



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

South Tyneside MBC Fostering

South Tyneside Fostering Service

16 Barrington Street

South Shields

Tyne and Wear

NE33 1AN

7th to the 24th March 2005

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

South Tyneside MBC Fostering

Address

16 Barrington Street, South Shields, Tyne and Wear,
NE33 1AN

Local Authority Manager

Brian Morgan

Tel No:

0191 4238500

Address

16 Barrington Street, South Shields, Tyne and Wear,
NE33 1AN

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 ?

Date of last inspection

1/12/03

Date of Inspection Visit		7 th – 24 th March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		2:00 pm	
Name of Inspector	1	Stephen Graham	133310
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. 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		Rhona Carr (Acting Manager) and Brian Morgan (Manager)	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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 CSCI in respect of South Tyneside MBC Fostering. 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 CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The fostering service is located within the Children's Services Division of the Social Care and Health Directorate of South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council.

The continuing aim of the service is to provide high quality fostering placements to secure the best possible outcomes for looked after children.

The fostering service has five categories of carer; these are mainstream carers, relative carers, respite carers, teenage scheme carers and permanence scheme carers. Mainstream carers provide a range of placements including pre-adoptive placements, emergency placements, as well as short, medium and long-term placements. At the time of the inspection the service has in excess of 100 approved foster carers who, at that time were providing substitute family care to over 140 children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years.

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 was the third inspection of South Tyneside MBC fostering service under the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. As with previous inspections the service was seen to have been pro-active in working to meet previous requirements and good practice recommendations and continues to work to further improve the overall quality of the services provided.

Statement of Purpose (standard 1)

Standard met

The Fostering Service has a Statement of Purpose (SoP) and children's guide that detail all required information and are subject to annual review. Work continues to produce a summary guide for the benefit of parents.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (standards 2-3)

One of the two assessed standards were met

The manager of the fostering service has the necessary professional qualifications and experience to manage this service. The content of the personnel records examined as part of the inspection were generally satisfactory, although there have been delays in acting upon previous recommendations regarding systems to ensure that CRB checks are regularly updated and that written references are followed through. It was confirmed that each staff file should include a recent photograph of that staff member as required by Schedule 1.

Management of the fostering service (standards 4-5)

All of the assessed standards were met

The manager has systems to monitor and demonstrated a clear understanding of the activities of the service. Since the previous inspection a placements officer post has been created with additional responsibility in collating and updating monitored information. Arrangements for senior staff to deputise for the manager in his absence are in place and were seen to be effective. Areas of responsibility and processes for communication within the service are clearly outlined. Discussion with staff and carers confirmed that they are aware of these.

Securing and promoting welfare (standards 6-14)

All of the nine assessed standards were met

Visits to foster carers and discussion with children in their care indicated that they provide a good service. Safe caring guidelines are agreed with each foster carer, as are agreements on acceptable sanctions.

The agency has responded positively to previous recommendations that matching should be improved through an increase in the number of available carers. This is being achieved through an extensive ongoing promotion and recruitment campaign. A placements officer has also been recruited whose focus is on matching the needs of children to available services.

The agency continues to maintain an anti-bullying policy. None of the children interviewed or who responded by questionnaire indicated that they were being bullied. The manager has a system in place to monitor any allegations of neglect or abuse. Child protection procedures are in place and are utilised appropriately.

Foster carers are supported in facilitating and maintaining contact between the child and their family and friends. Consultation with young people continues to be given key importance. The agency continues to be involved in new initiatives and joint training opportunities aimed at further ensuring that the health, educational and developmental needs of the children and young people continue to be promoted and met.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (standards 15-23)

All of the nine standards assessed were met

The agency has a number of very experienced staff, with support provided by the administrative team. In discussions, staff demonstrated a good understanding of foster care and the needs of young people. This experience and understanding was reflected in the number of very positive comments of carers regarding the support received from the agency. Recruitment process for carers and staff are thorough.

There is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Procedures for the use of independent agencies have been reviewed and improved. A standard format is in place to record the supervision of carers. Support visits take place regularly and on the whole are appropriately recorded. There is a good level of retention of experienced staff and carers within the service. Efforts to increase the number of carers available to the service generally have continued. The staff team can participate in joint training with carers and have similar access to appropriate training opportunities. The long-term absence of the manager has contributed to delays in the provision of regular supervision and annual appraisal; these delays are now being addressed.

