



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Fostering Service

County Hall
Cross Street
Beverley
East Yorkshire
HU17 9BA

26th January 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

East Riding of Yorkshire Council Fostering Service

Address

31/31a Lairgate, Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire.
HU17 8ET

Local Authority Manager

Mr Paul Dyson

Tel No:

01482 887700

Address

County Hall, Cross Street, Beverley, East Yorkshire, HU17
9BA

Fax No:

01482 936103

Email Address

Paul.Dyson@eastriding.gov.uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

N/A

Date of last inspection

24/02/03

Date of Inspection Visit		26th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jayne Tilley	106300
Name of Inspector	2	Lynne Busby	098365
Name of Inspector	3	Diane Wilkinson	
Name of Inspector	4	Malcolm Stannard	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		N/A	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Ms Sheila Ingram	

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of East Riding of Yorkshire Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council has a dedicated fostering service. It covers a large geographical area, which is predominantly rural. The fostering service's offices are based in Beverley. However, foster carer support groups and training are undertaken in a variety of locations within the county.

Information provided at the time of the inspection indicates that the service presently has 95 approved foster carer households, of which 17 are family and friends carers. A range of fostering provision is available to ensure flexibility in meeting children's individual needs.

The stated purpose of the service is to provide care for children and young people who are looked after by the local authority and whose needs are best met in a family environment. In order to achieve this stated purpose, staff of the fostering service are involved in the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers and provide post approval support, training and development. They are also involved in the placement decision process of endeavouring to ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs.

The assessment and support of family and friends carers is currently undertaken by childcare social workers within the child care teams. A dedicated worker has been recruited in to the fostering team to develop the support and services available to such carers.

The fostering service has a service level agreement with Barnardos who provide a specialist service offering short breaks and long term care to children and young people with disabilities. This service level agreement is currently under review.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

24 statutory requirements remain outstanding from the previous inspection in February 2004. These have been incorporated into the statutory requirements arising from this inspection and timescales for completion identified accordingly.

In addition to the inspection work undertaken within the fostering service itself, information was sought from young people placed by the fostering service, foster carers, placing officers, family members and specialist advisors to the fostering service.

27 foster carer questionnaires were returned. Foster carer's views were also sought through visits to four foster carer households and through contact at a meeting at the NCSC office. Placing officers views were sought through a questionnaire, of which 60 were returned. A questionnaire was used to gather views from young people aged 8 plus. 22 of these were returned. In addition, the views of young people were sought via attendance at a participation event for young people. Permission was sought to speak with birth families of those young people who were fostered in the households selected for visiting. Two family members responded positively, although contact was subsequently only possible with one of these. A summary of information gathered through the questionnaire surveys is attached as an addendum to this report.

Interviews were undertaken with 7 specialist advisors to the fostering service and included representatives from health, education, training, the children's rights service and the independent support service available to foster carers.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

Major shortfalls are noted within this standard.

Although a draft statement of purpose has now been completed this requires ongoing development, implementation and distribution to ensure that all regulatory requirements are met. The provision of a children's guide also requires further development to ensure that all information, as required by regulation is provided to looked after children in foster care.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

Standard 2 is met with major shortfalls noted with regard to recruitment and selection.

The management structure of the fostering service has been subject to significant change over the past few months. Whilst this has caused some difficulties with regard to workload issues, evidence indicates that those responsible have provided supportive and effective management and that progress has continued with regard to the development of the fostering service. The recruitment of an operational fostering manager was ongoing during the course of the inspection. Major concerns are highlighted with regard to ensuring that all aspects of safe recruitment, as identified within Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, are evidenced in practice.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Standard 5 is met with minor shortfalls noted within standard 4.

This is a local authority fostering service. Financial procedures are centrally determined and established lines of communication, accountability and delegation exist between managers and staff. A detailed fostering services' development plan has been produced and is in the

process of being implemented.

Good practice recommendations are made with regard to ensuring that foster carers are informed of the need to declare any conflicts of interest, to implementing a consistency of practice with regard to notification of significant events to the NCSC and to developing the range of monitoring activities currently undertaken within the fostering service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

Two standards are met with minor shortfalls noted in five standards and major shortfalls within the remaining two.

Significant progress has been made with regard to the policies, procedures and practice required to promote and safeguard the physical, mental and emotional welfare of children and young people looked after by foster carers.

Examples of positive practice is noted with regard to the introduction of a risk assessment framework, the further development of the supervisory visit process, the role of looked after children education and health co-ordinators, the promotion of contact, consultation, the matching requirements for children requiring long-term or permanent foster care placements, the introduction of safe caring guidelines and information and training regarding the safe care of looked after children.

Examples of issues that require ongoing development are the provision of an effective and comprehensive foster placement agreement, inconsistency of practice with regard to consent issues, the requirement for the provision of comprehensive health assessments, the management of out of approval placements, the need for consistency of practice with regard to risk assessments and the further development of matters pertaining to children and young people acquiring the skills needed for independent living.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

One standard is met, with minor shortfalls noted in five standards and major shortfalls noted with regard to the remaining three standards.

Evidence of safe and thorough staff recruitment is required in line with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Inconsistencies of information contained within personnel files would also benefit from review.

The absence of an operational manager has seen the management of probationary periods fall below that expected by regulation. The frequency of supervision would also benefit from review. However, positive practice has been maintained with regard to workload management and the availability of support and information for staff. Structures are in place regarding assessments, approvals and reviews of carers. Greater attention is required to ensuring that annual reviews are undertaken within the required 12 months timescale.

The role of independent reviewing officer has been developed but requires ongoing review to ensure that all required information is available to the IRO.

The provision of agency contracts and service level agreements, which meet the regulatory requirements, remain outstanding.

The provision of an independent support service for foster carers is acknowledged to be an ongoing positive development within the fostering service. Records of complaints and allegations of abuse are maintained but would benefit from evidence of evaluation with regard to informing the future provision of the fostering service.

Significant progress has been made with regard to the provision of training for foster carers and this is to be commended. Staff generally reported satisfaction with regard to training available to them, although the provision of training with regard to fostering assessments is required.

The provision of a foster carer agreement, which meets the requirements outlined by

Schedule 5, remains a significant outstanding requirement. In addition, whilst progress has been made with regard to the development of a foster carers handbook, the expedient implementation of this will resolve many outstanding requirements with regard to information required by foster carers.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Standard 24 is met with a minor shortfall noted within standard 25.

The fostering service has developed and implemented a child placement file, which is held and maintained by foster carers. This is deemed to be positive practice with regard to providing foster carers with comprehensive information on children placed with them and with regard to standardising the practice of record keeping and practice within the fostering service. Ongoing developments are required to ensure that the fostering services' administrative records contain all significant information as required by regulation and that this information is appropriately filed and stored.

Children's records are held within childcare teams. Whilst evidence of planning was available on files inspected, the effectiveness of the files is undermined by inconsistencies of recording, filing and recording formats. Issues with regard to the requirements for visiting children looked after, as outlined within regulation 35, are noted.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service (Standard 26)

A minor shortfall is noted with regard to this standard.

