



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering

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

*Lead Inspector*  
Stephen Graham

*Announced Inspection*  
18th September 2006      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering
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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Hartlepool Borough Council
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Richard Wrighton
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Authority Fostering Service

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      21st November 2005

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Hartlepool Borough Council fostering service is based in Aneurin Bevan House in Hartlepool. The service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs including long term foster care, short term foster placements for teenagers and also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a Shared Care scheme. In addition the service assesses and supports kinship carers and provides remand foster carers. At the time of the inspection visit the service was supporting 77 foster placements across these various areas of work. At the time of the inspection the family placement team included a staff team of eight people including the manager and an administrative support worker.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspector would like to thank the children, carers and staff at Hartlepool Fostering for their welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered by two inspectors over a 5 day period through:

- Talking individually with children, carers and staff.
- Visiting foster carers' homes.
- Group discussions with staff, children and carers.
- Talking with the managers of the service.
- Reading children's, carer's and staff files.
- Reading policies, procedures and records.
- Children's questionnaires.
- Carer's questionnaires.
- Children's social workers questionnaires.
- Observing the fostering panel.
- Talking with the Chair of the fostering panel.

Since the previous inspection changes have occurred to the management arrangements for this service with the current manager only commencing their duties at the end of May 2006, just over 3 months prior to this inspection. Despite these changes and throughout the course of this visit the inspectors noted the commitment both from managers, staff and foster carers to maintain good standards, whilst working to further improve the range and quality of service provided.

Inspectors found that the service has responded positively to the previous requirements set and recommendations made. The views of children, their carers and placing social workers received during the inspection further endorsed this.

## **What the service does well:**

Previous inspections had confirmed that the overall service provided by Hartlepool Fostering to its carers and children placed with them was good. Positively, the views of carers gathered during this visit confirmed that the service continues to be provided to this standard.

During this inspection, a number of very positive comments were received from placing social workers, carers and children. One carer stated: "When I need support I will phone the Department and we will work together to get results."

When asked: "Why do you choose to foster for this service?" carers gave many positive responses. One carer gave their view that Hartlepool Fostering "put

children first and their needs are met, we all work together for the good of the child." Another carer stated: "we chose the service because we generally believe that the staff constantly look to improve the service." When asked: "What does the service do to help you care for children?" carers again gave positive responses. One carer highlighted the "support, training, advice" received. Others stated that: "They will try their best when asked for help;" that they "care for children, give them schooling, what a lot of kids miss out on" and they "promote the young person."

Children and young people were happy to confirm that they felt safe, are well cared for and that their views are listened to both by their carers and staff. Children felt that their overall health and educational needs are well met and that they are supported in maintaining contact with their families where appropriate. They also enjoy the benefit of activities and hobbies and are involved within their communities.

Very positive descriptions were received from children explaining why they felt this was true. One young person said of their foster home: "I love where I am, I will stay here when I leave care." Another stated: "I am part of a family for the first time ever I love where I am." With regard to health needs one young person stated: "I am encouraged to eat healthy foods to help with my strength and growth." Another young person confirmed that if they were unhappy they would speak to: "My foster carer or my social worker sometimes my teacher." With regard to their education, one young person stated that: "I get help with education I ask my foster carers if I need questions answering on my future." Another older young person confirmed that: "I have now enrolled in college with help of foster family."

Overall the inspectors found that the service creates positive outcomes for children in meeting their health needs, keeping them safe, supporting their education, contact with family and friends and involvement in the community. Importantly, inspectors also found that children feel listened to by their carers, social workers and the fostering staff.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The service has continued to work to ensure good outcomes for children and to further improve the service by ensuring that previous requirements and recommendations made are fully implemented.

Carers were asked to comment on whether they felt that since the previous inspection the service was better, worse or not changed. Very positively, of those responding, most felt that the service was better, with others feeling it had not changed, no one felt that the service was worse.

As previously required, the service has worked with the department's complaints officer to establish and maintain a system for monitoring

complaints in relation to children placed with foster parents and their outcomes.

Recruitment records in respect of the manager and staff of the service have been reviewed and improved to ensure that evidence that all of the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 has been obtained.

The service has taken additional steps to further ensure that children are not placed with foster parents unless the service is satisfied that each placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all circumstances.

