

# **Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales**

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report  
Fostering services**

**Independent Foster Care Services**

Solva House  
Spring Meadow Business Park  
Wentloog Road  
Rumney  
CF3 2ES

**Date of publication – 03/02/2010**

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Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	
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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](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)

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## Section one: Summary of findings

Independent Foster Care Services (IFCS) describes itself as a looked-after children's service and currently provides long-term, short-term and respite foster placements. It is a private limited company with a Managing Director who also acts as the Business Manager and who is the Responsible Individual (RI). There is a Registered Manager who is responsible for the day-to-day operational services of the company.

The agency is based in Cardiff and operates solely in the South Wales area, developing its local knowledge and partnerships and providing services to local authorities across the region.

Information for this inspection was gathered from the following sources:

- Pre-inspection documentation
- Self-assessment form
- Meetings with senior management
- Observation of staff meetings
- Discussion with staff members
- Questionnaires completed by children, foster carers, staff and panel members
- Viewing of case records
- Viewing of policies and procedures
- Viewing of the premises
- Discussion with foster carers
- Viewing of personnel files
- Viewing of the website

All written material is comprehensive and covers all regulatory requirements. The quality of the documentation is excellent and the agency is characterised by its attention to detail and the accessibility and transparency of its literature and its systems. Where developments are needed the senior management is responsive to suggestions from all sources and swift in its delivery of changes.

The company is committed to modest and safe growth underpinned by careful business planning. There is a rich skill mix amongst the staffing group and in the inspector's view this approach would be enhanced by some changes in the existing job descriptions. The company are rightly proud of the differing perspectives which a multi-disciplinary team brings to the support of foster carers and children. Safety is provided by a large management team and staff supervision is thorough. Foster carer assessments are viewed as a prescribed task and are only allocated to qualified social workers. Caseloads are modified to take account of these tasks.

The recruitment strategy is well thought through and is responsive to developments within the child care context in South Wales. Other processes in relation to the provision of foster carers are robust. Foster carers are highly appreciative of the company. Examples of positive comments received from foster carers during the inspection were:

“ I love working for IFCS”

“Since I’ve been with IFCS they have given me and my family 100% support”

“I have excellent communication links with the agency”

“Have found the agency to be first class in all aspects, from initial contact through to panel and confirmation of acceptance”

Children feel safe within the agency and child protection procedures are robust. Children’s overall developmental needs are a central concern of IFCS and there is a great deal of attention paid, and resources invested, into areas such as leisure and cultural needs.

Insufficient information from local authorities regarding the children and young people causes some difficulties for the agency and for foster carers but everyone works hard to minimise these. Processes are in place which are enabling of local authorities in this regard, such as checklists of the information which is required.

There are no requirements made as a result of this inspection.

The Inspector would like to thank IFCS for their hospitality during the inspection and would also like to thank all those who contributed to the inspection in any way, for their co-operation.

## Section two: Policies and procedures / information

### Inspector's findings:

A Statement of Purpose was submitted as part of the pre-inspection documentation. This was a highly attractive, extremely informative publication which met all regulatory requirements. The document is available in both Welsh and English in either a printed or an electronic version. The agency keeps the document under constant review and the inspector was impressed by the speed at which a revised version was put into production following some possible amendments which were discussed during the inspection.

IFCS bases all of its services on the principle of promoting the welfare of children and young people and aims to offer a holistic foster care service which would include an assessment of the needs of children, young people and their families, therapeutic and educational support, the promotion of play, contact support and highly supported quality foster care. High importance is placed on providing services which are accessible to children and young people and attentive to their views.

Information is provided to children in a number of different ways including in a Children and Young People's Guide which meets all regulatory requirements. Not all of those surveyed were familiar with the Children's Guide although the Inspector is satisfied that the agency pays sufficient attention to the ways in which it communicates with children. It may be that as the Children and Young People's Guide is part of a larger information pack there is a tendency for it to assume a lesser importance than other items within the pack and other ways of communicating the necessary information. One of these ways is a personal contact card which is credit card sized and contains all of the contact details which the child might need including the telephone numbers for the Children's Commissioner for Wales, CSSIW, the NSPCC and Childline.

