



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Kirklees MC Family Placement Services**

Westfields

Westfield Road

Mirfield

West Yorkshire

WF14 9PW

2nd to 13th February 2004

## Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

### The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

## Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

**Address**

Family Placement Unit, Westfields, Westfield Road,  
Mirfield, West Yorkshire, WF14 9PW

**Local Authority Manager**

Ms Sarah Patrick

**Tel No:**

01924 483707

**Address**

Westfields, Westfield Road, Mirfield, West Yorkshire,  
WF14 9PW

**Fax No:**

01924 483720

**Email Address**

sarah.patrick@kirklees.gov.uk

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

3/3/03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		2nd February 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Ms Maxine Wright	073597
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Ms Helen Walker	073596
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>	Ms Stella Henderson	110610
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>	na	
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		na	
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		na	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		na	

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Kirklees MC fostering service provides a full range of fostering services including emergency, short term, long term, respite care, family link, friends and family and remand placements. The fostering service is part of the Family Placement Unit. The unit also provides the local authority's adoption services. Some of the fostering service's social workers undertake aspects of adoption work in addition to fostering work, namely step parent adoptions and post adoption counselling. The unit is managed by Ms Sarah Patrick and the fostering service has two team managers, Mrs Andrea Hoofe and Mr Rob Taylor, who are line managed by Ms Patrick. The NCSC has been notified that Ms Patrick is the local authority's designated manager of the fostering service.

Since the last inspection the local authorities supported lodgings scheme has been relocated to the fostering service offices. The worker for this scheme is now managed by the fostering service but the scheme's carers do not get approved and supported in the same way as foster carers. The fostering service manager advised that these arrangements are under consideration, particularly in relation to 16 to 18 year olds under the care of Kirklees Metropolitan Council. Kirklees fostering service also support a small number of their own approved foster carers residing outside the Kirklees area.

At the time of the inspection thirty-five children were placed via independent fostering agencies where fostering Kirklees fostering service's duties are delegated to these agencies. Figures provided to November 2003 indicated that, as at the previous years inspection, the largest number of foster carers are approved to provide short term placements, short term foster carers making up 61 of the total 141 Kirklees foster carers.

The service is run from one central location and is based in a large office which accommodates a number of other services provided by Kirklees Metropolitan Council, including some of the Children and Families service fieldwork services and the child protection and review team.

## **PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **Inspector's Summary**

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

This was the second annual inspection of the service by the National Care Standards Commission. An audit of the service was undertaken against National Minimum Standards and this include following up on the progress being made with provider's action plan produced in response to last years inspection report.

The fostering service's unit manager advised that a 30 percent increase in children being fostered is the most significant factors for the service since the last inspection. Total number of foster carers has remained relatively constant since last year, with a figure of 141 being given compared to 144 last year. The placement of children with independent fostering agencies has increased. The manager of the service hopes that when agreement is reached about the allowance structures for carers and payments for skills, this will result in an increase in the number of applicants seeking approval as foster carers and in turn the availability of foster carers approved by the service.

Details of the inspection methodologies used are given on page 26 of this report. It was most positive that there has been an increase in the contributions to the inspection via survey questionnaires on this occasion, particularly by placing social workers. Of a total of 197 survey questionnaires distributed to social workers responsible for placing children, 103 were returned. 132 were sent to foster carer's and 26 were returned. Two inspecting officers also met with a carers group run by the Fostering Network, where foster carers opinions of the service were gathered. 120 questionnaires were distributed via the fostering service to children over 8 years old placed with foster carers. 22 were returned. 6 children were seen directly by an inspector through sampling visits to 4 foster homes, but only 1 of these young people was of sufficient age and understanding to express a comprehensive view on the fostering service. Kirklees Children's Rights Service was commissioned to undertake a consultation exercise with a group of young people using the fostering service. 8 young people contributed to this and a report was produced detailing their views. All of these contributions were collated and the information is included under relevant National Minimum Standards in this report. Comments from Kirklees Child Protection and Review Unit Manager were also requested, but a response was not received.

The inspection took place over a 10 day period, with some inspection activity being undertaken in the evening.

Some progress has been made with the provider's action plan. A significant number of unmet statutory requirements remain, some of this is as a result of action being partially completed but not sufficiently progressed to achieve regulatory compliance. The service's guidance, procedures and documentary frameworks have been developed and administrative support has improved. Further time is needed to consolidate these in day to day practice, coupled with more effective monitoring to ensure consistency of practice. Some issues and requirements relate to placing social worker practices. The service has a shortage of suitably skilled foster carers and this is impacting on practice and decision making about placements.



**Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)****The standard was almost met**

Work has been undertaken since the last inspection to produce both a statement of purpose and a children's guide that meets with regulations. Suitable documents are now in place. The revised statement of purpose is to be represented to elected members for their approval and relevant parties are to be advised of the availability of the revised document. The document needs to play a role in quality assurance assessments of service. Development of additional format/s to those currently in place for the service's children's guide are to be looked at for children with a disability, such as a guide which includes picture symbols.

**Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standard 2-3)****1 of these 2 standards was met and 1 was almost met**

The management structure and personnel remain the same as those at the previous inspection. Outstanding documentation relating to fitness checks on the unit manager is now in place. The unit manager has commenced management training and the target given for completion of this is January 2005.

**Management of the Fostering Service (Standard 4-5)****0 of these 2 standards were fully met but 2 were almost met**

The service has a number of systems in place for monitoring and controlling the service's activities and ensuring quality performance. There have been developments of these since the last inspection. A number of recommendations are made relating to ensuring sharper and more consistent monitoring and quality control. Indications are that the management structure and roles and lines of accountability are generally sufficiently defined, some matters regarding delegated powers and certain aspects of the approval process for foster carers need to be clearer.

**Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standard 6-14)****0 of these 9 standards were fully met but 6 were almost met**

A range of foster homes were seen to be provided to children. The service has base line standards regarding accommodation and risk assessment processes relating to safeguarding children. Increased consistency is needed in their use and some different approaches to how risk assessments are produced for particular carers.

The service has a range of support and training in place for foster carers to assist them in understanding the importance of promoting and valuing children's identity and meeting their individual needs. Shortage of specific carer groups and sufficient funding for specific equipment and transport for children with disabilities using the service remains an issue and plans to address this are being considered.

The foster carer shortage impacts on matching and a choice of foster carers being available to children. The necessity to place children out of foster carer's approval profile before profile changes are considered by the panel and agency decision maker has continued. This is concerning and again reflects a lack of suitable foster carers. The service has well structured proformas to look at matching for short term placements, but these are being used inconsistently and evidencing matching varied considerably. The way in which shortfalls in matching are to be addressed is poorly evidenced, as are the arrangements for any additional support to sustain exemptions. Foster placement agreements are not always in place and most sampled had not been provided at the time of placement, leaving foster carers without important information, such as medical consent and health information. The service's practice of planning meetings being held fairly early on in placements helps firm up

arrangements.

There have been good procedural developments relating to protecting children. Most of these procedures are still in draft form and need to be ratified. The Area Child Protection Committee child protection procedures are being updated to meet with regulatory requirements, but a revised copy was not available at the inspection. Safe caring policies for each fostering household are being introduced which is positive. All parties need to feel confident that they are purposeful and valuable and completion needs to be thorough, with regular updating. There is a range of training available to foster carers to assist them in caring safely, but some issues regarding access to this and consistency of take up should be addressed. There are systems in place for collating information on allegations of abuse and neglect and matters relating to young people's safety; increased consistency in use is needed. There needs to be improvements in appropriate information about children being provided to foster carers in a timely fashion.

Foster carers had a good understanding of the importance of promoting contact for children and their role in this. Records regarding arrangements were variable.

Literature is provided to children being fostered about how they can make their views known and how they can make a complaint; additional mediums should be looked at. The service's systems for consulting with children and relevant others and using their views in service development are to be developed further.

Children indicated that foster carers gave them support with meeting their health care needs. The service provides foster carers with information, training and access to specialist services to support this and health care training has been developed since the last inspection.

Both young people and foster carers were generally positive about educational support available to them. Arrangements for aspects of practical support should be stipulated more clearly in placement agreements. It is still somewhat unclear how the organisation's policy and procedure on Personal Education Planning is working in practice and focused attention should be given to this so it is productive and foster carers' roles and responsibilities are clear.

Foster carers had limited experience of the Pathway Service, but those who were able to make comment about it were positive. Good practical assistance with learning independence skills within foster homes is available. The service is developing support with this via training for carers and establishing links with the Connexions Service. Developing written guidance for foster carers about preparation for adulthood for inclusion in the foster carer's handbook is recommended.

Foster carers were welcoming towards inspectors and have been made more aware of the role of the NCSC since the previous inspection.

**Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff (Standard 15-23)**  
**1 of 9 standards was fully met and 3 were almost met**

Progress has been made with evidencing recruitment checks on staff, but there is still some outstanding information required. The evidencing of staff training has improved and the structure to training. Increasing consistency in record keeping about foster carers and staff training is an area identified for attention. The service has a relatively stable staff group who feel supported. There are clear arrangements for staff supervision, although the level of supervision stipulated in supervision agreements and in the provider's policy is not always

being met. There are structured meetings systems. A new workload management system is being trialled.

Improvements have been made to the quality of administrative support and a panel clerk has been recruited and will be commencing work when recruitment checks have been completed. IT equipment has increased and identifying IT training needs of staff.

Regulatory requirements in relation to visits to children that provide important safeguards are not always being met by placing social workers.

The fostering panel is taking a more active role in monitoring the quality of the service's work. The service's administrator advised of developments to assist with meeting timescales for initial reviews of approvals, where there are still shortfalls. Satisfactory timeframes are being adhered to with progressing initial enquiries from prospective foster carers through to selection for assessment.

The services action in relation to looking at ways it can bring the approval of supported lodgings carers for 16 to 18 year old in the care of the local authority in line with fostering regulations needs progressing.

Work is needed on agreements with independent fostering agencies so content and processes comply with regulations. Checks of agency registration also need to be more scrupulous. Systems for monitoring standards of these placements have been gradually developed.

There are a number of ongoing concerns for the foster carers about arrangements for staff support, primarily out of hours support, but also arrangements for cover when their link social worker is absent through sickness. Consultation continues regarding these matters. The majority of foster carers thought that the service's staff do a good job but there are not enough staff. Difficulties recruiting a sufficient number and range of foster carers is affecting decision making processes. There is a clear structure for the assessment of foster carers. The organisation has a whistle blowing policy and information has been provided about this to the service's staff and foster carers.

The service has organised a structured training programme for its social work staff linked to a personal development system.

Staff have generic workloads with opportunities to take a key responsibility for a particular type of foster care, except those involved with respite care and family link, where the posts are specific ones.

The service's overarching strategy for working with foster carers and supporting them is being made clearer via updates to the fostering service's handbook which should be completed by April 2004.

The service is still not meeting regulatory requirements regarding the content and the issuing of foster carer agreements, approval notices and termination notices.

The service provides foster carers with a handbook, a range of useful literature and funds membership of the Fostering Network and legal liability insurance cover. Additional information is issued during the year, but comments from foster carers indicated more thought is needed about how new procedures are explained to foster carers.

There is a system of supervisory visits to foster carers which includes an annual unannounced visit now. The base line level for visits is not always adhered to and some particular areas of support to placements could be improved. Support is also available to foster carers via a range of groups, including one which is run independently of the service. The service has a complaints system which children and foster carers are aware of. Some foster carers expressed a lack of confidence in the system. The systems for recording complaints are used inconsistently, creating issues regarding monitoring.

Clear procedures are needed regarding complaints about foster carers performance, thresholds for removing foster carers from the register and procedures regarding reporting foster carers found to be unsuitable to work with children to the Protection of Children Act List.

A range of training is provided for foster carers but improvement in consistency of uptake is needed and arrangements to support foster carers to attend who have specific language needs. Clearer arrangements are also needed about specific training arrangements to enable foster carers to meet particular needs of children placed with them. Consideration is being given to how the service can support foster carers children. Acknowledgement needs to be given to the important role in the success of placements some Asian foster carers children play by offering them training as secondary carers.

### **Records (Standard 24-25)**

#### **0 of 2 standards were fully met but 1 was almost met**

The responsibility for keeping case records on children placed with the fostering service lies with placing social workers. Standards of records inspected were variable and Looking After Children Records were incomplete. Foster carers have a responsibility to maintain life story information for children, but this is not always being met. Independent fostering agencies are providing helpful monitoring information, but agreements do not contain the required information about notifications, record keeping and the return of information. There are monitoring systems for checking foster carers have necessary information about children placed with them, but this is not resulting in matters relating to shortfalls in information being rectified swiftly.

There are a number of regulatory shortfalls in records the fostering service has to keep and monitoring systems need to be more robust. The organisation's procedure on the retention and destruction of records needs to match requirements of The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 requirements.

Shortfalls were identified in adult children in foster carer households having Criminal Records Bureau checks.

### **Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)**

#### **Standard almost met**

There have been improvements to facilities including improved practices regarding holding information securely. Parking for visitors remains an issue.

### **Financial Requirements (Standard 27-29)**

#### **2 of the 3 standards not assessed as not applicable to the service, 1 standard almost met.**

Some allowance increases have occurred since the previous inspection, consultation is still in progress regarding the full proposals about changes to the allowances structures and payments for skills.

**Fostering Panels (Standard 30)****Standard not met**

Considerable progress had been made with recruiting appropriate panel members and improving the function of the panel and its role in quality assurance by the time this inspection took place. Membership and attendance at meetings needs to be sufficient to ensure monthly panels now continue to be quorate. Work is also needed to ensure all recommendations from previous non quorate panels are reviewed and approvals of foster carers made for independent fostering agencies between 2002 to 2003 are now passed back for approval in line with regulations by the service's own panel. Specific panel procedures developed need to be agreed formally.

**Short-term Breaks (Standard 31)****Standard almost met**

Some service specific policies and procedures should be looked at.

**Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)****Standard not met**

Some focused work has been undertaken to develop this area of work and to improve processes for approval, support and supervision of these carers. Further joint development work is needed with placing social work teams. A baseline for what must be achieved within the initial 6 week assessment period needs to be agreed with placing social work teams, to achieve some consistency regarding safe enough assessments pending full assessment. Shortfalls in relation to notices of approval and termination and required agreements need to be addressed.

## **Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

### **(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

### **The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

This was the second inspection of Kirklees Fostering Service and it was found that a considerable number of statutory requirements from the first inspection remain outstanding. All statutory requirements from this and the previous inspection are detailed in this report.

Due to section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000 being repealed from April 2004 by the Health and Social Care Act, the above notice is no longer applicable.

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

<b>STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>				
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	
3	12	FS9	<b>Arrangements for the Protection of Children</b>	31/7/03
4	13	FS9	<b>Behaviour Management and Absence from Foster Parent's Home</b>	31/8/03
5	17	FS12	<b>Support, training and information for foster carers</b>	31/7/04
6	20	FS15	<b>Fitness of workers</b>	30/9/03
8	29	FS18	<b>Reviews and terminations of approval</b>	30/4/04
9	28(5)	FS22	<b>Approval of foster parents</b>	08/9/03
11	31	FS25	<b>Register of foster carers</b>	8/9/03
12	30	FS25	<b>Case records relating to foster carers.</b>	30/11/03
15	25	FS30	<b>Meetings of the fostering panel</b>	31/7/03
17	38	FS32	<b>Emergency and immediate placements by the local authority</b>	30/9/03

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

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)****(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

**Lead Inspector****Maxine Wright****Signature****2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Inspectors****Helen Walker/ Stella  
Henderson****Signature****Locality Manager****Niall Roche****Signature****Date****14 June 2004**



## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34	FS8FS16	<p><b>Making of placements:</b></p> <p>Before any placement is made, all aspects of Regulation 34, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are complied with, including a foster placement agreement being drawn up, the content of which must comply with schedule 6.</p> <p>A child may only be placed with a foster carer if the foster carer is approved and the terms of approval are consistent with the proposed placement.</p>	1/7/04
2	12	FS9	<p><b>Arrangements for the protection of children:</b></p> <p>The fostering service provider's child protection policy complies with all relevant matters stipulated in Regulation 12, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/7/04
3	13	FS9	<p><b>Behaviour management and absence from foster parent's home:</b></p> <p>The draft policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents is ratified.</p>	1/7/04

4	17	FS12	<p><b>Support, training and information for foster carers:</b></p> <p>Foster carers are provided with appropriate information regarding the state of health and health needs of any child placed or to be placed with them and the arrangements for the giving of consent to the child's medical or dental examination or treatment.</p>	1/7/04
5	20	FS15	<p><b>Fitness of workers:</b></p> <p>Information stipulated in Schedule 1, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is kept on all the service's staff and persons seeking to work for the service.</p>	1/7/04
6	40	FS16	<p><b>Independent fostering agencies – discharge of local authority functions:</b></p> <p>No arrangements are made to place children with independent agencies unless,  (1)agreements are drawn up as stipulated under 40(4) and (5), The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p> <p>(2)The local authority ensures the agency is suitably registered with the NCSC.</p>	1/6/04
7	35	FS32FS16	<p><b>Supervision of placements:</b></p> <p>The social workers responsible for visiting and supporting children placed with foster carers meet regulatory requirements specified in Regulation 35, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/6/04
8	29	FS18	<p><b>Reviews and terminations of approval:</b></p> <p>Reviews of foster carers approval take place at intervals of not less than 12 months after initial approval.</p>	1/7/04
9	28	FS32FS22	<p><b>Approval of foster parents:</b></p> <p>When a foster carer is approved the fostering service must give the foster carer a notice of approval in writing specifying the terms of their approval and enter into a foster carer agreement that includes all the information specified in Schedule 5, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/7/04