Formal supervision of all foster parents is now undertaken at intervals of no more than six weeks. A supervision record has been put in place to provide greater evidence of this.

Reviewing officers are attending fostering panel meetings upon request in order to present their written reports.

As previously recommended, formal meetings between foster carers and senior managers have taken place in order to promote positive communication. These are likely to continue to occur at more regular intervals.

The service has established a system for informing the emergency duty team 'out of hours' service of the location of essential items of equipment. Experienced foster carers are directly involved in facilitating this process.

The previous inspection had highlighted the need for all carers to be provided with updated Foster Care agreements which include all matters listed in schedule 5 of the foster care regulations, including confirmation that corporal punishment may not be used by carers with any foster child. It was confirmed that this had now been achieved for nearly all carers with confirmation that those outstanding would be completed through their forthcoming annual reviews.

The previous recommendation that the service review its Statement of Purpose and incorporate more 'child friendly' language, has been completed. The Children's Guide has also been reviewed and references to the National Care Standards Commission have been replaced with that of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The service is continuing to develop good links with the 'Sahara Project', which works to recruit black and minority ethnic carers.



## **What they could do better:**

The views of children and carers interviewed or responding by questionnaire during the inspection did not highlight any major common areas in need of improvement. When asked: "what could the service do better" most carers and children took the opportunity to further highlight what they felt the service already did well. However, some individual comments received regarding possible changes are included within the main report and were fed back to the manager to be considered and addressed by the agency. One young person took the opportunity to highlight their views regarding the recruitment of foster carers in Hartlepool by stating: "Young people deserve a chance. Lives can be changed just by being in foster care."

The inspectors, however, identified a number of areas where they felt further improvements could be made. These are in summary;

To improve required record keeping for children and carers, the service should complete the planned work to improve their electronic database allowing the children's register to be developed to include all the information specified in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Similarly, that the foster carers' register must include all the information set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

To ensure that fostering panel members, staff and the agency decision maker are fully informed about decisions made by the panel, it is strongly recommended that the current system of minute taking at fostering panel meetings be reviewed. Particular emphasis must be placed on the production of fostering panel minutes in a more 'timely' manner.

To further improve the representation of the fostering panel, the service should continue its efforts to recruit a person who has been fostered or is the parent of a child who has been fostered.

The service must complete its current review of training needs and ensure that carers are provided with training in both recognising and responding to the potential abuse of children, bullying, behaviour management, first aid and health and safety.

To further ensure that children are cared for safely, the addition of signatures and dates of completion of safe care agreements would provide better evidence that these are being reviewed and updated at regular intervals.

To further ensure that the service is being appropriately monitored the manager should routinely report any significant events occurring at the service directly to the Commission.

To further ensure that children are cared for safely, the service must ensure that written indication that verbal confirmation of references received had been

obtained through follow up telephone calls to the referees themselves, should be included within staff files. Additionally, for ease of reference, written confirmation of CRB disclosure numbers should also be maintained within each staff file.

To further ensure that the service works to value and promote diversity, staff should work to raise awareness of the Sahara Project and it's potential to provide individual advice and support to social workers, children and carers where needed.

To ensure that the service continues to be effectively managed, the manager must continue their work to obtain their required management qualification.

To ensure that the service continues to be effectively administered, the arrangements to manage support and deputise for the team clerk should be reviewed and improved.

The service should review the process by which children's views are gathered and presented to carer review meetings to further ensure that children's views about the care they receive are heard.

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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Hartlepool Fostering works to ensure that the health needs of children placed with their carers are effectively promoted and monitored.

## EVIDENCE:

One young person, whilst confirming that they usually receive support and advice about being healthy, stated: "I am encouraged to eat healthy foods to help with my strength and growth." Another described how their foster carers: "always tell me to brush my teeth and try to get me to eat vegetables and fresh fruit." Another younger person stated that: "I am going to be a footballer so we try to keep fit and to be healthy." Another confirmed that they receive support with their health needs "because my nurse gives me advice."

The overall response received from young people was very positive regarding the support received from their carers and the service in meeting their health needs. Of the children and young people responding all were able to report that they had received help in meeting their own health needs. Over two thirds of those responding stated that they 'always' get support in meeting these needs, with others describing this as 'usually' provided.

