



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service

Central House
Gladstone Street
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 6JX

24th February 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

Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service

Address

Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service, Central House, Gladstone Street, Darlington, County Durham

Local Authority Manager

Alison Walton

Tel No:

01325 3462000

Address

Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service, Central House, Gladstone Street, Darlington, County Durham

Fax No:

01325 346474

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

12/02/03

Date of Inspection Visit		24th February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Michele Hargan	076522
Name of Inspector	2	Roger Gordon	
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.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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 Darlington Local Authority 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.

This local authority provides a well-established fostering service, which places children with foster carers on both a long term and short-term basis.

The service actively recruits foster carers and there are systems in place so that an initial assessment at the stage of a first enquiry from prospective carers can be carried out. All applicants are required to complete the Foster Carer training course, which includes many essential aspects relating to safe caring, child protection and meeting the emotional needs of children who have had experience of being "Looked After".

The service carries out a series of visits to prospective carers in order to complete the required assessment so that the suitability of carers can be determined. When a satisfactory assessment has been completed, this document, which is referred to as a form F is shared with applicants. The service carries out all other necessary checks including visits to referees for foster carers. Satisfactorily completed applications and other relevant details are presented to the local authority-fostering panel, which can approve or refuse applications.

Documentation is in place as required, which demonstrates that the agency is functioning appropriately. Liaison with all other relevant agencies takes place on an ongoing basis.

The service is able to offer robust psychological support to children and foster carers and this service is of real benefit and value to service users and fostering social workers.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This is the second inspection of this local authority service since the introduction of National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Whilst there is not a legal requirement for local authority fostering services to be registered as is the case with independent fostering agencies. The manager for the local authority service is required to undergo an interview to determine fitness in the same way, as a manager of an independent agency would be. The team manager for the service has previously been interviewed accordingly in compliance with the legal requirement under the Care Standard Act 2000.

The commission has to report the findings of the inspection to the Secretary Of State which is solely applicable to local authority fostering provision.

The local authority provides a well-established fostering service, which places children with foster carers on both a long term and short-term basis. Since the time of the last inspection the authority has undergone a re-configuration within Children's services. This has led to the present appointment of the Accommodation Manager who has day-to-day responsibility for the fostering team. There was substantial evidence to confirm that the present arrangements are working effectively including a robust response to requirements and recommendations made at the time of the last inspection. The findings of the inspection are detailed as followed: -

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard area is fully met. A Statement of Purpose has recently been compiled. This is a comprehensive document, which clearly outlines in detail the aims, and objectives and summarizes the services commitment to support partnership working including ensuring Health and Education services are provided to children looked after. Assurance was given by the manager for the service that plans were in place for this document to be ratified by the "Scrutiny committee" in compliance with 1.3 of NMS. The aforementioned document is dated February 2004 and includes a statement to the effect that the document will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. A comprehensive Children's guide has also been compiled in the form of an information pack called "Services for Children, Young People and Families in Darlington".

Fitness to Provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

One of these standards is fully met and the other is almost met. The present arrangements are such that the "Children's Accommodation Manager" is responsible for the fostering team, the adoption and intensive support team and also has other operational responsibilities. As well as line managing the officer responsible for the local authority children's homes. However despite this range of responsibilities the arrangements appeared to be working very effectively. Consultation with staff confirms that they experience good quality support

from the manager. Based upon discussion with staff and from available documentary evidence there are no concerns regarding the suitability of the persons appointed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Management of the fostering service (Standard 4-5)

Within this area both standards are fully met. Based on consultation with the manager for the service and documentary evidence concludes that there are effective systems in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service in line with ensuring quality performance. The reconfigurations of staff have established clear lines of accountability. The re-citing of the fostering team, which has resulted in the team being located alongside of colleagues in intensive support and placed on the same floor as other Children's services have significantly improved communication systems. Based upon discussion with staff and carers the role of the fostering social worker is clearly well established and lines of communication between carers, staff and managers are now well established. There is a clear job description and person specification in place for the manager setting out the duties and responsibilities of the post. Job descriptions are dated.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standard 6-14)

Within this area 1 standard is exceeded, 6 standards are fully achieved and 2 standards have minor deficiencies and are rated at level 2. Based upon visits to foster carers, discussion with staff and examination of documentary evidence a safe healthy and nurturing environment appears to be provided by the fostering service. First aid training is provided for foster carers. A risk assessment pro-forma is in existence however this appeared to be rarely used. Further recruitment of foster carers has taken place since the last inspection.

The authority were able to cite good examples of diversity in terms of carers able to meet a range of children needs including those with dual heritage and the specialist recruitment of a carer for a child with a disability. It remains local authority practice that every attempt is made to match a child with an existing local authority foster carer. However where a match cannot be achieved an agency may be used. Existing placements continue to be well used. All staff consulted were confident that proper consideration was given to the matching process when linking children with carers. Documentary evidence and discussion with the staff confirm that child protection training takes place on an annual basis.

A "Safe Caring Policy" is drawn up with carers and is attached to the "Pre-Placement Meeting Recording Sheet" which facilitates the sharing of information with the child's social worker. The Action plan received from the authority states that this information is then also shared with the child. This should be evidenced within supervision recording of foster carers. Based upon discussion with staff, carers and children and from available documentary evidence in the majority case tracked the appropriate contact arrangements are in place. A concern was raised in relation to social worker support for the child in the case of a family friends carer concerning contact. It would appear that initially the arrangements concerning contact were outside of the influence of the fostering team. Children views and those of their families where possible are sought over issues, which are likely to affect them in their daily life.

The training schedule for foster carers, which had taken place and were proposed for the coming year, includes a wide and varied range of topics which demonstrate the importance of listening and responding to children's views. Discussion with both frontline and senior staff confirmed the authorities commitment to listening to what children have to say about the services they experience. The inspection team were informed that in April Darlington

Borough Council was awarded Beacon status for the CAMHS services which are used by both children and foster carers in the form of CLASP the (CAMHS Looked After Systems Project). This service is an asset to the authority and fostering team and necessitates partnership working between CAMHS and Social Services. A "Joint Education And Social Services Strategy For Improvement In Educational Of Looked After Children" is in place, which outlines how the responsible authorities will ensure that children receive maximum educational attainment.