10	29	FS32FS22	<p><b>Reviews and terminations:</b></p> <p>Following a review of a foster carer a notice of approval or termination must be served as specified in Regulation 29, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/7/04
11	17	FS23	<p><b>Support, training and information for foster carers:</b></p> <p>The identified training needs are met of foster carers who have specific language needs.</p> <p>Any specific support or training arrangements foster carers require to meet children's needs and the general expectations of the fostering service on foster carers, are clearly identified and addressed.</p>	1/10/04
12	22	FS25	<p><b>Records with respect to the fostering service:</b></p> <p>A record of children placed with foster carers is kept containing the information stipulated in Schedule 2 (1), The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/8/04
13	31	FS25	<p><b>Register of Foster parents:</b></p> <p>The register kept contains all the information about foster carers stipulated under Regulation 31, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/8/04
14	30	FS25	<p><b>Case Records of Foster Parents and Others:</b></p> <p>Foster carers' case records contain all the information required under Regulation 30 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/10/04
15	27	FS25	<p><b>Assessments of prospective foster parents:</b></p> <p>Assessments include a Criminal Records Bureau check of members of the household over 18.</p>	1/7/04

16	25	FS30	<p><b>Meetings of the fostering panel:</b></p> <p>Panel business is not discussed unless the panel is quorate, as detailed in Regulation 25, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002.</p> <p>All decisions made at non quorate panels prior to February 2004 are represented at quorate panels.</p>	<p>1/4/04</p> <p>1/10/04</p>
17	26	FS30	<p><b>Functions of the fostering panel:</b></p> <p>The panel only makes recommendations appropriate to the functions of a single panel unless its membership is altered appropriately to enable joint panel functions. Approvals of foster carers during the year 2002 to 2003 for independent fostering agencies are passed back to the agencies panels to go through their approval process.</p>	1/4/04
18	38	FS32	<p><b>Emergency and immediate placements by the local authority:</b></p> <p>The required written placement agreements are entered into with persons who are relatives or friends of the child prior to the child being placed with them under Regulation 38, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>	1/5/04

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	<p>The revised statement of purpose it is presented to elected members for approval. Once approved by elected members relevant parties are advised of the availability of the revised document.</p> <p>The statement of purpose becomes a tool for measuring the service's performance.</p> <p>An additional format for the service's children guide is looked at for children with disabilities.</p>
2	FS2	<p>The unit manager completes her management award by January 2005.</p>
3	FS4	<p>Monitoring systems are used more consistently and links to changes in practice are clear.</p> <p>Where serious issues result in a child being removed from a foster placement and holding a disruption meeting is not felt to be appropriate, a meeting involving relevant parties is convened to identify any lessons that can be learned from these matters and this informs service developments.</p> <p>The service's base line standards are adhered to.</p> <p>There is full discussion with foster carers when new tools are introduced to assist with monitoring and safeguarding children, to ensure all foster carers understand the importance of the tools.</p> <p>The fostering service advises foster carers of the need to declare any possible conflicts of interest.</p> <p>A consistent approach is taken to making notifications to the NCSC.</p>

4	FS6	<p>Health and safety checklist are completed on all foster carer's home. They are updated annually or sooner where new risk issues are identified and appropriate action is taken to reduce the risk.</p> <p>Accommodation and bedroom arrangements are given fuller consideration and the service's base line standards are adhered to. If for some reason these will not be met, this is clearly documented and includes how the welfare of the children concerned will be safeguarded. The unit manager's agreement is gained for such arrangements before they proceed.</p> <p>Risk assessments produced about protection issues clearly specify matters relating to sharing bedrooms and the rationale behind decisions.</p> <p>Where an approved foster carer may require an alternative format to risk assessment and health and safety documents being produced in English, this is addressed.</p>
5	FS7	<p>Plans to address shortfalls in foster carer training and recruitment are progressed so they impact positively on the service provision.</p> <p>Plans to address shortfalls regarding support for children with disabilities, including equipment and training shortfalls are progressed.</p>
6	FS8	<p>The frameworks in place for evidencing matching are completed consistently.</p> <p>Additional support required by carers to compensate for gaps in matching or to support children being placed under an exemption are clearly recorded in foster placement agreements and exemption statements.</p> <p>Information in the foster carers handbook relating to mixing short and long term placements is reviewed as it does not correlate with practice.</p>

7	FS9	<p>Ongoing encouragement and appropriate support is provided to enable all carers to participate in training about safe caring and the protection of children.</p> <p>The fostering service progresses training plans being formulated for foster carers living outside Kirklees and ensures they have access to pertinent training. This includes training relating to safe caring and the protection of children.</p> <p>Each foster home has a safe care policy and pertinent risk assessments relating to protection issues that are revisited regularly and reviewed when new children are admitted to the foster home. These are sufficiently detailed. If the service's safe care guidance is not to be adhered in particular home's this is clearly documented, risk assessed and agreed and authorised by the unit manager. Safe caring policies are cleared with children's social workers.</p> <p>Further work is undertaken with particular foster carers to ensure ownership of the safe caring policy for their household and an understanding of the practical application of the policy. Guidelines are cleared with placing social workers and children placed understand the guidelines.</p> <p>Records on foster carers' files for collating allegations information are used consistently and transferred onto the fostering service's central record.</p> <p>Draft procedures relating to child protection, children going missing from care and staying out are ratified.</p> <p>The fostering service ensures foster carers are provided with sufficient information about children placed with them and that placing social workers provide copies of all the necessary Looking After Children forms.</p>
8	FS10	<p>Arrangements for children's contact, including how it will be supported, are clearly stipulated in foster placement agreements and children's care plans and changes to any initial contact arrangements are also recorded.</p>

9	FS11	<p>The services plans to undertake further consultation work with the Children's Rights Service, to set up e-mail system for children to give their views and to involve children placed with foster carers in training are progressed over the next year.</p> <p>Consideration is given to methods other than written information being used to provide children using the service information about how they can make a complaint and where they can obtain support from with this.</p> <p>Further ways of making placing social workers aware of the fostering service's complaints procedures are looked at, so they can support children to make complaints or make complaints on their behalf.</p> <p>Further consideration is given to how the Children's Rights Service, the fostering service, young people and foster carers work together and how children's feedback is used to inform the service being provided to them. Particular attention should be obtained to how the views of children with disabilities using the service can be obtained.</p> <p>Consultation methods with children's parent and significant others are developed further.</p>
10	FS12	<p>Arrangements are made that ensure appropriate health care records are kept for all children placed with foster carers.</p>
11	FS13	<p>Educational information included in foster placement agreements is developed in line with National Minimum Standard 13.4 and 13.8.</p> <p>Attention is given to how the organisation's policy and guidance on Personal Education Plans work in practice. The fostering service ensures children have Personal Education Plans and foster carers know how they are to contribute to the delivery of these plans.</p>
12	FS14	<p>Written guidance is produced on supporting young people to prepare for adulthood and independence. This is included in the foster carers handbook.</p>
13	FS15	<p>Telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references during recruitment processes.</p>
14	FS16	<p>All staff and carers have a training profile which is kept up dated.</p> <p>The fostering service meets its contractual obligations regarding the pattern of support visits to foster carers.</p>
15	FS17FS18	<p>Solutions are found, in consultation with foster carers, to foster carers' areas of concern about adequacy of staffing levels. Arrangements regarding out of hours support is prioritised.</p> <p>Proposals linked to recruitment strategies are progressed.</p>



16	FS20	Levels of supervision specified in the organisation's supervision policy and in individual supervision contracts are adhered to unless there is a significant reason why they cannot be. Where this is the case the reason for missing the session should be recorded in the staff member's supervision record.
17	FS21	The update of the foster carer handbook is completed within the timescale given, April 2004.
18	FS22	<p>The contractual pattern of visits agreed with foster carers should be adhered to.</p> <p>New and revised guidance and procedures sent out by post to foster carers should be discussed at supervisory visits and support group meetings.</p> <p>The supervisory visits forms should be used consistently.</p> <p>The service should review how it supports placements through respite care being offered and holiday cover. Improved arrangements for out of hours support should be finalised.</p> <p>A records are kept more consistently so it is clearer how complaints inform provision of services and support provided to individual foster carers. The service looks at how it can create a more open culture regarding the making of complaints and this involves consultation with foster carers.</p> <p>The draft procedure covering matters when there are complaints about a foster carer's standards of practice is updated and ratified.</p> <p>A policy and supporting procedure should be established which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register and processes for referral to the Protection of Children Act List if reasons for termination indicate that the foster carer is unsuitable to work with children.</p>
19	FS23	<p>Increased consistency is achieved regarding foster carers completing core training.</p> <p>Training for children of Asian carers who are involved in a secondary carers role is organised.</p> <p>Support for foster carers' children is organised and a revised timescale should be set for completing this.</p> <p>Training profiles are used consistently and updated.</p>

