



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Newcastle Fostering Service

Social Services

Civic Centre

Barras Bridge

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tyne & Wear

NE1 8PA

9th December 2003

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

Newcastle Fostering Service

Address

Social Services, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, NE1 8PA

Local Authority Manager

Ruth Rogan

Tel No:

0191 211 6307

Address

Social Services, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, NE1 8PA

Fax No:

Email Address

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 ?

NO

Date of last inspection

17/2/03

Date of Inspection Visit		9th December 2003	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Dennis Bradley	074426
Name of Inspector	2	Glynis Gaffney	074449
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
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.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

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Part D: Provider's Response

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D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

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 Newcastle 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.
Newcastle Fostering Service is based at the Shieldfield Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne. The Service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs including long term foster care and short-term placements for teenagers. The Service also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a Shared Care Scheme. At the time of the inspection visit the Service was supporting approximately 261 foster placements. The Service operates with a staff team of 21 people including the manager and administrative support staff. The Service also employs an independent Foster Carer Training Coordinator.

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.)

This is the report of an announced inspection.

The purpose of the inspections is

- a) to assess progress made towards meeting requirements and recommendations (where applicable) from the previous inspection.
- b) To assess the service against the National Minimum Standards.

It was evident that a lot of work had been carried out to develop the Fostering Service since the last inspection. Where many of the Standards were not fully met this was because the policies and procedures of the Service needed to be reviewed to meet the Standards. The timescale for action in relation to the requirement detailed in this report are advisory timescales.

Statement of Purpose

This Standard was almost met

The Fostering Service has a written Statement of Purpose. A draft Children's Guide had been prepared and arrangements had been made to consult children in foster care about its design and content.

Fitness to Carry on or Manage a Fostering Service.

Both of these standards were met.

The Manager of the Fostering Service has significant experience of working with children at a senior level and has a Diploma in Social Work. Arrangements had been put in place to have police checks on staff renewed every three years.

Management of the Fostering Service

One of these standards was met and the other was nearly met.

Arrangements were in place to monitor the operation of the Service. Staff interviewed were clear about their roles and lines of accountability. The Fostering Service Procedures need to be revised to accurately reflect the organisation of the Service.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

6 of these 9 standards were almost met and 2 were fully met.

The assessment process for new foster carers is comprehensive and includes a Health and Safety audit. There was evidence that the specific needs of children and young people are given consideration when foster placements are arranged, although decision-making can also be affected by the limited availability of placements. There was evidence that young people were consulted about their care plans and that arrangements were in place to enable young people to voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. Foster carers receive training about child protection and safe caring as part of the assessment process. Each foster carer should prepare a 'safe caring policy' for their household. The Council was taking action to improve the that is available to young people and carers where young

people in foster care refuse to attend, or are excluded from, school. Where appropriate the Fostering Service supports children and young people in foster care to maintain and develop family contacts. Training was available for foster carers regarding their role and responsibilities in preparing young people for independent living. The guidance for carers regarding health care should be developed to meet Standard 12.6.

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

6 of these 9 standards were nearly met and 3 were fully met.

The Council's recruitment and selection procedures need to be reviewed. A formal system of supervision and appraisal was in place for all social work staff. A system was in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers – including family and friends carers. Foster carers are provided with information regarding all the relevant policies, procedures and guidance concerning the Service and this was being reviewed. Draft procedures were in place covering the assessment, approval and review of foster carers and in general these were implemented effectively. All foster carers are required to attend a course of training prior to their approval – although with family and friend carers this can be provided on an individual basis. All foster carers have access to a programme of post approval training. The Foster Carer Agreement needed to be revised.

Records

Both of these standards were nearly met.

There were written policies regarding case recording and what information should be held on a child's file but no guidance regarding what information should be held by the foster carer. Some of the children's files and foster carer files did not include the appropriate LAC documentation and there were delays in foster carers receiving appropriate documentation. Foster carers confirmed that they knew why a child is placed with them and the basis for the placement.

Fitness of Premises for use as a Fostering Service

This standard was met.

The premises were adequate for the operation of the Service. Staff have access to quiet rooms in the Civic Centre for report writing.

Financial Requirements

2 of these standards were not applicable and the third was nearly met.

Arrangements were in place to review the Schemes of Allowances to fee paid and non-fee paid carers. The Finance Officer was looking at ways to ensure prompt payment to carers.

Fostering Panels

This standard was not met in full.

The Fostering Service Panel was observed to carry out its quality assurance role in relation to the assessment and review of foster carers. The Panel's policies and procedures should be reviewed.

Short Term Breaks

This standard was met.

The Short Break Scheme for Children with Disabilities has its own policies and procedures in respect of meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Family and Friends as Carers

This standard was nearly met.

The Service is sensitive to the pre-existing relationships when assessing and approving

family and friends as carers. There were delays in the assessment of some family and friend carers. Arrangements had been put in place to ensure that the support and training needs of these carers are assessed and met in the same way as for other foster carers.

