



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering

**Aneurin Bevan House
35 Avenue Road
Hartlepool
TS24 8HD**

Lead Inspector
Mr Bill Drumm

Announced Inspection
21st November 2005 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering

Address Aneurin Bevan House
35 Avenue Road
Hartlepool
TS24 8HD

Telephone number 01429 523926

Fax number 01429 523906

Email address carole.snowdon@hartlepool.gov.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Hartlepool Borough Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Carole Snowdon

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 24th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Hartlepool Borough Council fostering service is based in Aneurin Bevan House in Hartlepool. 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, short term foster placements for teenagers and also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a Shared Care scheme. In addition the service assesses and supports kinship carers and provides remand foster carers. At the time of the inspection visit the service was supporting eighty-one foster placements across these various areas of work. At the time of the inspection the family placement team included a staff team of eight people including the manager and an administrative support worker.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This announced inspection took place as part of the annual inspection programme. The inspection was carried out over five days, with extra time being set aside to observe the fostering panel. Four inspectors were involved at different times in the inspection process.

The service provided a great deal of information to the lead inspector ahead of the inspection process starting. The inspection programme that had been arranged was well organised, which was of benefit to the inspection team, young people, the family placement team and foster carers. This helped the inspection to be carried out with a minimum of disruption to the service.

During the inspection time was spent talking with young people who are fostered, foster carers, the chair of fostering panel, young peoples social workers, an independent reviewing officer, managers and other staff members. Young peoples case files and other records were also looked at as well as staff personnel files. Written policies and procedures and other documents relating to the fostering service were also looked at.

Visits were made to four foster carers and their views and comments have been included in this report. Questionnaires were also received from young people's social workers (29), foster carers (15) and young people (3). No questionnaires were received from the parents of young people fostered.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is 'well managed'. The manager is held in high regard and the foster placement team are committed and experienced 'child care' workers. The manager and staff are well qualified and have the necessary skills to do their jobs. Foster carers are well supported by their individual link worker and generally foster carers were happy with the service they receive. They also said good things about the department's staff. Comments like, "you do get a lot of support" and "really cannot speak highly enough of them" were not uncommon.

Children's welfare is safeguarded and children commented that they, "felt safe" in their placements. The assessment of potential foster carers is thorough and takes quite a long time; checks are made of prospective foster carers. Both staff and foster carers are fully aware of the organisation's safeguarding procedures.

Children said they were well looked after and helped in their placements and to stay in contact with family and friends. They also said they were helped and supported to attend school and to achieve as much as possible whilst there. Children also said they were often asked about what they think of things and

what affects their lives, as well as how things could be improved. Children told us that they are asked about their foster carers and what they think of them, and that they are involved in their reviews.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the fostering team has become more settled in both its staffing and management. Most of the concerns, which earlier inspections have said needed to be addressed, have been put right such as bringing records up to date. Foster carer records have been up dated to show that enhanced level criminal records bureau checks have been undertaken. Training for foster carers has also improved to include anti-bullying and safe care training. Looked after documentation is kept on young people's files and the files themselves are both up to date and accurate.

What they could do better:

Despite work having taken place to bring the children's register and foster carers' registers up to date, further work needs to be done to make sure this always happens. The new foster carer agreements must be given to all foster carers.

Recruitment records kept by the department that looks after staff records are also not very good and some important information and checks have not been done. This concern has been mentioned at previous inspections.

Risk assessments of the matching of young people with foster carers are not written down before a placement is made; the needs of young people and/or foster carers may therefore not be met.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

We looked at outcomes for standard 12

Hartlepool Borough Council effectively monitors and promotes the health of children placed with the service's foster carers this helps to ensure the wellbeing of all children in foster placement.

EVIDENCE:

An examination of children and carers' records confirmed that the agency promotes children's health and wellbeing. Supervising social workers and link workers remain in regular contact with foster carers and children in placement and regular checks are made of carers' log-books. Children's care plans were examined and were found to contain information about the child's health needs, there was evidence to confirm links with relevant health care professionals. Foster carers interviewed were able to demonstrate their awareness of the health needs of the children placed with them as well as an understanding of the need for consent to treatment. Young people spoken to said, "I go to the doctor's when I'm ill" and "my foster carers help me to eat healthily". A small number of questionnaires were returned and these also confirmed that children receive help with healthcare issues. Comments from questionnaires included, "I get help with puberty, like shaving and stuff" and "I go to the dentist and when I'm poorly I have medicine".

