



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

South Tyneside MBC Fostering

**South Tyneside Fostering Service
16 Barrington Street
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE33 1AN**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Key Announced Inspection
11th December 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

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Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	South Tyneside Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Brian Morgan
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 14th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

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

The continuing aim of the service is to provide high quality fostering placements to secure the best possible outcomes for looked after children. The fostering service has five categories of carer; these are mainstream carers, relative carers, respite carers, teenage scheme carers and permanence scheme carers. Mainstream carers provide a range of placements including pre-adoptive placements, emergency placements, as well as short, medium and long-term placements. At the time of the inspection the service has around 95 approved foster carers who, at that time were providing substitute family care to about 140 children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff for the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. Staff in the fostering team, carers and children spoken to were very helpful and people spent time filling in surveys and sending them to the inspectors before the inspection. Information and facts in this report come from surveys sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers and from written information the manager gave inspectors, as well as from the things seen and the people spoken to when they visited. Inspectors visited three foster carers with children living with them and surveys were returned from 18 fostered children and 35 foster carers. Unfortunately, though the fostering service were twice given survey forms to circulate to children's social workers, no survey forms had been returned from children's social workers at the time this report was written. All together, seven inspector days were spent with the fostering team and a further two days were spent reading questionnaires and sorting out the information in them.

A team of three inspectors carried out the inspection, which was done alongside an inspection of South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council's adoption service and an inspection of its arrangements for private fostering. Readers may wish to refer to the reports from these inspections, which are available from the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Information was gathered by:

- Talking individually with children and foster carers;
- Individual and group discussions with fostering staff;
- Group discussions with children social workers and their team managers;
- Visiting foster carers' homes;
- Group discussion with foster carers;
- Group discussion with independent reviewing officers;
- Reading children's, carers' and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Interviewing the fostering manager;
- Studying the surveys and other information sent back to us;
- Reading records of the meetings of the fostering panel.

People who told inspectors what they think about South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service generally said good things. The majority of people said that the service gives good support to foster carers and provides good outcomes for fostered children. The great majority (70%) of carers said that the quality of the service has not changed since last year. 27% said they think the service has got better. Only 3% said they think the service has got worse. When asked how things could be made better, most foster carers could not think of any suggestion to make it better. Any improvements suggested were varied. Suggestions made tended to be about matters such as communications, frequency of children's social worker visits, foster carers'

payments or levels of social worker turnover in the children's social work teams.

It is good that most people involved with the fostering service think it is doing a good job. A foster carer summed this up by saying, "We have had very good experiences with the fostering service. Any problems have been sorted out quickly and sensitively." Most importantly, children said good things about being fostered and said that they are well looked after and happy in their foster homes. They said things like, "My foster family are excellent," "My carer treats me no different from the other children in her house and I love her to bits" and "I get anything I want and everything I need."

What the service does well:

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council's fostering service is good at a lot of the things it does.

- The fostering service is good at working with people who want to foster to make sure that they are the right sort of people. It checks new foster carers out very carefully and they get good training before they can foster.
- New foster carers cannot foster until a group of experts called a panel make a recommendation that they are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly. This panel is careful, gets a lot of information and thinks very hard about people before it recommends that they can foster.
- The service is also good at supporting foster carers to look after children. Foster carers get visited regularly and get good advice about how to help the children they are caring for. Carers said things like, "We are given all possible assistance" and "My social worker is a good help to me and supports the whole family." There is some very good training provided for foster carers to help them care for children better.
- The fostering service is good at making sure that children get to live in the place that is right for them. This is hard for it to do as it needs more foster carers and it does not always have very good information from social workers about the children to work with but it works very hard to make sure that children go to carers who are right for them. Children said things like, "My foster family are excellent" and "My carer treats me no different from the other children in her house and I love her to bits."

- The service is good at helping children stay healthy and well. Children get good advice about their health and get help to get doctors and dentists when they need them. It also makes sure that children get their health checked often. A young person said, "My foster carers try to get me to eat healthy so that I can lose a little bit of weight." Children get especially good support with any special help or therapy they need to help them deal, in their heads, with any problems they have had.
- The fostering service is good at helping children get a good education. It is good at helping children stay in school and helping plan the support they need at school. Children said things like, "I get help with my work at school whenever I ask or I get help with my homework when I ask" and "My and my carer have been discussing what I want to do in the future."

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the service has:

- Made sure that children get visited by their own social worker more regularly and are asked what they think about the care they receive. Nearly all children said they feel listened to by their social worker.
- The service has also got better at finding out from children about how well they think their foster carers, the fostering service and the local authority are working to help them.
- Work has taken place to make sure that the person in the fostering service who helps foster carers get trained has the proper help and support from the service's bosses so she can do her work better.
- The service has worked to make sure that its fostering panel has got people on it with the right skills and knowledge to make good decisions and recommendations about new foster carers and foster carers' reviews. The records that are kept of the discussions that go on at panel and the decisions made have also got better since the last inspection.

What they could do better:

To make the service better for all children there are some things that the fostering service has to do. There are, also, some things that have to be done by South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council as a whole to make sure that it does the best it can for children.