20	FS24	<p>The observations of variable standards in children's files including the shortfalls in Looking After Children information and evidencing of statutory visits are passed on to the relevant manager's.</p> <p>Use of the monitoring systems for checking foster carers are provided with all the necessary information about the children they are asked to care for are sharper, so any gaps in provision of information provided to foster carers are addressed swiftly.</p> <p>Arrangements are made so the fostering service's base line standards on record keeping, including the gathering together of an archive of information for each child, are met.</p>
21	FS25	<p>Foster carers should receive further advice on completion of accident notifications so information submitted is adequate and useful to the service.</p> <p>There should be a clear system for identifying all those supporting placements, such as sitters used for helping care for foster children, have had a Criminal Records Bureau check.</p> <p>The organisation's policy on destruction of records specifies 15 years as the period of retention for all the records mentioned under Schedule 2, The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and 10 years for records kept on those person's with whom children are placed under Regulation 38.</p> <p>Foster carers are asked to countersign records consistently, such as those made of supervisory visits.</p> <p>The inconsistencies in use of the fostering service's records systems for recording complaints and allegations are ironed out, so records meet the recommendations specified in 25.13 of this standard.</p>
22	FS26	<p>Further consideration is given to parking arrangements at the fostering service's offices to see if a more suitable solution can be found.</p>
23	FS29	<p>Agreement is reached regarding changes to allowances and skills payments.</p>
24	FS30	<p>The panel member fulfilling the role of social worker with child care expertise employed by the fostering service is a practising social worker.</p> <p>The draft panel procedures are revised and ratified.</p>
25	FS31	<p>The fostering service develops some policies and procedures specific to short break foster carers.</p>
26	FS32	<p>A base line standard is agreed regarding what must be completed by way of assessment of Regulation 38 carers within the first 6 weeks of placement of a child, to ensure a safe enough initial approval is made pending a full assessment being completed.</p>
27	FS5	<p>The level of delegation and responsibility of the unit manager and team managers should be clearly defined.</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.

**PART B****INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	10
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NA
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NA
• 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	YES
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 – group consultation exercise by Kirklees Children’s Rights Service	YES
Date of Inspection	02/02/04
Time of Inspection	09.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	75.30

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

**Standard met?**

**2**

The services statement of purpose has been revised since the last inspection as required and some further amendments were made during the inspection so its contents comply with regulations. The revised document is to be presented again to the elected members for approval.

There is evidence that there is more awareness of the availability of the statement of purpose than there was at last years inspection. 48% of placing social workers contributing to the inspection commented that they had been provided with a copy of the statement of purpose. The service's staff commented that they were aware of the document and had been consulted about the content, but it is not used as a quality assurance tool. It is evident that the purpose of the document has not been fully assimilated into the services practice and this should be progressed once the document is finalised, along with all relevant parties being made aware of the availability of the revised version. No particular shortfalls in the service's policies, procedures and written guidance reflecting the service's statement of purpose were identified by the unit manager. Further changes may be needed when current service developments are completed.

The fostering service has produced its own children's guide since the last inspection in leaflet format which is succinct, clear and well presented. The manager advised that a CD Rom has also been produced about children's services that includes information about the fostering service. The guide includes a telephone number for obtaining copies in languages other than English, Braille, large print, audio tape and compact disc. An additional format for children with disabilities is also to be considered, such as a version using picture symbols. 81% of children contributing via questionnaires commented that they had been given a guide or leaflet about the fostering service.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The management structure of the service remains the same as that stipulated in last years inspection report and there have been no changes in personnel undertaking these roles.

The recommendation made in the last inspection report that the unit manager gains an NVQ Level 4 or equivalent in management studies by January 2005 is being progressed. The unit manager has commenced a Diploma in Management Studies and the target provided by her for completion of this is January 2005.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There has been no change regarding the person appointed to the unit manager post since the last inspection. The personnel records kept on the unit manager now include the outstanding documentation identified at the last inspection, namely documentary evidence of relevant qualifications and a current photograph.

As there has been no change in unit manager it has not been possible for the service to action the recommendation made that written references to check fitness are followed up with telephone enquiries. This practice is recommended should there be any changes in the unit manager in the future.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There are a number of systems in place for monitoring and controlling performance and quality of the service, including regular collation of performance indicators. Additional measures have been put in place since the previous inspection so carers forward information about particular issues to the service, such as accidents and illnesses involving children placed with them. It was positive to see reminder letters to fostering agencies used by the service that they wish to have notifications information forward to them about children they have placed with the agencies.

Some of the systems to support monitoring, such as records on carers' files used to record allegations, complaints, illness, accidents, visits are not being used consistently enough. This makes it difficult to track action and outcomes and whether the information has been used effectively to look at changes on an individual level, such as alterations to carers' profiles and changes to support to carers, or to inform changes at a wider service level. Monitoring systems should be used more consistently and links to changes in practice made clearer.

Of considerable concern was the lack of any formal meeting between the fostering service and the placing social work team following a child having to be removed from approved friends and family carers as a result of injuries. This was discussed with the unit manager who acknowledged this should be addressed and discussion held to analyse whether there were any lessons to be learned from this and any necessary changes to procedures and practice. The matter is being progressed down child protection avenues. Matters relating to protocols and thresholds for terminating foster carers are mentioned under Standards 22 and 32 of this report.

There are base line quality standards in place which have been provided to carers, but there was evidence that these are not always adhered to regarding particular issues, such as those relating to sharing bedrooms, the content of placement plans, and record keeping. Base line standards should be adhered to by the service.

All staff have job descriptions and there is a clear management structure. Discussions with staff indicated they all have a designated supervisors who they see on a regular basis and that there is also a good level of informal support.

All of the foster carers replying to the survey questionnaire indicated that they had been provided with information about the service's expectations of them as foster carers. The service's handbook for foster carers contains clear information about expectations and updates to the handbook were said to be in the process of being made. Foster carers visited indicated they are clear about their role and the fostering services social workers responsible for visiting them were said to be responsive and supportive. All approved foster carers have a designated social worker at the fostering service. Some foster carers contributing to the



inspection commented that they felt certain monitoring tools were simply paper exercises produced for NCSC inspections rather than useful mechanisms. This referred to matters such as safe care policies being produced on each foster home. When this was explored further it seemed more to do with how this information had been presented to some foster carers. This should be looked at so all foster carers are clear about the importance of such tools.

The provider is the local authority, therefore information on financial procedures are not required to be provided. The unit manager and recently appointed administrator indicated that progress was being made with improving financial monitoring which is positive. Foster carers advised that payments were usually punctual.

The Unit Manager advised that managers and staff are advised of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest, as per 4.5 of this standard. The action plan to last years inspection report stated that this would be included for carers in their letter of approval. These letters have been revised since the last inspection but do not include this information This should be actioned.

Local authority fostering services are not required to make notifications to the NCSC. The service has notified the NCSC of some child protection matters involving carers which is good practice, but it was evident from information provided for the inspection about notifications that this has been done inconsistently. The fostering service should decide its position on this and act consistently. Records relating to issues about notifications are kept at the service and were sampled during the inspection. It is positive that when a child protection allegation is made about staff or a foster carer there is a reciprocal arrangement with a neighbouring authority that their child protection and reviewing service will chair the strategy meeting.

<b>Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:</b>	3
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<b>Death of a child placed with foster parents.</b>	0
<b>Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.</b>	0
<b>Serious illness or accident of a child.</b>	0
<b>Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.</b>	0
<b>Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Serious complaint about a foster parent.</b>	0
<b>Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.</b>	0

<b>Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	0
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<b>Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:</b>	0
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**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**

**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

Personnel files sampled included job descriptions for the unit manager and the service's social work staff.

Indications are that levels of accountability generally appear sufficiently defined, but there is some uncertainty about of delegation of powers regarding aspects of the service's approval process which should be addressed.

In the unit manager's absence there are three members of staff within the organisation to whom responsibilities are delegated, all three have extensive child care experience.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

It was clear from observing the fostering panel that accommodation standards, particularly bedroom arrangements, are being given more attention in discussions. Records inspected and visits made to foster homes during the inspection indicated that there is still a very broad range of accommodation standards and the service's base line standards and safe care guidance around arrangements for sharing bedrooms are not always being adhered to. The base line standard of each child having their own bed was met at all the foster home's inspected, but individual space and privacy was at a premium in some situations. The unit manager advised that further work was going to be undertaken on sleeping arrangements in foster homes and the form for exemptions had just been revised to make this information clearer. Accommodation and bedroom arrangements should be given fuller consideration and the service's base line standards adhered to. If for some reason these will not be met, this should clearly documented and include information on how the welfare of the children concerned will be safeguarded. The unit manager's agreement should gained for such arrangements before they proceed.

