



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Northumberland Fostering Service

Family Support & Placement Service

Tweed House

Hepscott Park

Morpeth

Northumberland

NE61 6NF

8th March 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

Northumberland Fostering Service

Address

Family Support & Placement Service, Tweed House,
Hepscott Park, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6NF

Local Authority Manager

Mr Bob Ross

Tel No:

01670 533450

Address

Family Support & Placement Service, Tweed House,
Hepscott Park, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6NF

Fax No:

01670 533451

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (I FA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

11/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		8 th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Dennis Bradley	074426
Name of Inspector	2	Glynis Gaffney	074449
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not in attendance.	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		Not required.	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr Bob Ross	

Introduction to Report and Inspection
Inspection visits
Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings
Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings
(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Northumberland Fostering Service is part of the Family Support and Placement Service, which is based at Tweed House, Hepscott Park, Stannington, Morpeth. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements to children and young people, these include long and short-term foster care and short break care. The Service also includes Task Centred Teenager Placements and consideration was being given to developing Treatment Placements. At the time of the inspection the Service was supporting approximately 237 placements. The Fostering Service operates with a staff team of 34 including the Manager and administrative support staff. There were two vacant posts.

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.)

Standard 1 - Statement of Purpose

This Standard was almost met

The Fostering Service has a written Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide. The Children's guide requires additional information.

Standards 2 and 3 - Fitness to Carry on or Manage a Fostering Service.

1 of these 2 standards was met and the other was almost met.

There was evidence that the Fostering Service is managed by staff who have appropriate skills and experience. Recruitment and selection procedures need to be developed to comply with current legislation.

Standards 4 and 5 - Management of the Fostering Service

Both of these standards were met.

Arrangements were in place to monitor the operation of the Service. Staff were clear about their roles and lines of accountability. A manager duty system provides cover in the Manager's absence.

Standards 6 to 14 - Securing and Promoting Welfare

5 of these 9 standards were met and 4 were nearly met.

The assessment process for new foster carers is comprehensive, thorough and includes a health and safety check. There was evidence that the specific needs of children and young people are given consideration when foster placements are arranged. The Service has been pro-active in ensuring that, where appropriate, planning for permanence takes place. There was evidence that young people were consulted about their care plans and that arrangements were in place to enable young people to voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. Where young people in foster care refuse to attend, or are excluded from, school support is available for the young people and their foster carers. A placement agreement must be completed before the placement of any child or young person with a foster carer. A review of the Service's policy on the use of restraint and of the training provided to foster carers should be carried out.

Standards 15 to 23 - Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers.

4 of these 9 standards were met and 5 were nearly met.

The Authority's recruitment and selection procedures need to be reviewed. Staff had regular team meetings and a formal system of supervision was in place for all staff. A system was in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers. Foster carers have access to an independent mediation, advice and counselling service. Each foster carer receives a copy of the Service's Foster Carer Handbook. This contains details of the Service's core standards for foster care. The arrangements for the payment of special allowances to foster carers should be reviewed. All foster carers, apart from kinship carers, are required to attend a course of training prior to their approval. All foster carers have access to ongoing training. There was a backlog in foster carer assessments and a backlog in carer's annual reviews.

Standards 24 and 25 - Records

Neither of these 2 standards was fully met.

There were written policies regarding case recording. In general, appropriate records were maintained in respect of children and action had been taken to address shortfalls. Foster carers confirmed that they knew why a child is placed with them and the basis for the placement. However, foster carers did not always receive sufficient information prior to children being placed with them and, following placement, there were also delays in carers being provided with relevant information. The Children's Register and Register of Foster Carers need to be developed to include all the required information.

Standard 26 - Fitness of Premises for use as a Fostering Service

This standard was met.

The premises were adequate for the operation of the Service and suitably equipped.

Standards 27 to 29 - Financial Requirements

These standards were not applicable.

Standard 30 - Fostering Panels

This standard was not met in full.

The Fostering Service has two panels. The Fostering Panel was observed to work thoroughly and effectively. Panel members had undergone Criminal Records Bureau checks. The Panel Constitution should be revised in line with Standard 30.7.

Standard 31 - Short Term Breaks

This standard was met.

The Service includes two short break foster care schemes.

Standard 32 - Family and Friends as Carers

This standard was not met.