The overall response from carers was that the support provided was either good or excellent, with only one carer describing it as, at least, adequate. Carers gave a number of good examples of the support received from the service and the dedicated looked after children's (LAC) nurse. One highlighted that: "health workers, doctors etc. very supportive i.e. medicals, vaccinations." Another stated that: "If there are any difficulties in attending any appointment

the social worker will help to transport the children.” Positively, the manager themselves highlighted plans to further involve and introduce the LAC nurse to more carers through their direct participation in carer training events.

Examination of children’s care files and discussion with carers themselves provided lots of evidence that carers receive a full description of the health needs of the children they care for, are supported in ensuring that children are registered with doctors and dentists and that appropriate consents for any medical treatment required are provided. Carers are also supported to access necessary training in health, hygiene and first aid.

Very positive evidence was also received from social workers placing children through the service. Those interviewed highlighted the good support provided to foster children by the dedicated Looked After Children’s (LAC) nurse. Positively, statistics provided by the service confirmed that 95% of children had benefited from attending their statutory annual medical review. Placing social workers were also positive about their own access to specialist advice regarding the health needs of children within their own social work teams. Expertise in areas such as sexual health and addiction issues were highlighted.

One carer raised a concern regarding the “timeliness” of the provision of reports from specialist mental health workers to a child’s review. This was highlighted to the manager of the service for their review.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The manager of the service is both suitable and competent to provide it. Young people are placed with carers who provide safe homes. Arrangements to match young people with carers are generally effective. The overall arrangements put in place by the service keep children safe, are documented fully and consistently with any concerns responded to promptly. The fostering panel is well comprised and is making good decisions and recommendations to the decision maker. Some improvements are recommended in the procedures by which children themselves can comment on the ongoing qualities of carers in meeting their needs.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The manager was able to confirm that those members of staff in the fostering service, (who are required to be CRB checked), every foster carer, and all adult members of the households of foster carers, have had their required checks completed. Earlier this year and prior to the current manager's appointment, the service had been monitored through a 'temporary' management arrangement. Staff at the service and social workers placing children through it, were very positive regarding the stability provided by the permanent appointment of a full-time manager and the pro-active style evident in their work both to stabilise and further improve the service.

Discussion with carers, staff and an examination of carer files provided good evidence that the service works to ensure that carers provide an environment to children which is free from hazards and routinely checked to ensure that it remains safe and suitable for the care of children. Health and safety checklists are in use and were available within carers' files.

To ensure that children are cared for safely, full information is required from placing social workers to allow the fostering service to 'match' children successfully and inform carers of children's ongoing care needs. When asked how they would rate the information they received about the child before they were placed, positive responses were received from half of all carers, who described this as either 'good' or 'excellent' with a further third describing it as 'adequate.' With regard to information received, one carer stated that "it seems ok, they let you know everything that's going on." Another commented with regard to fostering supervising social workers that: "they can only pass on what they have received." However, two carers responding described the information received about children as 'inadequate.' One of these carers commented that: "sometimes background information is limited, we would like social services to be more open about information about young persons so we have more idea of what to expect from young people." One example of incomplete information, raising potential health and safety concerns for the carers themselves was fed back to the manager for their review.

Positively, carers provided a good indication of the planning and sharing of information taking place when children are moved to new placements. When asked "How good is the fostering service at supporting you in maintaining placements, so that children only move in a planned way?" carers described this as either 'excellent' or 'good.' Only one respondent described this support as poor with details of their concern fed back to the service manager for their review. One carer confirmed positively that: "the children's views are always considered." Another highlighted the potential difficulties in this by stating: "this is not as easy done as said, however all departments try to work together with me in trying to do the best for everyone involved."

Carers responded very positively when asked "How good is the service at ensuring that you can meet the needs of the children and young people placed with you?" with all of those responding describing this support as either 'good' or 'excellent.' In describing the support received one carer simply stated: "we work together."

Examination of care files and direct discussions with carers themselves highlighted some very good examples of good quality information being provided leading to appropriate matches of children to carers. Written placement agreements for children were seen to be completed in detail and to include necessary matching information. One carer interviewed described the qualities of staff in working with them to prepare a baby child for adoption,

describing how staff had worked with sensitivity and that the handover process had been handled very well. Positively, another carer was able to describe the quality of matching by simply stating: (the young person) "fostered us."