Risk assessments in place relating to protection issues of children in one of the foster homes sampled did not cover sleeping arrangements specifically in one and did not explain the rational behind arrangements in another. Risk assessments produced about protection issues should clearly specify matters relating to sharing bedrooms and the rationale behind decisions. Where production of safe guarding documentation in English is a barrier to foster carers, it is important that they are provided with the information in other ways, so the risk assessments can be used in the active way that would be expected to inform care practice.

Sampling of carer's files indicated that there is still inconsistency in completion of health and safety checklist on foster carers' homes and the updating of those initially completed. Where completed, matters regarding foster carers cars used for transporting children had been checked. Safety equipment was seen to be in place at some homes visited where young children were being cared for. At one home some risk issues needed addressing and details were passed on to the fostering service. Health and safety checklists should be completed on all foster carers' homes and updated annually or sooner where new risk issues are identified, with appropriate action being taken to reduce or eliminate the risk.

It is positive that the training in place at induction and through NVQs on safety in the home has been extended and a particular course in health and hygiene is now included in foundation training for foster carers, alongside first aid training and safe care. The completion of all three should take place within 12 months of foster carers approval. Training records indicated this is not yet the position. Further comments about training and support of foster carers are made later on in this report.

It was evident from documentation on carers' files and from discussions with a number of

foster carers that there is better understanding about the NCSC's role and efforts have been made by the fostering service to advise carers that they may be interviewed or visited as part of the NCSC's inspections. Foster carer's agreements also include information about this.

**Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)**

**The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

There are ongoing issues regarding recruitment of various carer groups, including foster carers for children under 8, foster carers for children and young people with complex disabilities and same race carers for children and young people from black, Asian and dual heritage backgrounds. There are also issue re sufficiency of equipment and transport for children with disabilities. Ongoing attention is being given to this strategically. This includes discussions about changes to foster carers allowances, recruitment and support practices, additional funding to specific placements to maintain children placed there safely, consideration to extending recruitment of professional carers. These discussions and plans should be progressed so issues are resolved.

The fostering service continues to employ two Asian social workers who undertake some development work in the recruitment and support of black and Asian carers. Foster carers were able to give some examples of how they have supported children in transracial placements. Information sent out after initial enquiries are made about becoming a foster carer includes information about promoting children's identity. Foster carers skills are the developed through training. Diversity awareness is now included in the service's continuous professional development programme for foster carers. There has been an increase in the number of foster carers attending Total Respect training, which is delivered by young people who are, or have been involved in being cared for. Total Respect training is also part of the induction programme established for new social work staff to the service and courses such as including Caring for Black Children, Challenging Discrimination in Family Placement Work and Foster Care for Disabled Children are all included in the continuous development programme.

The service provides allowances for celebrating religious festivals and additional allowances for specialist hair and skin care products. Access is available to an interpreting service and literature on equality is provided to carers.

Foster carers who are going to care specifically for children and young people with disabilities continue to receive some specific pre-approval training. Individual training is also provided in relation to meeting specific medical needs. The service's training programme includes movement and handling training and autism awareness training.

Children contributing via the survey questionnaire identified a range of activities and interest they participate in, with sports and swimming in particular being one of the most common activities being undertaken.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

**Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**1**

There is considerable pressure on placements as a result of the increased need for placements, coupled with the lack of an overall increase in the number of foster carers recruited. Realistically this means that for most young people they are not offered a choice of foster placements and matching is generally based around carer availability. Evidencing any matching in addition to this varied across the records inspected. The service has produced a draft procedure for matching short term placements since the last inspection which covers guidance in Standard 8, but there was little evidence on foster carers' files indicating this was followed fully. Completing a clearly laid out proforma when short term placements are required forms part of this process. This would usually be undertaken by the duty officer. None of the copies of these forms on foster carers' files seen by the inspector were fully completed and the content varied considerably. Attention should be given to taking a consistent approach with this, so there is a clear record of matching. Within the arrangements sampled there were some successful matches, others had been more difficult.

Records and comments received from foster carers indicated that placing children and young people outside foster carers' profiles has continued, which again is indicative of the pressures on resources. The carers in the group attended and those spoken to directly were of the view that these decisions were generally based on the fostering services staffs' good knowledge of individual carer's abilities. In one sample a carer's profile was changed in this way before they had been caring for a year. A draft procedure has been devised relating to this practice but this has not been ratified yet. Under this draft procedure these arrangements are made and then go to the fostering panel and agency decision maker for consideration within 3 months if the child remains in placement. The decision to place is authorised by a team manager. These arrangements must be the authorised by the agency decision maker unless the current local authorities delegated powers permit the agency decision maker's powers to be delegated down in this way to the team managers. This is also mentioned in Standard 5 of this report where a recommendation is made.

Three carers currently have exemptions and the sample inspected indicated that exemptions are provided on a regular basis to an emergency carer. The procedure for agreeing exemptions that has been ratified is in place. Consideration of any additional support these carers may require to support the placement of more than three children was poorly evidenced.

Similarly the information contained in foster placement agreements inspected varied considerably of 9 arrangements sampled only 2 agreements had been provided when the child was placed, leaving the carer without core information such as consent to take the child for medical treatment. A visits proforma being used by the service includes a reminder for this information to be checked, but this evidently is not always being followed up. It is a regulatory requirement that foster placement agreements are entered into before placements are made. Additional support to compensate for gaps in matches rarely featured in these agreements. The practice evidenced on a number of files of holding post placement planning meetings is positive and often assisted with ironing out fundamental arrangements.

84% of placing social workers responding to the questionnaires stated that placement

agreements were in place and 81% stated foster carers were looking after the child they placed in accordance with the agreement. Foster carers spoken to directly raised issues about delays in agreements being drawn up and being provided with background information on children. 68% of foster carers responding to the questionnaire stated that they were adequately informed about children's backgrounds.

There has been increased use of agency placements since the previous inspection and samples of these arrangements included some good examples of the service's processes for matching.

The practice of mixing long and short term placements has continued. The service's managers advised this is looked at on an individual basis and information relating to such arrangements in the foster carers handbook which states it is discouraged still requires reviewing. Revision of the foster carer's handbook is to be completed by April 2004.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>1</b>
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Safe caring and protection of children continue to be covered in pre-approval training, following which there are specific courses on safe caring, child protection and managing behaviour and children's anger. Post approval training is not compulsory and although encouraged, discussions with foster carers and inspection of training records indicated the take up of training is still variable and some foster carers' employment arrangements or support arrangements do not enable them to attend. Also, language issues have resulted in it being difficult for some foster carers to attend training. The inspector was advised that interpreter support had been provided for some recent training and focused attention was going to be given to increasing these foster carers' involvement in training, as some individual advice could be given at visits, but this did not constitute training or provide the benefits of group discussion. Changes to payments and allowances are under discussion and include on-going training being a requirement. The Safer Caring booklet produced by the Fostering network is provided to all foster carers.

Safe caring policies are being currently introduced across all foster homes which is positive and a safe care policy has been developed which is at draft stage. Discussions with foster carers indicated that there is a need for further work with some foster carers so their involvement in putting the policy together is more comprehensive and they understand the importance of such a documents fully in relation to day to day practice. The guidelines should also be cleared with placing social workers. This should be clearly evidenced and children placed should understand the policy. The content of some of the safe care policies and risk assessments inspected would benefit from more detail and more focus on some matters, such as the sharing of bedrooms, arrangements regarding others involved in supporting care. These documents need to be revisited when there are any changes to the children and young people being fostered in the household. This as yet is not always the practice, although this is required in the draft procedure. All of the placing social workers responding to the questions about whether they felt children were safe in current placements stated they were.

Progress is being made with organising training for foster carers living outside the area. Some foster carers are prepared to travel to training events in Kirklees and will be supported to do this, others can now have access to training via the local authority fostering service in

the area where they are living and arrangements are being made for another to access National Foster Carer Association training. Support for one child's foster carer was still outstanding, but the team manager responsible for organising this advised that the young person may be moving to Pakistan. Plans should be progressed so all carers have access to pertinent training and take training up.

Central systems for logging section 47 investigations and allegations made about foster carers are in place. Each foster carer's file also has a sheet for collating information about allegations. These were not being used consistently, with information not always being transferred from running records on to this sheet and some allegations not always being transferred to the service's central record.

The provider's bullying prevention policy has been circulated to foster carers since the last inspection and skills development training included in the service's foundation training programme for foster carers covers bullying behaviour. Central records are being kept of reports of bullying and how these are dealt with. Figures of reporting bullying are low presently, with 1.5% of children reporting bullying this year. 50% of these reports were made during consultation methods used with children for this inspection. Incident reporting forms have been developed and circulated to foster carers since the last inspection and these include reporting incidents of bullying.