The Service is sensitive to the pre-existing relationships when assessing and approving family and friends as carers. This process needs to comply fully with the Service's own Fostering Procedures and the Fostering Services regulations 2002.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	5, 7 & 20	FS3FS15	Take action to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the Service's recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that they comply fully with Standards 3 & 15 and Regulations 5, 7, 10 & 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002; Ensure that all staff personnel records contain the information stipulated in Schedule 1 the Regulations; Ensure that CRBs are carried out in respect of any person working in or for the Fostering Service and that arrangements are in place to have these renewed every three years. 	1/3/04
2	16	FS13	The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that any education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have.	1/12/03

3	22	FS25	<p>At the time of the inspection the timescale for compliance with this requirement had not passed.</p> <p>Take action to ensure that the Children's Register includes all the following information (as set out in Regulation 22, Schedule2, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002) in respect of each child placed with foster parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the date of his placement; • the name and address of the foster parents; • the date on which he ceased to be placed there; • his address prior to the placement; • his address on leaving the placement; • his responsible authority (if it is not the fostering service provider); • the statutory provision under which he is placed with foster parents. 	30/4/04
4	22	FS25	<p>At the time of the inspection the timescale for compliance with this requirement had not passed.</p> <p>Take action to ensure that the Foster Carers' Register includes all of the following information (as set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name, address, date of birth and sex of each foster parent; • the date of his approval and of each review of his approval; • the current terms of his approval; • the name and address of each person with whom the fostering service has placed a child under Regulation 38(2); • the date of each agreement entered into in accordance with Regulation 38(2)(b) and the terms of any such agreement for the time being in force. 	30/3/04
5	38	FS32	<p>Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure compliance with Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Fostering Service's own procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of relatives and friends as foster carers.</p>	28/2/04

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector **Dennis Bradley** **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager **Fiona Millns** **Signature** _____
Date _____ _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	5,7 & 20	FS3FS15	<p>Take action to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the Service's recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that they comply fully with Standards 3 & 15 and Regulations 5, 7, 10 & 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002; • Ensure that all staff personnel records contain the information stipulated in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002; • Ensure that CRBs are carried out in respect of any person working in or for the Fostering Service and that arrangements are in place to have these renewed every three years. 	December 2004
2	16	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that any education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have.</p> <p>Ensure that, where appropriate, Personal Education Plans are in place for each young person and that these are kept under review.</p>	January 2004

3	22	FS25	<p>Take action to ensure that the Children's Register includes all the following information (as set out in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002) in respect of each child placed with foster parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the date of his placement; • the name and address of the foster parents; • the date on which he ceased to be placed there; • his address prior to the placement; • his address on leaving the placement; • his responsible authority (if it is not the fostering service provider); • the statutory provision under which he is placed with foster parents. 	March 2005
4	22	FS25	<p>Take action to ensure that the Foster Carers' Register includes all of the following information (as set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the name, address, date of birth and sex of each foster parent; • the date of his approval and of each review of his approval; • the current terms of his approval; • the name and address of each person with whom the fostering service has placed a child under Regulation 38(2); • the date of each agreement entered into in accordance with Regulation 38(2)(b) and the terms of any such agreement for the time being in force. 	December 2004
5	38	FS32	<p>Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure compliance with Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Fostering Service's own procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of relatives and friends as foster carers.</p> <p>Ensure that where an immediate placement of a young person with a relative has been arranged, the social worker visits at least once a week as specified in Regulation 35(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	September 2004

6	3	FS1	<p>Amend the Service's children's guide to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The address and telephone number of the Commission; and • Information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate. 	December 2004
7	34	FS8	<p>Ensure that a Foster Placement Agreement is completed in respect of each placement with a foster carer.</p>	On-going
8	29	FS21	<p>Take action to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approval of each foster carer is reviewed at intervals of not more than a year; • The first review of a foster carer's approval is referred to the relevant Fostering Panel for its consideration. 	January 2005
9	28	FS22	<p>Foster Carer Agreements must include all the information set out in Regulation 28 and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	December 2004

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS18	<p>Prepare and implement a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff that covers all legal requirements.</p> <p>Where a decision has been made to reduce the frequency of visits to foster carers by family placement workers to less than that specified in the Service's Foster Placement Procedures, the reasons for this decision, and who was involved, should be recorded in the foster carer's file.</p>
2	FS24	<p>Ensure that the relevant information and Looked After Children documentation is made available promptly to foster carers as set out in the Directorate's own procedures.</p> <p>When placements are being considered on the basis of limited information the child's social worker should carry out a recorded risk assessment and review the foster carer's safe caring policy. This should help ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to enable the carer to provide appropriate care to the child and to protect the foster child, their own children and any other children for whom they have responsibility.</p>
3	FS29FS22	<p>A review of the arrangements for the payment of special allowances to foster carers should be undertaken to ensure consistency as well as promptness of payments.</p>
4	FS30	<p>Arrangements should be made to appoint a chair of the Fostering Panel who is independent of the Fostering Service, particularly since the current Chair of the Panel considers the recommendations made by the Panel and, where appropriate ratifies them, on behalf of the Directorate.</p> <p>The Fostering Panel's Constitution should be amended to include reference to its function in monitoring the range and type of carers available to the Authority in comparison with the needs of children. The Panel should also be given access to information that will enable it to carry out this function.</p> <p>The Fostering Panel's Constitution should be amended to include a procedure covering decision making when all members of the Panel are not in agreement.</p>

