



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Northumberland Fostering Service

Family Support & Placement Service

Tweed House

Hepscott Park

Morpeth

Northumberland

NE61 6NF

7th February 2005



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.



- 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.



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?"



- 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.



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YES

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Northumberland Fostering Service

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

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Mr Bob Ross

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

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[REDACTED]	1	Dennis Bradley	074426	
[REDACTED]	2	Hilary Stewart		
[REDACTED]	3			
[REDACTED]	4			
[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]				
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]				
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]		Mr Bob Ross		

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

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.

Northumberland Fostering Service is part of the Family Support and Placement Service, which is based at Tweed House, Hepscoth Park, Stannington, Morpeth. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements to children and young people, these include long and short-term foster care and short break care. The Service also includes Task Centred Teenager Placements and plans were underway to recruit, train and support carers who will provide Treatment Placements. At the time of the inspection the Service was supporting approximately 234 placements. The Fostering Service operated with a staff team of 37 including the Manager and administrative support staff. There was one social work post vacant in the Permanency Team.

1.1
(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 report of an announced inspection.

The purpose of the inspection is:

- a) to assess progress made towards meeting requirements and recommendations (where applicable) from the previous inspection
- b) to assess the service against the National Minimum Standards.

This inspection focussed on key standards in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services along with other standards that were judged to be necessary. This is in line with the current CSCI policy of proportionality. As a result there are a number of standards in the report that have not been assessed.

1.2

The Fostering Service has a written Statement of Purpose and a Children’s Guide. The Children’s Guide had been amended to include additional information.

1.3

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

1.4

1.5

The assessment process for new foster carers was comprehensive, thorough and included a health and safety check. There was evidence that the specific needs of children and young people were given consideration when foster placements were arranged. The promotion of young peoples health and development was taken seriously. The health care needs of children and young people were given consideration when placements were arranged and at formal reviews of the placements. There was evidence that young people were consulted about their care plans and that arrangements were in place to enable young people to voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. The Council promoted the education and achievement of children in foster care. Where young people were not attending school support was available for them and their foster carers. However, some young people were receiving less than 25 hours education a week. A supportive checklist was being used at placement agreement to ensure that appropriate information was obtained. The Fostering service had arrangements in place to safeguard children and young people in foster care.

New foster carers received in 'Safe Caring' and training on Child Protection and Managing Behaviour was available. Foster carers were also provided with written guidance and training in how to recognise and deal with bullying. All the placing social workers who completed a questionnaire indicated that they thought the child was safe in their foster placement and, that the foster carer used acceptable methods of control and discipline.

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The Authority's recruitment and selection procedures needed to be reviewed to ensure that the necessary checks were always carried out. Staff had regular team meetings and a formal system of supervision was in place for all staff. The Fostering Service had a stable core staff team and there was relatively low turnover of staff in the social work teams. The Service had a strategy to recruit a range of foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people. The Service's budget for the recruitment of foster carers had been increased for 2005/06. A system was in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers and foster carers received practical support that included insurance cover, out of hours support and respite care. Foster carers had access to an independent mediation, advice and counselling service. The arrangements for the payment of special allowances to foster carers needed to be reviewed to ensure consistency and prompt payment. All foster carers, apart from kinship carers, were required to attend a course of training prior to their approval. All foster carers had access to ongoing training although some experienced carers did not access this training even when it had been recommended in their annual review. The provision of such training, including the timing and venues, was being reviewed. There was a backlog in carer's annual reviews.

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There were written policies regarding case recording. In general, appropriate records were maintained in respect of children and foster carers. Foster carers confirmed that they knew why a child is placed with them and the basis for the placement. Although there had been some improvement there continued to be delays in some carers being provided with relevant information. The Children's Register and Register of Foster Carers need to be developed to include all the required information.

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Arrangements were in place for the basic allowances for carers to be paid promptly. However, there continued to be delays in some payments of special allowances that were authorised by team managers in the area social work offices.

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The Fostering Service had two panels. The Fostering Panel was observed to work thoroughly and effectively. Panel members had undergone Criminal Records Bureau checks. Arrangements should be made to provide panel members with appropriate training. The Panel should have an independent chair.

8.55

Findings

The Service includes two short break foster care schemes. The short break care scheme for children with disabilities was being developed and, in particular, consideration was being given to recruiting more carers who could provide short breaks for children with autism.