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:

YES

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:

NO

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	34	FS8	Ensure that a Placement Agreement is completed in respect of each young person and that a copy is kept on his or her file.	September 2003
2	28	FS9	The Foster Carer Agreement must include all the information set out in Regulation 28 and Schedule 5, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and specifically require foster carers to comply with the fostering services policies relating to child protection, bullying and behaviour management.	September 2003
3	15	FS12	Ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers are provided with appropriate information in respect of a child's health care needs at the outset of a placement; • The relevant documentation regarding the health care history and needs of each child is completed; • Appropriate action is taken to address the health care needs of each child. 	

4	16	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that foster parents are provided with such information and assistance as may be necessary to enable them to meet the educational needs of children placed with them.</p> <p>Ensure that the education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, is sufficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have.</p>	
5	5,7 & 20	FS15	<p>All staff records must contain all of the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations. Ensure Compliance with Standards 15.3 and 15.4.</p>	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

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	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Dennis Bradley	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Glynis Gaffney	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Fiona Millns	Signature	_____
Date	09 December 2003		

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	34 & 38	FS8	<p>The Provider and Manager must ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Placement Agreement is completed in respect of each young person and that a copy is kept on his or her file; • When placements are made outside of the age, numbers and categories for which the foster carer has been approved, the following measures have been put in place: the carer has been exempted from their categories of approval prior to the commencement of the placement, except in the case of emergency placements; that the initial exemption is referred to the next panel meeting for approval; that a record is maintained on the carers' files confirming that the initial exemption has been granted and when. 	30/06/04
2	28	FS9	The Foster Carer Agreement must include all the information set out in Regulation 28, Schedule 5, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and specifically require foster carers to comply with the fostering services policies relating to child protection, bullying and behaviour management.	30/06/04

3	15	FS12	<p>Ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers are provided with appropriate information in respect of a child's health care needs at the outset of a placement; • The relevant documentation regarding the health care history and needs of each child is completed; • Appropriate action is taken to address the health care needs of each child. 	30/06/04
4	16	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster parents are provided with such information and assistance as may be necessary to enable them to meet the educational needs of children placed with them; • Ensure that the education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, is sufficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have; • Ensure that a satisfactory procedure is in place for monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. 	30/09/04
5	5,7 & 20	FS15	All staff personnel records must contain the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations. Ensure Compliance with Standards 15.3 and 15.4.	30/07/04
6	22	FS25	Prepare and implement a written policy and procedural guidance for staff for the keeping and retention of case files ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.	30/07/04

7	24,25 & 26	FS30	<p>Take action to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement the Service's draft policy in respect of the Fostering Panel to ensure that the constitution and operation of the Panel complies with Regulations 24, 25 and 26 of the Fostering Services Regulations; Ensure that Fostering Panel meetings are quorate and include a minimum of 2 independent members. 	<p>30/07/04</p> <p>On receipt of this report</p>
8	38	FS32	Review the arrangements for assessing and approving family and friend carers to ensure that Regulation 38 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 is complied with.	30/08/04

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	The Provider and Manager should arrange for the recently drafted Children's Guide to be issued. The Guide should be available in a range of different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.
2	FS4	The Provider and Manager should make arrangements for the integration of the information systems between the team responsible for supporting foster carers and the team responsible for arranging the placement of children.
3	FS5	<p>The Provider and Manager should ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Foster Care Procedures are amended to more accurately reflect the way in which the Service; A person is appointed within the Fostering Team to assume managerial responsibility for the Service in the Manager's absence.
4	FS6	<p>Action should be taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend the Foster Care Handbook to include reference to the Service's Health and Safety Policy and written guidelines on the health and safety responsibilities of carers; Ensure that where foster carers receive respite care, this has been arranged in consultation with the placing social workers and support workers.

5	FS7	<p>Action should be taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend the Foster Care Handbook to include a specific policy on valuing diversity that covers the areas specified under Standard 7. • Ensure that the information provided to carers clearly sets out the Service's expectations of carers in respect of providing each child with encouragement and equal access to opportunities to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies.
6	FS8	<p>The Manager should ensure that where the Panel makes recommendations about the maximum number of placements that a particular carer should have and this is not adhered to, prompt arrangements should be put in place to inform the Panel of this decision and the reasons for it.</p> <p>The Provider and Manager should ensure that all childrens' social workers are familiar with, and adhere to, the Fostering Service's Protocols regarding the arrangement of foster placements for children and Young People.</p>
7	FS9	<p>The Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that each foster carer prepares, in collaboration with their support worker (or assessor in the case of prospective carers), a Safe Caring Policy for their household. The Policy drawn up should be shared with the placing social worker at the commencement of the placement. It is also recommended that the placing social worker's agreement with the policy is recorded in the Placement Agreement; • Develop the guidance on bullying in the Foster Care Handbook to include procedures covering how to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and how to help foster carers cope with bullying; • Review the Service's policy on the use of restraint, as well as the training provided to carers, to ensure that they comply with the recent guidance on the use of physical intervention issued by the Department of Health.
8	FS11	<p>The Provider should ensure that childrens' social workers carry out regular 'boarding out' visits in line with the Council's policy.</p>
9	FS12	<p>Action should be taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the guidance on health care in the Foster carer Handbook to cover the areas specified in Standard 12.6; • Ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for foster carers to receive relevant information regarding the child/young person's health care needs at the onset of the placement or, as soon as is possible, after the placement commences; • Develop the guidance for carers regarding health care to cover all of those areas referred to under Standard 12.6.