The strategy is comprehensive with clear tasks and required actions designed to support children in attending and staying in school, by means of mutually agreed systems between all relevant agencies. Generally consultation with staff and carers indicated that the educational needs of children were considered to be a high priority. The manager of the service was confident that significant improvements had been achieved in the area of preparing young people for independence, in that a newly devised Pathway Plan has been compiled. Assurance was given that systems are in place, to bring the attention of the team manager for the Leaving Care team when each young person looked after reaches the age of fifteen and a half, which then triggers the start of Pathway planning.

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

Within this area 1 standard is exceeded and as such warrants a level 4, 4 standards are fully met and 4 have minor deficiencies and such are accorded a level 2 rating. A Notice to the Local Authority under section 47 (5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 is made alongside of this report with regards to the regulatory requirement for disciplinary procedures to make clear that the failure on the part of an employee to report an incident of abuse, or suspected abuse of a child placed with foster parents to an appropriate person is grounds on which disciplinary proceedings may be instituted.

Inspection of personal records revealed that the necessary checks are carried out. All staff working for the authority have had a CRB check completed. Consultation with the Human Resources officer confirmed the authorities intention to renew checks every three years. Work is allocated appropriately and documentary evidence confirms that supervision of fostering workers takes place. Observation of Panel concludes that the chair monitors the quality of assessments and workers are given direct feedback about the quality/information issues. In addition the chair can draw any significant concerns to the attention of the relevant team manager. Annual reviews of foster carers take place. Policies are in place with regards to securing salaried staff, the provision of training supervision and terms and conditions of service. There is very good support available to foster carers.

The recruitment policy aimed at potential foster carers has been further developed and was made available in draft form this document should be dated, finalised and made available as appropriate. Employment practices appear to be sound. Recruitment documentation indicated that psychometric testing of candidates could be employed. The Emergency Duty Team is available to be used by carers out of hours, at this inspection there were no issues identified by foster carers regarding the present arrangements concerning out of hours support. Darlington Fostering department belongs to Southern Training and Interest Group (STIG), which is a regional initiative that organises training events for carers to attend. Staff of the service are encouraged to undertake additional training, the manager and a long serving experienced social worker hold the NVQ assessors award. The aim being that all fostering social workers attain the qualification so that foster carers undertaking NVQ can be appropriately supported.

The manager for the service presents certificates of attainment to foster carers at a planned award ceremony. It was evident from the inspection process that a strategy is in place for working with and supporting carers. This is not contained within one document. However all aspects as detailed within 21.2 aside from supervision, respite care and out of hours support is contained within the Fostering Handbook. The Foster Care Agreement has been revised and now contains all of the required information as outlined within The Fostering Services Regulations Schedule 5. A comprehensive foster carer handbook is provided to each foster carer. Case files examined included records of meetings with foster carers. Training is carried out at different times so as to enable attendance by all, in line with the authorities equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory framework. Approved foster carers are able to contribute to the initial induction training for prospective foster carers, which all applicants are expected to complete. Training concerning safe caring is provided.

Records (Standard 24-25)

Within this area both standards have achieved a level 2 rating because of minor deficiencies. Children's files maintained by their social workers appeared to contain the majority of relevant information. However there were some gaps noted within the LAC documentation. Consultation documents are used inviting comments from children. There was evidence that appropriate information was made available to foster carers concerning the child again there were some gaps in documentation. Recruitment records are kept for staff. Records are maintained for children and carers. Audits of files are completed and the manager confirmed the intention to carry out random spot checks of files during staff supervision. The manager was aware that spot checks of children's files are carried out.

Fitness of Premises (Standard 26)

This standard is fully met. The fostering team have moved to a different office since the time of the last inspection, which is more spacious and makes for a more open plan-working environment. The team manager is also based alongside of the team.

Financial Requirements (Standard 27-29)

All standards are fully achieved. Based on documentary evidence and discussions with carers and staff a fostering allowance is paid to carers. The allowance is reviewed annually. The former acting manager for the service stated that the fostering fees were supposed to be reviewed annually,

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard is almost met. The Fostering Panel Policy and Procedures have been revised and are more detailed, however these policies also indicated that it was a function of panel to consider permanency and adoption, which does not appear, be in line with the inspectors given understanding of this panel's function. The panel chair also drew attention to this and confirmed that this would be addressed. Panel policies should also detail and make clear the circumstances in which a carers name would be removed from the foster carers register.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard is almost achieved however there are minor deficiencies. The fostering service provides short-term breaks for children however there are no specific policies and procedures in place, which are distinct from those concerning children placed in foster care on a long- term basis. Discussions with staff confirmed that this is an area, which still requires development. The responsible person should ensure that policies and procedures are implemented in practice, which are designed to meet the particular needs of children receiving short- term breaks.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

This standard is fully achieved. Family and friends as carers are required to undergo assessment in the same way as any other prospective foster carer. The child's social worker completes a Form E. A slightly modified F2 form is used to assess the carers and the competency element of the Form F is also used to identify the skills of the prospective carers.

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:

Not applicable

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report, which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Mrs Michele Hargan **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Mr Roger Gordon **Signature** _____
Locality Manager Mr Gavin Purdon **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	

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	FS8FS8	It is recommended that any awards for children aimed at recognising their achievements in specific areas e.g. education, sports, etc be made clear to them in written form so that every one involved is clear and any confusion about what was promised does not arise at a later time.
2	FS3FS3	The responsible person should ensure that there is a system in place so that telephone enquiries are routinely made to follow up written references. This should be included within the "Policy Statement on Recruitment and Selection".
3	FS3FS3	The responsible person should ensure that individual safe care policies are evidenced as having been shared with children by means of recording this within supervision records of carers.
4	FS9FS9	The responsible person should ensure that the procedure concerning a missing young person be further developed so as to advise carers what if any additional action they may or may not undertake when a young person is absent without authority.
5	FS10FS10	The responsible person should ensure that the "Facilitating Contact Recording Sheet for Foster Carers" be dated to denote when it was implemented and to indicate that it is subject to review and revision in line with the authorities quality assurance and documentary control procedures.
6	FS11FS11	The responsible person should ensure that robust evidence is maintained which demonstrates the means by which children with communication difficulties are consulted about their care and treatment they receive on a regular basis.
7	FS12FS12	The responsible person should ensure that a healthcare record is compiled and maintained in respect of each child. The child should be made aware as to nature and contents of the record.
8	FS4FS4	The responsible person should ensure that a system is developed so that monitoring of matters as contained within Regulation 42 Schedule 7 are carried out which should also make clear how the quality of the service is improved. Reports compiled by the service in this regard should be forwarded to the Commission on a monthly basis.
9	FS18FS18	The responsible person should ensure that written supervision of carers takes place, copies of records be made available to them and that a consistent approach to supervision is implemented in practice. An appraisal system for carers should also be developed. The Whistle blowing policy should be made known to carers.