The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose. However, attention is required to the security arrangements regarding visitors to the building with regard to ensuring security and confidentiality of information.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

Standards 27&28 are not applicable to local authority fostering services. Standard 29 is met. Since the previous inspection, a payment for skills scheme has been developed and implemented within the fostering service. This has required an immense amount of work for all involved and has, generally been well received.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

Major shortfalls are noted with regard to this standard.

Evidence provided indicated that the fostering panel seeks to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

However, significant developments are required to ensure that the panel effectively operates within all regulatory requirements.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31)

Major shortfalls are noted with regard to this standard.

The short-term break service for children with disabilities is operated by Barnardos and via a service level agreement with the local authority. This agreement is currently undergoing review to ensure compliance with the requirements of regulation 40. Evidence of policies and procedures regarding short breaks is also required.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

Major shortfalls are noted with regard to this standard.

Whilst local authority services for assessing and approving family and friend carers are designed in a way that encourages their consideration as carers, there are significant gaps with regard to the approval, support, training and review of these carers.

The fostering service has positively recruited a 'kinship' worker with the aim of developing

the services provided to family and friends who are carers. However, the effective implementation of this role has been impeded by staff shortfalls within the fostering service. Issues highlighted with regard to shortfalls in practice raise serious concerns regarding the safeguarding of children's welfare.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

YES

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

The fostering service has a large number of requirements, resulting from breaches of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, arising from this inspection. It is however noted that positive developments within the fostering service have been maintained, in line with the action plan resulting from the previous inspection, despite staffing difficulties at both management and fostering social worker levels.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

24 statutory requirements remain outstanding from the previous inspection in February 2003. These have been incorporated into the requirements arising from this announced inspection and timescales for action identified accordingly.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
NOT APPLICABLE TO LOCAL AUTHORITY FOSTERING SERVICES.		
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Jayne Tilley	Signature	
Second Inspector	Lynne Busby	Signature	
Locality Manager	Stephen Sharp	Signature	
Date			

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	The provider must ensure the statement of purpose and the children's guide are completed and distributed in line with regulation. Policies, procedures and written guidance must reflect the service's statement of purpose.	4 th August 2004
2	4	FS1	The provider must ensure that a clear process for the review of the statement of purpose and the children's guide is developed. Any revision must be notified to the Commission within 28 days.	4 th August 2004
3	14	FS10	The provider must ensure that practice with regard to overnight stays for children and young people is consistently implemented.	4 th August 2004
4	15	FS7	The provider must ensure that foster carers who have children with disabilities are provided with appropriate equipment.	4 th August 2004
5	17	FS6 FS10 FS12 FS13 FS14 FS18	The provider must ensure that all requirements with regard to the training, advice, information and support of foster carers are met.	4 th August 2004

5	17(cont)	FS19 FS22 FS23 FS31 FS32	The provider must ensure that all requirements with regard to the training, advice, information and support of foster carers are met.	4 th August 2004
6	20	FS3FS15 FS18	The provider must ensure that the requirements of regulation 20 are met with regard to recruitment, the role of unqualified staff and work undertaken by foster carers within the service.	4 th August 2004
7	21	FS16 FS19	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to staff training and the evidencing of an effective period of probation are met.	4 th August 2004
8	22	FS12 FS32	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to records maintained within the fostering service are met.	4 th August 2004
9	23	FS26	The provider must ensure that the security arrangements with regard to visitors to the service provide for confidentiality and security of information.	4 th August 2004
10	24	FS30	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to foster panel membership are met.	4 th August 2004
11	25	FS30	The provider must ensure that requirements with regard to written records of foster panel meeting and quorate panels are met.	4 th August 2004
12	26	FS30	The provider must ensure that service specific policies and procedures regarding the functions and decision-making responsibilities of the panel are developed.	4 th August 2004
13	28	FS22	The provider must ensure that the foster care agreement meets the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service's Regulations 2002	4 th August 2004
14	29	FS6 FS9	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to risk assessments and reviews following section 47 investigations are met.	4 th August 2004

14	29 (cont)	FS16 FS22 FS30 FS32	The provider must ensure that the requirements of regulation 29 are met with regard to annual reviews of foster carers, environmental risk assessments and the removal or voluntary termination of foster carers from the foster carer register.	4 th August 2004
15	30	FS25 FS32	A record of each placement with the foster carer, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination must be consistently held on foster carers' files	4 th August 2004
16	31(3)	FS25	Each local authority shall enter, in its register of foster carers, information pertaining to placements made under regulation 38(2), including the date of each agreement entered into in accordance with regulation 38(2) and the terms of any such agreement for the time being in force.	4 th August 2004
17	34	FS8 FS10 FS12 FS13	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to foster placement agreements are met.	4 th August 2004
18	35	FS24	The responsible authority must ensure that the welfare of each child placed by it and the supervision of placements meets the requirements for visiting outlined within Regulation 35	4 th August 2004
19	38	FS8 FS32	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to emergency placements are met.	4 th August 2004
20	39	FS21	With regard to children placed, with approved foster carers, outside of England, the provider must ensure that the requirements of Regulation 39 are met.	4 th August 2004
21	40	FS16 FS31	The provider must ensure that the requirements with regard to agency placements and service level agreements are met.	4 th August 2004

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	It is recommended that elected members formally approve the statement of purpose.
2	FS3	It is recommended that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references.
3	FS4	The procedure for notifying the NCSC of events and notifications would benefit from review to ensure consistency of practice.
4	FS4	A system to monitor quality and adequacy of records, in line with Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services regulations 2002, would benefit from full implementation.
5	FS4	Procedures developed to monitor conflicts of interest with regard to staff would benefit from further development to ensure the inclusion of foster carers.
6	FS6	It is recommended that consistency of practice is reviewed with regard to the annual assessment of foster carers' accommodation.
7	FS6	It is recommended that any assessed needs for privacy are clearly reflected within the arrangements made for accommodating children and young people.
8	FS6	It is recommended that the forms used for risk assessments regarding the needs of children and young people are reviewed to improve consistency of practice.
9	FS7	Issues raised regarding the working relationships between foster carers and childcare social workers would benefit from further enquiry and action taken accordingly.
10	FS8	It is recommended that, where applicable, the procedure for amending approval status to include out of approval placements is reviewed and implemented consistently in practice.
11	FS8	It is recommended that the process for determining timescales for exemption certificates is reviewed to ensure consistency of practice.
12	FS9	It is recommended that management systems are more pro-active with regard to the collation and evaluation of information resulting from allegations of neglect and abuse of a child/young person in foster care.