10	FS13	Develop a specific policy relating to young people's education. The policy should be included in the foster carers' handbook.
11	FS14	The Manager should prepare written guidance for foster carers setting out what is expected of them in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. Carers should be provided with appropriate training.
12	FS15	The Provider and Manager should review the Service's recruitment and selection policies and procedures to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
13	FS16	<p>The Provider and Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the draft procedures for the assessment, approval and review of carers to reflect the re-organisation of the Service; • Ensure that the protocol regarding decision making in respect of arranging placements is incorporated into the Service's procedures.
14	FS17	<p>The Provider and Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the draft policy and procedures in relation to the support of foster carers; • Review the draft guidance regarding the assessment of prospective carers to ensure that it covers Standard 17.6; • Introduce a workload management system and review staffing levels within the Fostering Service; • Revise the draft guidance 'Support of foster carers' to reflect the current organisation of the Service; • Revise the guidance regarding the assessment of foster carers to ensure that it covers Standard 17.6
15	FS18	<p>The Provider and Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the draft Representations Policy for carers to clarify the rights of prospective carers to appeal against decisions; • Prepare a Whistleblowing Policy for inclusion in the Foster Care Handbook; • Carry out a review of the 'out of hours' support service provided to foster carers; • Prepare a comprehensive Health and Safety Policy for carers, staff and children/young people
16	FS22	<p>The Provider and Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide written guidance to children and young people regarding how the Service will investigate allegations; • Carry out an unannounced visit to foster carers at least annually. It is also recommended that a protocol be developed in relation to unannounced visits and what they should include.

17	FS23	The Provider and Manager should develop the Foster Carer Agreement to clarify the Service's expectations regarding foster carers attending training. Consideration should be given to providing crèche facilities to facilitate the attendance at training events.
18	FS25FS24	<p>The Provider and Manager should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that childrens' case files contain the relevant documentation and that foster carers are provided with the relevant documentation in relation to the child/young person placed with them; • Ensure foster carer files contain all the relevant LAC documentation relating to the children currently placed with them and improve the organisation of these files – including the provision of separate sections for allegations and complaints. • Ensure that the Service's central record on complaints is kept up to date; • Consider reviewing the Council's protocol regarding 'Looked After Children' reviews, case conferences and core team meetings to ensure that fostering service workers are invited to attend. Foster carers should be consulted regarding the timing of these meetings.
19	FS29	Put in place arrangements to ensure prompt payments to foster carers.
20	FS30	<p>Review the Fostering Panel procedures to ensure that arrangements are in place for Panel members and advisors to receive relevant information, such as medical reports, prior to the date of the Panel.</p> <p>Develop the Fostering Panel policy and procedures clearly identify how the Panel can exercise its quality assurance function in relation to assessments and reviews as well as its role in monitoring the range and type of carers available in comparison with the needs of children.</p>

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent

11

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)

NO

- Local Foster Care Association

NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements

YES

- Interview with children

YES

- Interview with foster carers

YES

- Interview with agency staff

YES

- Contact with parents

NO

- 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

9/12/03

Time of Inspection

9.30

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

77

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?

2

A Statement of Purpose was in place. The Statement was informative, easy to understand and well written. The Manager confirmed that the elected members of the Council had approved the Statement. A draft Children's Guide had been prepared and arrangements were in place to consult children and young people in foster care regarding its design and content. Written guidance on how to make a complaint has been provided to all foster children over 8 years of age.

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

It was evident during the inspection that work had, and was being, carried out by the Manager and his team to develop the Service and to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The Service's Manager has the following professional qualifications: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work; Post Qualifying Social Work Award; Post Qualifying Child Care Award and a Post Graduate Post Qualifying Child Care Award. The Manager has significantly more than the required length of experience of management and of working with children and, during the inspection, demonstrated an insightful knowledge of the operation of the Service and an open awareness of its strengths and areas for development. The Manager had commenced a course leading to the award of the Post Graduate Diploma in Management Studies.

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?

3

Evidence examined during the inspection showed that the organisation and Manager were suitable to run a fostering service. It was confirmed that arrangements are in place to ensure that telephone enquiries will be made to follow up written references in respect of all staff prior to their appointment. There was evidence that arrangements were in place to have police checks renewed every three years for staff working in the fostering service.

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?

3

There was evidence that:

- The Manager of the Fostering Service had a clear understanding of the strengths of the service and the areas that required development and gave a priority to monitoring and controlling its activities and the quality of its performance;
- Arrangements were in place for the formal integration of information systems between the Fostering Service and the Placements Team to take place;
- Action had been taken to build the organisational and social identity of the staff team. Social work staff had been allocated to either the Assessment Team or the Support Team – although during their induction they work in both teams;
- Clearer roles and lines of communication and accountability had been established between the Managers of the Fostering Service and the Shared Care Scheme and within the Fostering Service;
- Procedures were in place to monitor financial arrangements;
- Information was available about levels of payments to foster carers. Consultation with carers and other stakeholders was taking place prior to the introduction of a new scheme of payments.