10	FS21FS21	The responsible person should ensure that a strategy in line with 21.1 is compiled and contained with one document, which should be dated. It is recommended that this document could be employed usefully as an induction tool for the benefit of new and existing panel members. The document should also be updated on annual basis.
11	FS32FS32	The responsible person should ensure that systems are in place to monitor the effectiveness of the assessment and approval process of family and friend carers.
12	FS31FS31	The responsible person should ensure that policies and procedures are implemented in practice, which are designed to meet the particular needs of children receiving short- term breaks.
13	FS30FS30	The responsible person should ensure that panel procedures are amended in line with 30.7 and also make clear the circumstances in which a carers name would be removed from the foster carers register. Panel procedures should then be finalised and distributed to panel members as appropriate. Polices should be dated so that they can be reviewed and updated as a quality assurance measure. Panel should have access to any legislative/ guidance documents, which may further inform their recommendations. Panel members should receive induction and periodic training.
14	FS25FS25	The responsible person should ensure that fostered children and their parents are informed as the nature of records kept about them and as to the means by which they can access them.
15	FS6FS6	It is strongly recommended that an audit be carried out to conclusively establish whether or not overcrowding/sharing of bedrooms is a significant problem.
16	FFS9S9FS8FS8	It is strongly recommended that the responsible person ensure that risk assessments are routinely completed regarding each child placed in liaison with the child's social worker.
17	FS 13	The responsible person should ensure that carers are informed as to what the alternative arrangements are when a child/young person is not in receipt of full time education in line with 13.7 of NMS.
18	FS.16	The responsible person must ensure that disciplinary procedures make it more explicit that the failure on the part of an employee to report an incident of abuse, or suspected abuse of a child placed with foster parents to an appropriate person is grounds on which disciplinary proceedings may be instituted.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	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	YES
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• 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	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	24/02/04
Time of Inspection	9:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	84

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?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- A Statement of Purpose has recently been compiled. This is a comprehensive document, which clearly outlines in detail the aims, and objectives of the service and summarizes the services commitment to support partnership working including ensuring Health and Education services are provided to children looked after.
- Assurance was given by the manager for the service that plans were in place for this document to be ratified by "Scrutiny committee" in compliance with 1.3 of NMS.
- The aforementioned document is dated February 2004 and includes a statement to the effect that the document will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
- A Children's guide has also been compiled in the form of a pack entitled "Services for Children, Young People and Families in Darlington".
- Documentary evidence and consultation with service users and staff confirm that all foster carers and children have been supplied with a copy. A written request has been made to carers to go through the pack with children/young people and to ensure it is available to them for future reference purposes.
- The pack is comprehensive and leaflets are service user friendly. Details about complaints procedures are in place and the name and address of the NCSC are also included. Comments and suggestions about services are invited from service users. Information includes details of how to access advocacy services.
- Consultation with the senior officer responsible for the local authority representation procedures confirmed that there are plans in place for each child/young person to be written to an annual basis so as to elicit their comments, views or any complaints that they may have about the service they are receiving.
- The information is available in a various languages and in Braille, large print, picture and audio- cassette.
- The policies and procedures of the service are reflective of the Statement of Purpose.
- It is pleasing to report that the requirements and recommendations identified at the time of the last inspection have been responded to so comprehensively. It is anticipated that once these practices become established over time and the Statement of Purpose has been formally approved that this standard could be exceeded at the time of the next inspection.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The following information evidences that this standard is met: -

- This local authority has undergone a significant period of change with regards to the appointment of new senior managers and a re-configuration of Children's services.
- The present arrangements are such that the "Children's Accommodation Manager" is responsible for the fostering team, the adoption and intensive support team and also has other operational responsibilities. As well as line managing the officer responsible for the local authority children's homes.
- However despite this range of responsibilities the arrangements appeared to be working very effectively. Consultation with staff confirms that they experience good quality support from the manager.
- The skills of a very experienced and longstanding member of the team are undoubtedly an asset to the service in terms of enabling additional professional peer support to colleagues.
- At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy within the team and there were plans in place to recruit to this post.
- The Accommodation manager has previously successfully completed a fit person process.
- All staff are social work qualified. There are plans in place for the appointment of a senior practitioner within the team. It is envisaged that this will call for some management tasks to be undertaken for example allocating referrals as part of this role, however the appointed manager will still retain responsibility for the day- to- day running of the team.