13	FS11	It is recommended that the consultation process is extended to incorporate evidence of the operation of the fostering service itself.
14	FS12	The provision of information/guidelines to foster carers, regarding the use of home remedies would be beneficial.
15	FS13	In line with NMS 13.4, it is recommended that the foster carer's role in school contact, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate, is clearly outlined within the foster placement agreement.
16	FS14	Service provision could be enhanced with regard to foster carers providing all children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.
17	FS15	It is recommended that recruitment procedures evidence the practice of telephone follow up to written references.
18	FS15	It is recommended that a system is devised to ensure that CRB checks are renewed every three years.
19	FS16	It is recommended that the role of the administration team be reviewed to improve availability and consistency of administrative support.
20	FS18	A clear and comprehensive health and safety policy should be made available to children who are fostered.
21	FS19	A system for ensuring that training information, arising from the EDR process, is passed through to the training and development section would benefit from consistent implementation.
22	FS19	It is recommended that a clear plan for the development and training of all staff involved in fostering be provided.
23	FS20	It is recommended that staff of the fostering service are provided with up-to-date policies and procedures.
24	FS20	It is recommended that the matters pertaining to the frequency of staff supervision are addressed.
25	FS21	The process by which the ongoing developments of the fostering service are implemented would benefit from review.
26	FS22	The system for ensuring that both carers are seen during supervision sessions would benefit from review.
27	FS22	To inform future provision of services, a system to evaluate information pertaining to complaints and representation should be developed
28	FS24	It is recommended that inconsistencies with regard to recording, recording formats and filing systems are addressed with regard to children's case files.

29	FS25	The process, by which foster carers are encouraged to access their files and to make additions, comments or record personal statements, including any dissent, would benefit from review and implementation.
30	FS25	A system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records should be established and remedial action taken where necessary.
31	FS25	It is recommended that complete information regarding the nature of complaints and allegations, action taken and outcome is maintained on the appropriate individual records.
32	FS25	It is recommended that consistent practice with regard to information held within personnel files both locally and centrally, is implemented.
33	FS25	It is recommended that service information with regard to complaints is securely stored.
34	FS25	It is recommended that the procedure for the storage and management of confidential information is made known to panel members, and specialist advisors.
35	FS30	It is recommended that CRB checks are completed prior to panel members becoming operational.
36	FS30	Written guidelines should be provided which determine matters pertaining to the suitability of panel members.
37	FS30	Panel membership would benefit from the inclusion of a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers.
38	FS30	It is recommended that the written evidence of the quality assurance function of the panel is provided to assist with the development and review of the panel itself and the functioning of the fostering service.
39	FS30	It is recommended that the information provided to the medical advisor determines the nature of the fostering application.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent

25

Survey of placing authorities

YES

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey

YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

YES

- Directors of Social services

NO

- Child protection officer

YES

- Specialist advisor (s)

YES

- Local Foster Care Association

NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements

YES

- Interview with children

YES

- Interview with foster carers

YES

- Interview with agency staff

NO

- Contact with parents

YES

- Contact with supervising social workers

YES

- Examination of files

YES

Individual interview with manager

YES

Information from provider

YES

Individual interviews with key staff

YES

Group discussion with staff

NO

Interview with panel chair

YES

Observation of foster carer training

NO

Observation of foster panel

YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents

YES

Inspection of records

YES

Interview with individual child

NO

Date of Inspection

26/01/04

Time of Inspection

9.30

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

157.5

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The statement of purpose has been substantially revised but remains in draft form. This requires further development and clarification with regard to qualifications of staff and information regarding complaints. An inconsistency between information within the statement of purpose and the operation of the fostering panel also requires review. Once the statement of purpose is completed, it is important that policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflect the service's statement of purpose. Some policies remain in draft form and require implementation. It is recommended that elected members formally approve the statement of purpose for the fostering service.

A children's guide to fostering produced by the British Adoption and Fostering Agency (BAAF) has been purchased by the fostering service. This requires further development to ensure that the requirements of regulation 3(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, are met. The children's guide must be distributed in accordance with regulation 3 (4).

Once finalised, the statement of purpose must be made available to all staff and foster carers within the service and, in line with regulation 3 (2)(d), the statement of purpose should also be made available, upon request, to parents of children placed in foster care.

Given the fluctuating nature of fostering services, for example with regard to numbers of foster carers and children placed, it is important that a clear process for review of the statement of purpose is identified. Any revision of the statement of purpose or the children's guide must be notified to the NCSC (National Care Standards Commission) within 28 days.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This is a Local Authority Fostering Service and as such the business and financial expertise are managed on a departmental level. The operational manager of the fostering service is currently on long-term sick leave. This post was a temporary appointment and recruitment for a permanent manager was ongoing during the course of this inspection.

Since October 2003 the acting resource manager for children's services has managed the fostering service, supported by the fostering senior social worker. Despite the inherent complexities of the management arrangements, evidence provided to and observation by the inspectors indicated that a high level of support and effective leadership of the staff and service has been provided. However, it is acknowledged by those responsible for the service that the appointment of an operational manager remains a key development with regard to the future progress of and much needed stability for the fostering service.

The appointed named person for the service has changed and the NCSC has been notified in accordance with regulation 10.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

At the time of the inspection, the local authority was in the process of appointing an operational manager for the fostering service. Inspection of records regarding previous recruitment was undertaken and indicated ongoing gaps in respect of ensuring that the requirements of Schedule 1 are complied with. Concerns are raised regarding the lack of a completed Criminal Records Bureau check, lack of complete references and follow up telephone enquiries and a lack of positive proof of ID, including a recent photograph. Issues are also raised with regard third party, confidential information relating to other personnel within the department being held on the wrong files. This requires expedient review.

Due to ongoing developments within the senior management structure, evidence of recruitment and 'fitness' with regard the nominated manager for the service was not assessed on this occasion. This will be undertaken at the next announced inspection.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

For Local Authority fostering services, it is not a regulatory requirement to make notifications of events, as identified within Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. However, discussions during the course of the inspection have highlighted that, as a matter of good practice, those responsible for the fostering service are committed to the notifications being made. One notification was received at the outset of the inspection. The procedure for making notifications would benefit from review to ensure consistency of practice.

The Local Authority operates the fostering service. As such, financial procedures are centrally determined with clear lines of accountability and delegation for the management and review of financial matters.

Systems are in place to seek the views of foster carers and placing social workers with regard to monitoring the quality of foster care provided by the service. The inspector was informed that this process is being extended to ensure that the views of children in foster care are sought via the annual reviews of foster carers.

For Local Authority fostering services, it is not a regulatory requirement to ensure that the matters set out in Schedule 7 are monitored at appropriate intervals. Evidence provided to the inspection indicates that some matters identified within schedule 7 are already monitored. It is recommended that a review of outstanding matters to be monitored is undertaken to enhance the already established areas of good monitoring practice.

There are clear roles for managers and staff and established lines of communication and accountability between managers, staff and carers.

Procedures developed to monitor conflicts of interest with regard to staff would benefit from further development to ensure the inclusion of foster carers

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

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

16

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

7

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

X denotes that this information is currently not collated by the fostering service.

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The fostering service manager post is currently being recruited to and therefore since October 2003 the acting resource manager for children's services has managed the service. As noted previously, this has created some dilemmas for workload management and responsibilities, however evidence indicated that the fostering service has been positively and proactively managed during this difficult time.

A detailed fostering service's development plan has been produced and represents a positive and dynamic approach to the future provision of high quality foster care for children and young people. It is acknowledged that the implementation of parts of this plan have been impeded as a result of ongoing management shortfalls. However, implementation of outstanding matters will hopefully be facilitated by the pending recruitment of the fostering manager.