The manager was able to confirm that reviews of individual carers are regularly scheduled and completed, with a monitoring system in place. The fostering service has clear information and procedures to deal with allegations received and policy outlining the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster care register. Carer files examined contained good evidence of the range of training offered to them. Attendance at training is being further encouraged through the timing of courses to make them more accessible to carers and the use of appropriate venues with access to crèche facilities.

Records (standards 24-25)

Neither of the two assessed standards were met

All carers visited during the inspection confirmed that they are provided with sufficient written information about each child to ensure that their care needs can be met. Foster carers spoken to were able to demonstrate an awareness of children's legal status, understood care plans and were aware of the need to record significant life events in partnership with children.

Additional training in record keeping and safe storage has been introduced. Some delays in updating LAC documentation were evident and were raised with the Manager for review. The information kept by the agency meets the requirements of Schedule 2 of the Fostering Regulations 2002, although improvements to the children's register were suggested and agreed.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (standard 26)

This standard was met

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

Financial requirements(standards 27-29)

All three assessed standards met

The service is financially viable and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations. There are systems to ensure that accounts are appropriately maintained and audited. There is a written policy on fostering allowances, with information on payments provided.

Fostering Panel (standard 30)

Standard met

Observation of the panel confirmed that members had a good understanding of their task and that the panel as a whole operates efficiently and effectively. It was acknowledged that the recruitment of a member with an educational background would be beneficial to the panel overall.

Short-term breaks (standard 31)

Standard not met

The agency continues to work on the development of policies and procedures for short break carers. The next recruitment drive will attempt to target carers with the potential skills to provide short breaks.

Family and friends as carers (standard 32)

Standard met

There are policies and procedures in place to support family and friends as carers. The agency is continuing to re-evaluate and re-structure aspects of the training programme to meet the needs of this group and to encourage and facilitate their attendance and involvement. Case tracking and direct discussion with family carers during the inspection confirmed the ongoing support provided to them by the agency, as well as the positive encouragement received to attend training regularly.

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?

NA

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	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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 **Stephen Graham** **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager **Gerard Morris** **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements 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	20	FS3	A recent photograph should be kept on individual staff files.	1/9/05
2	22	FS25	Ensure that the children's register complies with all matters listed in Schedule 2 of the Fostering service regulations.	1/7/05

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	FE3 FS15	The agency should put in place a system to follow up written references with telephone enquiries.
2	FS3 FS15	The agency should put in place a system to renew police checks every three years.
3	FS8 FS17	The agency should continue to recruit carers whilst ensuring that the recruitment is targeted at carers who can meet the needs of children requiring placement.
4	FS24	Ensure that written information provided to Foster carer's in relation to a child placed with them is updated as changes occur.

5	FS31	The agency should develop policies and procedures and a recruitment strategy in relation to short break carers.
6	FS32	The agency should continue to develop training for relatives and friends approved as foster carers.
7	FS30	Membership of the fostering panel should include a representative with expertise in education.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	10
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	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
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	YES
Date of Inspection	7/3/05
Time of Inspection	2:00PM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	60.00

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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?

3

The service continues to have a Statement of Purpose (SoP) in place. This was subject to annual review in November 2004. Age appropriate children's guides are provided to all young people using the service. The manager confirmed that plans to produce a summary parents guide are ongoing.

Although the number of responses to this inspection was limited, the majority of pre-inspection questionnaires received from children and young people confirmed that they had received a children's guide. Each foster carer that responded confirmed that they had received written information about the service.

Only one third of placing officer's responding through pre-inspection questionnaires confirmed that they had seen the Statement of Purpose. This was highlighted to the manager who in response was able to re-confirm the practical arrangements made by the agency to ensure that each team office had received at least one copy of the SoP for reference, with additional copies freely available on request.

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
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The manager is professionally qualified, holds an appropriate management qualification and has extensive relevant child-care experience. Throughout the inspection process they demonstrated a detailed knowledge of carers and children as well as a good understanding of issues previously or currently arising within the service overall.

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?	2
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The manager confirmed that there has been a delay in responding to the recommendation from the previous inspection that written references for staff members should be followed up with telephone enquiries. Staff changes within the personnel department were stated to have contributed to this delay, however negotiations are in progress to ensure that this recommendation is acted upon. Similarly the recommendation regarding the introduction of a system to ensure the renewal of police checks on a three yearly basis had yet to be acted upon. The interim arrangement put in place by the manager at the last inspection continues as a temporary monitoring tool. The manager confirmed that negotiations with personnel are ongoing to ensure that a permanent monitor is created.