8.56

Findings

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

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:

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:

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:

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:

16/11/15

16/01/14

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

16/01/14

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	5, 7, &20	FS15	Take action to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revise the Service's recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that they comply fully with Standards 3 & 15 and Regulations 5, 7, 10 & 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002;• Ensure that all staff personnel records contain the information stipulated in Schedule 1 of the Regulations;• Ensure that police checks are carried out in respect of any person working in or for the Fostering Service and that arrangements are in place to have these renewed every three years.	30/9/04
2	18	FS13	Ensure that, where appropriate, Personal Education Plans are in place for each young person and that these are kept under review.	30/9/04
3	22	FS25	Take action to ensure that the Children's Register includes all the following information (as set out in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002) in respect of each child placed with foster parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the date on which he ceased to be placed there;• his address on leaving the placement. The foster carer Register must include the sex of each foster parent.	30/8/04

4	38	FS32	<p>Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure compliance with Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Fostering Service's own procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of relatives and friends as foster carers.</p> <p>Ensure that where an immediate placement of a young person with a relative has been arranged, the social worker visits at least once a week as specified in Regulation 35(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	30/10/04
5	29	FS21	Take action to ensure that the approval of each foster carer is reviewed at intervals of not more than a year.	30/10/04
6	28	FS22	Foster Carer Agreements must include all the information set out in Regulation 28 and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	30/9/04

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

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	5, 7 & 20	FS15	1. Revise the Service's recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that they comply fully with Standards 3 & 15 and Regulations 5, 7, 10 & 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002;	30/7/05
			2. All staff personnel records must contain the following information, as specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive proof of identity including a recent photograph; • Documentary evidence of any relevant qualification. 	30/10/05
			3. Ensure that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references and that records of these enquiries are included in the person's personnel file.	7/5/05
			4. Ensure that, where a person has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, so far as reasonably practicable verification of the reason why the employment or position ended is obtained. Maintain a record of the outcome of such checks.	7/5/05
			5. Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure that CRB checks, in respect of all people working in or for the Agency, are renewed every three years.	31/7/05

2	16	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that any education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have.</p> <p>Ensure that, where appropriate, Personal Education Plans are in place for each young person and that these are kept under review.</p>	30/9/05
3	2	FS25	<p>Take action to ensure that the Children's Register includes all the following information (as set out in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2, of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002) in respect of each child placed with foster parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the date on which he ceased to be placed there; • his address on leaving the placement. <p>The Foster Carer Register must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The name and address of each person with whom the fostering service provider has placed a child under Regulation 38(2); • The date of each agreement entered into in accordance with Regulation 38(2)(b); • The terms of any such agreement for the time being in force; • The sex of each foster parent. 	30/5/05
4	38	FS32	<p>Put in place suitable arrangements to ensure compliance with Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Fostering Service's own procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of relatives and friends as foster carers.</p> <p>Ensure that where an immediate placement of a young person with a relative has been arranged, the social worker visits at least once a week as specified in Regulation 35(2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	30/6/05
5	29	FS21	<p>The approval of each foster carer must be reviewed at intervals of not more than a year.</p>	1/3/06

6	28	FS22	<p>As specified in Regulation 28 and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, Foster Care Agreements must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The terms of the foster parent's approval; • The procedure available to foster parents for making representations. 	30/5/05
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<p>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).</p>		
No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS8	Ensure that when a foster carer is exempted from the terms of their approval this is clearly recorded in the foster carer's file.
2	FS13	Consideration should be given to involving the ESLAC Team in providing training to prospective carers as part of their initial training.
3	FS21	<p>Consideration should be given to ensuring that an independent person chairs carers' annual reviews.</p> <p>Children's social workers and, where appropriate, children and young people should be asked to provide written contributions for the annual reviews of foster carers.</p> <p>Review the arrangements for providing foster carers with respite care to ensure that requests are dealt with promptly.</p>
4	FS22	Unannounced visits to foster carer's homes should be carried out at least once a year.