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

The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- Based upon discussion with staff and from available documentary evidence there are no concerns regarding the suitability of the persons appointed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- The responsible person should ensure that there is a system in place so that telephone enquiries are routinely made to follow up written references. This should be included within the "Policy Statement on Recruitment and Selection".
- Scrutiny of staff files confirmed that CRB checks on all existing staff had been carried out. Consultation with the senior officer responsible for personal confirmed the local authorities intention to renew checks every three years.
- Records of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes are kept on file.
- Job descriptions and person specifications are also in place.
- It is anticipated that once the recommendation made within this standard is achieved this standard will be fully met.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- Based on consultation with the manager for the service and documentary evidence there are systems in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service in line with ensuring quality performance.
- The reconfigurations of staff have established clear lines of accountability. The re-citing of the fostering team, which has resulted in the team being located alongside of colleagues within “intensive support” and placed on the same floor as other Children’s services have significantly improved communication systems.
- Discussion with staff and carers confirm the role of the fostering social worker is clearly well established and lines of communication between carers, staff and managers are now well established.
- The responsible person should ensure that carers are also informed of their responsibility to declare any possible conflict of interest. Staff are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct in relation to conflict of interest.
- The manager for the service informed the inspection team that the internal auditor of the local authority to whom the manager was accountable for such matters had recently reviewed the financial procedures and budgets.
- The Fostering Handbook contains comprehensive information about all financial matters relating to foster carers including further direction to NFCA leaflets.
- The IT systems of the authority have been further developed in that the “Care First system has been installed which will be fully operational in April of this year. This system was described, as a “huge improvement” on the previous one, the new system that, can be managed by the individual responsible social worker, will enable shortfalls to be recorded and levels of provision to be monitored.
- It was agreed with the manager for the service that a good practice recommendation would be made to the effect that monitoring of the service should be undertaken in line with Regulation 42 Schedule 7.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:	0
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.	1
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	0
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
<p>The following information evidences that this standard is met;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is clear that the service is managed effectively and efficiently. • There is a clear job description and person specification in place for the manager setting out the duties and responsibilities of the post. Job descriptions are dated. • It is also the manager's responsibility to take the lead with ensuring that effective partnership working with Health and Education is achieved so that children's interest in these areas are safeguarded. 		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The following information evidences that this standard is met:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based upon visits to foster carers, discussion with staff and examination of documentary evidence a safe healthy and nurturing environment appears to be provided by the fostering service. First aid training is provided for foster carers. A risk assessment pro-forma is in existence. • Annual inspections of foster homes continue to be carried out including health and safety checks. • Assurance was given by the manager for the service that appropriate consideration was given with regards to ensuring adequate privacy and space for young people within bedrooms and that sharing of bedrooms was no longer a significant occurrence. • However some concern was reported within questionnaires about overcrowding. It is strongly recommended that an audit be carried out to conclusively establish whether or not this is a significant problem. • The "Pre-Placement Meeting Record Sheet" continues to be used and a verbal assurance was given that an assessment of risk is completed before any decision is made to allow any child with a history of abuse to share a bedroom with another child. • Foster carer training and preparation includes health and safety training. Health and safety checklists are used by fostering social workers to assess that appropriate safety measures are taken within the foster home. Comprehensive guidance documents are in place within the fostering handbook concerning health and safety. • Where foster carers are expected to transport children the fostering service checks M.O.T. certificates, insurance documents and ensures that appropriate seating for transporting the child is in place. • Foster carers are made aware that they may be interviewed as part of the N.C.S.C. inspection process. • The case tracking process further concluded that foster carers are available who are able to provide a healthy and nurturing environment. 		

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**

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- Further recruitment of foster carers has taken place since the last inspection. The authority were able to cite good examples of diversity in terms of carers able to meet a range of children needs including those with dual heritage and the specialist recruitment of a carer for a child with a disability.
- Further work is also being undertaken in this area by the authority as part of the North East Regional Consortium. There are plans in place for the appointment of a project leader whose brief will be to specifically recruit Black and Ethnic minority carers.
- Practice is becoming established with regards to advertising for specific carers who are able to meet the assessed needs of individual children.
- Parents are invited to pre-placement meetings where possible and consideration is always given to a child's cultural and religious needs. Senior staff stated that significant training as to the importance of cultural issues is provided.
- There was some excellent examples of support being made available to carers in the form of joint training provided by experienced fostering staff and Mental Health Services workers which is aimed at supporting placements. Discussion with staff, foster carers, children and documentary evidence confirm that the fostering service also continues to provide training to enable co-operative working together, aimed at enhancing the child's self- confidence and esteem.
- The local authority continues to use a voluntary agency to assist with the provision of "Shared Care" for parents of children with disabilities.
- Assurances were made that children's interests, talents and hobbies are encouraged and developed. Discussion with staff confirmed that this is an area of significant importance within the review process.
- It is recommended that any awards for children aimed at recognising their achievements in specific areas e.g. education, sports, etc be made to them in written form so that every one involved is clear and any confusion about what was promised does not arise at a later time.
- Children's questionnaires confirm that appropriate care was being provided by foster carers. One young person requested that the inspection report make the following point that foster carers should have "to knock before they enter our bedrooms and that they shouldn't be allowed to go through our things".

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

The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- As previously indicated a risk assessment pro-forma is in existence, which is a comprehensive document. Case tracking indicates that this form is rarely used. It is strongly recommended that a risk assessment be completed on every child placed and that this becomes established practice. So that matching takes place on a comprehensive basis inclusive of the risk assessed needs of the child as arrived at by a thorough assessment process carried out in liaison with the child's social worker.
- It remains local authority practice that every attempt is made to match a child with an existing local authority foster carer. However where a match cannot be achieved an agency may be used. Existing placements continue to be well used. All staff consulted were confident that proper consideration was given to the matching process when linking children with carers.
- The child's care plan and written assessments of their family and carers are used so as to inform the matching process and team meetings provide a forum for referrals and consideration to be given to matching and linking of children with carers.
- Matches are also achieved by means of meetings, which facilitate information sharing and appropriate involvement of professionals, children, their families if possible and potential carers and other children within placement.
- Pre-placement meetings attempt to address areas where there is a need for additional support, for example with contact, child minding arrangements and assurance was given that the identified needs are usually met. At present the Looked After Children documentation is used to identify any specific areas of need.
- The majority of information in relation to Placement Plans was in place however the -day to- day arrangements for one young person was blank. The responsible person should ensure that all relevant information is present so as to establish that elements of matching are appropriately recorded within the placement agreement.
- The manager for the service was able to illustrate examples of placement decisions, which demonstrated that careful consideration had been given to ensuring that the cultural needs of children with a dual heritage had been taken into account within the matching process.
- Where possible children are provided with the opportunity for a period of introduction to a proposed placement.

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?**

4

The following information evidence that this standard is exceeded: -

- Documentary evidence and discussion with the staff confirm that child protection training takes place on an annual basis.
- A “Safe Caring Policy” is drawn up with carers and is attached to the “Pre-Placement Meeting Recording Sheet” which facilitates the sharing of information with the child’s social worker. The Action plan received from the authority states that this information is then also shared with the child. This should be evidenced within supervision recording of foster carers.
- The Foster Carer Agreement states that corporal punishment is not to be used. Comprehensive guidance as to prohibited punishments and additional sources of support is contained within the fostering handbook and training for foster carers includes training on communicating with children.
- Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate the outcome of any allegations of any abuse. This includes taking relevant information to Panel, who collectively have the option to suspend foster carers.
- Based on discussion with carers and staff, examination of previous and prospective training the fostering service ensures that the vulnerability of children placed is highlighted appropriately. An anti-bullying policy for foster carers is in existence. There are plans in place for training specifically addressing bullying to be provided for foster carers.
- Guidance is contained within the fostering handbook concerning “Protecting Yourself and Your Family.”
- A brief procedure is in place in the event that a child goes missing. In addition a “missing persons” form has been developed which foster carers have to complete. The procedure concerning a missing young person should be further developed so as to advise carers what if any additional action they may or may not undertake when a young person is absent.
- The authority has compiled “The procedure to ensure the protection of children placed with foster parents from abuse and or neglect. The procedure is thorough and evidences good practice in that all reviews of carers are carried out by panel in addition to the first review.
- The aforementioned good practice exceeds the minimum standards and therefore warrants commendation.