5	FS9	<p>It is recommended that the Service's policy on the use of restraint, as well as the training provided to foster carers, be reviewed in light of recent guidance on the use of physical intervention issued by the Department of Health.</p> <p>Provide foster carers with training regarding how looked after children are susceptible to bullying and how to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying.</p>
6	FS12	<p>Ensure that all foster carers receive basic training in first aid and health and hygiene.</p> <p>Ensure that suitable records are in place to confirm that carers who carry out simple nursing tasks, as part of the care provided to a foster child, have received appropriate training and have been assessed as competent to carry out these tasks.</p>
7	FS1	<p>The Service's children's guide should be produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children. Consideration should be given to producing the guide in different formats for children and older young people.</p>
8	FS8	<p>Ensure that when a foster carer is exempted from the terms of their approval this is clearly recorded in the foster carer's file.</p>
9	FS13	<p>The Foster Care Handbook should be developed to include information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Educational Plans; • The maintenance of a record of school attainment and exclusion; • The Service's expectations of foster carers and the arrangements that will be put in place if any child in their care is not in school; and • The arrangements for purchasing equipment required for school.
10	FS17	<p>In light of the backlog in foster carer assessments and the backlog in foster carer annual reviews it is recommended that a review of staffing levels in the Fostering Service be carried out.</p>
11	FS21	<p>It is recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews of a foster carer's approval should not be carried out by the line manager of the carer's family placement worker; • Children's social workers and, where appropriate, children and young people should be asked to provide written contributions for the annual reviews of foster carers; • On the occasion of the first review of a foster carer's approval, and of any subsequent review that is referred to the Fostering Panel, the report of the reviewing officer should be submitted to the Panel for consideration.

12	FS22	<p>Each foster carer should be supervised by a named social worker and have access to adequate social work support.</p> <p>Unannounced visits to foster carer's homes should be carried out at least once a year.</p> <p>The Service's Foster Placement Procedures and the Carers Handbook should be developed to clearly set out the Service's expectation regarding unannounced visits by family placement workers as well as their purpose. Consideration should be given to preparing a separate pro-forma for these visits to give them structure and focus.</p>
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PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

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

Number of Inspector days spent 12

Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES

Date of Inspection	08/03/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	93

Northumberland Fostering Service

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Statement of Purpose is informative and includes a clear statement of the aims of the Service. Arrangements were in place for the revised Statement of Purpose to be formally approved by the elected members of the Local Authority.

The children's guide to the Service 'What is Foster Care' had been designed to be read by both children and older young people. However, it did not contain the address and telephone number of the Commission, nor did it include information on how a child or young person can secure access to an independent advocate. The guide included brief details regarding how to complain and children and young people are also provided with a leaflet that has information about the Council's Client Relations Officer and how to complain.

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

The Service's Manager has the following professional qualifications: Certificate of Qualification in Social Work; Post Graduate Diploma in Management Studies. The Manager has significantly more than the required length of experience of working at a senior level and of working with children. The Manager demonstrated a good knowledge of the operation of the Service and an awareness of its strengths and areas for development. There was evidence that the Manager exercised appropriate leadership of staff and the operation of the Service.

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

A CRB had recently been carried out in respect of the Manager who advised that discussions were ongoing within the Council regarding designing a system to ensure that CRBs are renewed every three years for staff and foster carers. Although two written references had not been taken up prior to the appointment of the Manager of the Family Placement Service, arrangements were underway to revise the Council's recruitment policies and procedures to ensure that, in future, written references are obtained and followed up with telephone enquiries.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence that:

- The Manager had a clear understanding of the operation of the Service and monitored its activities and the quality of its performance. The Manager has monthly meetings with the Directorate's Quality Manager;
- Data-bases were being developed, for example, in relation to the annual reviews of foster carers as well as their attendance at training. This should enable more effective monitoring of the Service;
- There were clear staff roles and lines of accountability within the Service;
- An established staff supervision and appraisal system was in place;
- Team meetings took place on a regular basis and minutes were taken and retained;
- Procedures were in place to monitor financial arrangements. The Council has calculated the total unit cost of its foster care service and this enables comparison with the costs of placements arranged with independent agencies;
- Information about levels of payments to foster carers was included in the Foster Carers Handbook and this is updated annually.

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

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

Procedures and measures in place to monitor and develop the quality and effectiveness of the work carried out by the Service. The Manager had a job description setting out their duties and responsibilities. There were clear lines of accountability.

Although the Manager does not have a deputy there is a manager duty system, involving the Team Managers of the Foster Care and Permanence Teams. This provides cover in the Manager's absence.

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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No problems were noted in respect of the standard of accommodation in the homes of those foster carers who were visited as part of the inspection. All of the carers made the Inspectors feel welcome and cooperated with the inspection process. They also confirmed that they had been informed that they might be interviewed or visited as part of the inspection process.

It was noted that:

- The assessment process for carers includes a health and safety check. This includes checking whether their cars are fitted with suitable restraints and that they have up to date MOT and car insurance – although in one case this had not been fully completed. The checklist should be amended to include checks in relation to the storage of any firearms owned by carers;
- Arrangements were in place for the accommodation of foster carers to be reviewed as part of the annual review process. Consideration should be given to including a health and safety check as part of the annual review of carers;
- The Foster Carers Handbook includes guidance regarding the health and safety responsibilities of carers;
- The preparatory training for foster carers covers 'Safe Caring' and was being developed to cover health and safety issues.

