



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

St Helens Council Fostering Service

St Helen`s Council
73 Corporation Street
St Helens
Merseyside
WA10 1SX

15th November 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

St Helens Council Fostering Service

Address

St Helen`s Council, 73 Corporation Street, St Helens,
Merseyside, WA10 1SX

Local Authority Manager

Mrs Christine Taylor

Tel No:

01744 456 526

Address

St Helen`s Council, 73 Corporation Street, St Helens,
Merseyside, WA10 1SX

Fax No:

01744 611 550

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

Date of Inspection Visit		15th November 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Mrs Lynn Paterson	073532
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		Mrs Christine Taylor	

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Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
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- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
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D.2. Action Plan

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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 St Helens Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the 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 St Helens Borough Council Fostering Service currently forms a part of The social services directorate and the service operates from a town centre location, which is easily accessible. The office accommodation houses two social work teams which are led by team managers, one holding responsibility for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and adopters and the other being responsible for the support and on-going training of existing foster carers. A foster care training officer a marketing officer and 2 full-time and 2 part time administrative officers complete the staffing levels of the fostering service. All teams are accountable to the Service Manager resources who is based within the premises.

At the time of the inspection the service provided for 100 children and young people in foster care, of whom 43 were girls and 57 were boys. The children and young people covered the full age range from 0 – 18 years old. The service provided for both short and long term fostering placements as well as short-term respite breaks provided for children with disabilities. Kinship carers were also utilised as carers looking after the children of relatives.

Records indicated that young people requiring support of the foster home who were in the care of St Helens Borough Council were accommodated from within St Helens own resources and also from external resources to include independent fostering agencies. This was due to the fact that the Borough's fostering and adoption service had been unable to recruit carers themselves to meet the needs of all the looked after children in their care.

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.)

The inspection of St Helens Local Authority Fostering Service commenced on 15th November 2004 and continued until 23rd November 2004. The inspector was able to meet with foster carers and young people, read comment cards and documentation and interview social work staff and other professionals to gain information for the compilation of this report a summary of which is recorded below:-

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE. All standards met.

The inspector noted that the statement of purpose for the year 2004/5 held clear relevant information detailing the nature and purpose of the document, the aims and objectives of the service and other information to include staffing, role definitions, marketing, training and support. A children's guide had also been produced in consultation with children and young people to ensure that young people also had full understanding of the service.

FITNESS TO PROVIDE OR MANAGE A SERVICE. All standards met.

Documentation showed that the manager was appropriately qualified within the child care arena and had extensive management experience. Recruitment and selection policies and procedures showed that the processes involved were fair and equal.

MANAGEMENT OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE. All standards met.

The management arrangements in place appeared to be effective, however the support team manager had been seconded for a six- month period to the performance and review team. In the interim an agency worker had been employed to cover her role. It was also noted that the recruitment team was currently undergoing an external review commissioned to look at management roles and team tasks and to clarify areas of responsibility between the fostering and adoption remit.

SECURING AND PROMOTING AND SECURING WELFARE. All standards met.

Foster carers and young people advised that they were well supported by their respective workers and that communication systems were good. Pre-assessment, assessment and induction procedures seen appeared robust and foster carers advised that they were left in no doubt of what was expected of them. Foster carers also advised that they received mandatory training in child protection and safe care prior to approval. The agency had devised a policy on restraint and were in the process of arranging restraint training for those who may in certain circumstances find it necessary to have full knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms involved to include full record keeping of any significant events. Records evidenced that the agency had recently revised and updated the foster carer preparation training and had developed strong links within health and education.

RECRUITING,CHECKING,MANAGING, SUPPORTING & TRAINING STAFF AND FOSTER CARERS. All standards met.