Behaviour management guidelines have been produced in response to the requirements made in last years inspection report, these are currently at draft stage and need to be formally ratified to ensure regulations are fully complied with. Foster carers advised they had been distributed to them prior to the inspection. Foster carer agreements include expectations that foster cares will not use corporal punishment and they will comply with the services procedures issued to them regarding managing behaviour. All of the foster carers responding to the questionnaire stated that the fostering service had made it clear what punishments were acceptable. 97% of placing social workers contributing said the service had made measures of control that are acceptable clear to them and where specialist therapeutic techniques are used these were said to have been agreed with the placing authority and were viewed as effective for the child.

The young people who responded to the questionnaires often viewed punishments and the setting of boundaries as the thing they most disliked about their placements in foster homes, but those they outlined were acceptable measures. The group consultation exercise with children gave some contradictory messages, with most of the children stating that foster carers care about them and treated them fairly, but opinion was divided on whether cruel or painful punishments were used. The group were clear that smacking children was wrong.

Guidance for foster carers about child protection has been developed further, as recommended in the previous inspection report. Guidance has been produced and circulated to foster carers about child to child abuse, following child protection procedures and reporting child protection concerns, along side a draft child protection policy for the service. There is a reciprocal agreement with a neighbouring authority regarding the investigation of child protection allegations made about foster carers and members of the local authorities staff. The ACPC child protection procedures are being revised. The revised procedure was not available at the time of the inspection to check for compliance with Regulation 12, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

Draft guidance has been developed relating to a joint protocol regarding children going missing from care which develops the current procedures already in place and includes

children going missing from foster home's. A staying out procedure has also been drafted. The unit manager advised these should be agreed early in 2004.

Issues have already been raised under Standard 8 about foster placement agreements being provided and a requirement is made. 80% of foster carers responding to the survey questionnaire felt they were adequately informed about the backgrounds of the children they care for. There was a clear message from the carers group the inspectors spoke to that there is often shortfalls in information provided by placing social workers and this was supported by the records of children inspected; none of these contained a full set of the looking after children forms which the placing social worker has responsibility for completing. Where parents of children were viewed as a potential risk to the child or the foster carer's family, agreements were seen to be in place at foster homes visited regarding restrictions on information being shared and foster carers not attending meetings where parents would be present. This was supported by comments from the foster carers.

<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	98.5	%
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**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	2
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Feedback from foster carers indicated a clear understanding of the need to support contact and how they as foster carers can contribute to this. Differences in their role in these arrangements when they provide respite care were also highlighted. Mileage costs are available to foster carers who transport children to and from contact. The service's foster carers' handbook includes information about foster carers' responsibilities in relation to contact.

A range of contact arrangements were seen to be in place at home visits, a number of which were supervised by the placing authority and most took place away from the foster carer's home due to risk and privacy issues. Placing social workers responding to the survey questionnaire all advised that, where contact arrangements are restricted, they are satisfied with the management of these restrictions.

The diary system mentioned in last years report continues to be used for recording day to day information about children. This would usually include matters relating to contact.

Contact arrangements should be clearly stipulated in placement agreements and they are then discussed through the statutory review process. Issue regarding the completion and content of foster placement agreements are already raised in this report but overall, current contact arrangements seemed to be better specified, if not in placement agreements in other parts of the Looking After Children documentation or in post placement planning meeting minutes. Foster carers visited as part of placement sampling appeared clear about arrangements for contact for the children they were looking after, although the arrangements were not necessarily recorded fully or as expected under the local authorities procedures and this standard; this should be looked at. Procedures regarding contact for looked after children are included in the local authorities children and families service manual.



**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

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

The children placed with foster carers receive a guide produced by the Children's Rights Service that includes information about how to complain, reviews, participation in decision making and other useful information. This was compiled by young people and is written in a child friendly format. The fostering service has also produced its own children's guide to the service and information is included in this about how to make a complaint, how to access advocacy support and how to contact the local authorities Children's Rights Service and the area office of the NCSC. There is also liaison from the Children's Rights Service with children when they are placed with foster carers and children are invited to attend events and groups run by the service. The fostering service do not run specific groups of their own for children being fostered. The manager of the Children Rights Service advised that children living with foster carers now represented the majority of children using the service which is not typical of national norms. The manager was of the view that work done with children this year had had a positive impact on children's relationships with their foster carers. The service has set a target to increase work done with the fostering service this year and, in particular, work with foster carers. This would be viewed as positive, as there were apparent tensions for some foster carers about the role of the Children's Rights Service. The manager of the fostering service advised that there had been less consultation with the Children's Rights Service than had been planned since the last inspection due to other operational pressures on both services. The recommendation made in relation to this and using children's feedback to inform service development is therefore carried over in view of this and comments from children outlined below. This should pay particular attention to children with disabilities using the service.

The fostering service unit manager advised they were looking at an e-mail system for children using the service and foster carers children to submit comments. Children's social worker are also encouraged to complete feedback forms with young people about foster placements when placements end and these are used to inform foster carers reviews. This was evidenced on some foster carers files inspected. Views being obtained from children's parents and significant others to children were not particularly apparent and this should be looked at. The unit manager also advised the service hoped to proceed with plans to involve children being fostered in the training of foster carers, in addition to the Total Respect Training run by The Children's Rights Service already mentioned in this report.

The 68% of children responding to the survey questionnaire felt that their foster carers often asked them for their opinions and ideas, with the remaining respondents stating that there was some consultation with them, other than one child who stated they were never asked for their opinions. 86% stated that the fostering service asked their opinions about their foster carers, this dropped to 41% in relation to the fostering service asking their opinion about how the fostering service could be made better. 90% stated that their social worker saw them on their own often or sometimes to ask their opinions. 77% stated they had been told how to make a complaint and 50% new how to get in touch with an NCSC inspector. The children in the consultation group were generally in agreement that they could talk to their foster carers if they had worries and most felt listened to and asked about opinions. All the group felt they had more influence in their lives since coming into care. The group were on the whole divided about how they could make a complaint and what would happen if they did. Half of the group thought they could only make a complaint with the agreement of their social worker and none of the group was aware of the complaints officer. Consideration being

given to additional methods or means of providing information to children about how they can make a complaint and who they can obtain support from with making a complaint is recommended.

95% of foster carers responding to the survey questionnaire stated that they had been given information about how they could complain on behalf of a child and 12% stated they had found it necessary to do this and that this had resulted in the matter being resolved. 64% of children's placing social workers commenting stated they had been provided with information about the fostering service's complaints procedures, 6% had found it necessary to make a complaint. It is recommended that further ways of making placing social workers aware of the fostering services complaints procedures are looked at, so they can support children to make complaints or make complaints on their behalf.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

It is positive that the health care advisor for looked after children has become involved in providing training in health and hygiene and sexual health issues for foster carers since the last inspection and this forms part of the foundation training programme for foster carers, as does first aid training.

Training continues to be provided to foster carers who specifically care for children with disabilities to enable them to meet specific health care needs; often this is addressed on an individual basis.

Involvement of the Community Adolescent Mental Health team in providing consultation, assessments and support to children and carers has also developed and the location of a specialist social worker and 2 psychologists in the recently established looked after children team should increase access to this advice and support about children's emotional and psychological difficulties.

Foster carers again raised the matter of medical consent being provided and this creating issues with obtaining medical treatment, despite strategies for dealing with this being outlined in the fostering service's action plan response to the previous inspection report. It was evident that medical consent has not always been provided to foster carers in a timely manner and some children's files inspected did not contain this consent. Health Care information in Looking After Children documentation sampled was also generally incomplete; gaps in information ranged from basic information about health care professionals involved with children to historical information about immunisations, illnesses and so forth. The requirement from last years inspection report in relation to these issues is therefore carried over. It is vital that obtaining medical consent and medical information on children is given higher priority.

Looking After Children health care assessments were seen on some children's file and where these were not included, records indicated assessments were planned. These assessments identify how children's health care needs are to be met. One of these assessments was discussed with a foster carer and the plans had been actioned for the child. A teenager health care needs were discussed with directly identified an age

appropriate approach was being taken to their health care. Foster carers visited and spoken to appeared clear on their role in promoting children's health care and ensuring they attend primary health care checks. Information about this is included in the foster carers handbook and service's base line standards. The organisation also has a policy on roles and responsibilities in relation to promoting the health of looked after children and young people.

Those children involved in the children's consultation group generally felt that their health needs were being met by their carers and most felt that their general health had improved since they moved into care. The group was divided on advice and support being available on issues relating to puberty, drugs and sexual health, but this may be linked to age differences. The recent introduction of training for foster carers about these issues will hopefully assist with this. Children contributing opinions via the survey questionnaire were all able to give examples of how foster carers help them keep healthy. These included encouraging healthy eating, exercise, and good personal and oral hygiene and making sure children attended medical appointments.