A job description is available for the manager of the service and the internal structure of the local authority is clearly defined in relation to areas of delegation and responsibility. Clear arrangements are now in place to identify the person in charge when the manger is absent.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service is committed to ensuring that all foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for looked after children and young people. Carers' homes visited by the inspectors fell well within expected standards. Environmental risk assessments are undertaken pre-approval and annually during the foster care review process. However, this is not consistent across the service and in records inspected, there was no evidence of this being completed in family/ friends foster carer households.

With regard to the risk assessments for children and young people, it is recommended that this process is reviewed to ensure consistency of practice within the service. Two forms are currently in use, one of which is linked to the annual review of foster carer households but which was, in the documents inspected, only completed on one occasion. It is further recommended that where applicable, the child's assessed need for privacy is reflected in the arrangements for accommodation.

There was evidence of positive practice in that fostering social workers during their supervisory visits to foster carer households also monitor accommodation, which includes sleeping arrangements provided by foster carers.

Written guidance on the safe transport of foster children has been provided and is monitored both pre-approval and as part of the supervisory visits.

Foster carers' preparation and training covers health and safety issues. Written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities remains in draft form.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The importance of valuing diversity and promoting equality is reflected in the pre and post approval training provided for foster carers.

The Local Authority has a service level agreement with Barnardos regarding the provision of fostering services for children with a disability. The provision of appropriate aids and adaptations remains an ongoing issue and is currently being addressed via the review of the existing service level agreement.

Information provided via children's questionnaires indicated that a wide range of opportunities is available to children to enable them to pursue their talents, interests and hobbies.

Information from completed foster carer questionnaires highlights some concerns regarding cooperative working relationships between foster carers and childcare social workers. Specific issues raised related to the frequent change of social workers, poor communication and a lack of support and visits for looked after children. It is recommended that this matter would benefit from further enquiry and action taken accordingly.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

The lack of foster care placements is a nationally recognised resource issue. As such, it is acknowledged that due to the limited number of vacant placements available, it is often difficult to ensure matching to a carer who can meet the child's individual needs.

Written and verbal evidence provided to the inspectors indicated that procedures have been developed to ensure careful matching and placement planning for those children and young people who require long term/permanent fostering placements. However, the process by which placements are made for short term/emergency placements requires ongoing review to ensure that evidence of matching, in line with NMS 8.2 & 8.3, is clearly documented and to ensure that areas of additional support, arising from gaps in the matching process, are identified and appropriate action taken.

There was evidence that a fostering placement agreement, which meets the requirements of Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, is still not in place. This was identified at the last inspection and remains a breach of regulation.

The number of exemption certificates currently in place is less than those in place during the previous inspection. Forms seen were appropriately completed and signed by a senior manager. Some evidence of confusion is noted, in one particular placement, with regard to the use of time-limited /open-ended exemption certificates. This would benefit from review.

Where 'out of approval' placements are made, a monitoring form is completed and signed by a manager. However, practice, with regard to placements must be brought in line with regulations 34 & 38, which clearly identify that (1) except in the case of an emergency or immediate placement, placements must be consistent with the terms of the foster carer's approval and (2) where emergency placements are made, they should not exceed 24 hours. It is also unclear to the inspectors as to why longer term out of approval situations, which do not lead to placements above the agreed fostering limit, are not consistently addressed via the foster carer annual review process. There was evidence that on one occasion the independent reviewing officer had recommended such action but this was not reflected in the minutes of the fostering panel and consequently, conflicting recommendations for approval had occurred.

Information provided for the inspection indicated that transracial or transcommunity placements have been made via the fostering service. The inspectors were informed that additional training, support and information is provided to carers to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care

The fostering service is committed wherever possible and appropriate, to a period of introductions to a proposed foster carer being undertaken. In practice this has to date only proved feasible in respect of long term, planned placements. Information regarding introductions is provided within the draft handbook for foster carers.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Evidence of progress made is noted both with regard to the provision of the required policies and procedures and the provision of training. Written and verbal evidence provided to the inspectors indicates that foster carers' training incorporates all areas identified with NMS 9. A written policy with regard to safe caring has been developed. Safe caring guidelines are discussed during the pre-approval assessment and a format for written guidelines on safe caring for foster carer households has been recently distributed to carers. Discussion with some foster carers indicated a level of confusion with regard to how such guidelines should be implemented. Inspectors were informed that this process is to be discussed during the supervisory visits undertaken to foster carers.

The fostering service is clear in its expectations that corporal punishment is not acceptable, in any form. This has consistently been set out in written information provided to carers and is included in the current foster care agreement. Management systems are in place to collate information regarding the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect and abuse of a child in foster care. However, no evidence was seen with regard to the process by which such information is evaluated. It is noted by the inspectors that a common theme arising within the information provided is carers undertaking placements outside of the original approval status.

Evidence from foster carers and staff of the fostering service indicates that full information about the foster child and his/her family is not always provided. Concerns were also expressed regarding the lack of expediency with which information sharing meetings were organised following emergency placements. The fostering service has developed and recently distributed a child placement file, which is to be maintained by foster carers. Guidelines with regard to information required and information gathering tools also feature in the draft foster carer handbook. It is acknowledged that this represents proactive practice, aimed at ensuring that all necessary information, with regard to a child's placement, is consistently provided.

Policies and procedures have been developed and distributed with regard to children absent from a foster home without permission, anti-bullying and managing behaviour. The fostering service has a policy of no restraints in foster care. This is clearly supported by its policy documents and appropriate TCIF (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training for foster carers) is currently being cascaded down to all carers.

Reviews of approval are required, by departmental policy, to be undertaken following strategy meetings resulting from Section 47 investigations. However, the process by which the independent reviewing officer is informed of such incidents and their conclusions requires urgent review to support this requirement being effectively implemented in practice. It is acknowledged by the inspectors that this is a wider departmental practice issue rather than specific to the fostering service itself.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: *This information could not be collated during this inspection.

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Verbal and written evidence indicates that those involved in the fostering service continue to promote family contacts and friendships. However, this is not consistently set out in the foster placement agreement currently used within the local authority.

Matters pertaining to the importance of contact are a feature of both pre and post approval training. Guidelines and formats have recently been provided to foster carers to improve the consistency of information recorded with regard to the outcome of contact arrangements and the perceived impact upon the children.

Information with regard to contact, as seen within the draft foster carers' handbook, includes information pertaining to contact for those young people accommodated within residential children's homes and as such does not entirely equate to the fostering context. In line with NMS 10.2, it is important that clear procedures are developed and set out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

Evidence from statutory reviews of care plans indicates that the views of children and young people are sought with regard to contact and that arrangements made are monitored and reviewed. A discussion with one relative indicated that she was very happy with the care afforded to her grandchild and that she felt that her contact was encouraged and positively facilitated.