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**

There was evidence that:

- Where children and young people had specific needs in terms of their culture and ethnic origin steps had been taken by the Service to try and address them. In one case, two young people had been placed with carers that the Service felt could best meet their religious and cultural needs and, in another, additional educational provision had been arranged for two children to help meet their cultural needs;
- The Council is collaborating with 11 other local authorities in the region, and 1 independent agency, in a project that aims to establish a service to specifically recruit and advise black and ethnic minority foster carers;
- One carer's home had been adapted and equipped to meet the needs of a disabled child and plans had been agreed for similar work to be carried out on the house of another carer;
- Two of the core standards in the Foster Carers Handbook are concerned with enhancing children's confidence and self worth and include reference to the need for foster carers to have an understanding of the possible effects of discrimination and how to offer appropriate support;
- The preparatory training for foster carers includes a session concerned with promoting children's rights and a positive sense of identity;
- Post approval training includes training in valuing diversity and anti-discriminatory practice;
- Policies on Valuing Diversity and Anti Discriminatory Practice were in place and these were to be included in the Foster Carers Handbook;
- The format used to assess prospective foster carers includes a section on valuing diversity and includes consideration of the carer/s capacity to parent a child whose cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic needs may be different to their own;
- Foster carers and fostering service staff interviewed confirmed that, where possible, matching considerations include deliberations concerning the way in which the specific needs of the children and young people could be met.

The provision of Fee Paid Foster Care, to provide placements for children and young people whose needs are too challenging for mainstream foster care, and Task Centred Teenage Placements, aimed at helping teenagers move into independence or return home, are positive attempts to address the specific needs of children. Plans were also underway to work with a neighbouring authority to secure finance to provide specialist Treatment Placements. The Service also provides short break foster care for children with disabilities and one of the family placement workers has the responsibility of liaising with this team.

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?

2

There was evidence that:

- Efforts were made to obtain a suitable matches between children and young people and foster carers;
- A shortage of foster placements restricted the opportunities available to ensure suitable matches, where short term or emergency placements were required;
- Carers were sometimes asked to take placements outside of the terms of their approval. Where exemptions to a carer's terms of approval had been agreed, these were not always recorded on their file;
- Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they were involved in the matching process, although some said that they did not always receive sufficient information in respect of children placed with them in an emergency;
- Family Placement Workers confirmed that, wherever possible, they are consulted regarding the emergency and short-term placement of children;
- Children's Permanency Workers, line managed by the Manager of the Permanence Team, are based in the social work area teams to facilitate the planning process, where permanent or long-term foster care has been identified as best meeting the needs of a particular child;
- One consequence of the Service's drive towards planning for permanence and the increase in such referrals is that children may remain in short term placements much longer. This reduces the number of vacant placements available;
- The matching process for children who require long-term foster placements involves referrals direct to the Permanence Team and the allocation of a 'family finder' to coordinate the work. Permanency Planning meetings, and a 'children and families' slot on the agenda for each team meeting, are used to monitor progress. However, it was not clear how family placement workers supervising those carers providing the bridging placements were kept informed of progress. One child who had been in a short term 'bridging placement' for 12 months had not been allocated a 'family finder';
- A new checklist had been devised which is to be completed at each placement agreement meeting to ensure that the relevant information is recorded as part of the foster placement agreement. In the sample of records examined, where this checklist had been used the required information had been recorded. The Foster Placement Procedures should be amended to include reference to the completion of this document and the document should be dated and signed by the relevant parties if it is to form part of the placement agreement;
- A placement agreement had not been completed in relation to the short-term placement of one child.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There was evidence confirming that:

- The preparatory training for carers covered Safe Caring and the importance of building and maintaining a positive sense of identity in a child;
- Post approval training included courses on Child Protection and Managing Behaviour (including training in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention);
- Arrangements were in place for prospective carers to prepare a safe caring policy for their own household as part of their assessment. Experienced foster carers had also been asked to prepare their own policy in consultation with their family placement worker;
- The Foster Carer Handbook makes clear that corporal punishment is not acceptable and this is also stated in the Foster Carer Agreement;
- An anti-bullying policy had been prepared and negotiations with the Directorate's training section were underway to provide training to carers in its implementation. Two foster carers interviewed described the action they had taken to address bullying between the foster children placed with them. This eventually led to one young person being moved. However, although it was seen as preferable to place the young person concerned with a foster carer who had no other children, because of the shortage of placements available the young person was placed with carers who had a younger child placed with them;
- The Foster Care Agreement had been amended to state that foster carers must comply with the Service's policies on child protection and bullying and includes an expectation that carers must attend training covering these areas;
- A procedure for foster carers regarding unauthorised absences had been prepared and will be included in the revised Handbook;
- Systems were in place to collate information relating to child abuse or neglect;
- A review of the Service's policy on the use of restraint, and of the training provided to carers, still needed to be carried out in order to take account of the most recent guidance issued by the Department of Health on the use of physical intervention.