A number of staff personnel files were examined during the inspection. Each was found to include all required information. With one exception, recent individual photographs of each staff member were available as required by Schedule 1. The exception was highlighted to the manager for review with the personnel department.

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

Clear procedures are in place enabling the manager to monitor activity within the service in compliance with regulations and standards. Records of this monitoring were made available for inspection and included current budget information.

Information from monitoring continues to be used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the service provided. Since the previous inspection a placements officer post has been created with additional responsibility in collating and updating monitored information.

A record of notifications is maintained and was available for inspection. Pre-inspection questionnaires received from placing officers confirmed that they are notified of significant events by the service.

The roles of managers and staff are clearly stated and communicated to carers.

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

11

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.

4

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

5

Number of complaints made to CSCI 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?

3

The manager has a clear job description outlining their duties and responsibilities and in discussions showed a clear understanding of the role, including areas of delegated responsibility.

The service has a deputy manager who is an experienced senior practitioner. Due to exceptional circumstances prior to and during the initial part of this inspection, both the manager and deputy were un-available. Temporary arrangements for an experienced manager to deputise for both were put in place and were seen to be effective.

All staff employed by the fostering service are provided with job descriptions, staff spoken to understood to whom they were accountable.

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?	3
<p>Visits to foster carer homes as part of the inspection found that each provided a comfortable environment for children and were appropriately furnished and decorated.</p> <p>Health and Safety assessments are completed as part of the carer's initial assessment, and are re-assessed during un-announced visits and annual reviews. Ongoing training and guidance in this area is also provided to carers.</p> <p>Within files examined, records of health and safety assessments were seen to be thorough and well completed, however one example, which was un-signed and un-dated was highlighted to the manager for review.</p> <p>All of the pre-inspection questionnaires received from placing officers confirmed their belief that the children with whom they worked were safe within the environment in which they had been placed.</p>		

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?	3
<p>Carers receive written guidance, training and support in their understanding of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Carers also receive training to support their understanding of the development of children and the skills to enhance a child's self-esteem.</p> <p>Conversations with foster carers and foster children and responses from questionnaires demonstrated that children and young people receive opportunities to develop and pursue interests and hobbies and are supported in this.</p> <p>There was continued evidence of the agency working to provide services for children with disability, and to provide specialist support to these arrangements.</p>		

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?**

3

The previous inspection report highlighted difficulties in providing appropriate matches within parts of the service. The lack of placement choice available at that time was seen to have impacted on appropriate matching of children with carers capable of meeting their assessed needs.

The agency have responded positively to the recommendation that they should improve the quality of matching by continuing to increase the number of available carers, particularly targeting those who are able to meet the specific needs of children requiring placement. This has been improved through an extensive promotion and recruitment campaign, which has increased the number of potential carers recruited to the agency. A significant number of those recruited were confirmed to have completed their introductory training and pre-approval assessment and are in the process of final assessment and approval by the fostering panel. It was confirmed that the campaign will continue with an increased focus on the recruitment of short break carers.

Plans by the agency to improve matching through the appointment of a placements officer have also been fulfilled. The placements officer was interviewed during the inspection and confirmed their key responsibilities and role in matching the needs of children to available carers. They also confirmed the positive effect the recruitment campaign has had in increasing choice and improving the number of successful matches.

During a team meeting a new draft placement referral form aimed at improving the quality of initial information used in provisional matching was introduced and subjected to thorough review by the staff team.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The processes put in place by the agency to assess and approve carers, ensures that, as far as possible, children and young people are protected against those unsuitable to care for children. During their induction and following approval, carers receive training and written guidance in child protection, caring for and supporting the child who has been abused, managing behaviour and safe caring.

Carers contribute directly to their own safe caring plan, which are explained to the child and discussed with their social worker. The manager highlighted additional work planned to further encourage the involvement of cared for children in safe care planning. Examination of sampled files highlighted one minor example of a wrongly dated agreement. This was highlighted to the manager for review. All carers visited during the inspection were in

possession of comprehensive written information about the children in their care, although some delays in the updating of LAC documentation were noted (see standard 24). Written information provided to carer's states clearly that corporal punishment is not acceptable.

Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on neglect/abuse of the children in foster care and are regularly reviewed. Examples where concerns had been raised, highlighted appropriate investigations by the agency with formal responses by them to those raising the concern.

There are procedures and guidance in place to minimise the risk of bullying to children. Guidance is provided to foster carers to help them cope with these issues. Although the number of questionnaire responses was limited, the evidence gathered from them and during direct discussion with children and young people indicated that bullying was not a problem for children or carers.