Evidence from questionnaires from children and young people highlighted some examples of young people stating that their contact arrangements had been amended in accordance with their wishes. Equally, evidence from questionnaires completed by childcare social workers indicated that they considered foster carers to predominantly work very well or fairly well with family contacts. However, a significant issue with regard to contact, arising from consultation with both carers and young people, related to the issue of overnight stays with friends. Evidence indicates inconsistency of practice within the local authority with regard to the required checks to be undertaken in such circumstances. This was discussed during the verbal feedback to the fostering service and those responsible acknowledged that current procedures and inconsistencies of practice require review in line with the recently circulated Department of Health guidance on the delegation of decisions on 'overnight stays' for looked after children.

Financial support for carers is available with regard to supporting and ensuring that contact arrangements take place.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Young people and where appropriate, their families/significant others, are consulted via the statutory review process. The fostering service has also developed a consultation format for gathering the views of young people during the annual review of foster carers process. The inspectors were informed that this would be implemented in the near future.

A participation officer has been appointed by the local authority and is actively involved in developing the range of consultation opportunities available to looked after children and young people. Inspectors attended one such consultation exercise during the course of the inspection.

Evidence from questionnaires completed by children and young people for the inspection indicates a mixed response to consultation. Responses indicated positive consultation with regard to being asked their opinions and specifically their views regarding their foster carers. Evidence of consultation regarding the operation of the fostering service itself was less forthcoming. It is recommended that such information is sought as part of the already established quality assurance system with regard to foster care.

The local authority has a service level agreement with a local children's rights service. Evidence provided to the inspectors indicated an initial reluctance by the local authority to provide contact information to the children's rights service to enable effective advocacy to be afforded to children and young people within the care system. This reluctance stemmed from concerns that confidentiality and data protection may be breached. During the course of the inspection, the inspectors were advised that this matter has now been positively resolved and children's rights officers are to be involved in providing information, support and advice to all children and young people entering the looked after system. During the course of these initial visits, they will also distribute a filofax of information, produced by the local authority, regarding services available for looked after children. This is acknowledged to be positive and proactive practice with regard to providing opportunities for consultation and advocacy.

The inspectors were informed that information leaflets regarding the complaints process are provided to children in foster care. Evidence provided from the children's questionnaires indicate that children are predominantly aware of how to make a complaint and that they have been provided with relevant information. However, the reverse is true with regard to knowing the role of and how to contact the NCSC. It is therefore important that a completed children's guide, which is required to include such information, is expediently circulated to children and young people in foster care.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

Matters pertaining to the health needs of children and young people in foster care are monitored both by the statutory review process and via supervisory visits made to foster carers. The newly developed, foster carer supervision form enables fostering social workers to record health related matters during their supervisory visits to foster carers.

Health co-ordinators have recently been established within the local authority and their primary focus is on ensuring that the health needs of looked after children are comprehensively met. The inspectors were also informed that a new health assessment programme is being developed for each looked after child which will eventually replace the current annual boarding-out medical system. This is acknowledged to be positive and proactive practice.

Given the newness of this role it is perhaps not surprising that the inspectors encountered a level of confusion amongst foster carers with regards to the scope and indeed the existence of the role of the health co-ordinators. However, the inspectors were informed that clarification of this is built in to the core skills training programme that is to be completed by all foster carers. This is again acknowledged to be proactive practice by those responsible for and working with the fostering service.

The provision of information identified by standard 12.6, within a handbook for carers would provide clarity and consistency regarding the role of foster carers in promoting the health needs of young people in their care. In addition, the provision of information/guidelines regarding the use of 'home remedies' and the monitoring/recording of medication would also be beneficial. A record of accidents occurring to children whilst placed with foster carers must be developed and maintained.

Evidence of carers providing information about a child's health needs was seen within review and planning meeting documentation.

Inconsistency of practice is noted with regard to the quality of health information provided to carers prior to placement and issues pertaining to medical consent. Written evidence seen also indicated inconsistency with regard to the undertaking of annual boarding out medicals for looked after children. It is acknowledged that the support to be provided by the health co-ordinators should seek to proactively challenge and eradicate such inconsistencies of practice.

A further positive development relates to the provision of a consultation service for foster carers via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the involvement of the CAMHS worker in foster carer training and the provision of related articles within the foster carer magazine.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Within the local authority, a high priority is placed on meeting the educational needs of looked after young children and this is reflected within the provision of the fostering service. Looked after children education co-ordinators provide a well established service for young people in foster care which incorporates oversight of the completion of personal education plans, quality assurance with regard to such plans, the ongoing provision of computers for children and young people, the collation of information regarding the educational achievement and school attendance rates of looked after children and general support regarding matters arising from their educational needs. The inspectors acknowledge this to be an excellent service provision with regard to promoting and monitoring the educational welfare and attainment of looked after young people in foster care.

Areas for development within the service relate to the need for school costs and consent for school trips to be clearly articulated within the foster placement agreement. In addition, it is recommended that the fostering service ensures that its expectations of foster carers, in line with NMS 13.7 are clearly communicated to all foster carers.

Information provided from foster carers, children/young people and childcare social workers indicates that foster carers are, for the most part, positively involved in contacting schools and attending meetings at school. In line with NMS 13.4, it is recommended that the foster carer's role in school contact, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate, is clearly outlined in the foster placement agreement.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Developments within the local authority have included the requirement for case responsibility for all looked after young people over the age of 16, to transfer to the leaving care team. As such, this enables proactive provision of the requirements for care-leavers as required by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Evidence seen within the draft foster carers handbook indicates a gap with regard to the need for clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. In addition, evidence or training programmes seen does not explicitly identify areas of training with regard to this aspect of care. It is however acknowledged by the managers of the fostering service that foster carers are encouraged and supported to ensure that all children in their care are provided with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Significant attention is required to ensuring that recruitment information meets the requirements of schedule 1 of the fostering services regulations 2002. On occasions, gaps were related to information not being available. However, it was also apparent to the inspectors that information is held in different formats and that the outcome of checks undertaken was not always recorded on the individual's personnel file. Records within the fostering service and at County Hall were checked.

Of significant concern was evidence that staff were commencing work without the required, updated CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check having been received. The criteria for the portability of CRB checks has been discussed with those responsible for the service and must be adhered to. In addition, where evidence of a CRB check was available, information as to its outcome could not be consistently evidenced.

Whilst evidence of the required references was available on staff files, this was not supported by the recommended telephone follow up to written references.

Evidence of identity, including a recent photograph must be included within the evidence of positive and safe recruitment, as must evidence of qualifications. Whilst new staff are requested, via their appointment letter, to bring such evidence on their first day of work, there was no records to indicate that this had been checked.

Inconsistent practice is highlighted with regard to the retention and storage of interview records. This was seen on two of the five files inspected.

It was also difficult to establish whether medical clearance had been received and/or the outcome of such checks with regard to establishing that staff are physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform.

All fostering social work staff are appropriately qualified or are in the process of obtaining an appropriate qualification. Where applicable, unqualified staff must appropriately supervised with regard to their undertaking of assessment and approvals of carers and the supervisor must be clearly accountable for the work undertaken.