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

100

%

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**

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- Based upon discussion with staff, carers and children and from available documentary evidence in the majority of cases tracked the appropriate contact arrangements are in place. A concern was raised in relation to social worker support for a young person in the case of a family friends carer concerning contact. It would appear that initially the arrangements concerning contact were outside of the control of the fostering team.
- It was acknowledged inevitably there are always issues arising with contact arrangements and as such there was recognition that fostering social workers needed to be involved appropriately. The responsible person should ensure that careful consideration is given as to the early involvement of a fostering worker where Regulation 38 assessments of family and friends as carers are being undertaken initially by the social worker for the child.
- Appropriate consideration is given to contact arrangements in circumstances where a child is placed outside of the area.
- Consultation with foster carers, children and fostering social workers confirms that, children's views and wishes are obtained and taken into account in determining contact arrangements.
- The team manager and foster carers confirms that the service trains foster carers so that they ensure children are supported in maintaining ongoing contacts with family members.
- The receipt of such support was confirmed by foster carers, who all spoke highly of individual fostering social workers and the service they received.
- Assurances were made by fostering social workers that risk assessments are carried out concerning the need for supervised contact. The pre-placement pro-forma contains a risk assessment framework.
- Staff confirmed that financial support with transport costs was made available to foster carers.
- In response to a recommendation made at the time of the last inspection a "Facilitating Contact Recording Sheet for Foster Carers" has been developed which carers are asked to complete and return to the fostering team. This document clearly states that "areas of observation to be fully discussed and agreed between the child's social worker and foster carer prior to contact". This form should be dated to denote when it was implemented and to indicate that it is subject to review and revision in line with the authorities quality assurance and documentary control procedures.
- At the time of the inspection several good practice initiatives were being developed, thus far a meeting with children who had been previously "Looked After" as part of Investing in Children had taken place in order to consider how children in foster care could best consulted about matters affecting them.
- Consideration was also being given as to the setting up of a process of evaluating the range and quality of services available to young people within foster care. This process has already been undertaken with children and young people within residential care by this local authority so there is established experience to draw on in taking this development forward.
- It is anticipated that this standard is capable of being exceeded should the aforementioned developments be fully implemented.

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?****2**

The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- Children views and those of their families where possible are sought over issues, which are likely to affect them in their daily life.
- The training schedule for foster carers, which had taken place and were proposed for the coming year, includes a wide and varied range of topics which demonstrate the importance of listening and responding to children's views. Discussion with both frontline and senior staff confirmed the authorities commitment to listening to what children have to say about the services they experience.
- As previously indicated a voluntary agency is used regarding placements for children with disabilities. It is still unclear what means the local authority takes to ensure that children with communication difficulties are assisted to make known their feelings and wishes about their care and treatment they receive on a frequent basis. The responsible person should ensure that robust evidence is maintained which demonstrates the means by which children with communication difficulties are consulted about their care and treatment they receive on a regular basis.
- As previously referred to a Children's guide in the form an information pack has been compiled with comprehensive information about complaints and children are to be written to on an at least annual basis to elicit any concerns. The proposed involvement of children and young people in a process of evaluating the services they receive would more than address this the minimum standard that young people are effectively consulted.
- The review process for children with mainstream carers has been redeveloped in that prior to the review a "Professionals Planning Meeting" is held. This then enables a much more informal review process to take place with only the chair, the child, the carers and social workers needing to be present.
- It is anticipated that when the recommendations are addressed this standard may well be exceeded.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

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

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- The inspection team were informed that in April Darlington Borough Council was awarded Beacon status for the CAMHS services which are used by both children and foster carers in the form of CLASP the (CAMHS Looked After Systems Project). This service is an asset to the authority and fostering team and demonstrates excellent partnership working between CAMHS and Social Services.
- The manager for the service confirmed that close monitoring continues by agreement; with appropriate others concerning the physical and emotional well being of service users.
- Each child is registered with a GP, dentist and optician.

- As indicated above access to sources of psychological help are in place for children, and time can also be made available by the worker responsible for this service to meet with carers, which also supports children placed. Training for foster carers included significant information about understanding and responding to the emotional needs of children placed. This service remains valued by all concerned and is to be commended.
- Assurance was made that where possible prior to placement, information as to the health needs of the child and consent to medical treatment is obtained and recorded within the LAC documentation.
- A separate health care record is not in place for each child. The registered person should ensure that such a record is compiled and maintained. The child should be made aware as to nature and contents of the record.
- First aid training has taken place and assurances were made that all carers were encouraged to complete this training. The responsible person should ensure that all carers are supported to enable them to complete this essential basic training.
- Liaison takes place between the fostering service and the designated nurse for children who are looked after.
- Foster carers consulted were clear as to their role in providing information concerning the child's health as part of the review and ongoing planning process.
- This standard area has been assessed as being met because of the firm evidence that the overall outcome is achieved and the good practice and investment evident, in ensuring children's emotional and social development needs are addressed.
- However the basic standard concerning the provision of a health care record should be addressed without delay so that practice in this area is fully established by the time of the next inspection, when it is possible that if this is the case the minimum standard could be exceeded.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- A "Joint Education And Social Services Strategy For Improvement In Education Of Looked After Children" is in place, which outlines how the responsible authorities will ensure that children receive maximum educational attainment.
- The strategy is comprehensive with clear tasks and required actions designed to support children in attending and staying in school, by means of mutually agreed systems between all relevant agencies.
- Case tracking confirmed that in the main education was considered to be a high priority within the service. However this was not the case in all instances where it was unclear what alternative arrangements had been put into place where a child was not in receipt of full time education. The responsible person should ensure that carers are informed as to what the alternative arrangements are when a child/young person is not in receipt of full time education in line with 13.7 of NMS.
- Carers generally consulted felt that they were well supported by staff with enabling children's educational needs to be met. Without exception all carers were supportive of children's educational needs and attainments and academic achievements were obviously cause for celebration. Children's attainments continue to be recognised and rewarded within the review process.
- Personal education plans are in place for all children.