5	FS24	<p>Ensure that relevant information and Looked After Children documentation is made available promptly to foster carers as set out in the Directorate's own procedures.</p> <p>When placements are being considered on the basis of limited information the child's social worker should carry out a recorded risk assessment and review the foster carer's safe caring policy. This should help ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to enable the carer to provide appropriate care to the child and to protect the foster child, their own children and any other children for whom they have responsibility.</p> <p>Foster Placement Agreements should clearly refer to the elements of matching taken into consideration when agreeing the placement and the action required to compensate for identified gaps.</p>
6	FS29	<p>A review of the arrangements for the payment of special allowances to foster carers should be undertaken to ensure consistency as well as promptness of payments.</p>
7	FS30	<p>Arrangements should be made to appoint a chair of the Fostering Panel who is independent of the Fostering Service.</p> <p>Review the training needs of the members of the Fostering Panel and provide appropriate training to meet these needs.</p>
8	FS32	<p>In line with the Authority's procedures, where an immediate placement is made with kinship carers, ensure that applications for Criminal Record Bureau checks are completed and submitted at the outset of the placement. Amend form FP2 to refer to this expectation. In addition, a safe caring policy for the household should be completed at the commencement of such placements.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to involving a member of the Fostering Team in the initial screening visits of kinship carers to ensure that the Authorities procedures and timescales are complied with.</p>

* 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.

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

Number of Inspector days spent	12
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	7/2/05
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	95.5

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

<p>Q1</p>			
<p>Q2</p>			
<p>Q3</p>			
<p>Q4</p>			
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<p>Q10</p>			
<p>Q11</p>			
<p>Q12</p>			
<p>Q13</p>			
<p>Q14</p>			

<p>Standard</p> <p>1.1</p> <p>• 1.1.1</p>		
<p>2.2</p> <p>2.2.1</p> <p>2.2.2</p> <p>2.2.3</p>		
1.1	1.1	0
<p>Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.</p>		

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.3.1</p> <p>3.3.2</p>		
1.1	1.1	2
<p>A Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check had been carried out in respect of the Manager. Arrangements had been put in place to ensure that these checks are renewed every three years for staff. Although the Council's recruitment policies and procedures had been revised, there was evidence that written references were not being followed up with telephone enquiries.</p>		

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4.1.3	4.1.3									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1.3 	4.1.3									
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Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.										
4.1.3	4.1.3	3								
4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3	4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3 4.1.3	<table border="1"> <tr><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>0</td></tr> </table>	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
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Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.										

<p>6.1</p> <p>6.1.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.1.1.1 		
<p>6.1.1.1</p> <p>6.1.1.1.1</p>		
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<p>The assessment process for carers included a health and safety check that covered their premises and vehicles. This had been amended to include checks in relation to the storage of any firearms owned by carers. Arrangements were in place for the accommodation of foster carers to be reviewed as part of the annual review process and for an annual health and safety check to be completed. The Foster Carers Handbook includes guidance regarding the health and safety responsibilities of carers. Post approval training for carers included a course on Health and Safety.</p> <p>No problems were noted in respect of the standard of accommodation in the homes of those foster carers who were visited as part of the inspection. All of the carers made the Inspectors feel welcome and cooperated with the inspection process. There were examples where foster children were sharing bedrooms with other foster children or the children of the carers. There was evidence that this raised issues of privacy for some young people. One social worker interviewed said that new carers were expected to have a spare bedroom.</p>		

<p>6.2</p> <p>6.2.1</p> <p>6.2.1.1</p>		
<p>6.2.1.1</p> <p>6.2.1.1.1</p>		
6.2.1.1.1	6.2.1.1.1	3
<p>There was evidence that where children and young people had specific needs in terms of their culture and ethnic origin, steps had been taken by the Service to try and address them. The Council was collaborating with other local authorities in the region to recruit black and ethnic minority foster carers. There were examples of foster carers homes being adapted and equipped to meet the needs of disabled children. The Service provided a range of foster placements to meet the needs of children and young people and plans were underway to develop specialist Treatment and Project Foster Care Placements.</p> <p>The preparatory training for foster carers included a session on promoting children's rights and a positive sense of identity. Post approval training included the course 'Valuing Difference'. The Carers Handbook included policies on Valuing Diversity and Anti Discriminatory Practice. The assessment of prospective carers included consideration of their capacity to parent a child whose cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic needs may be different to their own. It was evident that, where possible, matching considerations included deliberations concerning the way in which the specific needs of the children and young people could be met.</p>		