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

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

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

It was noted that:

- The preparatory training for carers covers working in partnership with parents and, for long-term foster carers, includes a session on Contact Issues;
- The Foster Carers Handbook contains guidance regarding how carers should support foster children to maintain and, where appropriate develop, their family contacts;
- The Foster Placement Procedures contain guidance regarding the setting up and monitoring of contact arrangements and reference to contact arrangements is included on the Service's placement referral form;
- There was evidence that contact arrangements were clarified and agreed at the outset of a placement, although this was not always possible in respect of emergency placements;
- Where contact arrangements had been agreed the foster carers interviewed were complying with them. Young people placed outside the area of the Authority were supported to maintain contact with their families;
- Those young people interviewed confirmed that their views were sought and acted upon in determining contact arrangements;
- Foster carers maintained records of such contact.

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**

There was evidence that:

- The preparatory training for carers emphasises the need to listen to the views of children and young people and includes a session on children's rights and how foster carers can promote them;
- Young people's opinions were sought and, where possible, acted on;
- The Authority's Participation and Information Officer runs a Reference Group for 'looked after children' where young people can voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. Issues raised included having to share rooms and access to the foster carer's home when the carer is not present;
- The newsletter for looked after children in the County includes contact numbers for independent advocacy services and the Authority's Client Relations and Emergency Duty Teams;
- A Divisional complaints procedure for children and young people was in place;
- A family placement worker attends the Young People's After Care Group meetings and reports back to the management team;
- Some of the young people interviewed attended their reviews and were visited on a regular basis by their social worker. However, interviews with foster carers and staff at the Family Placement Service, as well as an examination of a sample of records, indicated that some young people were not being visited by a social worker at the frequency specified in the Authority's minimum standards for visiting 'looked after children' or at the statutory minimum frequency. Sometimes this was because the social worker had left the Service. Foster Carers interviewed said that replacing social workers who leave may take 3 to 4 months.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There was evidence that:

- The health care needs of children and young people were given consideration when placements were arranged and at formal reviews of the placements;
- The Authority employs a Health Advisor who is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the general health needs of 'looked after children';
- The Foster Placement Agreement format includes a section concerning consent for medical treatment, although in one instance, for two siblings placed in voluntary care, the social worker had signed this section instead of the parent;
- Foster carers interviewed demonstrated an awareness of the young people's health care needs, although some said that they did not receive sufficient information at the outset of the placement. One carer had to request more information regarding two siblings 6 months after the placement commenced;
- The Foster Carer Handbook includes guidance regarding Health and Medical Issues;
- A 'Health FiloFax' was being prepared for issue to children and young people;
- Post approval training for carers includes workshops on HIV/Aids and 'Sex and Sexuality'. Carers are also provided with the opportunity to undertake training in First Aid. However, the sample of training records examined indicated that none of the five carers concerned had undertaken this training;
- There were no records available to confirm that carers who carried out simple nursing tasks as part of the care provided to a foster child had received appropriate training and had been assessed as competent to carry out these tasks.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Educational Support Team for Looked After Children (ESLAC) works with children and young people who have been excluded from school or, who are not attending school. Support, often provided by sessional support workers, can be provided in the young person's school or in various venues throughout the County. Discussion with foster carers and staff in the Fostering Service indicated that the work of the Educational Support Team was highly valued.

There was evidence that, particularly with the increase in the numbers of children looked after and the increase in other local authority placements, the resources of the ESLAC team were stretched and that it was not able to support all of the young people who required it. There was also evidence that foster carers who cared for young people not attending school were provided with differing levels of support. One foster carer advised that the young person placed with them was provided with day care and another carer, whose circumstances were similar, said there had been no offer of day care. The ESLAC team had recently been increased.

The ESLAC team collates information regarding the educational attainment of young people in foster care and the numbers excluded from school. The Manager of the ESLAC team had prepared an Education Handbook for foster carers and a three-day training event regarding educational issues had been arranged for later in the year. Fee paid foster carers were consulted about the content of the training during one of their support group meetings. A telephone help line is available for foster carers to discuss any relevant matters with a Senior Education Psychologist one half day each week. The Authority has provided lap top computers to look after children who are in year 11 and this may extend to pupils in year 10. Revision packs for year 11 pupils had also been sent to each young person's social worker and there was an expectation that the social worker would discuss the pack with the young person. However, some foster carers said that the young people in their care had not yet received the packs.

The Foster Care Handbook would benefit from being developed to include information about:

- Personal Educational Plans;
- The maintenance of a record of school attainment and exclusion;
- The Service's expectations of foster carers and the arrangements that will be put in place if any child in their care is not in school; and,
- The arrangements for purchasing equipment required for school.

Details of the foster carer's role in school contact were not always clearly set out in the sample of placement agreements examined. A Personal Education Plan had not been fully completed in respect of one young person.