The IFCS website allows easy access to children and young people and is an attractive tool allowing the agency to communicate easily with those of varying abilities. Young people are encouraged to e-mail the agency with any concerns or ideas which they may have.

There is a growing awareness within IFCS of the needs of the children of carers. Consultation with these young people has shown the company that there is a need to improve support for them as a distinct group and plans are in place to do this. This fits with the holistic ethos of the agency which sees looked after children as being part of a foster family within the wider fostering agency and not just being cared for by foster carers.

An updated Procedure Manual was submitted for the inspection. All policies and procedures viewed were transparent, clearly written documents which met regulatory requirements.



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

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

**Requirements which remain outstanding:**

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**New requirements from this inspection:**

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Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

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

#### **Inspector's findings:**

Both the Statement of Purpose and the Company Report contained a clear organisational chart which showed a structure consistent with the stated aim of IFCS which is to deliver high quality services. Growth is maintained at a level which does not compromise this aim and there is an effective staff recruitment strategy. IFCS places great emphasis on keeping children safe and has a large management team in place to ensure high standards. Supervision, appraisal and management support are key features of the company and all staff members are well qualified for the roles which they perform.

In order to strengthen managerial and supervisory support at a time of growth for the company a senior social work practitioner post has been created. This was filled through an internal promotion and has consequently contributed to the development of the career structure within IFCS. This is important for a small organisation which places a high value on the retention of staff.

The staff team are committed and hard working. The senior managers value this commitment greatly and staff turnover is virtually non-existent at the present time. Some of the practices which the managers think contribute to this well-functioning environment include a flexible management style which takes account of personal needs and also realistic payment for after office hours work.

Supervisory processes are supportive but robust and clear with an emphasis on professionalism and an awareness of the dangers of being too comfortable. There is a culture of "challenge" within the agency which permeates throughout and leads to good foster care.

Both family support workers and qualified social workers are recruited to support the foster care placements with no distinction in role, in relation to this activity, between the two. Although the job descriptions and person specifications vary the inspector was informed that in practice the roles are the same with each worker's supervision needs taken account of on an individualised basis. Foster carers consulted during the inspection were often unaware of the professional background of their support worker. The multi-disciplinary nature of the workforce is a planned strategy which makes for a rich skill mix. With this in mind revised job descriptions would lead to greater clarity.

In addition to the employed staff IFCS uses the services of temporary and relief staff and consultants. This enables the agency to fulfil its function, ensuring that sufficient resources are deployed to meet the identified needs.

Recruitment processes are robust and discussion with the senior managers as well as scrutiny of the staff files during the inspection reassured the inspector that all regulatory requirements were being met.

The administrative staff are fully integrated with the practitioner staff and are highly regarded by the latter. Many of the systems have been devised by the Office Manager and are well-functioning. A duty system for reception duty is used, which means that all of

the administrators meet foster carers, children and other visitors to the building. This assists with the strengthening of relationships both within IFCS and between IFCS and its stakeholders. Administrators attend staff meetings and training with the practitioner staff. Written instructions for answering the telephone are highly visible, ensuring consistency and a business-like approach.

Student social workers are a vital element in the staff team. During the last year there have been three social work placements. The presence of the students is seen as contributing to the development of the staff who are supervising and working with them. The provision of student placements also shows a degree of commitment to the profession as a whole which is to be commended.

The physical environment is of high quality. The office space is becoming too small for the storage of records and some internal restructuring was taking place at the time of the inspection. The premises are secure and monitored by CCTV surveillance.

The company remains financially viable.

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**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 when the pre-inspection documentation was submitted IFCS had 60 approved foster carers with seven prospective carers awaiting approval. The total number of approved places was 86.