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

2

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.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

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.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

There was evidence that:

- Measures were in place to monitor and develop the quality and effectiveness of the work carried out by the Service;
- The Manager had a job description setting out his duties and responsibilities. However, at the time of the inspection the role and responsibilities of the Manager of the Service were being reviewed;
- Although clear arrangements were in place in respect of managerial responsibility for the Service in the Manager's absence, these arrangements were being reviewed;
- Arrangements were in place to amend the Foster Care Procedures to more accurately reflect the way in which the Service is organised following its re-organisation.

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

No problems were noted in respect of the standard of accommodation in the homes of those foster carers who were visited. However, the Inspector was advised that sometimes, because of the shortage of available placements, children might be provided with a "put me up" bed or mattress in the living room for one or two nights in order to provide respite care to carers. These placements are sometimes arranged informally between foster carers. This practice is not consistent with the Service's own draft policy on providing 'a Safe and Positive Environment' which states that "The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there...".

Foster carers' homes are checked as part of their annual review and a health and safety checklist is completed. The checklist includes a section on the cars owned/used by the carer. A health and safety check is also carried out in respect of the households of all new applicants to fostering.

The Foster Care Handbook should be developed to include reference to the Service's Health and Safety Policy and written guidelines on the health and safety responsibilities of carers. Although the pre-approval training for carers includes four sessions on Safe Caring this should be developed to include Health and Safety training.

All of the carers who were visited in their own homes made the Inspectors feel welcome and cooperated with the inspection process.

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 Foster Care Handbook contains sections on Anti-Racism and Culture, Beliefs and Religion. This should be developed to include a specific policy on valuing diversity that covers the areas specified under Standard 7.

The format used to assess prospective foster carers includes a section on valuing diversity and a section on the carer's capacity to parent a child whose cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic needs may be different to their own.

Foster carers and Fostering Service staff confirmed that, where possible, matching considerations include deliberations concerning the way in which the specific needs of the children and young people could be met. This was also observed during the inspection.

The Action Plan for the Service includes a commitment to increase the number of black and ethnic minority carers. Two black social workers have been recruited to the Fostering Service team who focus on the recruitment, assessment and support of black ethnic minority foster carers.

The preparation training for new carers includes a section on 'Discrimination and Children's Rights' and the post approval training includes a session on 'Valuing Diversity'. The training programme was being reviewed to ensure that valuing diversity and promoting equality are central to, and underpin, the training provided to foster carers.

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

There was evidence that:

- Efforts are made to ensure a suitable match between a young person and a foster placement;
- Suitable matching was more evident in the planning of long-term placements and placements with carers in the Shared Care Scheme;
- Foster carers and their supervising social workers are involved in the matching process – although one carer commented that with one placement there had been no discussion and the child was simply dropped off at their house.

However, there was also evidence that:

- A shortage of foster placements continued to restrict the opportunities available to ensure suitable matches, particularly in relation to short term and emergency placements. This meant that the matching process was sometimes a secondary consideration because of the need to arrange a placement in an emergency. The recruitment of new carers had been given a high priority in the Service's Action Plan. The number of carers in the Shared Care scheme was falling and a temporary recruitment/assessment worker was being recruited to try to address this;
- A shortage of long-term placements, particularly for adolescents, meant that children could still be placed in short term placements for significant periods of time until a suitable long-term placement was identified;
- Some foster placements were made outside of the categories and numbers of children for which the carers were approved. (There was evidence that one carer occasionally had more than 5 young people placed with them.) In such cases, a procedure was in place to exempt carers from their conditions of approval. It was noted that this had been developed to ensure, where possible, the involvement of the relevant field social workers and family placement social worker in the decision-making regarding such placements. However, records were not always available on the carers' files that the initial exemptions had been agreed. In one case, a placement appeared to have been made without an exemption being granted. There were also delays in the applications for exemptions going to the Fostering Panel – in one case, over three months;
- It was of concern to note that placements continued to be made with one foster carer when it had been agreed by the Fostering Panel that the foster carer would receive no more placements for a period of time, in order to enable children already placed to settle

and become established in the placement. It was also a matter of concern that one of these placements had been arranged by the young person's social worker without the knowledge and agreement of the foster carer's supervising social worker or the Placements Team;

- When placements are made by social workers in the Emergency Duty Team they do not inform placements or the supporting social worker instead it is seen as the responsibility of the child's social worker. In one case following an emergency placement the support worker and placements staff only found out when the carer informed them. It is recommended that a protocol be put in place regarding the notification of relevant professionals;
- Foster carers did not always get sufficient information about the young person before their placement. The introduction of a new Placement Request Format should lead to carers receiving the basic information provided to the Placements Section. Some carers in the Shared Care Scheme felt that they were not provided with sufficient information about children and their families. The Manager of the Scheme advised that this was being addressed.