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

We looked at outcomes for standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The management and staff of the fostering department have the necessary skills and competencies to undertake their roles, however the recruitment processes do not safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The fostering service provides suitable foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds.

The process of matching children with suitable foster parents is generally appropriate. However, formal risk assessments were not undertaken and the matching process is therefore not thoroughly documented and may put the placement at risk of breakdown.

Staff and carers have a good understanding of child protection procedures and actively seek to make safe, caring and secure placements, however the outcome of any complaints investigations are not recorded or retained within the fostering team records.

Those who work in or for the fostering service are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. Recruitment processes for staff do not safeguard the welfare of children. The recruitment processes for foster carers do support the welfare of children.

The service's fostering panel monitors placements and outcomes for children.

EVIDENCE:

It was evident throughout the inspection that the organisation and manager are suitable to run a fostering service. The manager has the necessary skills, experience and competencies necessary to promote and ensure both the welfare and safety of children. This is supported by the organisation's robust Policies and Procedures. An examination of the service's recruitment records in respect of the manager did not contain evidence of proof of identity or birth certificate. In addition there was no evidence to show that written references had been followed up with a telephone enquiry in order to confirm their authenticity. This is the fourth time this issue has been raised during the inspection process and is something which requires urgent attention.

An examination of foster carer records, a meeting with the Chair of the Fostering Panel and a discussion with staff members confirm that recruitment of foster carers, foster carer assessments and review processes are both thorough and comprehensive. Young people spoken to and questionnaires received from young people all stated that they were happy with their foster placements. Other comments included, "you get your freedom" and "you get support against bullying and problems at school".

Foster carers and placing social workers both confirmed that efforts are made to ensure a suitable match between a young person and a foster carer takes place. Foster carers interviewed said they were involved in the matching process and generally this process worked well. However a number of examples were given where foster carers felt that they were not given sufficient information about a young person prior to a placement being made. This was particularly the case where placements were made via the emergency duty team 'out of hours' service. A number of records were examined and it was apparent that no formal risk assessments had been undertaken prior to individual placements being made.

A number of young people were spoken to and all stated that they felt safe in their foster placements. One young person said, "I feel safe and well cared for". Placing social workers confirmed that the young people they were responsible for were safe and free from harm. Young people spoken to and those who filled in the questionnaires all stated that they knew how to make a complaint if they needed to. Records of complaints made were examined, however the outcome of complaints had not been recorded or retained within the fostering team. Foster carers receive training with regard to child protection and bullying.

An examination of individual staff files confirmed that staff members' who work within the fostering team are professionally qualified and continue to develop their skills and competencies through ongoing training and development. Staff members files examined did not however contain evidence of suitable

references being obtained or followed up via the telephone. Some files had no confirmation of address and others did not contain copies of birth certificates.

As part of the inspection, two inspectors attended the fostering panel. It was observed that the panel was efficient and well run and centred upon the positive outcomes for young people. However it was also observed that the notes of the previous fostering panel were only made available at the next meeting, thus giving panel members little opportunity to read and digest the content of those minutes. It was also observed that a reviewing officer had written a report for a foster carer review but did not attend panel to present their findings. Panel members had a number of questions relating to this report, which were unanswered.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

We looked at outcomes for standards 7, 13 and 31

The service through its foster carers provides placements which promote equality, and values diversity.

Children placed with the service's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes educational achievement.

The service has policies and procedures for the provision of short break or respite (shared care) services.

EVIDENCE:

All young people spoken to and those who answered questionnaires said they were "happy" with their foster placements and foster carers; and that their needs were being met. The young people spoken to said that foster carers ask their opinions about things. They also said that their social workers asked them how they "get on" with their foster carers.

All the young people spoken to and those who completed questionnaires confirmed that not only do their foster carers help them with schoolwork they also encourage them to "stick in at school". Foster carers spoken to stated that they try to work with the young people to help them achieve as much as they can at school.

The respite care/short break service operated by Hartlepool Borough Council is a service used mainly by the parents of children with disabilities. Foster carers

interviewed who provide this service commented that they have a positive relationship with children's birth parents and that they feel valued and appreciated. One of the parents whose child accesses the respite/short break service described it as "a lifeline".