The company has a recruitment strategy which it regards as responsible in that recruitment of foster carers is tied very closely to staff recruitment and the commissioning and organisation of services to support the carers.

The development of the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CSSR) database and the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) has also had an influence on the recruitment strategy as has WAG guidance as defined in the document "Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future". The agency has seen an increase in referrals and a reluctance by some local authorities to place children outside of their geographical boundaries. This has meant that the agency has needed to target specific geographical areas in line with the business need. A negative consequence of practices developed by some local authorities lies in the rigidity of the application of their rules. IFCS cited an example of a local authority which was unwilling to place children even a small distance outside of their boundary regardless of the quality and potential match of the placement offered.

Most fostering assessments are completed by IFCS social workers although independent assessors are used when needed. Quality control mechanisms are rigorous with the Deputy Manager (Development) being responsible for ensuring that all assessments are fit to be presented to the foster panel. Minutes are available for all foster panel meetings and a summary is also completed by the chairperson. These are filed on the Foster Panel file. A Foster Carer Approval Notice is completed by the Business Manager on the same day as the panel meeting and records the approval or otherwise with the reasons as appropriate.

All foster carers within IFCS have their approval status reviewed at least annually. The Annual Review is a formal process which explores the professional development of the foster carer and constructs and records any action plan that is considered necessary. It is informed by a summary report prepared by the support worker and based on the quarterly supervision sessions which have been held during the preceding year. All necessary checks are also updated.

Should a foster carer be the subject of an allegation IFCS has the facility to engage an independent social worker to support the foster carer through the process.

Foster carers are supported by means of frequent telephone contact and home visits, which provide practical and emotional support. Stable, long-term placements receive visits every two weeks while all other placements are visited at least weekly.

In order to ensure that the practice of foster carers remains open to sufficient challenge

IFCS regularly changes the caseloads of the support workers. Although this is not universally popular, both foster carers and the staff understand the reasons for this. In addition to the benefit of having a new perspective periodically this system means that all of the foster carers get to work with all of the staff over time.

Foster carers feel well supported by the company and they are appreciative of the efforts being made on their behalf. A popular venture has been the engagement of a holistic therapist on a weekly basis who is available to give treatments to the carers. The aim of this is to relieve stress and to enable the carers to feel nurtured and valued for the work which they do.

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**New requirements from this inspection:**

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

## Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed

### Inspector`s findings:

IFCS is very clear in the way in which it puts the child at the centre of the support visits and children are seen individually and privately on a regular basis. The support workers regard themselves as supporting both the carers and the children and young people as well as assessing, on an ongoing basis, any unmet needs and the progress being made within the placement. It is a source of continuing frustration that the expertise in relation to the children being looked after by IFCS is often unrecognised by the placing authorities and sometimes not welcomed. IFCS workers are not usually invited to contribute to the child's Care Plan despite the extensive knowledge which they have gained about the child.

A particular concern relates to the uncertainty over future plans which face many children who are looked after. It is difficult sometimes for young people to understand that adults who are close to them, that is, their foster carers and the support workers in IFCS, do not have any knowledge of, or influence over, crucial decisions about their futures. IFCS workers describe hostility from some local authorities towards them when they ask questions and act as advocates for the children placed with their foster carers.

The Training Schedule is extensive. A Training Consultant has been engaged to work with the Deputy Manager (Development) to prepare and deliver the training programmes. Induction training is followed by ongoing training linked to individual needs. The Training Consultant works with the carers towards the attainment of NVQ Level Three in Child Care. All certificates and course attendance records are placed in the training portfolio section of the foster carer files.

All children consulted with during the inspection felt happy and safe. Many positive comments were made by the children and young people about the care which they were receiving.

The ethos of the agency ensures that everything possible is done to promote children's development and much attention is paid to individualised leisure needs. IFCS works in partnership with placing authorities to provide the material resources to meet these needs but often finds that the whole financial burden lies with the company. Careful financial management has meant that this has been possible to date.