Positive evidence of the quality of care provided through the good matching of children with carers was also received through children's questionnaire responses. When asked the question: "Do you feel well cared for where you live now?" nearly all the children were able to respond 'always', with no 'negative' responses received. Very positive descriptions were received from children explaining why they felt this was true. One stated: "Yes I am, I don't get shouted at and my foster carer cares about me." Another said: "I always feel well cared for, my carers look after me well, they also listen to me as well." A third young person stated: "I am part of a family for the first time ever, I love where I am, I will stay here when I leave care."

In discussion, placing social workers were positive regarding the choices of placement made available by the fostering service. Some however, felt that limitations with regard to "permanency" placements existed currently. This was fed back to the manager for their information and review.

Positively, the number of emergency placements of children with carers was balanced evenly with those that were planned. Again, good evidence of the quality of matching of children with carers was indicated by the relatively low number of un-planned endings of placements for the service in the 12 months prior to this inspection.

To ensure that children and young children are protected from abuse and neglect, it is necessary to provide carers with training in both recognising and responding to any such events as they occur. Examination of the current carer training programme for the service confirmed that only three carers had attended necessary training in child protection this year and this was acknowledged by the manager. However, it was also confirmed that departmental policies and procedures regarding access to necessary training are currently being reviewed. It was confirmed that opportunities for carers to attend necessary training would be re-established once the current review was completed. The manager acknowledged the inspectors recommendations that a 'spreadsheet' should be introduced to allow the service to monitor the training needs of all carers. Gaps in the current programme in respect to bullying, behaviour management, first aid and health and safety, all necessary to ensure that children are safely cared for, were also acknowledged with re-assurance provided that these current gaps would also be addressed through the training review. It was also agreed that where foster carers were involved in National Vocational Qualification (N.V.Q.) training, more detail of the individual modules undertaken should be included in their training records to further demonstrate how their necessary training needs had been met.



With one exception, safe care agreements were in place within those carer files examined. The one exception was highlighted to the manager for their review. Those agreements that were in place did not include the dates of their completion or the signatures of those involved in agreeing them. Although carers spoken to were able to confirm verbally that safe care agreements were being reviewed and updated at regular intervals, it was recommended that the addition of signatures and dates of completion would provide better evidence of this.

The previous inspection highlighted the need for all carers to be provided with updated Foster Care agreements which include all matters listed in schedule 5 of the foster care regulations, including confirmation that corporal punishment may not be used by carers with any foster child. Good file evidence and discussion with the manager confirmed that this had now been achieved for nearly all carers. The manager confirmed that those outstanding would be completed through their forthcoming annual reviews.

The service has an appropriate system in place to collect and monitor any allegations of abuse received. There was good evidence of this being closely monitored by the manager of the service. In discussion, the manager agreed to supplement their own monitoring by notifying any significant events directly to the Commission. From the questionnaire responses received and children interviewed, two concerns regarding bullying (at school) were received. These concerns were fed back to the manager for their review with the young person, their carers, supporting social work staff and the department's anti-bullying coordinator.

The service is staffed by experienced and well-qualified social workers. Those interviewed were positive regarding access to ongoing training, and the direct support and supervision provided to them by their managers. The previous inspection had highlighted that not all of the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 was present within staff files. During this inspection a selection of those files held at the personnel department were reviewed, these contained good evidence that required checks on staff had been completed. However, although personnel staff were able to confirm that verbal confirmation of references received were obtained through follow up telephone calls to the referees themselves, no written indication of this was contained within the files. Confirmation that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are completed for each staff member is held within the Department's electronic database. During the visit, personnel staff were able to access this information, but with difficulty. It was recommended that for ease of reference, written confirmation of CRB disclosure numbers should be maintained within each staff file.

Examination of foster carers' files provided good evidence of the quality of initial carer assessments undertaken by the fostering service and presented to the fostering panel. Files examined also provided good evidence of the

scrutiny of these assessments undertaken by panel members during their meetings.

During the meeting of the fostering panel attended by the inspector, panel members appeared comfortable in their roles and as previously highlighted, the presentation of written reports for their information was generally good. Discussion was thorough, with members able to raise and challenge any issues regarding the ongoing suitability of foster carers subject to initial assessment or their annual reviews.