- The local authority needs to make sure that all the LAC paperwork needed for a child is kept in their files and given to foster carers so that foster carers and everyone else know everything they need to look after children safely and well. The authority also needs to make sure that social workers tell the fostering team everything they know about a child when they are looking for a foster placement so that the fostering team can find the best foster carer for the child.
- The local authority needs to make sure there are less emergency placements of children with foster carers and more placements that are planned. This is important because it will allow children to move, in a planned way, to carers who know enough about them and are properly suited to the needs of the child.
- The local authority also needs to find more foster carers for older children and work out when and why it should use foster placements from independent fostering agencies. It needs to do this so that the money it has got to spend on fostering is used well to allow a better choice of suitable foster carers so that children and carers can be matched better. It should also keep on trying to get more carers from different ethnic backgrounds.
- The authority needs to make sure that some decisions it takes about fostering matters are made by someone with a job high enough up in the authority who does not work closely with the fostering team. This person should make the decisions about which people should be able to become foster carers and which should not and whether foster carers can care for more foster children than is usually allowed. The fostering service needs to make sure it sorts out how it writes down when carers have more children than is normally allowed so it keeps the right records about this.
- The authority should sort out how it does assessments of the relatives or friends of children (kinship carers) who want to care for them while they are looked after by the authority. It needs to do this to make sure that the people doing these assessments have the skills and training needed and get their work supervised by someone who knows fostering well and so that the person working with the child is not the same person who is working with the kinship carers.

- The service needs to make sure that, when children go to live with new foster carers, a meeting takes place to work out who needs to do what things for, and who can decide what things about, the child. A record of this meeting, called a 'placement agreement' must be kept and given to the foster carer, social worker and anyone else at the meeting. This is necessary to make sure that everyone knows as much as they can about the child and how to help them best.
- All foster carers need to have regular child protection, first aid and bullying training and all need to have training in how to deal with difficult behaviour properly. The fostering service should make sure that all foster carers do regular training and it needs to be better at writing down what training foster carers have done so it knows exactly who has done what training.
- The service has to get better at finding out what children think about their foster carers so that their views can be used to foster carers' reviews and at the end of foster placements. It needs to do this so that children's views are listened to when people are deciding whether foster carers are still the right sort of people to look after children.
- A 'safe care policy' showing how a foster carer is going to look after a child in a way that is safe for the child and carer should be written down for each foster placement and checked out with the child's social worker to make sure it is right.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children's physical and emotional health needs are well met by the fostering service but the information provided to, and agreed with, foster carers about children's health could be improved.

EVIDENCE:

People spoken to or consulted during the inspection said there are good links between children's services and health services working with children in the area. The authority has placed great emphasis on promoting the health of looked after children and has done a great deal of work to ensure that 91% of fostered young people have had a Looked After Children (LAC) medical check in the last twelve months. This is a high level and represents very positive practice in this area. All parties consulted reported good access to and good support from child psychology and psychiatry services and Access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is reported to be good, though a small minority of carers said that access had been slow. Everyone consulted spoke very highly indeed about the excellent support and advice provided by the child psychology service and its availability to fostered children and carers. Work is taking place in this area to further develop arrangements to build specialist teams to support children needing help in this area. Training has also been provided to foster carers working with children needing specialist input from these services.

Case tracking during the inspection provided good examples of how children's health needs are met and provided for, including children's dietary, medical and emotional needs. Children visited and spoken to were all registered with doctors and dentists and children's files contained information about their health needs and support or treatment provided. In one situation case tracked the young person did not have a Placement Plan (PP) Part 1 or 2 in her social work file and the foster carer confirmed that she did not have a copy of these documents. This means that arrangements for seeking and consenting to health treatments were not clearly identified and recorded. Additionally, in some situations, Essential Information Records (EIR) Parts 1 and 2 were not completed in sufficient detail to contain full history of children's health, treatments or immunisations. Full LAC documentation pertaining to children's health must be retained in their social work file and this information given to foster carers.

Foster carers are offered training in a range of matters relating to children's physical, emotional and mental health. There is, however, not enough first aid training offered to carers to ensure that all carers are in possession of an up-to-date first aid qualifications.

Foster carers views about how well the service them to meet children's health needs were as follows:

	% of Carers
Excellent	33%
Good	52%
Adequate	12%
Poor	3%

Foster carers' comments included:

- "Fostering service makes carers aware of outside agencies but offers little help in getting the kids to these agencies, eg. Alcohol abuse."
- "Support worker and young people's social worker is kept updated/informed of any concerns and referrals are made if required. All young people are registered with doctors and dentists."
- We have NVQ and many training schemes which include healthy wellbeing and healthy lifestyles. We feel well equipped in this area."
- "Had excellent support from a clinical psychologist in order to support the young person currently placed with me."

66% children consulted said they 'always' get the right help and advice with their health, 17% said they usually get this help and 17% said they sometimes get it. Children's said things like:

- "So I can stay healthy and eat a balanced diet."
- "My foster carers try to get me to eat healthy so that I can lose a little bit of weight."

- "To change my weight."
- "My teachers, carer, doctor, health visitor."
- "Because my foster carer is concerned that I may not eat healthily."
- "With my swimming."
- "(Foster carer) keeps us right with food same as nurse."