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**

It was noted that:

- The Authority employs after care workers who specialise in working with young people who are moving into independence. It is an expectation that an after care worker is invited to the first 'Looked After Review' after a young person's fifteenth birthday;
- In the sample of records examined an appropriate Pathway Plan had been completed for one young person;
- Discussion with foster carers indicated that they were aware of the need to provide the children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills;
- The Service has a number of specialist Teenage Task Centred Placements and one purpose of such placements is to support young people into independence whilst also giving them experience of living in a family;
- The Foster Carer Handbook contains information regarding aftercare and leaving care. However, this would benefit from being developed to include reference to Pathway Planning and clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers regarding the preparation of young people for independent and semi-independent living;
- Foster carers have access to relevant training.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- All social work staff in the Fostering Service had undergone a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check within the last 3 years and arrangements were being put in place for these to be renewed every 3 years;
- Arrangements were underway to renew the checks of foster carers every three years;
- The social work staff were appropriately qualified. Those social workers interviewed demonstrated their knowledge of foster care and a sound understanding of their role;
- CRBs had not been carried out in respect of administrative staff working in the Service.

The Manager of the Service confirmed that the Authority's recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff had not, at the time of the inspection, been reviewed to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Work was underway to ensure that staff personnel files contain all the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

Total number of staff of the agency:

36

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

5

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.1 6)

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 was evidence that:

- Staff were appropriately managed and a clear management structure was in place;
- Staff interviewed said that lines of responsibility, accountability and the level of delegation were clear. They also confirmed that they had received written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service;
- Regular, structured and minuted team meetings were taking place and there was a formal, documented staff supervision system;
- Procedures were in place covering the assessment, approval and review of foster carers;
- Staff had access to copies of the Service's policies and procedures;

- The Service has a clerical and administrative support team that now has an additional administrative assistant and clerk typist. Social work staff said that the level of administrative support had improved since the last inspection. Work was underway to prepare more detailed guidance regarding administrative procedures to enable staff to take on more varied tasks. Two new data base systems were being introduced and it was noted that staff still required training in both systems;
- Work was prioritised and workloads monitored in both the administrative and social work teams;
- Fostering Service social workers worked effectively with the children's social workers. Each family placement worker acts as a link with a specific child-care team in the Authority.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Fostering Service had a stable core staff team and there was relatively low turnover of staff in the social work teams, although there had been more turnover in the clerical/administration team. There were two vacant posts in the Permanency Team and because of this, and an increase in referrals to the team, a backlog of assessments had built up. This had implications in relation to the availability of short-term foster carers who were providing bridging placements for children assessed as requiring long-term placements. Arrangements had been put in place to reduce the backlog and these included the employment of a sessional worker, as well as social workers in the Directorate's child-care teams carrying out assessments. There was also a backlog of foster carer annual reviews.

However, there was evidence from records of foster carers' reviews and supervision, records of staff supervision, the layout and structure of files and, from interviews with staff members, and foster carers, that the service in general operated effectively. Discussion with fee paid foster carers indicated that they felt supported by their family placement workers. However, the Manager of the Permanency Team advised that occasionally, there were difficulties in allocating family placement workers to long-term family and friends carers. At the time of the inspection one family and friends carer had not been allocated a family placement worker.

Examination of the Service's procedures and process for recruiting and approving foster carers demonstrated that it was both thorough and exacting. A carer who had recently been assessed and approved confirmed this. The assessment process includes the use of a competency-based assessment. The Fostering Team's annual target for recruiting mainstream foster carers had been met, although the target in relation to fee paid carers had not.

The emergency assessments of kinship carers under Regulation 38 are carried out by child-care social workers in the area teams and are approved by the relevant Childrens' Services Manager.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

It was noted that:

- Disciplinary and grievance procedures were in place for staff;
- The Service's Foster Placement Procedures include a representations procedure for carers who wish to appeal against decisions;
- Carers can use the Corporate Complaints Policy to lodge any formal complaints they may have about the Service;
- A Whistleblowing Policy had been prepared and will be included in the revised Foster Carers Handbook;
- Systems were in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers. Contact Sheets are used to provide focus to such sessions. Family Placement Workers generally carry out monthly visits to carers although some are visited less frequently. Where a decision has been made to visit less frequently, it is recommended that the reasons for this decision, and details of those party to it, should be recorded in the foster carer's file;
- The Family Placement Service now provides an 'out of hours' telephone support service for foster carers. If a visit to a carers home is required, this is carried out by the Social Service Department's Emergency Duty Team;
- Arrangements were underway to prepare a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There was evidence that:

- The training and developmental needs of staff were being addressed. For example, some staff had commenced Post Qualifying training in Social Work and Child Care;
- Northumberland County Council received the Investors In People award in 2002;
- Although there is a Corporate induction scheme for new staff there was no formal induction programme for the Fostering Service. Instead induction training/support is negotiated on an individual basis with line managers;
- Arrangements were in place for staff to receive individual supervision and appraisals. These are used to identify and plan for the individual training needs of staff;
- Staff meetings are used to keep staff informed of changes in legislation and guidance;
- Foster carers can access the training provided by the Division's Staff Development Team and this provides the opportunity for them to participate in training with fostering service staff as well as staff who work in residential child care and field social work.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