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<p>A shortage of foster placements restricted the opportunities available to ensure suitable matches between children and foster carers, particularly where short term or emergency placements were required. There was also a shortfall in placements for sibling groups. Carers were sometimes asked to take placements outside of the terms of their approval. There was an example where a foster carer occasionally looked after 4 children but the exemption to their terms of approval had not been recorded on their file. The Principal officer for LAC advised that if a suitable placement was not available 'in house', a placement with an independent provider would be arranged. As part of the strategy to provide suitable placements to meet placement demand the Manager of the Family Placement Service was meeting with independent providers to review and formalise agreements with these agencies.</p> <p>Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they were involved in the matching process and family placement workers also confirmed that, wherever possible, they were consulted. Children's Permanency Workers, line managed by the Manager of the Permanence Team, were based in the social work area teams to facilitate the planning process, where permanent or long-term foster care had been identified as best meeting the needs of a particular child. However, in the sample of children case tracked, there was evidence of significant delay in the plan for permanency for one child being re-instated and progressed.</p> <p>Arrangements were in place for a supplementary checklist to be completed at each placement agreement meeting to ensure that the relevant information is recorded as part of the foster placement agreement. However, in the sample of records examined, the checklist had not been used for one placement. No placement agreement had been completed in relation to the placement of another child. Some placement agreements did not clearly indicate the elements of matching that had been considered in making the placement.</p>		

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<p>The Fostering service had arrangements in place to safeguard children and young people in foster care. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory and post approval training for carers in 'Safe Caring' and courses on Child Protection and Managing Behaviour; • Prospective carers prepared a safe caring policy for their own household as part of their assessment. Experienced foster carers had also been asked to prepare their own policy in consultation with their family placement worker; • The Foster Carer Handbook made clear that corporal punishment was not acceptable and this was also stated in the Foster Carer Agreement. The Handbook also included a procedure for when children went missing; • An anti-bullying policy was in place and post approval training for carers included a course on recognising and dealing with bullying; 		

The newsletter for looked after children in the County included contact numbers for independent advocacy services and the Authority's Client Relations and Emergency Duty Teams. A Divisional complaints procedure for children and young people was in place. The children's guide included contact details of the Commission and an independent advocacy service. Asked whether they had been told how to make a complaint about how they were being looked after if they needed to, 16 children indicated 'yes' and 5 'no'.

Some of the young people interviewed attended their reviews and were visited on a regular basis by their social worker. However, interviews with foster carers, as well as an examination of a sample of records, indicated that some young people were not being visited by a social worker at the frequency specified in the Authority's minimum standards. 6 children confirmed that their social worker 'often' saw them on their own to ask their opinions, 14 indicated 'sometimes'.

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It was evident that the promotion of young peoples health and development was taken seriously. The health care needs of children and young people were given consideration when placements were arranged and at formal reviews of the placements. A Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (LAC) was responsible for coordinating and overseeing the general health needs of children and young people. There had been improvements in ensuring that health assessments and health promotion checks were being carried out. The children's files examined contained information on each child's health history and health care needs. The children were registered with a GP. The Designated Nurse also did direct work with children and young people.

Foster carers' interviewed demonstrated an awareness of the health care needs of the children placed with them. The Foster Carer Handbook included guidance regarding Health and Medical Issues. Post approval training available to carers included: 'Sexual Health', 'Child Development' and First Aid. The Designated Nurse (LAC) had prepared a Sexual Health Policy for the Children's Division as well as draft guidance for young people. The latter was prepared following in consultation with young people. Consideration should be given to preparing a protocol in relation to carers carrying out simple nursing tasks as part of the care provided to a foster child. This should cover how they are to be trained and their competency assessed and reviewed.

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<p>The Council promoted the education and achievement of children and young people in foster care. The Education Support for Looked After Children (ESLAC) Team had increased in size and included 2 teachers, a mentor, a youth worker and a coordinator. The team provided a range of support to young people that included teaching, classroom support, re-integration support and additional teaching if a young person was excluded. The team also worked with social workers and carers and provided training and awareness sessions, as well as written guidance to carers. Discussion with foster carers and staff in the Fostering Service indicated that the work of the Educational Support Team was highly valued.</p> <p>However, there was evidence that, particularly with the increase in the numbers of children looked after and the increase in other local authority placements, the resources of the ESLAC team were stretched and that it was not able to support all of the young people who required it. Some carers described how children were receiving less than 25 hours education per week. One young person received 7.5 hours per week. The level of support provided to young people in part depended on their age. For example there were fewer alternatives to school for younger children. There was evidence of individual packages being put together involving academic lessons and vocational training for older children. Young people doing GCSE's and Key Stage 4 SATS were also given higher priority. The Coordinator advised that, if the timetables of the team were full, some children might have to wait to receive a service. The ESLAC team also collated information regarding the educational attainment of young people in foster care and the numbers excluded from school. In the year 2004/04, 50% of looked after children who were in year 11 attained 1 GCSE pass whereas in the year 2002/03 72.4% obtained 1 pass.</p> <p>In addition to the ESLAC Team a telephone help line was available for foster carers to discuss any relevant matters with a Senior Education Psychologist one half day each week.</p> <p>In the sample of children's files examined there were examples of Personal Education Plans being only partially completed. There was no plan for two young people.</p>		