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service provides children with carers with safe homes and works hard to match children placed with suitable carers though this is hampered by poor information from children's social workers and a high level of emergency placements. Some decision making arrangements regarding approval and exemptions are not robust enough to fully protect children and more carers need basic training in child protection matters. Staff recruitment procedures and fostering panel are robust and help protect children.

EVIDENCE:

All foster carers visited as part of the inspection process made the inspectors welcome and cooperated fully with the inspection process. The homes visited were comfortable and suitable environments in which to bring up children. Children consulted were very pleased with their home. Good health and safety checklists were in place in all the files examined; these contained thorough checks of home safety and include checks on car MOT and registration documents as well as driving licence and insurance details. These checklists were all up-to-date as were pet safety questionnaires where appropriate. The fostering service is working with the Fire Service and this includes arranging independent fire safety checks by the Fire Service on foster homes.

The fostering service works hard to match children with appropriate foster placements and arrangements are generally effective with the constraints of placement availability. Generally foster carers consulted said that they receive adequate or better information about child as below:

	% of Carers
Excellent	14%
Good	42%
Adequate	39%
Poor	5%

Carers said things like:

- "We think a little bit more information would be better as it would help to understand what the children have had to deal with and give us more insight of how we can deal with the children's needs."
- "We could have been given more written information. Most of what we were given was verbal meaning the child could probably hear."
- "Sometimes good but can be poor if the children arrive in an unplanned way."
- "I always get as much information as I possibly can. I fell the best policy is to ask lots of questions before the event."
- "I've been given as much information as possible then more shortly after the placement."

Social workers spoken to felt that they had little choice of placement though the majority felt that the fostering service tries to match placements but that there are not enough foster carers particularly for the older children. Members of the social workers' group spoken to said that they are very busy and do not have the time they would like to provide the fostering service with information about children for whom they need placements. Worryingly, some social workers said that they try to 'get away' with giving the fostering team as little information about a child as possible because they do not have the time to supply the information. This situation should be addressed by the authority to ensure that as much information as possible about children is available when matching decisions are being made and to give to the foster carer to ensure that placements are as safe and successful as possible for the child.

Case tacking of three children found that two children had no foster placement agreement for their current placement despite the fact that the authority uses PP 1 and 2 as the foster placement agreement. In one situation PP1 and 2 had been completed 14 months after the beginning and one month after the end of a child's previous placement with a carer and their was no agreement at all for the current placement, in another the documentation on the child file related only to a previous placement with an independent agency. The other file examined contained full LAC documentation for the child and this carer said that information provided is good. Other carers had useful supporting information about the child. It is essential full LAC documentation is in place

for all children and that foster carers receive copies of all these documents. No placements should be made without Placement Agreements. It was, additionally, noted that the fostering service does not retain LAC documentation in respect of foster carers currently placed children on their files. This means that fostering staff do not have ready access to information about children to support their work with foster carers. The manager said that fostering staff do not have access to these documents in the authority's computer system but that this could be arranged. The fostering service must have access to this information or retain it within foster carers' files.

The authority has developed a range of foster care schemes including, a permanence scheme, a teenage foster care scheme as well as its kinship, mainstream and respite care foster carers. The service is working to recruit and expand these schemes, particularly the permanence and teenage schemes, used mostly for older children, in order to reduce its use of placements with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) for older children. Most people spoken to said that IFA placements are generally used for reasons of capacity for older young people and tended to be used in emergency situations. A decision making process involving team managers is in place to manage the access to placements in the independent sector but, currently, a high proportion of independent placements (approaching a quarter of total placements) is used. These placements are expensive and people consulted expressed the view that many IFA placements don't need the specific services offered by the IFA. The authority should continue to develop its own provision for older young people and develop a planned commissioning strategy for using IFAs.

Fostering, placing social workers and IRO's said that the use of independent foster placements are monitored regularly and that in house provision is used where possible. All said that no children would be moved from IFA placements back into the authorities own foster care provision unless it was based on the child's needs. All said they had never experienced a child being moved on solely financial grounds.

Social work managers, placing social workers and supervising social workers all said that the authority's LAC population is relatively high and that the service is working to reduce this level. Within this environment the proportion of foster placements made in an emergency is also high. Figures provided by the authority showed that overall 49% of foster placements are made in an emergency with this proportion increasing to 100% for young people aged 10 and over. Social workers said that often placements are identified on a planned basis in case they are needed, only to be used for another child on an emergency basis. They said that that this then results in the originally identified child having to be placed elsewhere, probably in an emergency. This is partly a capacity issue but the authority needs to consider how to reduce the proportion of emergency placements made, as planned placements allow for

better information to be supplied to the foster carers and provide better outcomes for children.

The authority keeps a record of the number of exemptions in place where children are placed with carers outside the terms of their foster carer approval. At the time of the inspection the authority declared that no foster children were caring for more children than the 'usual fostering limit' set out in the Children Act 1989 though case tracking identified the fact that one set of carers were looking after more children than this limit. The limit states that no more than three children should be fostered unless they are all siblings in relation to each other and one carer had five children from two families placed. The inspectors noted that this is an excellent placement for the children, one child said, " I feel safe here they care really good for you." Nevertheless this placement is over the usual fostering limit and as such requires an exemption from this limit to be in place. Discussion with the manager identified that the service had misunderstood the regulation and he said they would correct the situation straight away.