It was noted that:

- A formal, structured supervision system was in place as well as a system of regular planned appraisals;
- Staff interviewed, including administrative staff, confirmed that they receive regular formal supervision. There was evidence that records are maintained of the content of the supervision, that there is a set agenda for supervision sessions and that a standard format is used to record each session;
- The frequency of supervision sessions had been reduced to once every 6 weeks and there was some evidence of a backlog in appraisals being carried out. Previously the responsibility for supervising some staff in the Fostering Team had been delegated to a lead family placement worker but this post no longer existed;
- Staff had access to the policies and procedures for the Service. Copies were available in the office. The Service's policies and procedures are covered in the induction programme for new staff;
- All staff had job descriptions and their duties, responsibilities and caseloads were discussed during supervision;
- Family Placement Worker Team Meetings and Administrative Staff Meetings took place regularly. The former concentrated on team business and practice issues alternately.

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

The Service had a clear strategy in place for working with and supporting carers and this is referred to in the Service's Statement of Purpose. The arrangements in place include:

- The services of an independent mediation, advice and counselling service;
- Support from the Service's Community Support Team for carers and young people where a placement is identified as being in danger of disrupting;
- Support from the ESLAC Team and an 'out of hours' duty system;
- Membership of Fostering Network which has a 24hr legal advice line;
- Two weeks paid holiday each year for fee paid carers. Discussion with fee paid foster carers indicated that there were some difficulties in obtaining suitable respite placements for the young people placed with them, so that they could go on holiday. The arrangements for providing respite care were being reviewed;
- Mainstream carers can negotiate periods of respite care and these are arranged by the Principal Officer (LAC);
- The provision of suitable transport, where necessary, in order to enable children placed with foster carers to accompany them on holiday;
- Foster carer support groups in some areas of the county, as well as a fee-paid carers support group where attendance is mandatory. Discussion with fee paid carers indicated that they felt that although the managers of the Fostering Service listened to their views and concerns, they were not acted upon.

There was evidence that:

- Reviews of carers were being carried out and that the review reports were available to the Fostering Panel;
- Foster carers interviewed said that they found the reviews useful;
- There was a backlog of reviews and sometimes, because of delays in receiving reports from the foster carers and reviewing officers, only the report of the family placement worker was submitted to the panel;
- Members of the management team chair the foster carer reviews. The Managers of the Fostering and Permanency Teams were chairing some reviews where they were line manager to the family placement worker of the carer;
- Arrangements were in place for the first annual review report of each carer supervised by the Fostering Team to be presented automatically to the Panel. However, this was not happening in respect of the first annual reviews of long-term foster carers supervised by the Permanency Team.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that an independent person chairs carers' annual reviews.

It was evident that supervising social workers were clear about the role of the supervising social worker.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Foster Carer Agreement format used by the Service had been amended to cover the information specified in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. However, it requires further development to include: more detail regarding the matters to be included in a foster placement agreement; the procedure available to foster parents for making representations in relation to reviews and terminations of approval as specified under 29 of the above regulations; the arrangements for meeting any legal liabilities of the foster parents arising by reason of a placement.

A Foster Carer Handbook is provided to each foster carer. Arrangements were underway to review and update the Handbook. There was evidence that, with the exception of one family and friends carer, each approved foster carer was supervised by an appropriately qualified, named worker on a regular basis. Records are maintained of the visits that are carried out by the family placement workers.

There was evidence available to confirm that unannounced visits had not been carried out in respect of each foster carer. Only one carer at the Fee Paid Carers Support Group attended by an inspector had received an unannounced visit. Discussion with staff indicated that some felt that these would be overly intrusive and others were not clear as to the purpose of these visits. One member of staff felt that they should be carried out by the child's social worker. It is recommended that the Service's Foster Placement Procedures and the Carers Handbook are developed to clearly set out the Service's expectation regarding unannounced visits by family placement workers as well as their purpose. Consideration should be given to preparing a separate pro-forma for these visits to give them structure and focus.

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**

There was evidence that:

- All foster carers, apart from kinship carers, are required to participate in the preparatory training provided by the Service. Arrangements were underway to replace the 'Choosing to Care' course with the recently developed 'Skills to Foster' training;
- The principles of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice underpin the training provided to foster carers; Experienced foster carers are involved in providing the initial training;
- Fee-paid carers and long term foster carers receive additional preparatory training; Post approval training covers a range of practice issues. Most of this training is either provided, or organised, by staff in the Fostering Service although foster carers can also access training provided by the Directorate's Staff Development Section;
- Carers also have the opportunity to undertake NVQ Level 3 training in Childcare;
- Foster carer reviews include identification of their training needs;
- Family placement workers will assist with transport and childminding to enable carers to attend training;
- The timing of the initial training is also varied to facilitate attendance;
- The Foster Carer Agreement had been developed to clarify the Service's expectations regarding foster carers attending training;
- A data base had been set up to record the training attended by each foster carer which should facilitate the monitoring of foster carer training;
- Foster carers had also been provided with files to enable them to maintain a training portfolio.