Foster service staff interviewed exhibited sound knowledge and professionalism in their roles of working with children and foster carers. Foster carers and young people in both verbal and written communications with the inspector advised that they felt valued and supported by the service. Staff training records showed that training was relevant and ongoing and staff advised that they were able to participate in in-house and external training as required. Foster carers training records showed that training was arranged in consultation with the foster carers and identified that an audit had been carried out to identify individual training needs. The inspector met with the training officer who advised that she was working with foster carers with a view to arranging training and venues, which were appropriate for training needs and accessibility. Documentation showed that the marketing officer had utilised innovative methods of projecting the fostering service with a view to recruiting more foster carers which continue to be needed to meet the needs of the children within the looked after system. The inspector noted that all records and files held within the teams were maintained as per the requirements, however not all foster carers appeared to maintain records within their homes as appropriate, although the inspector noted that the foster carers handbook and 2 current newsletters held information appertaining to the requirements and good practice issues of record keeping.

FITNESS OF PREMISES FOR USE AS FOSTERING SERVICE. All standards met.

As previously stated the fostering and adoption team operated from a town centre premises, which appeared secure and accessible. The building provided office accommodation for 2 fostering and adoption teams and accommodated the service manager, marketing officer, training officer and administrative support. The accommodation also provided a meeting room, which was utilised for office interviews team meetings and other communal gatherings.

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS. All standards met.

The service formed part of a local authority and was funded accordingly. The inspector was able to peruse budgets, which evidenced that the service was appropriately funded for its purpose. Foster carers interviewed advised that in general they were satisfied with the systems from which they received their payment.

FOSTERING PANELS. All standards met.

Documentation showed that the fostering panel met on a monthly basis with pre meeting information being distributed to enable panel members to peruse the paperwork prior to meeting. Records indicated that all panel members had been subject to Criminal Records Bureau clearance and had received training relevant to their remit.

SHORT TERM BREAKS. All standards met.

The service provided short terms breaks for children with disabilities, which were facilitated by a group of carers who received full training and support from the agency team. The inspector noted from documentation and discussions that the agency had insufficient carers to provide short- term breaks and as a consequence had raised its recruitment profile in this area.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS FOSTER CARERS. All standards met.

The service had developed a change of protocol for family and friend carers and documentation showed that the fostering team now carried out the full assessment process and provided training and support as appropriate.

CONCLUSION.

The inspector visited a random sample of 10 foster carers and young people in their homes and observed most favourable interactions. The inspector also perused 34 comment cards, which indicated that staff of the fostering service, were highly respected for their professional and supportive input. A most positive inspection.

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:

Following the inspection of the fostering service offered by St Helens Local Authority the inspector was satisfied that the fostering service satisfied regulatory requirements.

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		

Regulation Inspector	Lynn Paterson	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Lorraine Maguire	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	

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	FS9	It is recommended that all foster carers receive training to clarify restraint procedures.
2	FS18	It is recommended that a separate Whistle Blowing policy be introduced for foster carers.
3	FS24	It is recommended that training be provided to all foster carers to ensure consistency and safekeeping of records.

* 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	9.5
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	NO
Foster children survey	NA
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NA
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NA
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NA
• 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	NA
Observation of foster carer training	NA
Observation of foster panel	NA
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	15/11/04
Time of Inspection	10AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	72

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 inspector viewed the statement of purpose, which had recently been revised and noted that it contained all the necessary information to ensure that the full aims and objectives were identified within the document. The inspector noted also that the revised statement of purpose was in the process of being distributed to ensure that all who accessed the service were aware of the content. Young people interviewed advised that they had been given a copy of the children's guide, which they perceived to be useful.

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?