The same foster family had, for a short period of time, been used for short-term respite for another 2 young people and this had resulted in them having seven children in placement for a short period. The manager explained that the children already knew each other very well and that the foster families spend a lot of time together. The nature of the foster carer's house however and the number of children placed were however such that CSCI would expect that no extra children will be placed with these foster carers while they already have five children in placement. The fostering manager accepted this view and confirmed that no further placements would be made in the current situation.

The authority's arrangements for agreeing exemptions are such that they are considered and agreed by the fostering manager and, in one instance, it was noted that the supervising social worker had signed to agree an exemption on behalf of the manager. The manager is not of sufficient seniority within the authority to decide on the granting of an exemption there is a potential conflict of role when deciding on exemption based on children's needs and having the responsibility for managing the resources of the fostering service. The authority needs to develop arrangements for exemptions to be decided on by someone with appropriate seniority.

People consulted during the inspection were generally positive about the support provided to maintain placements and promote stability and all parties consulted were very positive about the input from the child psychology services in this area. Additionally, very good quality life story work for younger children was reported and people spoken to said that arrangements were in place to provide this work with older children as well. Case tracking provided an example of the service negotiating summer school placements for two young people placed with a carer on a short-term basis to allow the carer and a long-

term foster child to have special time together and 'bond' to support the placement. Foster carers are provided with good training in attachment issues.

Foster carers views, in surveys, about the quality of support provided to them to maintain placement stability and make sure children are well cared for were as follows:

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Promoting stability for children	33%	48%	15%	4%
Support for carer to make sure children are well cared for	46%	37%	11%	6%

Carers said things like:

- "If there's a problem they do what they can to help."
- "People visit us regularly and offer support, advice training and respite if needed"
- "We had a situation in which a placement was very 'wobbly' everybody did what they could to make it work and we got through it."

Foster carers spoken to said they get good support from supervising social workers and most said they are well supported by placing social workers. All parties said that they are visited appropriately including unannounced visits from their fostering officer. In one case tracked situation, however, it was noted that there had not been an unannounced visit recorded since October 2004 and recording in the file showed that this visit had not been unannounced as the fostering officer had telephoned the carer that morning to say a visit would be taking place that day. People spoken to said that social workers visit children at least in line with their statutory responsibilities and recording in files showed that usually visits are much more frequent. Although a small minority said, in survey forms, that children do not see their social workers enough some excellent levels of support were noted for children from their social workers were noted.

In survey forms young people said they feel well cared for where they are living and this view was reflected by children visited during the inspection. 88% of children said in surveys that they 'always' feel well cared for where they are living, the remaining young people said they 'usually' or 'sometimes' feel well cared for. This represents a high level of satisfaction from young people who said things like:

- "I'm happy where I am and who I'm with – my nana."
- "My foster family are excellent."
- "My carer treats me no different from the other children in her house and I love her to bits."
- "Because I am loved."
- "Because I get a lot of things I want."
- "I am always."

- "I get anything I want and everything I need."

All young people consulted by questionnaire said they know who to speak to if they are worried or had a personal problem and 89% said that they know how to complain. The remaining young people were not sure whether they know how to complain or not, no young person said they definitely do not know how to complain. The authority provides young people with a very good young person's guide which includes this information. Children said things like:

- "If I'm at home, I talk to my nana about any problems that I may have. If I'm at school I would tell the teacher or my mentor. I would then tell my nana when I get home."
- "I talk to (foster carer) sometimes or I talk to her daughters. If I'm in school then I talk to my mentor."
- "Someone gave me a leaflet about making a complaint and how to go about it."
- "I ask my carers."
- "I know that I always talk to my carers about any problems."
- "My gran or carers."
- "I can speak to my social worker or you (Commission for Social Care Inspection) I think."

The great majority of children consulted said that they are not being bullied with only three young people saying bullying is taking place. The names of these children were passed to the fostering service who were already aware and dealing with two situations and undertook to respond to the third. The overwhelming majority of children said they feel listened to by their placing social worker.

Foster carers have safe care policies in place but these are generalised and not specific to the individual child placed and were not agreed by all parties including the child's social worker. The manager said that safe care policies are agreed initially with the fostering service then should be adapted at the placement agreement meeting. Since, in some situations, there were no placement agreements made, this situation is not robust enough and the service should develop a system of ensuring that safe caring arrangements specific to the needs of the child and foster carer are discussed, drawn up and agreed at the start of each placement.

Training in child protection, behaviour management and bullying is available to foster carers but records sighted during the inspection showed that a limited number of foster carers have undertaken these training sessions. Training in these topics need to be seen as mandatory, basic training for all carers and work needs to be carried out to ensure that all carers receive training in these areas that is updated at appropriate intervals. Children consulted reported only appropriate sanctions taking place. The manager has an effective system of monitoring any significant events such as restraints, unauthorised absences or complaints from children.

