placement. The agency is aware of the need for copies to retain for 15 years 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
It was recommended that the manager and staff monitor the production of written reports from foster carers and they stipulate appropriate time-scales for their production and endorsement.	

SECTION SEVEN – FITNESS OF PREMISES FOR USE AS A FOSTERING SERVICE

Inspector's findings:

Pathway Care (West Wales) fostering agency is situated in the village of Capel Dewi approximately four miles from the town of Carmarthen.

It is a large building set in its own grounds with ample parking spaces for staff and carers. The area designated for car parking is gravelled and may be difficult for wheelchair users, however access to the ground floor area's of the building would not be restricted for a person with a disability.

Internally the ground floor comprises of reception, two large meeting rooms and one smaller contact room. The contact room is equipped with play equipment and toys to which the young people have access. All of these rooms can be used by foster carers and young people for meetings or for supervised contact with birth parents. The administration staff are also located on the ground floor.

The upper floor is utilised as office space for staff and has restricted access to non-staff members. The storage of files is located in the office space. All staff have their own desk space and the manager has a separate office. All staff have access to a kitchen area on the ground floor. Pre-inspection documentation indicated that an upgraded IT systems were provided in January 2007.

The agency's insurance cover includes employer and public liability, professional indemnity and covers the premises and contents.

The premises are protected by a security system.

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 EIGHT – FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

Inspector's findings:

The accounts for the year ended the 31st March 2006 were at the time of inspection still in draft stage and were with auditors in preparation for filing with Companies House.

Pathway Care did provide financial statements for 31 March 2005 undertaken by Carston & Co (Cardiff) Ltd.

The pre-inspection documents provided for inspection stated that a finance director had been appointed in order to undertake the responsibility for the financial management of the company. The pre-inspection documents also stated that a full financial contingency plan was in place with the support of the bank.

The inspector, during the course of the inspection, did not evidence any issues that would suggest that the fostering agency was not financially viable.

Pathway Care employed a dedicated finance department that managed the payment systems.

Foster carers did not raise any issues with regards to payments.

Foster carers appeared to be clear about payments and funding for equipment required for looking after children. Updated information on such matters is contained in the foster carer's handbook.

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 – FOSTERING PANELS

Inspector's findings:

The inspector did not attend panel during this inspection episode. Evidence for this section was obtained from information provided by the pre-inspection documents and, an evaluation of the questionnaires completed.

Access to the agency's policy and procedures documentation for fostering panels dated July 2006 informed that the fostering panel which was located in Cardiff provided for Pathway Care South East Wales and Pathway Care West Wales. This document outlined the procedures and terms of reference for the fostering panel and incorporated all matters as required by Standard 31 and the relevant regulations.

Those requirements ensured that the fostering panel was organised efficiently and effectively in that good quality decisions were made with regards to foster cares that promoted and safeguarded the welfare of children in foster care. The document was evidenced as thorough and pertinent to the tasks of the panel members.

The inspector was provided with a copy of the panel managers' report last completed in September 2006. This report reflected the work of the panel and detailed panel membership and training together with panel applications considered during the past 12 months. The report detailed the changes in membership during the last year but considered that the changes had been well managed. It remained the agency's view that the panel had retained its ability to be an effective recommending body for Pathway Care.

The monitoring and quality assurance of social workers' assessments for carers is a prime focus of the panels' function. Panel member feedback forms are used to collect the views of members on the quality of those assessments.

Panel members also undertake an annual evaluation of their work with particular emphasis to their training needs and personal development on the panel. Examples of these evaluations were provided with the panel manager's report together with the panel chair's evaluation 2005-2006.

The comments provided by the panel members' evaluations evidenced that a lot of thought was given to the roles they held. There were several suggestions for improvement such as receiving more training on the business planning of the agency, attending some foster carer training and the benefits of dealing with any contentious issues which may arise from same sex applications and/or completely unacceptable applicants. Other comments focused on the changes that had occurred in the panel membership and the need to build up trust and confidence with new members particularly when dealing with emotive issues. Another panel member reported that they felt that the changes had resulted in the panel becoming more independent and autonomous.

Generally the comments from these evaluations were extremely positive and this was reflected in the questionnaires that had been completed during the course of the inspection.

A copy of the minutes for the Pathway Care fostering panel meeting dated the 16th January 2007 were also provided and examined by the inspector. Again there was evidence of all matters being well documented and that careful consideration had been given to all matters such as approvals, reviews, variations and resignations.

The inspector concluded that the role of the fostering panel was effectively delivered by an appropriate and skilled membership that operated within the regulatory requirements.

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 TEN – SHORT – TERM BREAKS**Inspector's findings:**

This is not currently applicable to this fostering agency, however discussions with the manager indicated that the agency may apply for a variation to their registration to allow them to incorporate short-term breaks into the service they offer.

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 ELEVEN – 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**

--	--

SECTION TWELVE – PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

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:

Pre-inspection documentation and discussions with the manager indicated that every placement of a child is supported by a foster placement agreement. Evidence to support this was observed during the inspection of individual files. The manager of this agency stated that no Local Authority has specifically delegated responsibility to Pathway Care Ltd (West Wales), however they are in the process of seeking clarification on this with each individual authority who is placing children with them. Some authorities are using the All Wales – Individual Placement Contract that identifies the basic services that are provided for the child in placement.

Discussion and documentation indicated that a written agreement specific to each child placed under the Regulation 40 arrangements has been completed and this includes all the information as prescribed by Regulation 40 (5). Evidence to support this was not sought during this inspection.

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