4

The inspector interviewed agency staff and staff who found it necessary to access the service and read documentation to include pre inspection questionnaire to gain evidence for this standard. The service manager presented as well qualified with many years experience in the child -care arena and documentation showed that she held a professional social work qualification. The inspector noted that the team managers deputised for the service manager in her absence and records indicated that they also held professional qualifications and had experienced many years working within children and families. The inspector held discussion with agency staff and foster carers, which highlighted that the management team were highly respected for their transparency, professionalism and leadership skills. Further comments received via comment cards identified the high regard in which the management team were held. Comments of which the inspector felt were commendable.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector read agency records, policies and protocols appertaining to the methods used to promote and safeguard the welfare of children, interviewed agency staff and viewed training programmes and foster carers records to gain evidence for this standard. Records showed that police checks were in place for all who worked within the service and references were sought and obtained in written form.

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

The inspector viewed records, policies and procedures and held discussion with staff and foster carers to gain evidence for this standard. It was noted that the agency had clear procedures in place to include potential foster carers receiving individual visits with a view to discussing the application and clarifying issues with visits being followed up and preparation training being in place to ensure that foster carers were clear about their remit. Staff advised that there case files were regularly examined by the supervising officers and staff also advised that they supplied case files to be monitored when they undertook monthly supervision. Financial records seen identified that charges for services, amounts paid to foster carers, both in allowances and other essential payments were recorded and reviewed as appropriate. All staff interviewed showed awareness of their line management structures and advised that they were kept informed of any service developments. It was noted that the agency had recently developed a conflict of interest policy for both staff and foster carers.

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

3

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.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

1

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

3

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

1

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**

Management and staff advised that they held job descriptions, which in general terms were a clear reflection of their duties. Staff advised that the service manager and team managers held strong leadership skills and were able to utilise the appropriate powers of delegation. The team managers displayed knowledge and understanding of their respective team members and remits to ensure the effective and efficient management of the service. It was noted however that a team manager had been seconded to another role for a six -month period and an external agency worker had been employed to cover the role in the interim. The inspector noted that this event had created an unsettling period for some staff who had enjoyed a long professional relationship with the person who had been seconded. The inspector was advised that this in no way reflected upon the abilities of the external agency worker but was indicative of the high regard they held for the substantive team manager.

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?
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The inspector read policies and procedures case records, perused questionnaires and interviewed staff, foster carers and young people to gain evidence for this standard. 10 foster carers were interviewed in their own homes and the inspector noted that all the homes visited presented as warm, comfortable, hygienic and most homely and welcoming. Foster carers interviewed advised that they had received excellent preparation training and could dip into any other training that they felt necessary. Foster carers also advised that they had been provided with an updated foster care hand – book, which in their opinion gave valuable information to enable them to have knowledge and understanding of promoting and safeguarding children in their care. Foster carers interviewed showed full awareness of risk assessment and appeared fully committed to the provision of quality safe care.

Questionnaires perused indicated that young people were comfortable and at ease with their foster carers.

Records and feedback identified that most foster carers had their own transport, however where this was perceived to be inadequate, records held details of more appropriate transport being provided to facilitate need.

The foster care agreement showed that details of the expectation for foster carers to agree to be visited as part of the Commission for Social care Inspection were included in the documentation.

The inspector found the evidence of compliance with standard 6 commendable.

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?**

4

Foster carers interviewed advised that they were afforded training both in the preparation stages and as an ongoing process to ensure that they had sufficient understanding and knowledge to enable them to value diversity and promote equality. Foster carers also advised that social work staff worked in partnership with them to ensure that each child was supported and valued as an individual. The inspector visited foster carers homes and met with children and young people and observed that the atmosphere within all homes was of mutual trust and rapport. Children and young people in face- to -face discussion and by way of completed questionnaires told the inspector that they felt valued and respected by both foster carers and social workers, who they perceived to work together to ensure positive outcomes. Records showed that the fostering agency had developed strong links within health and education and as a consequence was able to enable foster carers to access opportunities for young people to develop and pursue talents, interests and hobbies. The inspector found the evidence of compliance with this standard to be commendable.