The foster carers' review system includes an attempt to seek young people's views about their foster carers. The responsibility for getting these views is with children's social workers, and fostering officers and the manager said that the service finds it difficult to get these views back for foster carers' reviews. Examination of foster carer's review records in their files showed that these reviews had not had access to children's views to inform the review process. Additionally, there is no system in place for reliably getting young people's views about carers at the end of their placements. The authority needs to develop a procedure to effectively seek young people's views about foster carers at the end of placements and at the time of foster carer reviews in order to make the consideration of placement safety more robust.

Recruitment files examined of staff members appointed since the last inspection were in good order and demonstrated that a robust and well recorded recruitment procedure is operated with effective checks and references being sought. Full employment histories of applicants are sought along with the reasons for leaving previous posts working with children and good records of verbal follow-up of written references are maintained.

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering service operates an effective panel that employs structured processes and keeps good records of its decisions and how it reaches them. Decisions and recommendations made are clear and the agency decision maker makes a decision promptly bearing in mind the panel recommendation; good records of these decisions and panel minutes are maintained on foster carers' files. Panel is correctly constituted in line with the regulations and national minimum standards. Currently the fostering manager acts as the organisation's decision maker other than in very difficult decisions. The potential conflict of role between the manager's need to recruit carers and the objectivity required of the decision maker means that the manager not undertaking this role is not appropriate. The authority should make sure that the person making decision is at a suitable level and not have a day to day involvement in the running of the fostering service.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children are very well supported with their educational and leisure needs. Foster carers get good support to help them care for children with different needs and from different ethnic backgrounds and the service is working to improve its provision in this area.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides foster carers with good information about promoting equality and diversity within the foster carer handbook, issues surrounding this are covered in foster carers' approval training and training provided by the authority is effective in this area. BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) induction and foundation training provided to carers covers diversity issues and around 20 carers undertook diversity training in Autumn 2006. The population served by the local authority is predominantly white British and the make up of foster carers and children that the service works with reflects this composition. The service is involved with the Sahara project, which provides support for the recruitment and support of carers from different backgrounds. Links with the project has provided training for staff in working with foster families from ethnic minority backgrounds. The service is developing links with Bangladeshi and Bengali communities and working to recruit more carers from ethnic minority backgrounds. People spoken to expressed the view that the service has benefited from its involvement with Sahara in terms of advice,

information and awareness raising though acknowledged that the service needs to develop further in this area.

Foster carers and social workers said that carers have access to a budget for any aids and adaptations necessary. Foster carers consulted spoke very positively about how well the service supports foster carers to address diversity issues in relation to the children they care for as follows:

	% of Carers
Excellent	41%
Good	47%
Adequate	12%
Poor	0%

Carers said things including:

- "I have had children with disabilities placed with me and children of mixed race. The service has always supported them well."
- "We have covered diversity in a lot of training but we don't have much experience in our day to day work."

The foster carers' handbook and blue box provides carers with good information about promoting education for fostered children and working with the different services involved. The service has worked hard to raise the proportion of looked after children who have up to date Personal Education Plans (PEPs) with very nearly 100% of fostered children having plans in place. Children of school age spoken to during the inspection had PEPs and SENs were in place where appropriate. It is also commendable to note that, of those children whose age makes it necessary 100% of fostered children have a Pathway Plans setting out the arrangements to help them become adults.

83% of care leavers whose last placement was a foster placement achieved at least 1 GCSE at A* - G or a GNVQ with one of the 12 young people referred to gaining at least 5 GCSEs at grades A* - C. Evidence of good support for the education of children visited was. One carer gave an example of how she worked to get a long-term fostered child into a good school that she knew well so could liaise more easily with the school about any problems. She said that this also meant the young person could walk to school like other children and not be marked out as different by arriving in a taxi. Examples of the fostering service helping to arrange additional support for a child in school to help catch up for missed education and encouragement for children to take part in after school and summer school activities as well as activities and groups in the community were available.

Children's views about whether they get the right sort of help with their education and are helped to think about their future were as follows:

	Education	Future
Always	78%	44%
Usually	22%	17%
Sometimes	0%	22%
Never	0%	17%

Children's comments included:

- "So I get the right qualifications for a job in later life."
- "I get help with my work at school whenever I ask or I get help with my homework when I ask."
- "Carer, teachers, placement."
- "(Carer) tells me to stick in at school."
- "No."
- "Because I always get help."
- "I'm in my last year at school, so I need to think about what I want to do. The Connexions Advisors have been in school to discuss later on education and jobs."
- "I never really ask and I never plan ahead. I plan stuff when the time is a bit near."
- "Carer, family, teachers, social worker."
- "To help me."
- "(Foster carers) talk to me about what is going to happen later on."
- "Always."
- "No."
- "My and my carer have been discussing what I want to do in the future."
- "We sometimes talk about it."
- "Talked about future career."

It is positive to note that so many children believe they are getting the help they need with their education. Foster carers' views about the support provided to children with their education, help with access to activities in the community and help to provide an environment for children to prosper in were also generally positive.