- An “Education of Looked After Children Guidance for Social Work Staff” has been developed as a practice indicator which denotes actions are to be taken depending upon the occurrence of Red, Amber or Green issues in liaison with education staff and in order to feed into monitoring systems in this area.
- Information about the educational attendance and achievements of children is recorded and used as a key performance indicator.
- Foster carers consulted were aware of the expectations of the fostering service in terms of the educational arrangements for children
- The foster placement agreement identifies financial responsibilities.
- It is possible that with the achievement of the objectives as outlined within the aforementioned strategy that this standard will be exceeded.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- The manager of the service was confident that significant improvements had been achieved in this area in that a newly devised Pathway Plan has been compiled. Assurance was also given that information systems are in place, which brings to the attention of the team manager for the Leaving Care team when each young person looked after reaches the age of fifteen and a half, which then triggers the Pathway planning process.
- The “Pathway Plans” are compiled in consultation with young people, foster carers and appropriate others, which identify the support, assistance and skills required to enable a young person, to move towards an independent living situation within the wider community.
- A brief statement “Preparing Older Children For Independent Living” along with the Pathway Plan and Assessment document is in place. This document was noted to be comprehensive and is available to foster carers and children. Information leaflets advising young people about general and financial support are also supplied.
- At the start of the process of Pathway Planning the children’s Personal Advisor is identified.
- Training schedules continue to take into account the needs of Children in this area. Suggestions for training in 2004 included “Moving Children on”

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met: -

- Inspection of personal records revealed that the necessary checks are carried out.
- All staff working for the authority have had a CRB check completed. Consultation with the Human Resources officer confirmed the authorities intention to renew checks every three years.
- A corporate “ Policy Statement on Recruitment and Selection” is in existence. This policy document indicates as a minimum “at least one person on the interview panel will receive training in Recruitment and Selection and the effectiveness of their ability will be constantly monitored”.
- There are comprehensive policies and procedures in place with regards to the services recruitment practices.
- All staff employed by the service are experienced and hold an appropriate social work qualification.
- Appointment to posts is decided by panel interview and application. Candidates are required to provide proof of identification and qualifications.
- All staff consulted during the course of the inspection were knowledgeable regarding legislation relating to children.

Total number of staff of the agency:

5

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

The following information evidence that this standard is almost met: -

- Staff are managed and monitored by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications.
- Management structures are evident and there are clear lines of accountability.
- Staff are supported by a manager who is highly skilled and appropriately qualified.
- The levels of management delegation and responsibility are clear and carried out by staff with commensurate levels of skill and expertise.
- The service is a busy one and staff have been stretched in the intervening year since the last inspection, particularly during the previous summer months when staffing levels were low and the service was going through a period of significant change. However the staff team describe themselves as having absorbed these difficulties with services still being well maintained.
- Since that time additional staff have been recruited and both the reconfiguration of children's services including the appointment of the present manager have produced a robust team who are clearly very committed to this area of service.
- It is also evident that a great deal of work has been undertaken by all those within the team to address the requirements and recommendations at the time of the last inspection. The service is managed in a pro-active manner with the emphasis on producing quality outcomes for children and young people.
- Work is allocated appropriately and documentary evidence confirms that supervision of fostering workers takes place.
- Observation of Panel concludes that the chair (who has previous experience of chairing panel) monitors the quality of assessments and workers are given direct feedback about any quality/information issues. In addition the chair can draw any significant concerns to the attention of the manager for the service.
- There were no conflicts of interest identified in relation to the panel chair and the employing authority in that this officer has no day-to day responsibility for accommodating children looked after. Assurance was given that in the event of any future conflict of interest that may arise this would be declared so that the vice chair could step in.
- Annual reviews of foster carers take place.
- There are systems in place so that the service can monitor the quality of care provided by the agencies used, which include pre-placement meetings. Agreements are drawn up by the placing authority and the agency, which are then monitored by the children's social worker who also has sight of the completed Form "F's".
- It is recommended that systems be further developed in this area to demonstrate quality of care is assured via the contract and monitoring arrangements including the routine practice of reference to inspection reports to ensure that there are no concerns in line with 16.6.
- Ongoing training is provided for staff and carers, discussion with staff and carers confirm that training is relevant to maintaining and developing the necessary skills.
- The department now certifies training and carers are encouraged to maintain a portfolio of training attended. In addition to very good in-house training there were some very good examples of training course being promoted and made available to both carers and staff, by Tees, Durham & Darlington Health Promotion Consortium.
- A senior worker within the team had recently completed the PQ award in childcare.
- The service benefits from sound clerical support and this officer has developed skills

within this area of service provision to the extent that payment to carers are also to be undertaken by her. It is anticipated that this would mean that another would undertake some of the present clerical duties.

- There are varying sources of advice, guidance and expertise in place so that foster carers are enabled to support children placed with them.
- Contracts and conditions of service are provided to all employees as well as job descriptions.
- Fostering social workers clearly understood the role of the social worker for the child and there appeared to be effective working together.
- Staff are issued with copies of all relevant employers/employee policies and procedures.
- A Disciplinary procedure is in place, which makes provision for suspension of an employee as neutral act if warranted during the course of an investigation.
- The responsible person must ensure that disciplinary procedures make more explicit that the failure on the part of an employee to report an incident of abuse, or suspected abuse of a child placed with foster parents to an appropriate person is grounds on which disciplinary proceedings may be instituted in line with Regulation 21(2) (b).
- It would be considered acceptable for an addendum to be added to the existing procedure as detailed above on an interim basis on the agreed understanding that this requirement be incorporated into the main body of this document at the earliest opportunity. The addendum must be drawn to the attention of all relevant staffs.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- The fostering team benefits from having workers with a range of skills and experience all of whom are well qualified and competent.
- The fostering team currently comprises of four social workers two of whom job share. There is vacancy for one full-time social worker. There are plans in place to recruit to this post.
- Agency staff were not currently in use.
- The present contingency in terms of staffing shortfall includes one part-time member of staff working on a full time basis.
- Policies are in place with regards to securing salaried staff, the provision of training supervision and terms and conditions of service. There is very good support available to foster carers.
- The recruitment policy aimed at potential foster carers has been further developed and was made available in draft form this document should be dated, finalised and made available as appropriate.
- A clear strategy is in place, which is aimed at recruiting a diverse range of carers in order to meet the needs of children placed by the service.
- Questionnaires from staff within the authority identified areas for development to be considered in relation to targeting the recruitment of carers for older children. Alongside the provision of additional training in this area concerning understanding and coping with offending behaviours in young people.
- The assessment process for foster carers is clearly set out and a comprehensive Fostering Handbook is provided to carers.
- Based on discussions with staff, carers and from an examination of information supplied

the service continues in assessing prospective carers, with appropriate consideration being given to all the necessary competencies and qualities required of suitable applicants.