Discussion with the Chair of the panel confirmed that the service had responded positively to the recommendations made at the previous inspection. The Chair described how officers responsible for the annual reviews of foster carers now attend panel upon request both to present and answer the questions of panel members regarding their written reports. Senior managers confirmed that the recruitment of additional review staff would allow this to occur on a more regular basis. The panel Chair added their observation that reviews are now being presented more promptly to panel for their consideration.

The panel Chair also confirmed that as recommended at the previous inspection, a potential panel member has been identified who has direct experience of being fostered. It was hoped that this person would possibly be recruited in the near future. The manager of the service was also able to confirm this.

The previous inspection report had also strongly recommended that the current system of minute taking at fostering panel meetings be reviewed with particular emphasis being placed on the production of fostering panel minutes in a more 'timely' manner. Unfortunately, the Chair highlighted that delays in the provision of minutes continued to cause concern with panel members having only limited time to read these in advance of panel meetings. This was further evidenced by the experience of the inspector themselves with the service unable to provide the minutes of the previous panel meeting in advance of the meeting attended. Positively, whilst acknowledging the continued delay in the provision of minutes, the manager confirmed that the minute taker and the manager meet with the agency decision maker normally three days after panel to provide details of decisions made, allowing these to be ratified by the decision maker and thereby avoiding any delays in their confirmation.

A review of previous panel minutes and discussion with the panel Chair confirmed that some panels had been cancelled, as they were not quorate. This had caused some delays in the presentation and approval of carer assessments. Again the panel Chair and service manager were able to confirm that these issues had been addressed through the recent recruitment of additional panel members.

Both the service manager and panel Chair were positive with regard to the provision of additional training opportunities for panel members. The Chair themselves has recently participated in the regional independent panel chair forum. The manager highlighted their plans to further co-ordinate regional training opportunities for panel members through the already established links with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Hartlepool Fostering through its foster carers works to provide placements, which value diversity and promote equality. Children placed with the agency's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes their educational achievement. Where short-term breaks are provided arrangements ensure that the parents of children are recognised as remaining the main carers for the child.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The service works to provide carers that value issues of equality and diversity in the provision of care to children placed with them. Positively, when carers were asked: "How well does the fostering service address issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability?" all carers who responded described this as either 'excellent' or 'good.' One carer stated positively, "I was impressed at meetings how this was put across." Equally positive examples of additional support, advice and equipment being provided to carers caring for children with disabilities, were also received. The majority of placing social workers who responded were also equally positive regarding this aspect of the service.

Although the service does have a small group of carers of non-white British and other backgrounds, the number is low. At the time of the inspection all children placed through the service were of white British background. Positively, the manager was able to confirm that the service is continuing to

develop good links with the 'Sahara Project', which works to recruit black and minority ethnic carers. Discussion with placing social workers provided one example of ethnicity issues involving an asylum-seeking child being positively addressed through the gathering of direct advice from a neighbouring local authority with more experience in this area. It was recommended that the fostering manager work to raise awareness of the Sahara Project and its potential to provide individual advice and support to social workers, children and carers where needed.

With regard to access to activities in the community, carers were also positive regarding the support received from the service. When asked to 'describe how well the fostering service helps you in supporting the children you care for undertake activities in the community,' all of those responding again described this as either 'excellent' or 'good.' One carer highlighted that: "They (the service) always send letters out saying what's going on for the children." Another carer stated that: "Although we do little activities through the fostering service as my children are already very busy with activities but the services are offered to us regularly."

The previous inspection had highlighted difficulties for carers in accessing adaptations and support for children with disabilities particularly 'out-of hours,' the service has worked positively to address this and has now nominated carers with expertise in this area who are accessible through the out-of-hours duty system and can coordinate access for carers to specialist equipment where needed. Very positive comments were received from placing social workers regarding the individual qualities and skills of foster carers provided by the service in working with children with a range of disabilities. However, some individual concerns were raised that lack of larger equipment and home adaptations can lead to children having to be placed in residential settings rather than foster placements. These concerns were fed back to the manager of the service for review.

With regards to how the fostering service and carers promote educational attainment, children and young people were asked directly about the level of support they received. Very positively all of those who responded stated that they 'always' or 'usually' get the help and support they need. None of the responses received indicated that they did not receive support. One young person stated that: "I go to school every day, usually when I lived with dad I use to go twice a week." Another described how: "I get help with education I ask my foster carers if I need questions answering on my future." A third stated that "(my carers) helped me to learn my times tables. And they help me with my homework." An older young person highlighted how: "I have now enrolled in college with help of foster family."