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

At the time of the inspection records indicated that there were 85 foster carers available and as with other fostering service providers St. Helens Borough council were experiencing difficulties in the recruitment of a sufficient range of carers to enable full placement choice. However case files and case- tracking methods showed that wherever possible a full matching process was carried out by people who were fully qualified and experienced to do so. Interviews with foster carers and social workers evidenced that matches were achieved by effective communication systems in which all information was shared. The assessment of need was carried out by use of British Agency for Adoption and Fostering documentation, which was also utilised for the assessment of foster carers. The inspector noted that the authority had placed 35 children and young people with independent fostering service providers and feedback indicated that a robust assessment was carried out prior to placement to ensure that the matching process was adhered to.

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
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The inspector read documentation to include training programmes, foster carers handbook, case records, policies and procedures and met with foster carers, children and young people and social work staff to gain evidence for this standard. Foster carers advised that they had received good quality training in respect of child protection and safe care and stated that advice/guidelines were also provided within the foster carers handbook. Foster carers interviewed exhibited awareness of various types of abuse and identified that they had gained knowledge and understanding of detecting the signs and symptoms of abuse and of the mechanisms involved in dealing with disclosures. Foster carers training records further evidenced that the training in place in respect of child protection was ongoing. Children and young people interviewed advised that in general they knew about safe care, as it had been discussed by their social worker and foster family. Foster carers said that full information appertaining to the children and young people was generally provided prior to placement. Foster carers and young people both in interview and via questionnaires identified that corporal punishment was perceived to be unacceptable and that any sanctions imposed by carers were within the permitted guidelines. The inspector noted that the agency had an anti bullying policy in place and written procedures to deal with any foster child who was missing from home. The inspector noted that the foster carers handbook held information relating to behaviour management and included a section relating to physical intervention. Records indicated that a restraint policy had recently been introduced and staff interviewed stated that they anticipated that all foster carers would receive mandatory training in all aspects of physical intervention and restraint.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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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
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Foster carers and young people interviewed advised that contact arrangements usually worked well. They stated that discussions were held at the beginning of the placement with a view to developing family contacts and contact arrangements were then planned and recorded as appropriate. Foster carers interviewed exhibited full understanding of the children's need for contact and appeared to be most supportive of this need. Records showed that some foster carers facilitated contact either by way of providing transport or utilising their homes where appropriate. It was noted also that support workers were employed by the authority to assist with the contact arrangements. Perusal of the foster carers handbook, placement agreements, training records and general observational practices further evidenced compliance with standard 10.

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

The inspector met with staff, foster carers and young people, read documentation to include children's guide, questionnaires and utilised case tracking methods to gain evidence for this standard. Foster carers interviewed exhibited full understanding of the need to listen to the views of children and young people and appeared most skilled in this area. This was further evidenced by the feedback from young people interviewed, who stated that they were asked their opinions and views on all matters affecting them and felt that they were always listened to by their foster carers. Young people advised they had a children's guide that provided general information about the looked after system and how to access independent support. Review records identified that all young people were able to contribute to their review.

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

The inspector utilised case tracking methods, read documentation and held discussions with foster carers and young people to gain evidence for this standard. Discussions indicated that health professionals monitored and reviewed need and case records identified that all young peoples health care needs were reviewed and recorded at reviews and as an ongoing process as required. Records also identified that accidents, illness and medication was closely monitored. Foster carers advised that health and hygiene training was provided for all carers and that they were supported to ensure that all children were registered with a GP and dentist. All young peoples records viewed held full information of health care need, both past and present.

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?**

4

The inspector read documentation and met with foster carers and young people, social work staff and other professionals to gain evidence for this standard. The foster carers handbook held information and guidance about the educational systems and foster carers advised that they found this useful. It was noted that all young people had a personal education plan which detailed the educational needs of each child and who was responsible for helping to implement them. Documentation showed that the fostering service held strong links with the education service and they worked in partnership to support foster carers to promote educational achievement. The support systems included the provision of equipment, training events, achievement events, annual review monitoring and the right to read project. The service also utilised the skills of a dedicated looked after children education officer. Records indicated that at the time of the inspection there were no looked after children of compulsory school age not in receipt of regular education. The inspector noted from records, general feedback and observation practices that young people interviewed showed a pride in their educational achievements and were greatly supported and encouraged by their foster carer's and social workers which the inspector found most commendable.