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

The following information evidence that this standard is almost met:-

- Employment practices appear to be sound. The Emergency Duty Team is available to be used by carers out of hours. Case tracking did not identify any concerns regarding these arrangements. However some issues were alluded to within questionnaires. Carers views should be elicited regarding out of hours services so that any issues can be captured and addressed appropriately.
- Comments in questionnaires without exception viewed relationships with fostering social workers as excellent. Comments about children's social workers were mixed ranging from very good to apparent dismay at the lack of contact.
- Based upon discussion with foster carers and staff and from an examination of available evidence foster carers received robust ongoing support from fostering social workers.
- Annual reviews of foster carers take place.
- The formal supervision of carers remains an outstanding recommendation from the last inspection. Social work staff were all aware that this still required implementation and there were plans in place to discuss how this was going to be achieved during the course of a planned away day for the team to consider issues and practice developments.
- The responsible person should ensure that copies of written supervision records are made available to carers and that a consistent approach to supervision of all carers is implemented in practice. An appraisal system for carers should also be developed.
- Health and safety policies and procedures are in place concerning children and staff.
- A whistle blowing policy is in place for staff, however this had not been made known to foster carer's. A recommendation concerning this is made within the appropriate section of this report.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- Staff of the service are encouraged to undertake additional training, the manager and one other social worker within the team hold the NVQ assessors award. The aim being that all fostering social workers attain this qualification so that foster carers undertaking NVQ can be appropriately supported.
- Induction training for staff takes place and is completed within a ten- week period.
- A corporate staff appraisal scheme is in operation, which includes foster care social workers.
- It was evident that staff are made aware of changes in legislation. During the inspection process an issue arose which necessitated reference to the DCC Regulations 2002. It was acknowledged that this document was not readily available or widely known to staff, however immediate steps were taken to obtain and circulate it to all staff prior to the completion of the inspection.

- The training department carries out evaluation of training courses received by the service.
- Joint training with foster carers takes place. The manager confirmed by means of the Action Plan that the training department of the authority includes spaces for foster carers.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met: -

- Staff are accountable and supported within their practice.
- Staff are have clear written details of their duties and responsibilities by means of job descriptions. Consultation with the Human Resource Officer confirmed that as part of the re-configuration of services job descriptions were reviewed and updated to reflect the changes.
- Supervision of workers takes place in written form and on a regular basis.
- Annual appraisals of staff are completed.
- Consultation with staff confirm that meetings take place.

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 following information is evidence that this standard is almost met:-

- It was evident from the inspection process that a strategy is in place for working with and supporting carers. This is not contained within one document. However all aspects as detailed within 21.2 aside from supervision, respite care and out of hours support is contained within the Fostering Handbook.
- The responsible person should ensure that the strategy in line with 21.1 is compiled and contained with one document, which should be dated. It is recommended that this document could be employed usefully as an induction tool for the benefit of new and existing panel members. It should also be updated on annual basis, which would further serve as a benchmark of continued developments within the service.
- Discussion with carers and staff confirmed that they are clear concerning the role of the social worker.
- Consultation with staff and carers confirmed that there is effective communication between the fostering social worker and the child's social worker.
- Annual review reports are prepared for panel. The manager for the service explained that the current and new IT systems required some finalising so that reports of this nature could be appropriately generated when due to be presented to panel.
- Some concern was expressed by fostering social workers; carers and children/young people in that in some instances regular contact by the child's social worker in line with statutory visits had not been achieved. This was perceived to be because of a high staff turnover.
- Any significant concerns in this area should be drawn to the attention of team managers.
- Fostering worker's also reported that increased attempts had been made to carry out periodic joint visits with the child's social worker. It is obviously in everyone interests for this practice to become established.

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 following information evidences that this standard is almost met: -

- The service undoubtedly encourages and enables foster carers to develop their skills. Foster carers reported receiving very good support from fostering social workers in this regard.
- At the present time formal supervision of foster carers does not take place.
- All foster carers had a clear understanding of what was expected from them. There was evidence to suggest that there is some development work to be undertaken in ensuring that at the earliest stage possible that Family and Friend carers be fully informed as to the fostering task by a fostering social worker.
- The Foster Care Agreement has been revised and now contains all of the required information as outlined within The Fostering Services Regulations Schedule 5.
- A comprehensive foster carer handbook is provided to each foster carer.
- Case files examined included records of meetings with foster carers.
- The local authority position with regards to insurance of foster carers is made plain within the Fostering Handbook.
- A corporate complaints procedure is in place. Details of complaints procedures are in place within the foster carer handbook. Complaints are recorded and investigated. However there were no reported complaints made to the authority. Every attempt should be made to elicit any informal complaints/concerns etc from service users by workers.
- The fostering handbook makes reference to independent sources of support in the event of an investigation being carried out concerning a foster carer.
- Records about any allegations of abuse are maintained. It was clear that any concerns of any nature are speedily addressed as evidenced by panel procedures.
- Whilst it was evident that there is a policy concerning terminations of approval of foster carers. The responsible person should ensure that the policy is written down and included within panel policies and procedures.

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?**

4

The following information evidences that this standard is exceeded: -

- Very good quality training for foster carers takes place. A newsletter is produced on a quarterly basis by CLASP, which highlights future training and developments within this area. As previously indicated this resource is valued by all concerned and obviously makes a significant contribution in raising the profile, needs and human rights of looked after children.
- Darlington Fostering department belongs to Southern Training and Interest Group (STIG), which is a regional initiative that organises training events for carers to attend.
- The manager for the service presents certificates of attainment to foster carers at a planned award ceremony.
- Training programmes for 2003 and those proposed for 2004 for foster carers were viewed and are obviously wholly appropriate to the needs of carers.
- Carers consulted during the inspection all spoke enthusiastically as to the quality and benefits of both the initial and ongoing training provided.

- Training is carried out at different times so as to enable attendance by all, in line with the authorities equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory framework.
- Approved foster carers are able to contribute to the initial induction training for prospective foster carers, which all applicants are expected to complete.
- Training concerning safe caring is provided.
- Assurance was given that help and support for sons and daughters of foster carers, is provided. With opportunities extended to additional members of the family other than main carers to attend training, which it was identified in some instances, had been taken up.
- The annual review process includes appraisal of training and the developmental needs of foster carers.
- Documentary evidence confirms that evaluation of training is undertaken.