Carers were also positive about the support and advice received with regards to the education of children placed with them. All of those responding described this as 'good' or 'excellent.' One carer highlighted how: "The

children have been supported with extra classes in school which were very beneficial, so it helped them to “catch up” on lost schooling time.” Another carer highlighted that: “They (the service) have provided extra funds for equipment for college.”

Care files examined during the inspection along with discussion with carers, children and placing social workers also provided positive evidence of the good educational support being provided to children. Examples included good mentoring support provided to one child who was visited. Carers involved in the provision of ‘respite’ shared care also demonstrated the good lines of communication that had been established between parents, schools and themselves. The fostering service has strong links with an educational coordinator who regularly provides direct support to children and their carers.

Positively, although the actual number of children was small, statistics provided by the service confirmed that of those children leaving the care of the fostering service over the last 12 months 40% have been awarded at least one GCSE or GNVQ, with 20% having achieved 5 GCSEs.

As part of overall case tracking arrangements during this inspection, carers providing ‘short break care’ to children and their families were interviewed and care files examined. This provided very positive examples of the quality of the joint working arrangements put in place, as well as confirming that these arrangements positively recognise and support parents in their role as main carers to their children.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

### **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Hartlepool Fostering actively promotes and supports contact between children and their families and friends where this is appropriate. Arrangements are in place to seek children's views about their lives and the care they receive.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The overall response of carers when asked about the quality of children's networks with family and friends was 'good' with some describing this as excellent. Only one carer described the child's network with family as adequate, in doing this they also confirmed that contact with family had been assessed and agreed as not being in the best interests of the child in question.

Overall, the files examined contained clear recording and good evidence of the work done by carers to support appropriate contact between children, young people and their families. Interviews with carers and children during home visits also provided positive examples of contact being supported and promoted. One young person had requested direct contact with their siblings, although this had previously assessed as not being in their best interests, very positively the service and the child's social worker had reviewed this situation with their current assessment due to be presented and reviewed in court.

One example of a child raising concerns regarding the lack of response from their placing social worker regarding contact issues was raised with the service manager for their review.

Positively, through their questionnaire responses and through direct discussion with inspectors, all young people responding were able to confirm that they did know who to speak to if they were unhappy or had a personal problem. Unfortunately, three of the same young people were unclear when asked 'Do you know how to make a complaint?' Their details were provided to the manager for clarification with those young people.

Nearly all of those children spoken with directly as a group were able to confirm that they had been provided with written information about the service through the young person's guide, some however, were unsure. In discussion, the manager confirmed that they are currently reviewing distribution methods to ensure that all children had direct access to this guide.

One young person raised a concern regarding the level of consultation with their placing social worker caused by their infrequent visits to the foster carer's home. This was raised with the service manager for their review. However, with this exception, the overall response from children and young people when asked: "Does your social worker listen to you and take notice of your opinions?" was very positive. Nearly all described this as being always or usually true. One young person said of their social worker that: "When he comes out to see me he gives me advice and he listens to me when I have something to say." Another young person described the support from their social worker as follows: "He listens to any of my questions and opinions and helps to answer them and steer me in the right direction to an answer."

With regard to overall consultation, young people gave a number of very positive examples. With regard to carers asking their opinions young people responded very positively, with nearly all stating that this 'always' happens. One young person stated: "Whenever I need to talk to some one my carer listens to me and voices her opinions to help with the situation." Another stated that: "They always listen to me when I have problems". A third stated realistically that: "when I am cheeky they ignore me."

When carers were asked: 'How would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about their day to day lives?' All who responded described this as either 'excellent' or 'good.' Carers were also very positive about how the service involves children in how it (the service) is run with the vast majority described this as 'good,' with no negative responses received.

During the visit a group discussion took place with children and young people attending the established consultation group for the service. They provided a number of positive examples of the direct work undertaken by staff to support them in providing their opinions to their own care reviews and also in gathering their overall views on the quality of support they receive from the service. A number of young people highlighted their awareness of access to additional support where necessary through the national youth advocacy



service (NYAS). The manager of the fostering service also highlighted the ongoing work to further develop consultation strategies with the continuing aim of the service to further improve consultation with young people.