The fostering service provides carers with clear policies and procedures for dealing with children missing from the foster home, with evidence that these are followed when such circumstances arise.

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

0

%

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

Appropriate policy and procedure regarding contact arrangements are in place. Foster carers are supported in facilitating and maintaining contact between the child and their family and friends where this is appropriate. Carers record details of the contact, how it went and how children felt.

Any financial costs to carers arising from contact arrangements are met by the fostering service.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

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

Although the response to this inspection through pre-inspection questionnaires was limited, those received from children and young people confirmed that both their carers and the staff at the agency asked for their opinion regarding their care. They also were able to highlight positive changes that had occurred as a result.

All of the pre-inspection questionnaires received from foster carers confirmed that they attended children's reviews. The majority confirmed that they felt that their views were listened to. Some of the children's files examined during this inspection contained limited evidence of consultation. Examples from these were highlighted to the manager for review. The concerns of one carer that the child's placing officer had never visited the child at her home were also shared with the manager.

There was extensive evidence within foster carers files, which confirmed that they are regularly consulted by staff at the agency. None of the pre-inspection questionnaires received from placing officers suggested any changes necessary to improve the service. This was mirrored by responses from children.

Concerns were raised during the previous inspection that some young people did not know who to make a complaint to. The agency has responded to this through the production of a complaints pack, now finalised and in the process of being issued. The pack was produced in partnership with the foster children's consultation group. In addition to this, the children's guide continues to provide contact details for the complaints officer and CSCI. The majority of pre-inspection questionnaires received from children stated that they had access to complaints information and the children's guide.

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?****3**

Carers receive support from agency staff to ensure that children are registered with doctors and dentists and that health issues are given proper attention in the everyday care of each child. Training for carers is also provided in this area. All of the carers visited had appropriate medical consents and health information for the children placed in their care, however in one example reviewed during case tracking, information regarding the child's health visitor and doctor had not been recorded within their LAC documentation. This was highlighted to the manager for their review.

The previous inspection highlighted that one child with a disability did not have all the equipment needed in the foster home. The agency responded promptly to ensure that this was immediately rectified. Consequently access to the occupational therapist service has

been reviewed and improved to ensure that any aids and equipment required to support the developmental needs of individual children can be accessed and put in place.

The manager highlighted the steps currently being taken to strengthen links between the agency and the newly appointed Looked After Children's Nurse and LAC Health Team.

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?

3

Pre-inspection questionnaire responses received from children in education were very positive regarding the support received from carers. Discussion with carers with children in education confirmed their commitment and steps taken to support the educational needs of those children.

Additional specialist educational support is provided to the service overall by 'The Place' educational project who are also involved directly in training for carers. The agency supports an annual award ceremony to celebrate and promote educational achievement by young people. Each fostering household has a computer for the use of the children cared for.

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 agency maintains a policy for care leavers. Specific guidance on preparation for independence is included in the foster carer's handbook. Young people of an appropriate age and their carers receive additional planned support from the Directorate's "Leaving Care Team".

The previous inspection report recommended that the agency should further develop training for carers in helping young people develop the skills for independent living. This is being provided through the BAAF training modules with carers who have young people moving toward independence particularly encouraged to attend. Joint workshops have also been planned with the "Leaving Care Team" to provide additional support and advice to carers. The agency are also involved in the Directorate's "leaving care" pilot scheme, with an increased focus on planning to support individual "life skills". Examples of the provisional written planning for this were examined, this confirmed that the detail of preparation and quality of presentation were to a high standard.

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?

3

The fostering team are all appropriately qualified and/or experienced and have been CRB checked. Recruitment procedures are in place, examples of which were examined during these visits through personnel files. Although these procedures were generally satisfactory, outstanding recommendations in this area are highlighted within standard 3 of this report. Administrative support is in place with additional support from the Directorates central administrative team also available if required. The agency has a number of very experienced staff; in discussions they demonstrated a detailed knowledge and understanding of foster care and the needs of young people. This experience and understanding was reflected in the number of very positive comments of carers regarding the support received from the agency.

Total number of staff of the agency:

10

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

0

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?

3

There is a clear management structure. The staff team appeared clear as to their own key responsibilities and to whom they are accountable. The manager has the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications needed to manage and monitor the staff team, including the allocation and review of workloads.