A new foster placement agreement format had been prepared. When used this should ensure that the agreements include reference to the elements of matching taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and any actions required to compensate for any gaps. In respect of two trans-racial placements there was no evidence that the carers had received additional training or support. However, plans were in place to use newly recruited black ethnic minority carers to provide such support to other carers, where appropriate. Post approval training for carers now also includes a course concerned with responding to the needs of black and ethnic minority children.

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?

2

There was evidence that:

- Foster carers receive training about child protection issues and safe caring as part of the assessment process;
- The Foster Carer Agreement used by the Service was being developed to clearly set out the expectation that foster carers comply with the Service's policies on child protection, bullying and measures of control;
- The post approval training for carers did not include a specific course on Child Protection although refresher training is provided in Safe Caring. There is also a course on recognising and dealing with bullying;
- Carers are provided with a copy of the Service's 'Working together to Protect Children' procedures;
- Foster carers did not have their own safe caring policy for their household.

The Manager confirmed that the section on bullying in the Foster Care Handbook was being developed to include a procedure covering all the areas specified in Standard 9.6. Management systems were in place to collate information relating to child abuse or neglect.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

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?****3**

Foster carers receive written guidance regarding supporting foster children to maintain and, where appropriate develop, their family contacts and this is also covered in the preparatory training.

There was evidence that, particularly in respect of emergency placements, contact arrangements were not always clarified and agreed at the outset of a placement. However, where such arrangements had been agreed and recorded, the foster carers interviewed were aware of this information and were complying with it.

The newly developed foster placement agreement format should ensure that, when it is completed, the specific arrangements for contact with family as specified in Standard 10.7 and Regulation 34 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, will be recorded. This format had not been used in respect of the sample of placements case tracked by the inspectors.

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?****2**

The preparatory training for carers emphasises the need to listen to the views of children and young people. Post approval training includes the course 'Listen To Me' which focuses on listening to children.

Some of the young people attended their reviews and were visited on a regular basis by their social worker – others were visited less regularly and one foster carer advised that she did not know who the social worker was for one of the children in her care. There was evidence that young people's opinions were sought and, where possible, acted on. However, discussion with some foster carers indicated that the views of children and young people were not always sought regarding placements arranged to provide foster carers with periods of respite. Matching considerations were also less evident in such placements.

The Authority has a Children's Listening Officer and action had been taken to issue every child aged over 8 years with a copy of the Council's revised Complaints Procedure for children and young people. In addition, the Council was working in partnership with the Children's Society to promote and increase the involvement of foster children in decisions about the overall running of the Fostering Service. The Children's Society had recently carried out a survey of a children and young people in foster care and a report was being prepared at the time of the inspection.

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?****2**

There was evidence that:

- The health care needs of children and young people were given consideration when placements were arranged and at formal reviews of the placements;
- The preparatory training for foster carers includes guidance regarding the health issues that arise for 'looked after' children;
- Post approval training for carers includes courses on Sexuality and Sexual Health and First Aid – 48 carers had undertaken training in first aid during the previous 12 months. (One foster carer in the Short Break Service said they had to arrange their own first aid training);
- Some foster carers received very little information about the child being placed with them at the outset of the placement. The introduction of a new placement agreement format should ensure that they receive the necessary information more quickly.

With one exception those foster carers interviewed were able to demonstrate their awareness of the health needs of the young people placed with them and the action taken to address these needs. However, one foster carer felt that information about the health care needs of one young person had not been shared with them. In addition, a request for a mental health assessment to be undertaken in respect of this young person had been turned down because they were placed with carers who did not live in Newcastle. Over three months after being placed with the carers this young person had not been allocated a social worker.

The Manager confirmed that the guidance for carers regarding health care was being developed to cover all the areas specified in Standard 12.6.

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**

New carers receive training regarding the educational needs of looked after children and the resources available to help address these. Action was also being taken to update experienced carers about such resources – this includes the preparation of written guidance by the Educational Achievement Team similar to that provided to social workers. This should address the concern raised by the FUN Committee that foster carers are not aware of the resources and support that are available. Post approval training includes 'Fostering Good Education' but none of the carers chosen to case track had attended this course.

The Foster Care Handbook contains useful guidance on the educational needs of children in foster care. It is recommended that this be developed to include information about Personal Educational Plans, the Council's policy on exclusions, the maintenance of a record of school attainment and the arrangements for purchasing equipment and uniforms.

There was evidence that the Education Directorate and Social Services Directorate of the

Council were working together to actively promote the education of looked after children. Members of the Fostering Under Newcastle Committee meet regularly with the Manager of the Educational achievement Team. The Manager of the Fostering Service attends the Health and Education group that was set up to ensure that looked after children receive the services they need.

A protocol was in place regarding the action to be taken when children are formally excluded from school – including a review of their Personal Educational Plan (PEP) by the carer, social worker, school and child. These plans should clearly identify the responsibilities of the each party in relation to the education of the child. Foster carers had also been provided with written guidance concerning the Council's corporate policy on excluded children.