In an arranged discussion with a group of carers some highlighted how the children in their care did not wish to attend the young people's group as, positively, they were happy and established in their placement and did not see themselves as 'looked after' children. Other carers with 'looked after' children who did attend the group were very positive in their descriptions of its purpose and the benefits for children attending.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Hartlepool Fostering ensures that appropriate and prompt payments are made to carers in accordance with its policies and procedures.

## EVIDENCE:

Policies and procedures in respect of fostering allowances and payments to carers are in place. This information is made available to carers and staff through the foster carers' handbook. Carers raised no concerns regarding their receipt of the necessary fostering allowances and the prompt payment of them by the agency.

Positive comments were received regarding the 'banding' system used by the service to further reward the commitment to training and development of skills and experience of foster carers in their work with children and young people. Two requests for clarification were received from carers with regard to allowances received. One carer requested clarification with regard to payments received when providing 'respite care.' This was fed back to the manager who reviewed this with the carer concerned during the course of the inspection. A separate request for clarification with regard to the payment of disability allowances for children in foster care was also fed back for the manager to review with the carers involved.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

**The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

1.2.16.17.21.23.24.25.32.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Hartlepool Fostering is an effectively managed service. Its team of social work practitioners provide good quality supervision and support to its carers. Management systems and records in use at the service are generally robust, however some recommendations are made regarding administrative records and staffing as well as children's and carer's documentation.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The previous inspection had recommended that the Statement of Purpose (SoP) for the service be reviewed and produced in more 'child friendly' language. It was also recommended that the Children's Guide to the service also be reviewed with references to the National Care Standards Commission be replaced with that of the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The manager was able to confirm that both the SoP and Children's Guide had been updated and amended as requested.

The manager was also able to confirm that they are continuing their work to obtain their required management qualification and should complete this by September 2006.

Discussion with the team clerk, the manager and supervising social workers highlighted the extensive responsibilities and key role that the team clerk holds in the administration of the fostering service. The individual work undertaken by the clerk to produce a handbook for use by other staff outlining key procedures and responsibilities in administering the fostering service was highlighted. However, despite this, the manager acknowledged that arrangements to deputise for the clerk in their absence are limited. Line management for the clerk is also based outside of the fostering service, thereby limiting the direct support currently available to them.

The service has appropriate policies and procedures in place for the recruitment and assessment of carers. Files examined provided good evidence of the quality of the assessments undertaken with potential carers and the good panel processes in place to review these. Files contained clear notices of approval as well as good evidence of written records of referee interviews being shared with the referee themselves to confirm their accuracy. In one exception to this, it was noted that although the signed written references were in place, the file did not contain direct evidence that the referees themselves had been visited. This was fed back to the manager for their review. In addition, one file provided only limited written evidence that disclosed information arising from a Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB) had been discussed with the applicant, again this was fed back to the manager for their review.

When asked to describe, 'how well the fostering service supports you in caring for the children you look after' carers were very positive in their questionnaire responses. The majority described the support received as 'excellent' with all others describing it as 'good'. One carer stated that: "when I need support I will phone the Department and we will work together to get results." Another described how "they were good at supplying essentials i.e. pram etc." Other comments received included: "I have always received any help I have required

in caring for the kids” and “the link worker provides vital support as and when needed.”

Carers benefit from access to regular support group meetings with guest speakers and training events included. The previous inspection had recommended that formal meetings between foster carers and senior managers be provided in order to promote positive communication. Discussion with carers, senior managers and examination of the written group programme itself confirmed that these had and would continue to take place regularly.

Examination of records of supervision within carer files and discussion with carers during a number of home visits confirmed that they receive regular supervision from their own social workers. An agreed format for recording issues arising during supervision is in use and examples examined provided good evidence of the quality of supervision provided.

Evidence of the good communication between supervising social workers and placing social workers was provided through separate discussions with representatives of each group. Carers were equally positive regarding the joint working undertaken to ensure that the needs of children are met. However, some individual concerns regarding difficulties in telephone contact with social workers at one office location were highlighted to the manager for their review.