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Support for children's education.	29%	55%	13%	3%
Support for children's activities in the community.	19%	58%	19%	4%
Support to provide an environment in which children can prosper.	33%	36%	24%	7%

Foster carers made comments including:

- " We have had all the help possible from the fostering service but my foster child was let down by the education authority."
- "Taxi is provided for the young person to and from a specialist school and an assessment and special education needs statement was organised by the young person's social worker. Education arranged a school move in a planned way."
- "We get MAX cards which give us free entry to museums etc. This is a good help."
- "My foster child goes to a weekly after school club to help with his maths."
- "Finance is provided for activities within the child's allowance. There is encouragement from the department for carers to take children to activities."
- "We get good help with the children's education and they are doing well, better than anyone thought they could when they first came to me."
- "We've had very good support from the school and everyone involved with the young person."
- "Sometimes poor communication between services lets things down even though the plans were good and its frustrating sometimes how long things take to happen."
- "My child has had good help to grow into a person with a good future."

The authority provides short break care for children with disabilities either with in-house foster carers or more frequently with carers working for IFAs. Arrangements are suitable to ensure that responsibility for decisions regarding these children remains with their parents. At the time of the inspection the manager told inspectors that the service is examining various ways of developing the provision of this type of care further including the possibility of providing more in-house carers alongside a small residential provision.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children get good support to maintain contact with their family and friends. Children's views are important to the service; they are listened to and can influence the care they receive. The service is working to further develop this area of work.

EVIDENCE:

The importance of promoting appropriate contact between young people and their families is set out in the foster care agreement and stressed in the foster carers' handbook. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection told inspectors about the actions they take to support contact and the support they receive from the fostering team and children's social workers. Good examples were identified during case tracking and visits to foster carers about how carers work with families. One carer said that she had received excellent support for her and her own family when a contact situation was very difficult.

The service's foster placement agreements contain information about the arrangements and responsibilities for contact. However, as the inspection found that some placements are made without foster placements agreements, being completed this information is not always set out sufficiently clearly. All parties reported good arrangements for contact where it is in children's interests and foster carers' survey responses showed that children's networks with family, friends and the community are generally good unless the specific situation of the child limits these links.

A good range of training is offered to foster carers to help them understand children’s relationships with their families and other contact issues. Training covers attachment, contact, life story work and the needs of looked after siblings.

The authority has a number of initiatives in place to seek the views of fostered children including a children and young people’s group. The authority is introducing Viewpoint as a way of seeking young people’s views for their own reviews but also for using data from Viewpoint to inform other parts of the service. The young people’s group are being consulted about the review process and use of Viewpoint. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) said that, initially, Viewpoint is available for young people in residential care or fostered with IFAs but is being extended to all fostered children. Some carers consulted during the inspection confirmed that Viewpoint is being used by young people placed with them already.

As stated earlier in this report the foster carer review process includes forms used to seek young people’s views about carers for the carers reviews as well as the views of young people who have left the placement in the time since the last review. The process of collecting these views however places the responsibility on the children’s social workers and the fostering service does not get many views from children back for reviews. IROs said that end of placement meetings take place but, in their, view, are not often very challenging about identifying reasons for the placement disruption and learning points. The service must develop a system for seeking children’s views about their carers at foster carers’ reviews and the end of placements in order to make the consideration of placement safety and suitability more robust.

Children’s views about how they are listened to were generally positive with children feeling well listened to by their foster carers and, mostly, by their social workers as below:

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
By foster carer:	67%	22	11%	0%
By social worker:	47%	24%	24%	5% (1)

Children said about their carers:

- "We talk to each other, and discuss any opinions or situations at that time."
- "Well if I have something to say about what I like, what I want to do then they listen to me."
- "Because my foster carer thinks children should always have their say."
- "(Foster carers) ask me what I think about things."
- "When I ask or say about going to college or something she listened and talked to me about it."

Only one child who made a comment implied that she thought she does not see her social worker enough. She said she is listened to "When she comes." Other children said things like:

- "We talk to each other and discuss any opinions or situations at that time."
- "Well some of the time social workers don't listen to what you want. They take things into their own hands thinking they know best but they don't. They mess you about."
- "She does what she can and she does what I ask her to do sometimes."
- "She believes children should have their opinion."
- "I can say!"

Carers views about how well children are consulted about their care and the running of the fostering service were as follows:

	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor
Consulted about their care?	30%	47%	13%	10%
Consulted about the running of the service?	35%	20%	35%	10%

Foster carers made comments about consultation with children including:

- "The children are included in meetings and share their views."
- "(Young person) is always consulted about any decisions made about her."
- "Everything has always been discussed openly with the child."
- "They have always treated children and young people with respect when I have been at meetings."
- "(Young person) can never get hold of her social worker when she needs to talk to her."
- "They consult all right but then things take such a long time to happen that the child has often moved forward and is no longer bothered about what happens."
- "Young people are encouraged to attend LAC reviews and complete viewpoint. The child's social worker and my fostering officer regularly ask the child his views. This is obviously age appropriate."

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service has an effective system for making foster carer payments.

EVIDENCE:

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council fostering service has structured payments schemes in place for foster carers. These schemes include a permanence and a teenage foster carer scheme as well as the mainstream, kinship care and short break care fostering that takes place. The teenage and permanence schemes offer specialist carers a payment in addition to the fostering allowance paid to mainstream carers. Information about payment levels and the system of payments is contained in the foster carers' handbook.