Foster carers interviewed indicated that they were satisfied with the training opportunities provided, although some said that they would prefer to have some training provided in their local area, rather than having to travel to Hepscott Park. Examination of a sample of five mainstream foster carer's training records indicated that only one had attended any post approval training and this was in 1980.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- Policy and procedural guidance was in place regarding the purpose, content and structure of young people's files. The case records of young people in foster care are maintained by the relevant child-care social worker in the area teams;
- The Foster Carer Handbook refers to the 'Looked After Children' (LAC) documents that a foster carer should receive at the outset of a placement as well as a section on the need for the carer to maintain appropriate records in respect of children in their care;
- Foster carers did not always receive sufficient information when children were placed with them in an emergency, and there were delays, in one case of more than six months, before some carers received the relevant L.A.C. documentation. One foster carer described how she had not been given certain information regarding a young person being placed with her and, because of this, she felt that her own child and another foster child could have been at risk;
- Foster carers interviewed understood why the young people were in their care as well as the purpose of the placement. However, the intended duration of a placement is not always clear because it depends on the availability of alternative placements;
- Foster carers were involved in reviews and case conferences.

Discussion with foster carers indicated that they understood the need to encourage, as appropriate, young people to reflect on and understand their past and to keep appropriate memorabilia. Guidance regarding this is included in the preparatory training for foster carers as well as in post approval training.

The Handbook refers to the need for foster carers to keep the records about a child in their care locked in a safe place. Consideration should be given to providing carers with suitable lockable storage for such records.

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
The administrative records were generally comprehensive and well maintained. There was evidence that work had been carried out to develop the Register of Foster Carers although this still needed to be developed to include all the required information in respect of family and friends carers. Arrangements were also underway to develop the Children's Register to include all the required information in a single database. Currently the required information is held in three separate places. Records were maintained of: allegations; complaints and accidents occurring to children whilst placed with foster parents. A policy was in place for staff in respect of the retention of records. A policy should be prepared and implemented for foster carers. Current foster carer's records were stored in lockable filing cabinets but not in rooms that were lockable.			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			237
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £		X	Maximum £
			X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises comprise sufficient space and facilities for the operation of the Fostering Service. The Service was equipped with IT and communications systems. Appropriate security measures were employed in respect of information retained on the computer system. Lockable and secure storage facilities for confidential information were available with the exception of a lockable room for records relating to current foster carers.

Training facilities for staff and foster carers were available on the Hepscott Park site. Meetings of the Foster Care Panel are held on the premises.

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?
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Not applicable.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Not applicable.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The Fostering Service publishes details of carers' allowances on an annual basis. These are provided to each carer. Although arrangements were in place for the basic allowances for carers to be paid promptly, there was evidence, from discussion with carers, that there continued to be delays in some payments of special allowances that are authorised by team managers in the area social work offices, rather than managers in the Fostering Service. Action had been taken to try to address this. The Foster Carers Handbook included details of the Service's policy regarding fostering allowances.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Fostering Service has Fostering Panel and a Permanency Panel. A policy/constitution in respect of the Fostering Panel was in place. The Manager of the Fostering Service chairs the Fostering Panel.

Observation of the Fostering Panel, as well as an examination of panel minutes, indicated that the panel members engaged in a thorough consideration of the information presented to them and that there was a structured decision making process. The Panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process and monitors the work of the Fostering Service. The Panel's Constitution should be amended to include reference to its function in monitoring the range and type of carers available to the Authority in comparison with the needs of children. The Panel should also be given access to information that will enable it to carry out this function. In addition, the Constitution should include a procedure covering decision making when all members of the Panel are not in agreement.

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 provides Short Break Foster Care for families that are experiencing difficulties and need regular short breaks as well as Short Break Foster Care for children with disabilities. The foster carers who provide short break care undergo the same assessment process and initial training as other foster carers.	3
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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There was evidence that the Authority was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as carers. Kinship carers do not undergo any preparatory training as part of their assessment and approval. The assessment process is also different and shorter although there was evidence that this was thorough and considered. Kinship carers have the same access to post approval training as other carers and, once approved, are allocated a supervising social worker from the Foster Care Team. Discussion with staff indicated that they were sensitive to the particular needs of kinship carers and the children placed with them. A working party of family placement workers had been set up to review the training and support provided to kinship carers although no report had been prepared at the time of the inspection.

In the sample of foster carer records examined, there was evidence that the Fostering Service's procedures and timescales in respect of the assessment and approval of kinship carers were not being followed. There was also evidence that where an immediate placement of a young person with a relative had been arranged, the social worker did not visit at least once a week as specified in Regulation 35(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. In addition, the written agreement made by the carer with the Authority did not cover all the areas specified in Regulation 38(3) of these regulations.

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 8th March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 20th July 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>	YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Mr Eugene M Hill of Northumberland County Council SSD (Northumberland Fostering Service) confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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