Total number of staff of the agency:

14

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

10

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

As noted, the operational manager for the fostering service is currently being recruited and the acting childcare resources manager has most recently managed the service. Despite this information indicates that staff are positive about the forward and future direction of the service. Evidence does however indicate that the sheer weight of information that has recently been distributed to staff and carers has, at times, hindered the process for consultation and effective implementation of new policies and practice initiatives.

The fostering service has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads. This is undertaken predominantly via staff supervision and team meetings. Evidence indicates that there are clear management structures and lines of accountability within the service.

Clear structures and systems are in place with regard to assessments, approvals but require development to ensure that annual and three yearly reviews are undertaken within the required timescales. The inspectors were informed that such systems were in the process of being developed. The fostering service has developed the role of an independent reviewing officer (IRO) to undertake all foster carer reviews for mainstream carers. This is deemed to be good practice. However, during the course of the inspection it became clear that the process of feedback to the IRO following the reviews being submitted to panel and decisions being made was a significant gap with regards to communication. This was expediently addressed by those responsible for the fostering service. Procedures are in place for the use of agency placements. The inspector was informed that an agreement format is currently being developed to ensure that all aspects of agency placements, as required by regulation 40, are adhered to.

Staff have copies of information detailed within standard 16.16 and all staff are provided with written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service. Information provided to the inspection team indicates inconsistent practice with regard to ensuring that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation. A comprehensive system has been developed to manage the probation period, however, the required forms must be consistently completed.

Concerns were raised regarding the availability of administrative support. These concerns centred on the impact of the administration team undertaking the administrative work for both the adoption and the fostering panels. This was positively identified to be a priority area of work but equally acknowledged to impact upon the availability of support to fostering social workers, especially when additional panels were arranged. This has impacted upon consistency with regard to case filing and also with regard to the range of administrative duties undertaken by social work staff. It is recommended that this area of practice be reviewed to improve availability and consistency of administrative support.

Information from fostering and placing social workers indicated improved working relationships compared to evidence available from the previous inspection. A full range of advice needed to provide a comprehensive service for children and young people and to support carers is available.

Training portfolios for carers have been developed and recently implemented.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Those responsible for the fostering service indicated that the staffing complement was adequate to meet the current needs of the fostering service, although the inspectors were informed that it hoped to seek to increase the number of staff available to the service in line with the outcome of ongoing foster carer recruitment. Information provided via foster carers' questionnaires differed significantly from this view and overwhelmingly indicated that the fostering service was understaffed. It is acknowledged by the inspectors that the fostering service has undergone a lengthy period of staff changes and recruitment at all levels and that this has impacted upon the consistency and availability of support available to foster carers. All fostering social worker posts have now been appointed to and the only remaining appointment remains that of a fostering manager.

Evidence of contingency planning to manage staffing shortfalls is available and implemented in practice. The current staff group represents a mixed balance of skills and knowledge both in terms of previous fostering and childcare experience. Information provided to the inspectors indicated a positive energy and value base within the staff team, which has as its aim, the provision of a high quality of fostering services to looked after children. This is to be commended. It is acknowledged that the team is very much in its infancy in terms of its identify, as many of the staff have been recently recruited. However, the introduction of development days and the ongoing team meetings are seen as positive practices to ensure that consistency of practice and team development are maintained as central and important themes for effective service delivery.

A dedicated Marketing and Information officer supports the fostering service. Evidence of the recruitment strategy seen indicates that positive and proactive action is undertaken to target recruitment to the areas of most need.

The format for the assessment of foster carers follows that recommended by the British Adoption and Fostering Agency (BAAF). A competency based assessment format is now being undertaken within the fostering service. This is evidenced in practice.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The local authority has detailed policies and procedures with regard to employment practices. Out of hours support is predominantly provided via the local authority's emergency duty team. Developments are ongoing to seek to extend this service and the role of foster carers in providing additional out of office hours support is being considered. In light of this and information provided to the inspectors which highlighted that foster carers have, in the past, supported the fostering team with daytime duty, those responsible for the fostering service must review the role of foster carers in line with the requirements of regulation 20. It is agreed that this may require ongoing discussion between the service and the NCSC to ensure that all aspects of regulation are clarified and complied with.

In line with NMS 18.5, the provision of a comprehensive health and safety policy for foster carers and young people is required. In addition, a whistle blowing policy must be made available to all foster carers.

Matters pertaining to insurance cover were not inspected on this occasion.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Information from staff reported a general level of satisfaction with regard to the quantity and quality of training available to them. Gaps were identified with regard to ensuring that all staff who undertaken foster carer assessments are trained to do so. Whilst information provided by staff indicated that induction, post qualifying and in service training is made available to them, there was no evidence of this being formalised in to a clear plan for the fostering service. This is recommended. Evidence of training undertaken or planned for staff indicated that training provided reflected the policies of the fostering service.

Staff appraisals take place twice yearly and evidence of this was seen. Evidence of training needs being discussed and recommended, as part of the staff appraisal was also available. However, there was inconsistency of practice with regard to evidencing how this information is passed through to the training officers. This would benefit from review.

Staff informed the inspectors that they are kept informed of any changes in legislation and guidance and that this is discussed via team meetings and supervision.

Joint training between fostering staff and foster carers has been undertaken informally. However, this needs to be reviewed to ensure that such joint training is held on a regular basis. Information provided to the inspectors indicated that this was being considered for future training programmes.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Staff are provided with information regarding their duties and responsibilities. All fostering social workers receive management supervision. Due to the current lack of a team manager, supervision for some staff has been disjointed and irregular. Gaps in the frequency of supervision range from one to three months. A record of supervision is maintained and staff generally reported satisfaction with the content of their supervision. Staff receive regular and planned appraisal from their line manager and this is considered to be positive practice. Staff are provided with opportunities to attend regular staff and team meetings. Information provided to the inspectors indicated that staff view such meetings as positive arenas to discuss allocations and workload issues, the management of placement requests and vacancies and service developments.

It is acknowledged that not all policies and procedures are available to staff as they have yet to be been developed/revised in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and associated National Minimum Standards.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

A detailed carer support plan has been devised within the fostering service. Aspects of this plan which have been implemented since the last inspection include the employment of a part-time staff member to provide consistency and support to foster carer support groups, the provision of two independent support workers, the introduction of practical support to foster carers via the Priority Care Teams. This ongoing positive focus on carer support is to be commended.

Information from foster carers indicates that they generally feel well supported by the fostering team. Concerns arise with regard to the inconsistent provision and availability of support via the priority care teams and the recent 'deluge' of new procedures/policies for carers, alongside the introduction of the foster carer skills matrix and introduction of a new allowance scheme. Foster carers have expressed genuine concern that the requirements of the new skills matrix and the need to review new procedures and policies has at times represented a difficult balance in terms of meeting the required targets for their allocated 'band' and ensuring that the ongoing needs of the foster children are met. Some carers have expressed anxiety at what may happen if they are unable to meet their targets due to work or fostering pressures. Whilst these developments are to be commended, it seems imperative that provision is made for new developments to become rooted in practice and be reviewed before additional pressure for more developments is placed upon the foster carers, and indeed the fostering social workers.