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 inspector met with social work staff, young people, foster carers and read documentation to gain evidence for this standard. It was noted that the fostering service had strong links with the young persons team and records indicated that they worked closely to assist young people move into independent living. Staff of the fostering service identified that they recognised that children of all ages should be assisted in independence and as a consequence the service promoted this via training, supervising social workers support and guidance provided in the foster carers handbook.

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

Policies and procedures viewed in respect of recruitment and selection appeared robust and included good practice issues in respect suitability to work with children and young people. Records indicated that all personal responsible for recruitment and selection of staff were experienced and trained to understand the purpose and function of their role. The inspector noted that most of the staff of the fostering service were long serving members of St Helens Local Authority and had gained vast experience in working with children and young people. All staff interviewed exhibited most appropriate knowledge of child -care legislation and of child development and associated frameworks. Records perused showed that all supervising staff of the fostering service were qualified social workers who had worked in child care and had specialised knowledge in fostering. Records also indicated that staff had undertaken training by British Agency for adoption and Fostering in relation to the assessment of foster carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

18

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

X

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**

The inspector met with social work staff, administrative staff, member's of the management team and viewed documentation to gain evidence for this standard. Staff advised that they felt that they were organised and managed in an effective manner and they were clear about their lines of accountability. Staff also advised that they received professional supervision, which was pre arranged, time limited and uninterrupted with written records being available for future reference. Staff advised that the post of marketing officer had been a most positive appointment as the role involved not only a marketing strategy but also a responsibility for dealing with and monitoring and reviewing new applications from prospective foster carers. Records showed that the fostering service was in the process of employing extra support workers and sessional workers to ensure that workloads could be processed utilising staff as appropriate for each task. Staff advised that they had access to all policies and procedures and were subject to development reviews that dealt with ongoing personal and professional development. The inspector noted that the service employed 2 full time and 2 part time administrative officers and as a consequence of the low staffing ratio, social work staff were expected to complete the filing of all documentation. It was noted that as a consequence some documentation was awaiting filing at the time of the inspection. The inspector observed that the fostering service enjoyed a most effective working relationship with the looked after children's teams with each showing full knowledge and understanding of each other's remit and working in partnership in the best interests of each child. A working relationship of which the inspector found to be most commendable.

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**

As stated in standard 16, the service had introduced a specialist marketing officers post to promote fostering with a view to increasing the numbers and range of foster carers. Documentation showed that the marketing officer had a three -year strategy, which was reviewed and adjusted annually. The strategy involved advertising, profile raising events, joint campaigns, word of mouth and promotions. All new enquiries were routed through the marketing officer with her remit including responding to the enquiry and monitoring and reviewing the throughput. Policies and procedures in place showed that the service had a consistent procedure for responding to enquires which if active, were followed through by social workers who dealt with preparation, assessment and approval

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**

Social work staff and foster carers interviewed during the inspection advised that they felt St Helens Local Authority fostering service had sound employment and support practices in place. Staff advised that they were aware of the Authorities personnel policies. Foster carers stated that out of hours support services were in place via the emergency duty team and also support was offered by way of a carers support group. Records showed that each foster carer was allocated a supervising social worker who visited the foster carers on a regular basis both announced and unannounced with all visits being recorded on file. Social workers advised that they carried out visits to ensure that foster carers received supervision, appraisal and support. The inspector viewed policies and noted that the service had a health and safety policy for carers, children and staff and also provided a Whistle Blowing policy. Staff interviewed exhibited full knowledge and understanding of the Whistle Blowing policy, however foster carers stated that they knew of the policy but were not fully conversant with the mechanisms involved. The inspector would recommend that the service introduced a Whistle Blowing Policy that was separate from the staff policy and utilised solely for the foster carers.