As part of the inspection survey forms were sent to all the authority's foster carers with forms being returned from 35 carers. Only a very few carers raised fostering allowances as a problem with those that did stating that they feel the allowance is too low. Only one carer expressed the view that the system for making payments to carers on time needs to be improved; "I think the fortnightly payments could be higher and that payments for children's birthday allowance should be made on time." The great majority of carers raised no concern about allowances or the arrangements for them to be paid.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Arrangements for management of foster carers are generally good though and carers receive good levels of support to help them look after children. Some arrangements for reviews and foster carer training and recording could be improved. Children's files need to contain better information about the child and this needs to be made more available to foster carers and the fostering service to help them help children better.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is effectively managed and organised with clear lines of accountability and procedures for decision making. The service has systems in place to ensure that work relating to the assessment, approval, management, support, supervision and review of foster carers takes place effectively. The manager effectively supervises and manages the team of staff and supervising social workers said that their case loads and the work within the team is very busy but manageable. Fostering officers expressed the view that they have a higher workload than fostering staff in surrounding authorities. Fostering officers have specific responsibilities within the team and take a lead on developing service in these areas. Levels of clerical and administrative support are usually appropriate though vacancies with the team has left the service very short of administrative support for a significant period of time before the inspection. The service is able to access advice, guidance and specialist services to support young people and their foster families.

Recent foster carers' assessments seen during the inspection were very thorough and robust with evidence of very detailed and careful checks on applicants' suitability and competence to foster. Checks on foster carers' backgrounds were thorough. Records of visits to the referees of applicants to be foster carers were appropriate but, as they were not signed by the referee, it was not possible to verify their accuracy. It is recommended that reports of visits to referees are shown to the referee and their signatures gained to ensure that they are full and accurate reports of what the referee said. As stated earlier in this report the authority needs to ensure that the person undertaking the role of 'agency decision maker' and making decisions about the approval of foster carers is at an appropriate level within the organisation.

The local authority has effective arrangements in place for the management and support of carers that include training, information, supervision and support, respite care and reviews. Carers receive a handbook which contains useful information and guidance about their roles and problems they might face, including signposts to other sources of help and a 'blue box' containing a range of useful information, documents and professional contacts. Arrangements for the scheduling of foster carers' reviews are effective with reviews taking place within timescale and being chaired by an IRO. Reviews seen were thorough and detailed and the recommendations from each review

were clearly stated and evidenced. As stated earlier, however, children's views are not well reflected in foster carers' reviews and the service needs to get better at seeking their views.

Some examples were noted in situations case tracked during the inspection in which a review changed a foster carer's approval status and this had not been reflected in a new foster carer agreement or notice of approval so it was not always easy to identify a carer's current terms of approval. As stated earlier the service also needs to ensure that all foster carers are visited on an unannounced basis at least once per year.

Foster carers spoken to and those who completed questionnaires were very positive about the support provided to them by the fostering service. All those spoken to were very positive about the support received from their supervising social worker and most said that they get good support from children's social workers. Some carers commented that they do not see children's social workers as much as they would like or said that social workers are sometime slow at doing what they say they will do but, generally, carers accepted that they are very busy and do what they can to support children. Carers' views about how well they are supported to care for fostered children were as follows:

	% of Carers
Excellent	62%
Good	19%
Adequate	14%
Poor	5% (1)

Comments made included:

- "We are given all possible assistance."
- "My social worker is a good help to me and supports the whole family."
- "They have chosen the two children which they think are best placed in my care and help me with their needs and also give me the support I need."
- "We find South Tyneside a very caring fostering service."
- "The fostering service are always approachable, available and supportive to me."

Foster carer's records viewed during the inspection showed that foster carers receive frequent, regular supervision from their supervising social worker. Records showed that supervision discussion covers any issues relating to the children fostered as well as support, development and training issues for the foster carer. Carers visited confirmed that they get frequent support visits and supervision and said they found this helpful. The service has a foster carer agreement in place for foster carers though, in the files examined, this had not been renewed after carer's approval terms had changed. The manager has an effective system in operation for monitoring any significant events including those identified in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and

the service notifies the relevant bodies of any significant events set out in these regulations.

The fostering service provides foster carers with very good training opportunities and employs a staff member to work specifically to develop training and assist and assess foster carers undertaking training including NVQ level 3 in child care. Good advanced training is available to carers and the service offers BAAF induction and foundation training to foster carers as well as NVQ 3 and short courses. At the time of the inspection 26 of the authority's foster carers had completed NVQ 3 and a further 6 carers were undertaking this qualification. It is positive that the authority offers and encourages foster carers to develop and engage in these longer term training courses.

Other training is offered also, by the fostering service or authority and carers can access corporate training events as well. Social workers spoken to cited situations where they had attended training at which foster carers had been present and said that they found this useful. Training courses jointly run by the child psychology service and the fostering team were particularly praised by people during the inspection. There is, however, a shortage of more 'basic' or 'fundamental' training for carers in topics such as child protection, behaviour management, bullying and first aid that need to be undertaken by all carers and updated at periodic intervals. Fostering officers said that although some carers are very keen to undertake training there are some who are more unwilling. The service needs to ensure that training in these 'fundamental' topics is provided to all carers. Training records held by the fostering service did not provide a centralised record of all the training undertaken by foster carers. This record did not contain a full record of all the training done by some carers and some corporate training events provided by the authority were not recorded. It is recommended that a central record is developed to include all training done by foster carers in whatever way in order to provide clear management information about the training needs of carers.