Discussions regarding the provision of priority care support have indicated that the fostering service is seeking to develop a service specific provision and thereby address some of the inconsistencies of availability and quality of service that have arisen.

The role of the supervising social worker appears clear to both the worker and the carer. Annual review reports are prepared and are available to the Fostering panel. Practice within the service dictates that all annual reviews are presented to panel. This is acknowledged to be good practice.

Issues raised with regard to communication between fostering and childcare social workers at the previous inspection, have not been evident on this occasion. Questionnaires returned by childcare social workers indicated that they considered the fostering service to predominantly work very well/quite well with the placing authority.

Evidence arising from the inspection of a foster carer file highlighted a gap in practice with regard to supporting those carers who live outside of England. Where foster carers live outside England, it is the duty of the Local Authority to ensure that the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 regulations are met. Whilst it is acknowledged by the inspectors that the young person concerned had recently left the care of the foster carers, the foster carers' approval status was nevertheless active and had been so during the previous six+ months when the carers had moved to live outside of England, with the young person still in placement at this time. The evidence seen indicated a lack of contact between the fostering service and the carers concerned and evidence of practice available fell significantly short of that required by regulation.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

Foster care agreements are in evidence on foster care files but there is inconsistency with regard to the format used. Two formats are currently in use, neither of which fully meets the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services regulation 2002. In addition, there is positive practice of foster care agreements being used when emergency placements are made with carers who are not approved. However, these are not updated once approval has been achieved.

All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker. This is a positive development from the previous inspection.

Evidence provided to the inspectors indicated improvement with regard to the frequency of supervisory visits undertaken in comparison to the previous inspection outcomes. However, there remains an inconsistency with regards to the frequency of such visits required by the fostering service. Timescales for visits ranged from monthly, or more frequent if required, to a gap of four months. The amount of support available to foster carers must be clearly articulated in the foster care agreement and implemented in practice.

Supervisory visits have a clear purpose and provide for opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work. Such visits are recorded and the form recently developed provides a positive opportunity to ensure that all aspects of a child's care and the work of the foster carer are monitored. Evidence of records seen indicates that both carers are not routinely seen during supervision. The requirement for unannounced visits has been developed and implemented in practice.

The provision of a handbook for foster carers remains in draft form. This requires implementation. Information provided within the draft handbook represents examples of good practice with regard to enabling foster carers to ensure that they have all information required to meet the needs of the child/ren placed with them. Supervising social workers must ensure that each carer accepts, understands and operates within all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service.

Information regarding complaints is available to foster carers. Complaints and representations are monitored and recorded centrally. Although improvements have been made with regard to the information available within the fostering service itself, information was incomplete and did not allow for evaluation of complaint outcomes to inform the future provision of services.

Information regarding the procedures to deal with investigations is comprehensively included within the draft handbook. This is also covered within the training programme provided for carers. As noted, the provision of independent support workers, during an investigation, is now available for foster carers. Records about allegations are presently maintained in electronic form and are monitored by the senior social worker. Written evidence provided to the inspection indicated that these records were incomplete.

A clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a care should be removed from the foster carer register, must be developed.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

A significant development within the fostering service has been the implementation of a comprehensive training programme for foster carers. This directly relates to a new skills matrix for foster carers, which in turn links to a payment for skills allowance scheme.

Pre-approval training is available for prospective foster carers. The provision of this training is being reviewed by the fostering team to ensure that all aspects of training identified within the national minimum standards are incorporated. Post approval all carers are expected to complete core skills training. Further training is then linked to carers needs and where applicable, their progression through the skills matrix /banding system.

Outstanding requirements relate to the need for safe caring to be provided to all members of the foster household and for attention to be given to the training needs of specific groups, such as male carers, or foster carers own children. In addition, it is required where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, that both successfully complete all training. Such developments clearly present ongoing challenges for the provision of training for foster carers. However, evidence provided to the inspectors indicated that these matters are already being considered and that the development of the training programme remains a dynamic process to ensure that all requirements for training are met.

This has involved a considerable shift of focus within the fostering service and all those involved are to be commended for its introduction. Whilst it is clear that some confusion remains regarding the introduction of the new system, it provides a solid foundation from which to continue to develop the foster care services provided for looked after children.

Evidence from annual reviews indicates that an appraisal of training and development needs is undertaken and is documented in the review report.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Children's case records are not held within the fostering service. They are held and maintained within the local authority childcare teams. Case records were inspected during the course of the inspection. Generally, the inspectors were able to establish from the files the current care planning for the young person via statutory review information and evidence of information from the commissioning panel. However, inconsistencies of recording, filing systems and recording formats undermined the effectiveness of the case records. Specific feedback has been provided, to managers of the service, outlining concerns raised regarding these issues.

The fostering service has developed and implemented a child placement file, which is held and maintained by foster carers. This is a new system and is aimed at enabling carers to ensure that they have comprehensive information on children placed with them and at standardising practice of record keeping and recording amongst carers. Guidance seen with regard to these files outlines the requirement for safe and secure storage of information and also provides clear guidelines regarding access to information. This is noted to be positive and proactive progress with regards to the development of case record for children and young people. Evidence provided indicates that carers are encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia to assist children and young people to make sense of their history. Life story work training further backs up this practice for carers.

Developments are ongoing with regard to agency placements to ensure the effective integration of the information held in the agency case files and those of the responsible authority.

A record, in the form of a register, for children's looked after placements is maintained in electronic form and meets the requirements of schedule 2.

Concerns have been raised via file audits and information from foster carers and young people with regard to the frequency of social worker visits falling short of that required by regulation. Limited evidence was available on the files seen to indicate that frequency of such visits are monitored regularly or systematically with regard to both immediate and longer term placements. Whilst this lies outside the direct remit of the fostering service, it is considered to be a significant practice issue, which has been brought to the attention of those responsible for Children's services.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)			
The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	2
<p>Foster carer files are securely maintained within the fostering service and records regarding staff, carers, complaints and allegations are held separately as recommended by NMS 25.2. Records regarding complaints are currently held within the service but action must be undertaken to ensure that these are securely and confidentially stored. File audits indicated that information regarding complaints and allegations was recorded on the relevant files for carers. However, this information was often not comprehensive or consistently filed and it was difficult to establish details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken. In addition, inconsistent information is held within foster carer files with regard to a record of each placement made.</p> <p>In accordance with NMS 25.8, it is important that those responsible for the fostering service ensure that panel members and specialist advisors know the procedure on storing and managing confidential information.</p> <p>A register of foster carers is electronically maintained and details information outlined within regulation 31(2). However, in accordance with regulation 31(3) each local authority shall enter into its register of foster carers, information pertaining to immediate placements of children with a person who is not approved as foster carers.</p> <p>Evidence seen indicated that foster carers have been provided with clear guidelines regarding children and young people accessing the newly developed children's placement file. However, no evidence was seen of foster carers being encouraged to access their own files, make additions/comments and to record personal statements, including any dissent. This requires review.</p> <p>Evidence of recruitment checks and references for staff is generally held centrally, although some information was also held within the fostering service. This was sometimes duplicate information but also some original information is held. The system with regard information held on personnel files, both locally and centrally, would benefit from review and consistent implementation.</p> <p>Evidence of written evidence seen was generally legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and distinguished between fact, opinion and third party information. Confidential information, specifically with regard to references, was often found in the main body of the file as opposed to the confidential section. A system for monitoring the quality and adequacy of files is available to the fostering service but the inspectors were advised that its effective implementation has been impeded by the managerial arrangements over the previous months. It is recommended that this be reinstated at the earliest opportunity.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			168
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			122
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			129
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			18
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			18
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	104.79	Maximum £	305