Although the members of the FUN Committee conceded that there had been some improvement regarding the numbers of children excluded from school they remained concerned about the level of informal exclusions and the limited educational support provided to children who are excluded.

There was evidence that one young person who had, earlier in the year, been excluded for over 3 months only received 3 hours of educational support a week. Another young person although not formally excluded was only attending school two mornings a week. One young person had no school placement after having been placed with carers for over 3 months

Arrangements are in place for foster carers to notify the Manager of the Educational Achievement Team of any child excluded from school, whether formally or informally. The Manager advised that, although informal exclusions remained an issue, on the basis of the information provided by foster carers, the level of informal exclusions was not as high as was being indicated by FUN.

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?

3

The Service's Statement of Purpose states that it will work with the Leaving Care Team to support young people making the transition from foster care to independent living. However, Pathway Plans were not in place for three young people in the sample of records examined.

The Foster Carer Training Schedule for 2003 included training on 'Preparing for Adult Life' and the Leaving Care Team has also provided a course of training to foster carers.

There was evidence from discussion with foster carers that they were aware of the need to provide the children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.

The Manager advised that written guidance was being developed in consultation with the Leaving Care Team setting out what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living.

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?

2

The Authority has clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff. The Manager confirmed that these were being reviewed to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

A sample of staff files was examined and it was noted that some did not contain all the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. There was evidence that Criminal Records Bureau checks had been carried out for the newly appointed social work staff and the administrative staff. Arrangements had been made to renew police checks on staff and foster carers every three years.

There was evidence that the social work staff employed by the Service were appropriately qualified. Those social workers interviewed demonstrated their knowledge of foster care and a sound understanding of their role.

Total number of staff of the agency:

23

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

1

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?

2

A clear management structure was in place within the Fostering Service Team although this was not reflected in some of the draft procedures for the Service. Social work staff work in either the Assessment or the Support Teams – although new staff get experience of working in both teams prior to specialising. The draft procedures regarding the assessment, approval and review of carers need to be revised to accurately reflect the current organisation of the Fostering Service. The Action Plan for the Service aims to ensure that any enquiries from prospective carers will be responded to within 24 hours and that these will be followed up by personal contact within 14 days. A competency based assessment format has been introduced as part of the assessment of prospective foster carers.

Since the last inspection, the responsibilities and lines of accountability of the Manager of this Service and those of the Manager of the Shared Care Service have been clarified. Staff

in the Placements Team confirmed a protocol had recently been agreed regarding situations where there may be disagreement about the appropriateness of a proposed placement between staff in the Placements team and staff in the Support Team. This needs to be incorporated into the Service's policies and procedures. Staff responsible for undertaking the annual reviews of foster carers are no longer part of the Placements Team. Annual reviews are now being carried out in respect of carers in the Short Break Scheme and action had been taken to address a backlog of annual reviews.

Staff interviewed said that there was an appropriate level of level of administrative and clerical support. The Service now has a Fostering Panel Administrator and it was noted that the minutes of Panel meetings were being typed and forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker much more quickly.

Regular, structured and minuted team meetings were taking place in the fostering team, with additional team planning days. However, team meetings were not being held for staff in the Short Break Service's team.

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?

2

Each foster carer had been allocated a support worker. However, this meant that social workers in the Support Team had case-loads of between 30 and 35 carers. Some staff interviewed felt that they sometimes could not provide the support needed to retain carers and keep placements stable. There was also evidence of a backlog of foster carer assessments – in part due to the success of a recent recruitment campaign – social workers in the Support Team were having to carry out screening visits, mini assessments and re-assessments of foster carers. The minutes of staff meetings indicated that there were not sufficient staff available to run the Children Who Foster Group. It was not clear how workloads for staff were determined. However, action had been taken to employ an agency social worker to assist with the backlog of assessments and arrangements were also in place for a voluntary agency to carry out some assessments.

The draft 'Policy and Procedure for the Support of Foster Carers' should be revised to reflect the current organisation of the service. The draft guidance regarding the assessment process in respect of prospective carers should also be reviewed to ensure that it covers Standard 17.6. The assessment process now includes a competency-based assessment. Consideration should be given to using a competency-based approach in the annual review of foster carers to increase the evaluative content of the reports. There was evidence that the assessment of foster carers by social workers in the Fostering Service covered those areas specified in Standard 17.7.

All the foster carers interviewed said that they thought the recruitment and assessment process was thorough and appropriate.

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**

It was noted that:

- Disciplinary and grievance procedures were in place for staff;
- Carers can use the Corporate Complaints Policy to lodge any formal complaints they may have about the Service;
- Systems were in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers, although some foster carers had only recently been allocated a support social worker;
- Out of hours support for foster carers is provided by the Social Service Department's Emergency Duty Team (E.D.T.). These arrangements were under review;
- A comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff needs to be developed;
- The draft 'Representations Policy for Carers' needed to clearly identify the rights of prospective carers to appeal against decisions;
- Foster carers should be provided with a Whistleblowing Policy.