The skills of carers in caring for the children placed with them are subject to annual review and in discussion, the panel Chair had confirmed that although some delays had occurred, reviews are now being presented more promptly to the panel for their consideration. It was noted that review reports contained limited evidence of the views of children regarding the quality of care that they receive from their carers. In discussion, placing social workers confirmed that their views were sought by the service and acknowledged that they could and did present children’s views on their behalf. However, it was recommended that the process by which children’s views are gathered and presented to these meetings be reviewed to ensure more consistency.

From files examined one example highlighted some confusion regarding the change of approval for one carer through their annual review. Positively, the file also contained evidence that this had been ‘spotted’ by the current manager through their monitoring of files, with the carers next review brought forward to ensure that the matter was addressed. Those review reports examined included good detail and evidence that health and safety checks were also being reviewed and updated as part of the overall process. Only one inconsistency in this was noted and fed back to the manager.

Some of the issues arising in the provision of training to foster carers to ensure that children are cared for safely have been highlighted earlier in this report. During direct discussion, carers demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm with

regard to their participation in training events. One carer involved in co-ordinating carer support group meetings highlighted how meetings often overran as a result of carers wishing to talk at length with guest speakers to add to their knowledge and understanding of a range of child care issues. Further evidence of the commitment of carers to training was available through the numbers participating in National Vocational Qualification Training (NVQ). Information provided by the service confirmed that nearly half of all carers approved by the service have either completed or are currently in the process of completing this training or it's equivalent.

During case tracking a number of children's files were examined. The quality of the information held within and overall presentation of information was generally good. However, some isolated examples of Looked after Children (LAC) documentation containing only minimal detail or requiring update were highlighted to the manager for their review. Service managers acknowledged that the scrutiny of children's care documents by the team of independent reviewing officers was working positively to improve standards overall.

The previous inspection had highlighted the need for the service to develop a children's register, which includes all the information specified in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Although the manager was able to demonstrate that all required information is available through the electronic database maintained by the service, work to present this in a concise format has not yet been achieved. It was agreed that the service would continue to liaise with the database providers to achieve this previously set requirement. Similarly, with regard to the foster carers' register, the service is continuing to work with the database providers to develop a format which will include all information set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to assess, encourage and support the care of children and young people by family members and friends. There was good evidence of the use of regulation 38 (emergency placement arrangements) to monitor the safety of children whilst thorough assessments of their carers were completed and presented to the fostering panel. These assessments were seen to be thorough, and in one example where the timescale of assessment was prolonged there was good evidence of the close monitoring of the interim care arrangements by social work staff and the fostering panel to ensure positive outcomes for the child and their carers.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS25	22	The children’s register must be developed to include all the information specified in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. <b>(Previous timescale 21/2/06)</b>	31/03/07
2.	FS25	31	The foster carers’ register must be developed to include all the information set out in Regulation 31 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. <b>(Previous timescale 21/2/06)</b>	31/03/07

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS9	The service must complete it’s current review of training needs and ensure that carers are provided with training in both recognising and responding to the potential abuse of children, bullying, behaviour management, first aid and health and safety.



2.	FS9	To further ensure that children are cared for safely, the addition of signatures and dates of completion of safe care agreements would provide better evidence that these are being reviewed and updated at regular intervals.
3.	FS9	To further ensure that the service is being appropriately monitored the manager should routinely report any significant events occurring at the service directly to the commission.
4.	FS15	To further ensure that children are cared for safely, the service must ensure that written indication that verbal confirmation of references received had been obtained through follow up telephone calls to the referees themselves should be included within staff files. Additionally, for ease of reference, written confirmation of CRB disclosure numbers should also be maintained within each staff file.
5.	FS30	It is strongly recommended that the current system of minute taking fostering panel meetings be reviewed with particular emphasis being placed on the production of fostering panel minutes in a more 'timely' manner.
6.	FS30	It is recommended that the membership of fostering panel be reviewed to include a person who has been fostered or is the parent of a child who has been fostered.
7.	FS7	To further ensure that the service works to value and promote diversity, staff should work to raise awareness of the Sahara Project and it's potential to provide individual advice and support to social workers, children and carers where needed.
8.	FS2	To ensure that the service continues to be effectively managed, the manager must continue their work to obtain their required management qualification.
9.	FS16	To ensure that the service continues to be effectively administered, the arrangements to manage support and deputise for the team clerk should be reviewed and improved.
10.	FS21	The service should review the process by which children's views are gathered and presented to carer review meetings to further ensure that children's views about the care they receive are heard.

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