<p>44 44 44</p>	<p>44</p>	
<p>44</p>	<p>44</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.</p>		

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There was evidence that all social work staff in the Fostering Service had undergone a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check within the last 3 years. Those social workers interviewed demonstrated their knowledge of foster care and a sound understanding of their role. Staff personnel files that were checked did not contain the following information: positive proof of identity, including a recent photograph; documentary evidence of relevant qualifications; evidence that where a person had worked with children or vulnerable adults the reason why their employment or position had ended had been verified; evidence that written references had been followed up by telephone enquiries.

Although arrangements were in place to renew the checks of foster carers every three years there was evidence of delays in relation to some carers.

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Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.

<p>6.7 Stability Staff Turnover</p>	<p>Stability</p>	
<p>6.7</p>	<p>6.7</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The Fostering Service had a stable core staff team and there was relatively low turnover of staff in the social work teams. There had also been more stability in the clerical/administration team. Since the last inspection the Service had appointed an additional permanence worker, a foster care development worker and an additional administrative assistant. Because of vacancies in the Permanence Team consideration was being given to appointing a panel of independent social workers to carry out assessments.</p> <p>The Service had a strategy to recruit a range of foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people. The Service's budget for the recruitment of foster carers had been increased for 2005/06. As well as emergency placements, intermediate placements and task centred Teenage Placements plans were underway to develop Project and Treatment foster care placements and to increase the number of placements for children with disabilities.</p> <p>There was evidence from records of foster carers' reviews and supervision, records of staff supervision, the layout and structure of files and, from interviews with staff members, and foster carers, that the service in general operated effectively. Discussion with fee paid carers indicated that they felt supported by their family placement workers. This was also confirmed by other carers who were interviewed.</p> <p>Examination of the Service's procedures and practice in recruiting and approving foster carers demonstrated that it was both thorough and exacting. A carer who had recently been assessed and approved confirmed this. The assessment process included the use of a competency-based assessment. The emergency assessments of kinship carers were carried out by child-care social workers in the area teams.</p>		

<p>6.8 Disciplinary Grievance Procedures</p>	<p>Disciplinary Grievance Procedures</p>	
<p>6.8</p>	<p>6.8</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>Disciplinary and grievance procedures were in place for staff and there was a representations procedure for carers who wish to appeal against decisions. Carers could use the Corporate Complaints Policy to lodge any formal complaints they may have about the Service. A Whistleblowing Policy had been made available to staff and foster carers and a health and safety policy for carers, children and staff was in place.</p> <p>Systems were in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers. Contact Sheets were used to provide focus to such sessions. Family Placement Workers generally carry out monthly visits to carers although some are visited less frequently. Reasons for less frequent visits were being recorded in the foster carer's file. The Family Placement Service provided an 'out of hours' telephone support service for foster carers. If a visit to a carer's home was required, this would be carried out by the Emergency Duty Team.</p>		

<p>29</p> <p>Standard</p> <p>29</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.</p>		

<p>29</p> <p>Standard</p> <p>29</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.</p>		

<p>29</p> <p>Standard</p> <p>29</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>The Service had a clear strategy in place for working with and supporting carers and this was referred to in the Service's Statement of Purpose. The arrangements in place included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from the Service's Community Support Team for carers and young people where a placement is identified as being in danger of disrupting. There was some evidence that earlier referral to this service could be more effective; • Support from the ESLAC Team and an 'out of hours' duty system – this included a telephone help line provided by family placement workers; • Membership of Fostering Network which has a 24hr legal advice line; • Respite care where appropriate. Fee paid carers received 2 weeks paid holiday a year. However, there continued to be difficulties in obtaining suitable respite placements for the young people placed. Carers said that even after giving plenty of notice a respite placement might not have been identified until the day before it was required. This caused both carers and children anxiety. Carers also said that they were asked to offer respite placements to children where these were not consistent with their terms of approval; • The provision of suitable transport, where necessary, in order to enable children placed with foster carers to accompany them on holiday; • Foster carer support groups in some areas of the county, as well as a fee-paid carers support group where attendance is mandatory. <p>There was a backlog of annual reviews of foster carers. Members of the management team chaired the foster carer reviews. Managers no longer chaired reviews where they were line manager to the family placement worker of the carer. A new review format had been introduced. Consideration should be given to collating the information obtained from annual reviews and providing regular reports to the Fostering Panel.</p>		