As stated earlier in this report, children's files examined did not all contain full LAC documentation in respect of the children. One file examined contained all the necessary LAC papers and these were signed by all parties to the agreements. In another file, however, there were no up-to-date LAC documents relating to the current placement and in another there was no PP 1 or 2 for the current placement. In a number of situations LAC documents on children's files were unsigned so it was not possible to be certain that necessary consultation and agreement had taken place. Records of reviews, however, were good and reading these records helped give a picture of the child's background, progress and plan. At the time of the inspection the LAC documentation of children placed with foster carers was not available to the fostering service; it was not retained in foster carers' files and the manager said that fostering staff do not have access to the part of the council's computer system that retains the electronic versions of these documents. This means that, in its day-to-day work supporting foster carers, the service has no

access to information about the children's needs or difficulties. It is vital that full and up-to-date LAC information is in place for each child and a copy of all current information is available to the foster carer and fostering team. Placement Plan Parts 1 & 2 form the authority's placement agreement and as such no placement may be made without a fully completed placement agreement setting out how the carer is to look after the child and who will be responsible for any decisions and consents necessary.

At the time of the inspection assessment of family and friends carers carried out under Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 were being undertaken by social workers in the children's teams rather than in the fostering service. Social workers and team managers spoken to expressed the view that children's social workers do not have the training or expertise to undertake these assessments and that there is a potential conflict of role being the child's social worker and the assessor of the family member as a potential carer at the same time. The view was also expressed that the social workers' heavy caseloads means that they do not have the capacity to do this work. The manager of the fostering team confirmed that ongoing discussion is taking place about how family and friends assessments are carried out but said that he did not think the answer was simply to move the work into the fostering unit as workloads in that unit are already high. However the matter is resolved the authority should take steps to ensure that family and friends assessments are carried out by social workers with the necessary experience and training and that any possible role conflicts are identified and managed appropriately.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS12 FS8 FS24	11, 34	Full LAC information must be retained in children's files and given to foster carers to ensure carers have the information necessary to look after children safely and well.	16/03/07
2.	FS12 FS8 FS10 FS24 FS11	11, 34	Placement Agreements must be in place for all foster placements made.	16/03/07
3.	FS8 FS24	11, 34	LAC documentation of the children currently placed with foster carers must be retained in the files of their foster carers or be accessible to fostering staff in the authority's computer system.	16/03/07
4.	FS8	28, 34 Children Act 1989 Sec 63(12)	The fostering service must ensure that foster carers do not care for more children than the usual fostering limit unless a certificate of exemption from this limit rather than from the category of approval is in place.	16/02/07
5.	FS12 FS9 FS23	11, 12, 15	The service must make sure that all carers receive regularly updated training in first aid, child protection, behaviour management and bullying.	22/06/07

6.	FS9 FS21 FS11	12, 29	The authority must develop a procedure to effectively seek young people's views about foster carers at the end of placements and at the time of foster carer reviews in order to make the consideration of placement safety more robust.	22/06/07
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RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS8	The authority should ensure social workers provide the fostering team with as much information as is possible about a child to properly support the matching process and allow safe and successful placements to be made.
2.	FS8	The authority should continue to develop its own provision for older young people and develop a planned commissioning strategy for using IFAs.
3.	FS8	The authority needs to consider how to reduce the proportion of emergency placements made, as planned placements allow for better information to be supplied to the foster carers and provide better outcomes for children.
4.	FS8	The authority needs to develop arrangements for exemptions to be decided on by someone with appropriate seniority.
5.	FS9 FS21	The fostering service should ensure that all carers receive an unannounced visit at least annually.
6.	FS9	The fostering service should develop a system of ensuring that safe caring arrangements specific to the needs of the child and foster carer are discussed, drawn up and agreed at the start of each placement.
7.	FS30 FS17	The authority should make sure that 'agency decision maker' role lies with a role of sufficient seniority and with someone with no day-to-day involvement in the running of the fostering service.
8.	FS7	The service should continue to work to ensure that sufficient placement choice exists for children who are placed. The service should continue its work to recruit more carers from a range of ethnic communities and backgrounds.

9.	FS16	The level of clerical and administrative support available to the fostering service should receive attention until the current staffing situation is resolved.
10.	FS17	It is recommended that reports of visits to the referees for people being assessed as foster carers are shown to the referees and their signatures gained to ensure that they are full and accurate reports of what the referee said.
11.	FS21 FS22	A new foster carer agreement and notice of approval should be issue to foster carers after each change of approval.
12.	FS24	It is recommended that a central record is developed to include all training done by foster carers, in whatever way, in order to provide clear management information about the training needs of carers.
13.	FS32	The authority should take steps to ensure that family and friends assessments are carried out and supervised by social workers with the necessary experience and training and that any possible role conflicts are identified and managed appropriately.

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