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?****3**

There was evidence that:

- 3 staff had commenced Post Qualifying training in Social Work and Child Care and 3 staff had applied for this training;
- The Action Plan for the Service includes the aim of carrying out a skills audit of the staff team.
- Staff appraisals had been used to identify the individual training and development needs of staff involved in fostering work;
- Supervision sessions and annual reviews are used to identify the training and development needs of carers although the recommendations arising from the reviews would benefit from being more specific and including timescales e.g. for the completion of training;
- The training programme provided to carers is reviewed and updated annually and reflects the policies of the Service;
- Although there is a corporate induction scheme for all new staff, a formal induction programme for new staff involved in fostering work needs to be put in place.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>It was evident that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal, structured supervision system was in place. Supervision sessions took place regularly and were appropriately recorded. Arrangements were being made for the Recruitment Officer to receive regular supervision from the Manager; • All staff had job descriptions and their duties, responsibilities and workloads were discussed during supervision; • With the exception of the Shared Care Team, team meetings take place on a monthly basis and additional meetings are arranged when needed. These are supplemented by team development days. The assessment team has regular allocation meetings. Consideration should be given to providing staff in the shared Care Team with the opportunity to attend regular staff and team meetings; • A formal staff appraisal system has been introduced. 		

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
<p>The Service's draft policy for supporting foster carers was being reviewed. The role of the supervising social worker appeared to be clear to both the social work staff and the carers. Arrangements were in place for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development and training of foster carers; • The support of the Fostering Under Newcastle (F.U.N.) carers support group; • The supervision and support of carers – all carers, including family and friend carers, had recently been allocated a support worker. The draft policy refers to monthly support visits being carried out. However, carers in the Shared Care Scheme receive one visit every 3 months, unless additional visits have been agreed. Some foster carers reported that there was a lack of support available when their support worker was on either sick leave, or had left the Service and a new support worker had not been allocated; • The annual review of carers – there was evidence that action had been taken to reduce the backlog of reviews. Arrangements were in place for the annual reviews of carers in the Shared Care Scheme to be carried out by the Review Team to ensure more independence; • The provision of respite care to carers. However, there continued to be some difficulties regarding the availability of respite care and these placements were sometimes being arranged between carers, rather than by the supervising social worker. In addition, young people do not always have introductory visits. 		

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?****2**

It was noted that:

- Foster Carer Agreements were being revised to comply with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It was confirmed that these would be used for carers in the Shared Care Scheme;
- The Foster Care Handbook was being revised to cover all the relevant policies and procedures of the Service;
- Out-of-hours support arrangements were in place via the Emergency Duty Team although these were being reviewed;
- Unannounced visits by support workers were not taking place. It is recommended that a protocol be developed in relation to unannounced visits and what these should involve. There is a format for recording supervision meetings with carers that provides a focus and purpose for these meetings;
- The Council has a Complaints Officer for children. Corporate complaints procedures for children and other service users were in place as was a brief draft procedure for dealing with representations made by foster carers;
- Foster carers interviewed said that there were delays in the receipt of some payments – for example for mileage claims.

Procedures for investigating allegations were in place and guidance was also included in the Foster Care Handbook. However, there was no guidance provided specifically to children and young people. Arrangements had been made for an independent agency to provide support to carers who are subject to investigation. However, members of the FUN committee said that the procedures provided to carers should clearly explain what a carer should expect, who will contact them and when, and who will provide support. They also advised that carers often felt that there were unreasonable delays before being told about the nature of an allegation and that they felt unsupported during an investigation.

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?****3**

It was evident that:

- A range of training opportunities was available for foster carers. The training programme is to be revised to ensure that it is underpinned by the principles of cultural diversity;
- All foster carers receive training as part of their assessment and their participation is evaluated and used to inform their overall assessment. The preparatory training is to be revised to cover shared care/working with parents and caring for children with disabilities;
- Carers have the opportunity to undertake NVQ Level 3 training in Caring for Children and Young People;
- In order to improve the take up of training, the Training Coordinator provides training in carers' homes for small groups, or for individual carers, at times convenient to them. This is to be commended;
- Foster carer reviews included identification of their training needs.

It was noted that carers in the Shared Care Scheme, who may have to assist children and

young people to mobilise, do not receive training in moving and handling. It is recommended that where a decision is made not to provide such training this should be on the basis of a recorded assessment made prior to the commencement of a placement. The Manager of the Scheme advised that the training provided to carers regarding the carrying out of simple nursing tasks was being reviewed.

To improve attendance at training events consideration should be given to providing crèche facilities. The Foster Carer Agreement should be developed to clarify the Service's expectations regarding foster carers attending training.

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?

2

There was evidence that:

- Policy and procedural guidance was in place regarding the purpose, content and structure of young people's files. However, some of the young people's files examined did not contain all the appropriate LAC documentation – in one case the current file contained no LAC documentation;
- A clear policy relating to the amount and type of information to be retained in foster carers' homes should be prepared;
- Foster carers did not always receive all the relevant Looked After Children (L.A.C.) documentation in respect of the young people placed with them;
- Carers were involved in reviews and case conferences, although these were not always held at appropriate/convenient times - (support workers were not always invited to these meetings);
- Foster carers interviewed knew why the young people were in their care and were aware of the need to encourage, as appropriate, young people to reflect on and understand their past and to keep appropriate memorabilia;
- A draft policy on recording was in place and guidance was included in the Handbook. Arrangements were in place to review this policy. Consideration should be given to providing carers with suitable lockable storage for the records concerning the children in their care.