A new draft medication policy has been developed and circulated to carers since the previous inspection and a form for recording medication administration.

A foster carer looking after young children had the relevant Person Health Care Record. Foster carers use a diary system for recording day to day arrangements including children's attendance at health care appointment. It was of some concern that one foster carer visited as part of sampling does not keep these records and it is important that clear arrangements are made for each child cared for at this placement to ensure records are maintained regarding their health care.

Minutes of children's statutory reviews indicated that health care is discussed and action needed to support this is identified.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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Foster carers comments were generally positive about educational support available and information about education of children is provided in the foster carers handbook and the services base line standards. The fostering service unit manager identified one young person who is currently without an educational placement. It is expected that a restructuring of support to children being cared for, with a Looked After Children Team being established including educational support should act to improve children's educational achievements.

The Education for Looked After Children Team give support to foster parents and children placed with them and are also involved in giving training about promoting educational opportunities for children. Foster carers education of young people was discussed with were able to give examples of how they provide support with education including giving help with homework and attending school meetings.

Young people contributing via survey questionnaires identified that foster carers give them help and support with homework, reading, going on school trips and equipment such as desk, computers and reference books are provided in some foster homes. Other children

mentioned receiving extra help in school. The children in the consultation group were on the whole united in saying that they did not like school. Most of the group felt supported by their carers in relation to education and they were positive about the support they had received from the Education for Looked After Children Team. The group were divided about the extent to which their education had got better or worse since coming into care.

The unit manager advised that the service has provided further computers to foster home's since last year and soon 80% of all foster homes will have a computers. Carers raised some issues about shortfalls in their own IT skills and some learn direct courses have now been offered to carers to help with this.

The monitoring systems regarding educational attainment mentioned in the previous inspection report have been maintained. The organisation has a procedure regarding authorisation of school absence.

The foster placement agreements still do not cover the details of educational support arrangements and financial responsibilities outlined in 13.4 and 13.8 of this standard, although placement planning meeting minutes included discussions about some of these matters. It is felt inclusion would have helped avoid some matters arising regarding purchasing of college books and adequacy of items of school uniform. The recommendation is therefore carried over.

Although no Personal Education Plans (PEP) were available on young people's case records, there were notes indicating that these were being organised. There does seem to be some increased understanding about the purpose of these plans, although it is still not clear how these are being integrated into young people's care and pathways plans in practice and if foster carers are fully involved so they can support plans. The organisation has revised its policy and guidance on PEPS since the previous inspection and the inspector has been advised this is to be confirmed in early 2004. More focused attention should be given to how this works in practice.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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Foster carers spoken to had limited experience of Pathway Planning and the two foster carers who had experience were positive about the support provided to young people with this. One young person felt it could have been more individually tapered, but they were clear that structured, planned support was being provided by their foster carer with developing independence skills.

There have been some developments regarding young people's preparation for independence and the service has established links to a Connexions worker for young people in year 11 at school. Training in preparing young people for independence for foster carers is also being looked in the 2004 to 2005 training calendar. The provider has a procedure on Pathway Planning for its child care staff. The recommendation that production of guidance on preparation for adulthood for foster carers is carried over to this report, as there is nothing specific about this in the foster carers handbook.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
<p>The local authority's generic child care recruitment and selection procedure applies to the fostering service staff. Some action has been taken in relation to requirements made in the last inspection report relating to evidencing checks on staff fitness, but this needs to be completed to ensure records comply fully with regulations. Criminal Records Bureau checks have been sent off for all social work staff. The return of one check was outstanding at the time of the inspection, but there was an acceptable reason for the delay with this. Copies of some of the documents used to check identity have not been kept, but the member of personnel responsible for this area of recruitment advised this was in the process of being remedied and appropriate documentation had been checked in relation to completion of Criminal Records Bureau disclosure applications. All except one member of staff from the sample of 10 records checked had at least one document relating to checking identity. Two members of staffs' record did not have copies of the essential social work qualification needed for the post. Copies of the staff members' identity card photographs are now kept with staff records held at the fostering service's offices.</p>		
<p>A senior member of the provider's personnel department has advised they do not feel making telephone enquiries to referees will enhance their already thorough recruitment checks. This practice is still recommended as it is included in this national minimum standards.</p>		
<p>All the staff employed to carry out social work functions have social work qualifications and at least 2 years experience of working in a child care setting before being employed by the fostering service. The organisation of staff personnel development folders held at the fostering service office has been improved and demonstrate staff training and skills more clearly. A structured induction, foundation and continuous development programme for the fostering services social work staff has also been established and this includes assessment skills training as part of induction training.</p>		
<p>None of the professionals mentioned in 15.7 of are employed directly by the fostering service, but such services and support are accessed via established links and agreement or referrals for individual children.</p>		
<p>There is a stable social work staff group at the fostering service, 1 part time social worker has left employment in the last 12 months. There has been a change in the whole clerical</p>		

staff group since the last inspection, with the administrator and 3 clerical staff leaving employment.

The total staff figure below represent the full time equivalent staffing figure. There are actually 24 staff, as some social worker are employed on a part time basis. The unit manager, 1 administrator and 3 clerical staff included in this figure are shared with the adoption service.

<b>Total number of staff of the agency:</b>	18	<b>Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	5
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**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	1
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There is a clear management structure and all staff have a designated supervisor. The two team managers have complimentary skills and experience, arrangements about staff they supervise are informed by this.

Staff have job descriptions which were seen on personnel files and permanent posts are subject to probationary periods. Staff have contracts. Agency social work staff are not used by the service.

The workload management system has been reviewed since the last inspection, as recommended and new system was being trialled at the time of this inspection. Staff felt it was too early to comment on the new system. This will be followed up at future inspections.

The fostering panel plays a role in monitoring assessment, approval and initial reviews of carers. The panels role in quality assurance is being developed so it more active; this is commented on in Standard 30 of this report. The agency decision maker is responsible for decisions on approvals. Further annual reviews do not go to panel unless there are significant changes, but the reviews are undertaken by the social worker assigned to the foster carer and a colleague. A team manager is involved if issues are significant. There is standardised documentation at the service for recording all of the aforementioned and the administrator advised systems for monitoring timescales on review were being improved. Concerns are raised under Standard 8 of this report about the decision making process where foster carers are permitted to operate outside their approval without the agency decision maker authorising this initially.

The fostering service is already looking at how placements made with supported lodgings carers for young people aged 16 to 18 years old in the care for by Kirklees Metropolitan Council can be brought in line with regulatory requirements. Such carers must be approved as foster carers.

As already stated in this report, placing children with independent fostering agencies when their needs cannot be met by the local authorities has increased. These arrangements were sampled at this inspection. Action is needed by the service to ensure that the agreements made with these agencies comply with the contents stipulated under Regulation 40(4) and (5) and these are made prior to placements being made. The fostering service also needs to be more scrupulous in checking that any agencies used are suitably registered with the

NCSC. There was evidence that systems for monitoring the quality of these placements have been gradually developed and there were some good examples provided of the fostering service checking out the agencies standards of assessment of foster carers. The fostering panel are advised of decisions to place children with agencies.

Improvements to the structure for training opportunities for staff are already mentioned under Standard 15 of this report and this is informed by a professional development folder. Joint staff and foster carer training events are also held. Foster carers and staff spoke positively about training opportunities. Some issues about one member of staff not undertaking professional development in the previous year appear to have been picked up and addressed, with plans being identified for the next 12 months. This member of staff had also not completed the training profile which was present in the other 4 staff members personal development files sampled; this should be addressed. Ongoing professional development includes Post Qualification Awards. Foster carers files contain a training profile.

Positive improvements in administrative support have been made since the previous inspection where a statutory requirement was made. The whole administrative team have changed and the team is led by a skilled and focused administrator who is systematically improving administrative systems and processes. A panel clerk has been recruited but recruitment checks are not yet complete, delaying the start of the clerk. When they commence they will replace one of the clerks currently employed through an agency. In the interim the administrator attends the panel as minute taker.

The number of desk top computers has increased to assist staff accessing the computerised records. The manager advised all staff have a computer now. Staff have varying levels of IT skills and they advised that clerical support around this is flexible and IT training is being offered as part of professional development.

Sampling of files of prospective foster carers indicated efficient responses to initial enquiries about fostering and generally prompt timescales for initial visits.

Although the service does not employ specific advisors, the service has access to a range of professionals within the local authority from whom they can gain specialist advice.