The previous inspection highlighted that the agency had used an independent provider without satisfying all the requirements in Regulation 40. The agency subsequently addressed this through a full review of arrangements in place. This process has been further enhanced/supported through the appointment of a placements officer, part of their role being to monitor placements made in the independent sector. It was confirmed that contacts are in place with each agency and that these are subject to regular review. Costs are also monitored with negotiation taking place to ensure that longstanding placements are maintained to the benefit of each child.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The agency continues to benefit from the high level of retention of both staff and carers. Plans to further increase the number of staff and areas of expertise within the staff team continue to be followed through.

The staff team continue to utilise the comprehensive assessment process in place to assess the qualities, competences and aptitude of prospective carers. Within the foster carer files examined all information relevant to approval was seen to be in place.

As highlighted previously in this report, placement choice continues to be an issue. However the extensive recruitment campaign run by the agency has begun to address this. Further recruitment drives are planned, with carers with the potential to provide the specialist skills needed to meet specific care needs to be targeted.

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?	3
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Carers continue to benefit from the individual support provided by their fostering officer. As in previous inspections, carers spoken to and responding by questionnaire continue to be very positive about their overall access to members of the fostering team and the level of support received. The service continues to actively support and facilitate peer contact for carers.

Examination of carer's files indicated that support visits take place regularly and on the whole are appropriately recorded. A standard format is in place to record the supervision of carers, this includes monitoring of training suggested to and completed by carers. One example of a supervision visit having not been recorded on the contact-monitoring sheet was highlighted to the manager for review. Annual review reports are prepared in partnership with carers with copies maintained on file.

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**

The agency and carers continue to benefit from the work of the NVQ assessor and their co-ordinating role in the overall provision of training. The foster care training programme has continued to be reviewed, revised and enhanced. The programme was developed in partnership with British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering and is designed to encourage joint training of social work staff and foster carers. This BAAF training is supplemented through the continued access to a variety of courses provided by the Directorates own training department.

The timing of training and provision of crèche facilities have both been reviewed to encourage better participation by carers. An 'Open Learning' pack has been developed to facilitate home study where attendance at organised training is difficult.

Those carers spoken to and those responding by questionnaire were very positive regarding the specific training provided to them. Some carers felt that the more regular participation of social work staff in joint training would be beneficial; this was highlighted to the manager for their review.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

A number of personnel files were examined and were seen to include job descriptions for individual staff.

The service manager provides individual supervision to the staff team and monitors the overall schedule. The programme of individual supervision was confirmed to have been delayed by the manager's own extended absence from the service. However, they were able to confirm the steps being taken to re-establish it. Annual appraisal for staff was also acknowledged to have suffered delays, however the manager confirmed that the schedule for this year had been completed for the majority of staff. In the absence of the manager, advice and guidance is normally available to staff from the deputy, who has extensive experience.

Team meetings are regularly scheduled. One was attended as part of this inspection. Those staff in attendance demonstrated a detailed knowledge of carers and children as well as a good understanding of their role and responsibilities within the service overall. Where any difficulties in scheduling team meetings have arisen, they have been combined with allocation meetings to ensure that they remain regular.

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?****3**

The agency has clear policies and procedures which outline how carers will be supported. The foster carer handbook includes detailed information for carers regarding the support and supervision they will receive. The role of the supervising social worker was clear to all foster carers interviewed, who also knew how to access support out of office hours if needed.

Carers continue to have access to their weekly support group; this was visited during the inspection. The group was well attended and appeared well organised. A variety of positive comments were received regarding the service overall. The group continues to be actively encouraged and practically supported by the agency.

Since the last inspection the agency have established the post of Independent Review Officer, based within the Children's Standards Unit. The manager was able to confirm that individual carer reviews are regularly scheduled and completed, with a monitoring system in place to ensure that this continues. Evidence from the selection of carer files examined confirmed that reviews were taking place; although some reports from recently held reviews were outstanding, those available on file were seen to have been prepared and carried out in partnership with carers.

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?****3**

Foster Care Agreements are maintained on file and are compliant with Regulation 28 (Schedule 5 checklist). One example, where the terms of approval had not been fully updated following the review of the carers, was highlighted to the manager for action. Foster carers receive guidance covering all the points outlined in Standard 22.5. Practical support is provided and includes all areas outlined in standard 22.7.

Supervising social workers undertake regular home visits and occasional un-announced visits as required. Regular telephone contact with carers was also evident from files examined. A record of all contact is maintained on each individual file. Carers spoke very positively about the quality of support provided by agency staff.