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
The fostering service's premises are an identifiable office that staff and others have access to during normal working hours. The premises are shared with the adoption and leaving care services, which are operated from within separate parts of the building. The layout of the building does not allow for the provision of a public waiting area and information provided to the inspectors and observation by them, indicates that this can cause difficulties with regard to security and confidentiality of information when visitors or service users visit the premises. It is important that strategies are in place to manage such instances and that these are well known by all who use and work within the building. The premises have facilities for the secure retention of records and appropriate measures have been taken to safeguard IT systems. Room for meetings is at a premium and requires careful planning and booking arrangements. A large meeting room is available on the first floor of the building.	2

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

This standard does not apply to Local Authority fostering services.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

This standard does not apply to Local Authority fostering services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Since the previous announce inspection, significant developments and changes have been implemented with regard to allowances and agreed expenses. Fostering allowances have been increased and are now in line with those recommended by the fostering network. In addition, a payment for skills system has been introduced and recently implemented.

This has required an immense amount of work on behalf of all involved with the fostering service. Information provided by carers indicates that the payments for skills scheme, and the associated training, have generally been well received. Some confusion remains for both staff and carers, regarding the new allowance system. Concerns were also raised that the impact of implementation and the timescale for the review of the initial banding, which is due for completion by the end of March 2004, has detracted from other areas of practice, notably the consistent and regular support of carers.

The inspectors acknowledged that work is ongoing to ensure the effective implementation, review and monitoring of the system.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

The fostering service operates one fostering panel, which was directly observed during the course of this inspection. An interview was also undertaken with the panel chair.

Whilst panel members are provided with the BAAF booklet regarding fostering panels, service specific policies and procedures regarding the functions and decision-making responsibilities of the panel must be developed. In line with NMS 30.2 and 30.3, this information should include written procedures to cover decision-making when all panel members are not in agreement and which determine matters pertaining to the suitability of foster panel members. The inspector was informed that such procedures are in the process of being developed and that a training workshop for all panel members is planned for March 2004.

Criminal records bureau checks are in the process of being undertaken for all panel members. It is recommended as good practice that panel members do not take up their place on the panel until the outcome of their CRB check is known.

Medical expertise is available to the fostering panel and observations indicated that this is constructively considered during the panel discussions regarding approval. Discussion with the medical advisor highlighted that the nature of the application is not made clear when medical information is received. This is deemed to be beneficial to highlight which applications apply to mainstream carers and which to family and friends carers. It is recommended that this information be provided to the medical advisor to further underpin the service's approach to promoting family and friends as potential carers for looked after children. Discussions with the medical advisor and fostering service staff highlighted the potential benefits, in terms of service delivery, of increased liaison and consultation between the medical advisor and the fostering service.

Panel membership has been reviewed and amendments made in line with the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Education and health representatives are included in panel membership as independent members and two elected members have recently become panel members. Gaps remain with regard to the inclusion of one person who is, or within the previous two years has been, a foster carer for a fostering service provider other than the one whose fostering panel is being established. In addition, a vice chair must be appointed. In line with standard 30.9, panel membership would benefit from the inclusion of a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers.

Information provided during the inspection indicates a gap in practice with regard foster carers who wish to voluntarily cease fostering. Written notice from the foster carer must be received, whereupon approval is terminated with effect from 28 days from the date on which notice is received by the fostering service.

Fostering panels are required to provide a quality assurance function in relation to the

assessment process. Information provided during the inspection and observation of the panel indicates that the quality assurance function of the panel is implemented in practice. Feedback is verbally provided to the fostering service managers via the panel chair and the panel chair further advised that discussion are also undertaken regarding the placement types available as compared to children's needs and requirements. However, no written evidence of the quality assurance role of the panel is provided. This is recommended. The role of the panel and panel membership, with regard to the outstanding service level agreement with the Barnardos fostering service, must be reviewed.

In the previous announced inspection of the fostering service in February/March 2003, it was noted that previous foster panels had not always been quorate, inline with the requirements of regulation 25. Any recommendations made by a non-quorate panel are deemed to be invalid and should therefore be reconsidered. The need for this requirement was highlighted at the previous inspection, but no evidence of action taken to address this issue was presented to the inspectors. It is acknowledged that retrospective action is likely to fall short of a quorate panel reconsidering all of the cases on which recommendations were made, as this may involve a vast amount of work and be difficult to achieve. However, it is imperative that these panel meetings are identified and that action is undertaken to ensure that all recommendations and approvals have been reviewed via the annual review process.

All annual reviews of foster carers are presented to the fostering panel. This is noted to be commendable practice.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The short-term break service for children with disabilities is operated via a service level agreement with Barnardos. This scheme was not inspected on this occasion, as Barnardos is subject to its own separate inspection as a fostering service provider. However, the inspection team was informed that the current service level agreement is under review, in line with developments within the service. Upon completion, a copy of the service level agreement must be supplied to the NCSC. The fostering service also provides a respite, foster care scheme.

No evidence of dedicated policies and procedures regarding short-breaks was available for inspection. From evidence available, it is difficult to establish whether policy and practice reflects the requirement that, where applicable, birth parents should remain central to the promotion of health and educational needs.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Inspection activity and information received indicates that mechanisms exist for encouraging family and friends to be considered as foster carers. 17 family and friends foster carer households were approved at the time of the inspection. It is acknowledged that the fostering service has developed the role of a kinship worker and that developments have taken place with regard to establishing the context and number of family and friends carers. This work remains ongoing but has been hindered by staff shortages within the service and the requirement for the 'kinship' worker to undertake the support of mainstream carers.

Evidence provided to the inspectors outlined that the length of time between placement and approval of family and friends foster carers was often significantly greater than the required 6 weeks. One example of evidence seen indicated that a relative carer had been waiting 15 months for a foster carer assessment to be completed.

Information provided during the inspection indicated that there are significant inconsistencies with regard to the assessment, support, training and information afforded to family and friends carers.

Records inspected fell significantly short of the requirements for information as identified within regulation 30. In addition, no evidence of annual reviews for family and friends carers was provided or noted during the inspection of records.

It is the considered opinion of the inspectors that the issues highlighted with regards to shortfalls in practice, raise serious concerns regarding the safeguarding of children's welfare.

PART C**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY****(where applicable)**

Not applicable

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

Action taken by the NCSC in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

NO

Note:

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

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

D.3.1 I, Jack Blackmore of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above dates and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name	_____
Signature	_____
Designation	_____
Date	_____