Foster carers generally understand and appreciate the individualised nature of the financial contributions made by IFCS to promote non-general leisure and play activities. They also receive payments from IFCS for other specific needs in relation to the placement including internet connection costs. All carers spoken with during the inspection felt that this system was a good one although the Inspector noted that not all of the foster carers understood the system thoroughly. Some carers appeared to be unaware that they did not have to pay for their own internet connection costs. The provision of a babysitting service in exceptional circumstances was known only by a few of the foster carers in the group consulted. This, however, fits with the stated values of the agency which expects children to be cared for within their foster families.

It is recognised and stated within the Statement of Purpose that respite care can assist

foster carers to maintain placement stability through providing an opportunity for rest and recuperation. Respite is not regarded as a holiday away from the children. All foster carers are entitled to 14 nights paid respite care every year but sometimes children and young people who have significant needs have extra respite care provided. There is the facility for foster carers to receive a payment in lieu of their respite care entitlement if they wish this. All respite placements are arranged in partnership with the placing authorities.

Child protection procedures are robust and clear. IFCS makes referrals wherever they suspect that a child is suffering or is at risk of suffering from significant harm. The senior managers are confident that these are dealt with appropriately by their colleagues in other agencies wherever there is an allegation against a foster carer. There is some concern, however, within the agency, that a pattern exists of local authorities not convening strategy meetings within meaningful timescales or at all when children are subject to incidents outside of the foster home or who are at risk because of their own behaviour. The senior management of IFCS believe that they are unable as a single agency to fully protect children in these types of circumstance as a multi-disciplinary strategy is usually called for. They do, however, ensure that their workers and carers carry out their duty of protection to children and young people to the best of their ability.

There is a continuing emphasis within IFCS on the promotion of complaints procedures. The senior management are disappointed at the low level of complaints, believing that a complaints framework used appropriately can lead to positive developments within organisations.

Support for educational achievements is an integral part of the IFCS approach to children's services. Their aim is to work in partnership with local education professionals thus building up relationships within the community which will be beneficial to the children.

An independent family therapist is engaged to provide a therapeutic assessment and individual psychotherapy to address a child or young person's emotional needs if this is included in the aims and objectives of the fostering placement as agreed with the placing authority. These interventions will be charged for separately from the placement fee. Consultancy support to staff and carers from the family therapist is sometimes included as part of the package of support to the placement and is included in the placement fee charged to local authorities.

Out of office hours support is extensive within the agency and it is expected that everyone will take part in this activity so that foster carers and children receive high quality services throughout the 24 hours. Much attention is paid to communication between the staff members about the issues involved.

IFCS is committed to promoting contact for the children in the care of their foster carers with their families. A large, comfortable room is available for this purpose if necessary and the agency is able to offer supervised and assessed contact. This service incurs no extra fee to the local authority but some authorities prefer their children to be seen at other venues. It is sometimes difficult for IFCS staff to understand the reasons for these decisions.

The Company Report which is produced annually was presented to the Inspector in order to fulfil the requirements of Regulation 42, that is, as the Annual Review of the Quality of Care. The report described a number of consultation exercises and ways in which the

company had decided to review and change its practices as a result of the consultations and subsequent reflections. Further development of this document is necessary and this will be looked at more carefully during a future inspection.

The holistic nature of the agency means that there is a commitment to the local community and various local charities. In this way the company becomes integrated into the community and a model of responsible citizenship is portrayed to the 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 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:**

Within IFCS matching is seen as a management function although support workers are sometimes consulted for their views. Placements are made with the information available. This information is sometimes misleading and often not enough. Systems are in place to ensure that the foster carer receives as much information as possible in order to provide good care for the child who has been placed. IFCS has noticed that occasionally anonymised referrals are made where they recognise who the child is because of a previous placement with the agency and the information is out-of-date. Examples were cited where progress which the child had made in placement did not constitute part of the present referral so that the description of the child dated from time of the original referral.