<p>Q29 The Service's Foster Care Agreement format contained clear expectations in relation to foster carers and the Local Authority. However, it needed to include details of the procedure available to foster parents for making representations.</p>	<p>3h</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>The Service's Foster Care Agreement format contained clear expectations in relation to foster carers and the Local Authority. However, it needed to include details of the procedure available to foster parents for making representations.</p> <p>A Foster Carer Handbook is provided to each foster carer. This contained information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and allegations. Each approved foster carer was supervised by an appropriately qualified, named worker on a regular basis. Records were maintained of the visits that were carried out by the family placement workers.</p> <p>There was evidence available to confirm that, although family placement workers were carrying out unannounced visits to foster carer households, such visits had not been carried out in respect of each foster carer. A protocol was in place regarding the purpose, frequency and content of such visits. However, there was evidence that some staff felt that these visits would be overly intrusive.</p>		

<p>Q30 All prospective foster carers, apart from kinship carers, attended the 'Skills to Foster' training. Experienced foster carers were involved in providing this initial training. Post approval training covered a range of practice issues such as child development, challenging behaviour and substance misuse. The Foster Care Development Worker was responsible for facilitating the training of foster carers as well as identifying gaps in the training that was available. Five foster carers were undertaking NVQ Level 3 training in Childcare. Foster carers' annual reviews included identification of their training needs. The Foster Carer Agreement had been developed to clarify the Service's expectations regarding foster carers attending training. For example foster carers were required to attend child protection training. However, it was not clear how often carers were expected to attend refresher training in, for example, first aid.</p>	<p>3h</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>All prospective foster carers, apart from kinship carers, attended the 'Skills to Foster' training. Experienced foster carers were involved in providing this initial training. Post approval training covered a range of practice issues such as child development, challenging behaviour and substance misuse. The Foster Care Development Worker was responsible for facilitating the training of foster carers as well as identifying gaps in the training that was available. Five foster carers were undertaking NVQ Level 3 training in Childcare. Foster carers' annual reviews included identification of their training needs. The Foster Carer Agreement had been developed to clarify the Service's expectations regarding foster carers attending training. For example foster carers were required to attend child protection training. However, it was not clear how often carers were expected to attend refresher training in, for example, first aid.</p> <p>Although there was a core group of experienced foster carers who attended a number range of training events each year it was also noted that some carers attended very little training. One experienced carer said they had not attended any post approval training since 1983. One issue for some carers was that most training was provided centrally and this made it difficult to attend. It was confirmed that the use of other venues was being considered. Family placement workers assisted with transport and childminding to enable carers to attend training and the timing of the initial training was also varied to facilitate attendance.</p>		







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<p>2.1.1.1.1</p>	<p>2.1.1.1.1</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Policy and procedural guidance was in place regarding the purpose, content and structure of young people’s files. The case records of young people in foster care were maintained by the relevant child-care social worker in the area teams. There were examples of foster carers not receiving sufficient information when children were placed with them in an emergency. There were also delays in some carers receiving the relevant L.A.C. documentation. Asked if they were adequately informed about the backgrounds of children placed with them 22 carers indicated ‘yes and 6 ‘no’. Foster carers interviewed understood why the young people were in their care as well as the purpose of the placement. Foster carers were provided with lockable boxes for storing records.</p> <p>Discussion with foster carers indicated that they understood the need to encourage, as appropriate, young people to reflect on and understand their past and to keep appropriate memorabilia. Guidance regarding this was included in the preparatory training for foster carers.</p>		


<p>2.1.1.1.1</p> <p>2.1.1.1.1.1</p> <p>2.1.1.1.1.2</p>	<p>2.1.1.1.1.1</p> <p>2.1.1.1.1.2</p>	
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<p>The administrative records were generally comprehensive and well maintained. Arrangements were underway to develop the Children’s Register and Register of Foster Carers to include all the information required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Details of kinship carers were not included on the Foster Carer Register until the carers were approved by the Fostering Panel / Agency Decision Maker. Records were maintained of: allegations; complaints and accidents occurring to children whilst placed with foster parents. The accident record did not include details of a recent accident that involved a foster child. A policy was in place for staff in respect of the retention of records. Current foster carer’s records were stored in lockable filing cabinets but not in rooms that were lockable. The records for one carer did not include a copies of their Form F assessment and the Panel minutes relating to their approval.</p>		

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Not assessed. However, this standard was met at the time of the previous inspection.		