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

We looked at outcomes for standards 10 and 11

The agency makes good provision for the promotion of contact between children and their families and friends.

The agency actively seeks the views of young people about their lives and the care they receive.

EVIDENCE:

Information from young people's files and from foster carers confirms the individual arrangements for contact between the young people with their parents and families. Foster carers were able to give a number of positive examples where they have supported this contact. One young person who had completed a questionnaire stated that they would like to see more of their brother and sister. This will be raised with the manager of the service.

Placing social workers, foster carers, staff from the fostering team and young people themselves all confirmed that their opinions are sought and where appropriate acted upon. Families' views are also acted upon where appropriate. There was evidence of young people being involved in their reviews. Records also confirmed that visits made to foster homes by staff included time alone to speak with the young people who are also able to express their views when foster carers' reviews are held and placements are ending. The children's guide also explains how young people can make a complaint and how to access advocacy services should they wish to do so.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

We looked at outcomes for standards 14 and 29

Both the service and its foster carers contribute toward the preparation of young people for transition into adulthood.

Foster carers receive appropriate allowances and expenses for looking after children.

EVIDENCE:

Each foster carer receives a foster carer's handbook, which contains information about how they can help a young person prepare for adult life through the promotion of skills, developing competence and gaining knowledge.

Hartlepool Borough Council operates a 'banding' system for foster carers, which changes as foster carers gain knowledge, skills and experience as foster carers. As they progress through the banding, carers' fostering allowances are increased to reflect their expertise. None of the foster carers interviewed expressed any concern about the level of or arrangements for payment of their allowances.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

We looked at outcomes for standards 1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28

There is a concise Statement of Purpose, which sets out clearly the aims and objectives of the service.

The fostering service is managed by an appropriately qualified and experienced manager.

The agency has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service.

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Staff are well supported and managed.

The agency employs a sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff.

Hartlepool Borough Council is a fair and competent employer.

Staff within the fostering department receive regular training in order to maintain and enhance their skills.

Staff receive regular planned supervision and performance appraisal to enable them to continue to provide a good service.

The agency has clear strategies for supporting carers.

Supervision and support of foster carers is generally good.

Foster carers are able to access a range of different training opportunities to help ensure they have up to date skills and knowledge.

Case files of children contain up to date and comprehensive case records although risk assessment prior to placement of children with carers is inadequate.

The administrative records are not maintained as required; some essential information relating to the children is not therefore routinely recorded.

The premises used by the agency fully meet the needs of the service.

The service is financially viable and the budget is adequate.

The financial processes of the agency are robust to allow for good financial management.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers spoken to confirmed that they had received a copy of the organisation's Statement of Purpose and that it accurately reflects the service's practice. The policies and procedures looked at during the inspection reflected the Statement of Purpose. The organisation also has an information leaflet for young people entitled 'Welcome to Foster Care'. This document would benefit from minor review in order to reflect the name change from the National Care

Standards Commission (NCSC) to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

From discussion with the manager, discussions with the staff team, and from examining the relevant personnel files it was evident that the manager has the necessary business, management and financial skills to work efficiently and effectively.

The service has systems in place which are necessary in order to ensure that the operation of the fostering team is monitored effectively and efficiently. Staff supervision systems work well and staff commented that they found supervision to be a "supportive experience" rather than a "policing" one. Systems are also in place to notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection of any significant events which may occur. Some foster carers did voice their concern at not being kept informed or up dated with regard to changes within the organisation.

Placing social workers said that communication with the fostering team is "very good". Staff members have clearly defined job descriptions and when interviewed were clear about their individual roles and responsibilities. All staff spoken to were positive about the management of the service.

All staff within the fostering team receive regular supervision from the team manager. The team are appropriately qualified and experienced and training is available for staff to continue to develop their skills and competencies. The staff team were friendly and welcoming, and the team room had a positive atmosphere. Foster carers interviewed were also positive about the help and support they receive from the team.

It was evident from interviews and from examining records that the organisation provides an effective fostering team. The staff team are well qualified and have the necessary skills, experience and competencies to undertake their role.

Hartlepool Borough Council has well established and well developed recruitment and selection procedures, which ensure fairness and equal opportunities.

The fostering service provides a comprehensive induction training programme for staff. Training needs are highlighted during individual supervision sessions and a clear record is maintained of all training which has been undertaken. Training is also held jointly with both staff members and foster carers.