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 inspector met with the training officer and staff of the fostering service, held discussion with foster carers and read documentation to include training programme, foster carers files to gain evidence for this standard. Discussions with staff and foster carers identified that the service provided a good quality programme and records showed that the training programme reflected the policies of the fostering service. Staff advised that training and development needs were discussed during supervisions and appraisals and mechanisms put in place to ensure that training needs were addressed wherever possible. Staff further advised they attended regular team- meetings in which new developments, legislation and guidance was discussed. Training records identified that joint training between staff and foster carers were arranged and this was further evidenced by feedback from foster carers who stated that they felt joint training was most effective. Discussions with the training officer identified that part of her remit was to target staff and foster carers re their training needs, record a needs analysis and provide training accordingly..

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

All staff interviewed advised that they felt accountable, valued and supported and had full details of their remit and the policies and procedures of the Authority. Staff further advised that they attended regular team meetings in which they were encouraged to participate and they had monthly supervision in which sessions were pre -arranged, time limited and uninterrupted.

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 inspector met with foster carers and supervising social workers and read policies, procedures, questionnaires, training records and foster carers files to gain evidence for this standard. Documentation showed that the fostering service had heightened arrangements for the supervision and support of foster carers by updating the looked after children procedures and out of hours support systems to include the provision of additional support workers and sessional workers. Foster carers advised that they felt supported by their social workers and the service in general, especially with the introduction of the mentoring scheme, respite care and enhanced training programme. Foster carers stated that they had a clear foster care agreement, a copy of which was perused by the inspector who noted that it complied with the regulations. The foster carers handbook was perceived by the foster carers to be a useful document and the inspector noted also that this had recently been updated and fine tuned and appeared to hold most relevant information. The inspector spoke with supervising social workers and children's social workers and observed that they appeared to enjoy good working relationships and had developed clear systems of communication. Interactions between staff of the fostering service and children's teams during interview seemed to be one of mutual trust and rapport.

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

As stated in standard 21 the fostering service strongly evidenced compliance with the management and supervision of carers by way of the provision of clear foster care agreements, named supervising social workers and an unambiguous foster carers handbook. Further evidence of compliance with the requirements of standard 22 were obtained in discussion with foster carers who advised that they were afforded training as per a training need analysis, provided with all relevant policies and procedures which were fully explained to them by their supervising social worker if required and were able to access respite and social work support as required. Foster carers stated that payments were generally prompt and insurance cover was in place. Documentation viewed during the inspection showed that complaints and representations were recorded and monitored as were records appertaining to allegations of abuse. All policies seen were clear and relevant.

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

The inspector met with foster carers and their families support social workers, training officer and read training programmes and carers files to gain evidence for this standard. Foster carers advised that they felt the preparation training was most helpful and included input from long standing existing foster carers. Foster carers stated that they had good quality induction, which was carried out by suitably qualified and experienced people. The inspector noted that the training programme had been updated since the last inspection and incorporated all the training needs as raised in The Fostering Standards National Minimum Standards. Discussions with the training officer highlighted the agency had an overall strategy in place to collate the training needs of foster carers and arrange training accordingly. It was noted also that the agency training was based within the framework of equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. The inspector had canvassed the views of foster carers own children, albeit on a very small scale, who advised that they felt included in all aspects of the foster care agreements and any relevant discussions thereafter.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector perused case records, policies and procedures and spoke with foster carers and social work staff to gain evidence for this standard. Staff interviewed advised that they were clear about their remit to include compilation of case records and storage and access procedures. Carers interviewed showed awareness of the reasons for the looked after children being accommodated and stated that they were included in the care planning process. The agency files viewed during the inspection were clear and consistent and social workers advised that they passed on all need to know information to the carers as a matter of course. Foster carers interviewed displayed differing levels of understanding in relation to recording and storing information, however the inspector noted from guidance notes and training records that the agency had addressed recording and storage of information as an ongoing issue. It would be recommended therefore that supervising social workers look at ways to develop the knowledge and understanding of all foster carers to ensure a consistent approach to both recording and storing information.