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
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The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- Children's files maintained by their social workers appeared to contain the majority of relevant information. However there were some gaps noted within the LAC documentation.
- Consultation documents are used inviting comments from children. There was evidence that on the whole appropriate information was made available to foster carers concerning the child however there were some gaps in documentation.
- A policy concerning recording and storage of diaries for foster carers is in existence.
- The responsible person should ensure that the recommendation identified at the time of the last inspection in line with 24.2 be compiled regarding case recording which establishes the purpose, format and contents of files and clarifies what information should be present on both the foster carer and the child's file including the need to establish a health care record in respect of each child in line with 12.4.
- Consultation with foster carers and staff established that foster carers are provided with information concerning the reasons why the child is in foster care the intended duration, purpose and the child's legal status.
- Discussion with fostering social workers and foster carers confirms that the child's history is live and valued. Children are able to keep memorabilia. Training in Attachment Theories and Resilience is provided for foster carers.
- Foster carers have been supplied with diaries and lockable storage boxes in which to keep confidential information.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- Recruitment records are kept for staff. Records are maintained for children and carers.
- Audits of files are completed and the manager confirmed the intention to carry out random spot checks of carer's files during staff supervision.
- The manager was aware that spot checks of children's files were being carried out.
- Information can be obtained and shared as appropriate in the event that a child moves.
- The manager confirmed that, the procedure for managing and storing confidential information was known to panel members, staff and specialist advisors.

- A number of records were examined during the inspection. Entries within records were not always signed or dated and the purpose of case recording was not always clear.
- Documentation is in keeping with the “Looked After Children” System.
- Records of checks and references are maintained.
- Assurance was made that children and foster carers are able to have access to their records. However the process by which this is made known to fostered children and their parents was not evident. The responsible person should ensure that fostered children and their parents are informed as the nature of records kept about them and as to the means by which they can access them.
- The authority monitors information concerning the nature and outcome of complaints.
- The authority keeps the information as required by Regulation 31 and 22 within electronic IT systems. Documentary evidence of the majority of details required was also supplied during the course of the inspection to confirm compliance.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			77
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			33
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			28
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:			7
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	64.50	Maximum £	129

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 following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- The fostering team have moved to a different office since the time of the last inspection, which is larger and makes for a more open plan-working environment. All staff considered that they now had a better working environment which had enabled increased communication with other colleagues within children services, who are situated close by.
- The team manager is also sited based alongside of the team.
- Premises are clearly identifiable and can be accessed during office hours.
- IT and security arrangements are in place which are robust and efficient.
- Premises are adequately equipped.
- Assurance was given that equipment is insured.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

In view of the way in which the local authority is funded the NCSC accept the continuing financial viability of the fostering service and as such this standard is fully met.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

In view of the way in which the local authority is funded the NCSC accept the fostering service is publicly accountable for financial procedures and as such this standard is fully met.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met:-

- Based on documentary evidence and discussions with carers and staff a fostering allowance is paid to carers.
- The fostering handbook includes comprehensive information concerning finance and outlines departmental policy regarding allowances.
- The local authority is currently reviewing fees paid to foster carers (as part of its retention planning) and anticipates that this will be completed in Spring this year when any proposed changes would be discussed with carers themselves.

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 following information evidences that this standard is almost met: -

- The Fostering Panel Policy and Procedures have been revised and are more detailed, however these policies also indicated that it was a function of panel to consider permanency and adoption, which does not appear, be in line with the inspectors given understanding of this panel's function. The panel chair also drew attention to this and confirmed that this would be addressed.
- Panel polices should also detail and make clear the circumstances in which a carers name would be removed from the foster carers register.
- The panel procedures should be amended, finalised and distributed to panel members as appropriate. Polices should be dated so that they can be reviewed and updated as a quality assurance measure.
- The policy includes a statement to the effect that Criminal Records Bureau Checks have to be carried out on all members of panel at a standard level.
- Consultation with the fostering panel medical advisor confirms that this specialist advisor is used appropriately and that the advisor is also invited to contribute as a full member.
- It is recommended that all panel members receive induction when they join panel and training should be provided on a periodic basis.
- The quality assurance function of panel is reflected within the aforementioned procedural guidance.
- The process by which panel monitors the range and type of carers available to them in comparison with the needs of the children, is not evident and this is not contained within panel procedures.
- The responsible person should ensure that a process is established whereby panel can appropriately fulfil this function, which should also be included within panel polices and procedures.
- Panel members include expertise in child health and a Foster carer along with representation from a number of other agencies and a local authority representative. Consultation with the chair confirmed that plans were in place to invite an education professional to sit on panel.
- Minutes of Panel meetings make clear the reasons for its recommendations.
- Panel should have access to any legislative/ guidance documents, which may further inform their recommendations.
- The role of the "Agency Decision Maker" is made clear to panel members.
- Consideration is being given to inviting prospective carers to meet panel upon completion of the assessment.
- It was evident at panel that issues of risk were highlighted and contingencies agreed in this respect.

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?

2

The following information evidences that this standard is almost met:-

- The fostering service provides short-term breaks for children however there are no specific policies and procedures in place, which are distinct from those concerning children placed in foster care on a long- term basis. Discussions with staff confirmed that this is an area, which still requires development. The responsible person should ensure that policies and procedures are implemented in practice, which are designed to meet the particular needs of children receiving short- term breaks.
- Discussion with staff, carers and children confirmed that where possible birth parents remain central to the promotion of health, education and the ongoing welfare of the child whether the child is placed on a long or short- term basis.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following information evidences that this standard is met: -

- Family and friends as carers are required to undergo assessment in the same way as any other prospective foster carer. The child's social worker completes a Form E. A slightly modified form F2 is used to assess the carers and the competency element of the Form F is also used to identify the skills of the prospective carers.
- The same support and training is made available to family and friend carers, as is available to other foster carers.
- Systems should be in place to monitor the effectiveness of assessment and approval processes for family and friend carers.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

A Lay Assessor did not accompany the Inspector on this occasion

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 24th February 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The Providers Response has been received and can be viewed at the Darlington Area Office

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

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

YES

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 4th May 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

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

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, Mrs Margaret Asquith of Darlington Local Authority Fostering |Service confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, Mrs Margaret Asquith of Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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