IFCS views positively developments within South Wales which have led to SEWIC. As they are an agency that wishes their views about individual children, and services in general, to become influential, they are pleased that local authorities are collaborating to improve services. With such collaboration, in their view, high quality children's services such as theirs will receive the appropriate recognition.

Systems within IFCS are present to ensure that all appropriate delegation agreements are in place before a placement is made.

During the last year IFCS has restructured its charges so that there is no longer a different fee for a child/young person who has a high level of need or requires to be placed alone within the foster home. Very careful matching takes place so that children's needs are usually met without extra funding from the local authority. This pricing structure means that local authority social workers do not need management approval for extra services and consequently are able to make decisions, in partnership with parents where appropriate, about the provision of extra services and support. This places the child's needs at the centre of the decision-making and prevents unnecessary delay.

IFCS has also been able to offer a reduced fee for placements of children under eight years of age and for sibling groups. There has been an increase in referrals of this type. The reduced sibling rate is used for unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK. The special bonds which usually develop between children in this extreme situation are recognised in this way. Consequently local authorities are encouraged to place these young people in small groups within family homes thus enhancing their resilience by not disrupting the bonds between them.

Lower fees are also in evidence for children placed on a long-term basis and for those who are over 18 years of age.

IFCS is committed to the principle of providing the best possible value for public money in its pricing structure and provision of services.

The implementation of the All Wales Pre-placement Agreement and the associated Delegation Agreement has meant that working relationships have significantly improved between the agency and family placement and commissioning teams in local authorities.

**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:**

IFCS keeps comprehensive records in relation to all activities. The files are well-ordered and controlled by the administrators. This system ensures consistency. Although more archive storage space was being developed at the time of the inspection, it would be beneficial for more clarity to be gained concerning the length of time during which information is required to be kept.

The inspector was informed that all information about children is sent to the placing authorities every six months. Although this was found to be the case with the information contained in the children`s files it was found not to apply to the same information about children in the carers` files. Discussion with the senior management during the inspection resulted in plans being made by the agency to change their system of recording so that recording in the carers` files was labelled clearly with the carers` names. Information about the children would be detailed in the body of the recording. Although the Inspector recognises that this system is potentially more burdensome it ultimately will lead to greater clarity. The Inspector was also informed that plans were in place for a new computerised system to be purchased which would enable greater efficiency including easy cross-referencing of information. Because of this it would become easier for reports to be generated for differing purposes so that information rightly belonging to a child would no longer need to be retained in a carer`s file. All of these developments are welcome and will facilitate compliance with data protection legislation.

Another potential difficulty in relation to information was highlighted during the inspection. Carers are invited to make contact with the organisation anonymously when they feel the need to. To date, the originators of most of these communications have been identifiable to the manager because of the handwriting. Where appropriate these communications have then been placed on the relevant carer`s file. Where not appropriate or where there has been some doubt about the origin of the communication then it has been placed in a separate file. As the agency grows the support workers are beginning to question this practice. The Inspector was impressed by the willingness of the manager to listen to these concerns and to agree to resolve the issue.

IFCS has a system whereby Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out annually. They have been in the practice of keeping the current certificates until the new one was obtained. This is contrary to the guidance from the Information Commissioner`s Office which stipulates that although the information recorded on the certificates should be stored, the actual certificates should be destroyed by the organisation. During a post-inspection meeting the senior management of IFCS indicated that they would review their practice.

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

Action required	When completed	Regulation number
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**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: Short term placements**

**Inspector`s findings:**  
 IFCS had five Individual Placement Contracts at the time of the inspection. These were to provide respite care. The company does not enter into block purchase arrangements for any placements. They view short-term placements in the same way as they would all other placements, which is on an individualised basis. This ensures that matching considerations are taken account of and the child`s needs are placed at the centre of the decision-making.

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

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**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**

<b>Inspector`s findings:</b>
This is not applicable to this service.

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

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**New requirements from this inspection:**

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source