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?

3

The inspector noted that the administrative records managed by the agency were kept in full accordance with regulations to include files being kept in locked cabinets and access to the staff accommodation being by keypad entry only. The inspector viewed the recording systems and noted that separate records were kept for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. The inspector was advised that separate records appertaining to staff were kept within the local authority personnel section whilst all other records were held within the fostering service. All staff interviewed exhibited full awareness of all aspects of confidentiality of information, retention of information and storing and managing the information. The inspector was unable to interview all panel members, however agency staff advised that panel members received training in respect of string and managing confidential information.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			100
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £		X	Maximum £
			X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector viewed the premises and noted that access was via a lockable front door with all other areas being accessible only via keypad entry. All staff interviewed advised that they had their own office space and were provided with facilities for the secure retention of records. The accommodation appeared to be easily accessible and centrally positioned within a town centre location. The inspector noted that the staff had shared access to IT and telephone systems. The inspector was advised however that it is envisaged that all workers would be provided with individual computers in the not too distant future.

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
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The inspector noted that the service formed part of a Local Authority Social Service Department and was funded appropriately.

The management team advised that the budget ensured that the service was adequately financially supported.

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
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The management team advised that their were sound procedures and systems in place which were clearly documented and controlled. The agency employed a dedicated finance officer who held responsibility for monitoring and controlling finances. Records seen appeared clear and consistent and maintained and audited via robust procedures.

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

Records showed that each foster carer was given full details of their personal allowance and agreed expenses and foster carers advised that this information was given and that payments were usually made promptly and at the agreed time. Foster carers interviewed advised that they had been able to access extra allowances and expenses as the need arose and that payments had been agreed and paid quickly. Records showed that all allowances and fees were reviewed annually.

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
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The inspector was unable to observe or interview panel members on this occasion therefore evidence for this standard was based on feedback from staff and perusal of documentation. Policies and procedures viewed appeared clear and records showed that the panel met monthly with the relevant documentation for each meeting being distributed a week prior to the meeting. The inspector was advised that the membership of the panel had recently changed and that as a consequence the membership numbers may have to increase or further develop with the inclusion of a young person. As a consequence the agency had arranged for the panel membership to be reviewed and a process for applicants to attend panel will be developed. After discussion with the management team the inspector did not identify any shortfalls in the compliance with this standard.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The fostering service were able to facilitate short term breaks which were provided by carers who received the same level of support and training as full time carers and with extra input as required from the children with disabilities team. Carers interviewed advised that they perceived the parents of the young people placed on a respite basis as remaining central to the care of their child and as a consequence they fully worked in partnership to ensure a consistent approach to care practices. Agency records indicated that their were insufficient carers at this time to meet all assessed need for both children with disabilities and other young people as in line with most other local fostering agencies. The agency had as a consequence raised the recruitment profile with a view to providing more short-term break carers.	
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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?
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The inspector met with staff, foster carers and young people and viewed policies, procedures and other documentation to gain evidence for this standard. The inspector noted that the agency had policies and procedures in place, which ensured that the same level of support and training was afforded to all family and friend carers as required. Documentation showed that all assessments were now carried out by members of the fostering team and staff interviewed exhibited sensitivity to pre existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers.	3
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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 15/11/04 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

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

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 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

NO

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

YES

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 Susan Lightup of St Helens MBC 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 Susan Lightup
Signature _____
Designation Responsible Individual
Date 29th December 2004

Or

D.3.2 I Susan Lightup of St Helens MBC 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 Susan Lightup
Signature _____
Designation Responsible Individual
Date 29th December 2004

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
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

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