<p>  </p> <p>   </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">   	<p>   </p>	<p>    </p>
<p>Not applicable.</p>		

<p>   </p>	<p>    </p>
<p>Not applicable.</p>	

<p>    </p>	<p>    </p>
<p>The Fostering Service published annual details of carers' allowances. These were provided to each carer. Arrangements were in place for the basic allowances for carers to be paid promptly. However, there was evidence, from discussion with carers, that there continued to be delays in some payments of special allowances that were authorised by team managers in the area social work offices. Action was being taken to address this matter. The Foster Carers Handbook included details of the Service's policy regarding fostering allowances.</p>	

	<p data-bbox="159 268 215 302"> Findings </p> <ul data-bbox="159 336 1506 515" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="159 336 1506 515"> Findings <ul data-bbox="215 380 1506 515" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="215 380 1506 515"> Findings 	
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<p data-bbox="159 683 1506 795"> The Fostering Service had Fostering Panel and a Permanency Panel. A policy/constitution in respect of the Fostering Panel was in place. The Manager of the Fostering Service chaired the Fostering Panel. </p> <p data-bbox="159 828 1506 1086"> Observation of the Fostering Panel, as well as an examination of panel minutes, indicated that the panel members engaged in a thorough consideration of the information presented to them and, that there was a structured decision making process. The Panel provided a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process and monitored the work of the Fostering Service. This included monitoring the range and type of carers available to the Authority in comparison with the needs of children. How the Panel is provided with information that will enable it to carry out this function will be reviewed at the next inspection. </p> <p data-bbox="159 1120 1506 1198"> Funding was available for training panel members although, at the time of the inspection, no training had been provided. </p>		

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The Fostering Service provided short break foster care for families that were experiencing difficulties and needed regular short breaks. The Service also provided short break care for children with disabilities and recruited carers specifically to provide the needs of these children and their families/carers. This service was being developed and, in particular, consideration was being given to recruiting more carers who could provide short breaks for children with autism. Foster carers who provide short break care undergo the same assessment process and initial training as other foster carers.

<p>5.1.6</p> <p>5.1.6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.1.6 5.1.6 5.1.6 5.1.6 	<p>5.1.6</p> <p>5.1.6</p>	<p>5.1.6</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>There was evidence that the Authority was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving kinship carers. Kinship carers did not undergo any preparatory training as part of their assessment and approval. The assessment process for short-term carers was also different and shorter, although there was evidence that this was thorough and considered. However, there was evidence that a safe caring policy had not been completed for the household where one young person was placed.</p> <p>Kinship carers had the same access to post approval training as other carers and, once approved, were allocated a supervising social worker from either the Fostering or Permanence Team. Discussion with staff indicated that they were sensitive to the particular needs of kinship carers and the children placed with them. This was also reflected in the minutes of team meetings. Arrangements were in place to pay kinship carers the same allowances as mainstream foster carers.</p> <p>Although there were no separate policies in place regarding the recruitment and retention of kinship carers there was evidence that the Authority encouraged such placements where appropriate. For example, of the 43 long-term carers supported by the Permanency Team 21 were kinship carers. The Fostering Team supported 27 kinship carers. The Manager of the Permanence Team advised that the assessment of kinship carers for long-term placements had had a significant impact on the workload of the team.</p> <p>Although there were clearer arrangements in place for the referral of kinship carer assessments to the Family Placement Service there were delays in assessments being completed. There was evidence that the Fostering Service's procedures, in respect of the assessment and approval of kinship carers, were not being followed. In one example, applications for Criminal Records Bureau checks in relation to the prospective carers had not been completed and submitted at the outset of an immediate placement. The procedures should be amended to include an expectation that a safe caring policy for the household must be completed at the outset of a placement.</p>			

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We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 7th February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

4.10

Amendments to the report were necessary

 NO

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

4.11

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.

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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

4.18

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

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