A complaints policy and an appropriate complaints procedure are in place. The manager has a system in place to monitor any received.

The service has clear information about procedures to deal with allegations received and policy outlining the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster care register.

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

Discussion with carers, responses through pre-inspection questionnaires and examination of carer files all provided good evidence of the range of induction and subsequent ongoing training provided. Attendance at training is recorded on individual monitoring sheets and maintained on file. Foster carer review reports also include details of training attended by the carer as well as any suggestions for additional training.

Discussion with carers, staff and the manager confirmed that the agency continue to work to reinforce the importance of ongoing training and development with each carer.

Attendance at training continues to be supported by the organisation of courses to make them more accessible to carers and the provision of crèche facilities. The manager outlined plans to introduce a support group for the children of carers.

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

Carers visited during the inspection confirmed that when children are placed with them they are provided with sufficient written information about them to ensure that their immediate care needs can be met. They were aware of children's legal status and understood care plans. Significant life events for children were being recorded and information was securely stored. Foster carers were aware of what they should record overall and share with the fostering service. Written guidance regarding recording, safe storage and sharing written information is provided by the agency.

A number of children's case files were inspected. Those files examined were found to be well presented and organised, however some examples of misfiling and a number of examples of delays in the updating and full completion of LAC documentation were noted and shared with the manager for review and action.

There was evidence that staff at the agency work consistently in support of carers to ensure that required written information is requested and provided to them.

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

Overall, the information kept by the agency meets the requirements of Schedule 2 of the Fostering Regulations 2002. However, it was agreed with the manager that although the information required in Schedule 2.1 was available through a combination of children's and agency records, this information should be drawn together and presented in the form of a central concise register.

As in previous inspections, case files for children and carers continue to be securely stored and are well maintained.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	144
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	101
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	92
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	31
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	10
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	89.20
Maximum £	263.51

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 are suitable for their purpose. An electronic security system provides overall protection for the building. There is sufficient space, secure lockable storage and appropriate measures in place to safeguard IT systems. The building is centrally located with good access to public transport and private parking and is also used to facilitate meetings of the Fostering Panel and some care training. The building is shared with other services provided by the directorate. The manager confirmed that telephone reception duties are being reviewed as these are currently covered for the building as a whole by the administrative staff of the fostering service.

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?

3

The Directorate maintains management of the fostering services finances at a strategic level. Information provided during the inspection confirmed that the service is financially viable and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

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?

3

The manager confirmed that there are systems for ensuring the services accounts are appropriately maintained and audited. The Directorate's finance department monitors accounts and payment systems.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a written policy on fostering allowances, and information on payments is distributed to carers and purchasers each year. Carers are made aware of allowances and expenses payable in advance of children being placed.

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?

3

The chair of the panel was interviewed as part of the inspection, and a panel meeting was observed. The chair was very clear about the role and function of the panel. Through review of panel papers and observation of the panel itself, it was clear that members had a good understanding of each assessment presented, and put forward appropriate questions on each case.

All panel members undergo appropriate checks and clearances prior to commencing their duties. They are provided with guidance and training, including guidance when the panel may not be in agreement.

Independent members of the panel include representatives with a range of necessary skills. The panel chair and the manager of the service both acknowledged that the recruitment of a member with an educational background would be beneficial to the panel overall. It was confirmed that the efforts made to recruit a representative with this area of expertise are continuing.

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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Work is continuing on the development of policies and procedures for short break carers. The agency plan to target the recruitment of short break carers as part of the next recruitment strategy with a focus on those able to provide care to teenagers and young people on remand. If recruitment is not successful the agency will review alternative proposals to meet this demand.
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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?	3
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The previous inspection highlighted the need for the agency to develop training for relatives and friends approved as foster carers. The agency is addressing this issue and is currently re-evaluating and re-structuring aspects of the training programme. The sympathetic timing of courses, easier access to crèche facilities and the provision of computers to facilitate open learning, have all been highlighted and are being given priority by the agency. As recruitment to the staff team continues, it is hoped that one of the fostering officers will take key responsibility and co-ordinate in this area of work. Case tracking and direct discussion with family carers during the inspection confirmed the ongoing support provided to them by the agency as well as the positive encouragement received to attend regular training.

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 conducted on 7th – 24th March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

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 16th June 2005, 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI 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 Eileen Dunn of South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council (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 _____

Or

D.3.2 I Eileen Dunn of South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council (Fostering Service) am unable to 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) for the following reasons:

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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
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