Regular, formal and structured supervision exists for all staff in addition to regular team meetings for all staff. In addition staff have clear job descriptions and understand their individual roles and responsibilities. Staff members interviewed felt they were well managed and supported by the manager.

A number of the carers interviewed commented that they found out about new initiatives within the fostering team via a third party and that they had no opportunity to meet with senior management from the Borough Council. They stated that they would welcome the opportunity to develop these links and that this would help to make them feel more valued and 'part of the team'. The roles of placement officer and supervising social worker were clearly defined with each party being clear as to what is expected of them.

Foster carers receive regular supervision and contact with the Borough Council. However, formal supervision sessions were reported to be held approximately once every three months. It is recommended that the council review this policy and arrange for foster carers to receive formal supervision at four to six week intervals. A group of foster carers interviewed also expressed some dissatisfaction with regard to the contact they have with managers within the organisation and the information passed to them about new developments, initiatives and placements available. A newsletter or regular formal meetings may help to ease these feelings of dissatisfaction.

Foster carers confirmed that they all undertake comprehensive induction training as part of their recruitment and assessment process. There is evidence available to confirm that training is an on-going process and continues after registration as a foster carer. Foster carers are also encouraged to undertake NVQ training in child care. At the time of the inspection sixteen foster carers had achieved the NVQ qualification and a further seven were in the process of completing this course.

Children's files examined were well structured and the information easily accessible. They contained both LAC documentation and Personal Education Plans. There was no evidence on individual case files to suggest that a formal risk assessment had been undertaken prior to placements being made. Foster carers spoken to confirmed that they are generally well informed of the identified needs of the young people in their care and are fully involved in reviews and case discussions. Some carers did however comment that information about the young people is not always available or forthcoming particularly when the placements are made via the emergency duty team out of hours' service.

Administrative records were generally well maintained. Records of foster carers assessments, reviews and approval decisions were of a high standard. The children's and foster carers' registers did not however contain all the information required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The premises used by the fostering service are easily accessible and there are suitable security measures in place to ensure that confidential information is not accessed by any unauthorised personnel.

A detailed annual budget was available for inspection, which indicated that the service operates on a secure financial footing.

The budget of the fostering team is managed appropriately by the team manager in line with existing departmental protocols.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	1
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	2
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	3
4	4
5	3
16	3
17	4
18	3
19	3
20	3
21	3
22	3
23	3
24	2
25	2
26	3
27	3
28	3
32	X

YES

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS25	22	The children's register must be developed to include all the information specified in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	21/02/06
2	FS25	31	The foster carers' register must be developed to include all the information set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	21/02/06
3	FS9	28 + 42(1)	The new foster carer agreements that include all the matters set out in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 must be issued to all foster carers. The responsible person must establish and maintain a system for monitoring complaints in relation to children placed with foster parents and their outcomes.	21/02/06
4	FS15FS3	7, 20	Recruitment records in respect of the manager and staff of the service must include evidence that all of the information required by Schedule 1 of the	21/02/06

			Fostering Services Regulations 2002 has been obtained in respect of the person (this is the fourth time that this has been raised during the inspection process).	
5	FS8	33(b)	The responsible authority must not place a child with a foster parent unless it is satisfied that a placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.	21/02/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS22	It is strongly recommended that the formal supervision of all foster parents is undertaken at a minimum of at least four weekly intervals but not greater than six weekly intervals.
2	FS30	It is strongly recommended that the reviewing officers attend fostering panel in order to present their written reports.
3	FS30	It is strongly recommended that the current system of minute taking fostering panel meetings be reviewed with particular emphasis being placed on the production of fostering panel minutes in a more 'timely' manner.
4	FS21	It is recommended that formal meetings between foster carers and senior managers be promoted in order to promote positive communication.
5	FS8	It is recommended that a system for informing the emergency duty team 'out of hours' service of the location of essential items of equipment be established.
6	FS30	It is recommended that the membership of fostering panel be reviewed to include a person who has been fostered or is the parent of a child who has been fostered.

7	FS1	It is recommended that the Statement of Purpose be reviewed and produced in a more 'child friendly' language. It is further recommended that the Children's Guide also be reviewed and references to the National Care Standards Commission be replaced with that of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
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Commission for Social Care Inspection

Darlington Area Office

No. 1 Hopetown Studios

Brinkburn Road

Darlington

DL3 6DS

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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