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

It was noted that:

- Children and Foster Carers' Registers were in place;
- The administrative records were generally comprehensive and well maintained but the organisation of the foster carer files could be improved to make them more accessible. These files should also have separate sections containing records of any complaints or allegations received;
- Some of the foster carer files did not contain the full LAC documentation relating to current placements and the record of placements was not always up to date;
- A policy for staff concerning the retention of records was in place. It was confirmed that

there were plans in place to review this policy. A similar policy should be put in place for foster carers;

- Foster carer records were stored in lockable filing cabinets and it was confirmed that the room in which they are held is kept locked when the office is closed;
- A system was in place for keeping records about allegations and complaints. However, the complaints record did not include details of one complaint concerning a carer.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			261
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

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?

3

The premises used by the Fostering Service were part of the office premises shared with other sections of the Council's Department of Social Services. Disabled access to the floor that accommodated the Fostering Service was not available.

The Fostering Service was equipped with IT and communications systems and it was confirmed that appropriate security measures were employed in respect of the information held on the computer system. The Manager advised that the IT facilities required updating.

The office accommodation was very compact. Social workers and some of the administrative staff share an open plan office. Some social workers said that it was difficult to write reports in the office because there was no quiet area. However, quiet rooms are available at the civic centre. The Shared Care Team are accommodated in a separate office. The kitchen/meeting room facilities are shared with other teams situated on the same floor. Consequently, the availability of the meeting room was limited.

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

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

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?

2

The Fostering Service publishes separate 'Schemes of Allowances' for fee paid and non-fee paid foster carers. Details of the allowance levels are provided to each carer. It is intended that the schemes will be reviewed to simplify them and reduce the potential for inconsistency in their application. The appointment of a Finance Manager for the Fostering Service has led to an improvement in the promptness of payments to carers – although there were still some delays in payment of mileage allowances. There was also evidence of delays in payments to a 'friends and family' carer. The Finance Officer advised that consideration was being given to setting up a 'one stop' service to deal with any queries and concerns carers had regarding payments and allowances.

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?

2

The draft policy concerning the operation of the Fostering Panel was being revised to ensure that it is in line with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. At the time of the inspection the panel membership did not include four independent members. Nor was there an independent member who had either been placed with foster carers or was the parent of a child placed with foster carers. On one occasion, a panel meeting had proceeded even though it was not quorate and two independent members were not present. A new Panel Chair had recently been appointed and arrangements were being made to recruit an additional independent panel member.

There was evidence that the Fostering Service's Panel engaged in a thorough consideration of the information presented to it and had a structured decision making process. However, the quality of the reports provided to the panel varied and some did not contain the information required. In addition, the reports of carers' medical checks were not provided to the Medical Advisor prior to the meeting, which meant they had to be read during the meeting.

The Panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process and monitors the work of the Fostering Service. For example: the Manager of the Service provides monthly reports to the panel concerning developments in the Service; one of the concerns identified by the panel meeting attended by an inspector was the number of carers' annual reviews where it had been indicated that childrens' social workers were not visiting regularly. As indicated earlier in this report there was evidence that because of the demands placed on the Service, the views of the panel regarding, for example, the numbers of children placed with a carer, are not always paid heed to when placements are arranged.

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 Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service now includes reference to the Shared Care Scheme. All of the carers in the Scheme have been issued with a copy of the Foster Carer Handbook. The Manager of the Scheme advised that once the Handbook has been revised consultation with carers in the Scheme will take place regarding any additional policies and procedures that may be required. The Scheme has its own policies and procedures in respect of meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.	3
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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?

2

There was evidence that the Authority was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as carers. Arrangements had been made to allocate each carer a support worker from the Fostering Service and, according to the sample of records examined, monthly support visits were taking place.

The content of the initial training for family and friends carers is agreed between the carers, the child's social worker and the training coordinator. Family and friends carers can also attend sessions of the preparatory training provided to other foster carers. The training records for the carers of one young person indicated that neither had attended the introductory training and one carer had not attended the training that had been recommended by the assessing social worker or, training recommended by the Fostering Panel. Family and friends carers have access to the same post approval training as other foster carers.

The assessment process for family and friends carers is different and shorter than for other foster carers. Although, there was evidence that this was thorough and considered. However, records indicated that there were sometimes significant delays in the assessments being carried out after a young person is placed with family and friends carers.

Discussion with staff indicated that they were sensitive to the particular needs of kinship carers and the children placed with them.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection commenced on the 9 December 2003 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report.

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.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 04 June 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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>

NO

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

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I Ruth Rogan of Newcastle City Council Social Services Directorate (Newcastle Fostering Service) confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name	_____
Signature	_____
Designation	_____
Date	_____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.