Staff spoken to had a clear understanding of their own role and that of children's social workers. The unit manager advised of discussions with field work teams placing children about aspects of joint working which could be improved and she also identified plans for further discussion about the approval and support of family and friends placements. The local authority has procedures identifying the minimum level of visits to children in addition to those stipulated in regulations. It wasn't always clear in children's files if these requirements were being met. In two placements made under Regulation 38 the pattern of weekly visits had not been met and the required pattern of visits subsequent to their approval as foster carers had not been met. The foster carer group two inspector met with identified issues about delays in allocating social workers to children and frequent changes of social workers. This must be addressed and the fostering service unit manager needs to take these matters up with placing social work teams who hold responsibility for this. The fostering service has set a minimum of a 6 weekly visit to every foster carer and this is included in the new foster carer agreement introduced since the previous inspection. Foster carers' files indicated this is not yet applied consistently and this should be worked towards, to ensure contractual obligations with foster carers are met and a base line standard of support is adhered to. Placing social workers contributing via the survey questionnaire rated the fostering service's work in partnership with the placing authority as average to very well, with 73% rating it as

very well.

Employees receive copies of the provider's policies detailed in 16.16 of this standard as standard.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

The key issue raised by foster carers in relation to adequacy of staffing of the fostering service was the arrangement for out of hours support. Foster carers do not find the generic emergency duty system adequate. This was raised at the previous inspection. There has been consultation about this with foster carers since then, as recommended, but as yet a favourable solution has not been reached. The foster carers favour an out of hours support service staffed by experienced foster carers. The unit manager advised this has now been submitted to the local authority as part of the service's budget proposal.

Foster carers also raised some issues about support when staff are absent through sickness. The unit manager advised that the duty system remained the main system of support in these instances and some consideration was being given to whether this could be extended to cover the full working day rather than the afternoon. Where staff have been off for lengthy periods of time, some work has been reallocated to other staff in addition to duty and team manager support being available.

In response to a general question in the survey questionnaires about sufficiency of staff in the fostering service, 40% of respondents considered that there was enough staff. Additional comments were made about staff being under increasing pressure, but the consensus of opinion was that they did a good job despite increased pressures on their time.

Solutions should be reached regarding these ongoing concerns identified by foster carers about adequacy of staffing, with out of hours support being prioritised.

The service's social work staff workloads were discussed with considered them manageable and they advised that workloads could be negotiated in supervision.

Staff turnover is low, one social worker, one administration officer and three clerks have left employment of the service since the previous inspection. Systems for support and development of staff are already commented on.

It is evident from the inspector's contact with foster carers during the inspection and from the inspection of records relating to foster cares, that the service has managed to recruit a range of carers. There remains shortfalls in foster carers with particular skills and backgrounds and particular approvals, resulting in an increased use of fostering agencies and placement of children outside foster carers' approved profiles. The unit manager advised that the key strategy relating to this currently is linked to reaching an agreement over the fostering allowance structure and payments for skills. Current proposals linked to recruitment strategies should be progressed.

Records inspected and information provided by managers, staff and foster carers indicated that the assessment process for approval of foster carers is well structured and clear and



competency based workshops form part of the process. There is standardised paperwork used for the process and assessment reports are produced on Form F's with competency based assessment information attached. Prospective foster carer's produce folders with information evidencing their competence. The service also has a planning framework for staff for the Form F assessments. Details of the service's assessment process are given in statement of purpose.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The fostering service is run by a local authority and staff are subject to the local authority's employment policies and procedures. There are systems of supervision, personal development plans, team meetings, training and away days to discuss service developments for staff.

There is a system of support and supervision of carers and annual reviews for approved carers, with supporting forms. These processes involve team managers seeing these documents and in the case of reviews, the unit manager also sees the review documentation. The first annual review goes to panel. The administrator advised that a monitoring system has now been established regarding foster carers reviews and the team managers are now advised on a monthly basis about reviews due in the next 2 to 3 months. Information in the service's register of foster carers indicated there were still annual reviews which are out of date. The service gave the date for completion of updating the foster carer register with accurate information about reviews as April 2004. This target must be met and any outstanding annual reviews organised.

Issues about out of hours support for foster carers are detailed under Standard 17 of this report and the recommendation made also applies to this standard.

The service has a health and safety policy and base line standards also cover health and safety issues. The health and safety checklist used on foster carers' homes is commented on under Standard 6 of this report where a recommendation is made.

Foster carer agreements read that legal liability arising as a result of fostering is covered by Kirklees and fuller information is attached for carers.

In response to the recommendation made in the previous inspection report the organisation's whistle blowing policy is now included in the approval pack sent to foster carers and it has also been distributed to approved foster carers since the last inspection.

<b>Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)</b>		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>A clear framework is now in place for the induction, foundation and continuous professional development of staff undertaking social work tasks specific to the fostering service. This is linked into an annual personal development review system. Sampling of these records and discussion with staff about development opportunities indicated they had received an annual development review and an action plan had been developed from this. One annual review was due.</p> <p>Joint training events are also held with foster carers and staff commenting on these were positive about the benefits of such events.</p>		

<b>Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)</b>		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	2
<p>There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability, with each member of staff having a designated supervisor. Records are kept of supervision. Staff spoken to said they felt well supported on both a formal and informal basis by their designated supervisor. Records sampled indicated staff have supervision contracts and there is a standardised format used for the agenda and recording of sessions. Supervision was fairly regular but not always in line with the monthly level stipulated in supervision contract and the provider's supervision policy. These levels should be adhered to unless there is a significant reason why they cannot be met. If missed the reason for this should be recorded in staff member's supervision record. The annual personal development reviews system is already mentioned under standard 19 of this report.</p> <p>All staff have job descriptions and most have generic workloads, with some having responsibility for particular types of foster placements. The Family Link Scheme and respite team have designated workers. Staff spoken to were clear about their responsibilities.</p> <p>The organisation's policies and procedures are held at the office and available to staff for reference; new staff are also introduced to key areas of these during their induction.</p> <p>There is a system of staff meetings.</p>		

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

The recommendation made in the previous inspection report to develop an overarching strategy about how the service works with and supports foster carers covering all matters in 21.2 of this standard was to be actioned via updating the foster carer's handbook. This was said to be currently in progress and the unit manager advised this should be completed by April 2004. Foster carer agreements have been revised to make contractual agreements clearer and they include the minimum level of supervisory visits that can be expected. Foster carers responding to the survey questionnaire all stated that they had been provided with written information about what is expected of them as foster carers and the majority said stated they felt well supported by the fostering service.

Placing social workers view on the fostering services joint working with them are included under standard 16 of this report. 94% said that the fostering service are good at letting them know about significant events affecting children and the remaining 6% said this was done by directly by the foster carers.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)****The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****1**

The fostering service's foster carer agreement has been revised since the previous inspection as required, but it still does not cover all the information required under Regulation 34 and specified in schedule 3. One foster carer's file inspected did not have the required foster carer agreement, although a notice of approval was present on the file. Another had a notice and agreement but the agreement had not been signed. One carer's agreement and notice contained an error regarding the age range of approval and this had been altered in pen on the agreement to reflect the correct approval profile. One carer's approval had been changed in January 2004 and the issuing of the notice of approval and new agreement was pending. One carer takes female children only, but this was not specified in their terms of approval. Where a foster carer required specifically tailored support to that given as standard, this was not clearly specified; comments are made in relation to this under a number of other standards in this record relating to matching, training and record keeping. This must be addressed; the service must ensure that following approval all foster carers are issued with accurate notices of approval and they enter into a foster carer agreement containing the required information.

Notices specifying the terms of the approval continuing or termination of approval and the reason must also be issued following reviews of approval. Termination notices had not been served on two sets of family and friends carers approved for a specific child, although decisions to terminate them had been recommended by the fostering panel and ratified by the agency decision maker. This is of concern, particularly as one of the couples were being terminated following the removal of the child as a result of abuse allegations.

All foster carers have a designated social worker from the service who is named in the foster carer agreement.

On approval foster carers receive an approval pack containing the fostering service's handbook, policies, procedures and guidance, information about insurance cover and other useful literature. The service also pays for membership of the National Fostering Network.

The position regarding updating the handbook is mentioned in this report already. Foster carers advised they were issued with a large amount of new and updated information and procedures prior to the inspection. Some foster carers said that delivery of the information by post was rather overwhelming and they felt overly scrutinised by the new procedures. It is recommended that supervisory visits and support groups are used to discuss this information with foster carers.

A minimum pattern of a 6 weekly supervisory visit to foster carers is included in the agreement. Inspection of foster carers' files indicated that this is not adhered to for all foster carers. The service has a supervisory visits form which gives some focus to the visits as it contains prompts and reminders. These are not always being used at visits or completed consistently and sections for the social worker, their manager and the foster carer were not always being signed. Copies should also be provided to the foster carer, but this is not happening consistently. Those foster carers visited were satisfied with the level of support provided through visits and phone calls and this was the consensus from foster carers contributing to the inspection. The matter of out of hours support is already mentioned in this report and a recommendation made. Individual carers mentioned matters such as being uncomfortable asking for support when regular visits are not being made, the lack of respite care for foster carers which could help assist with sustaining placements and not taking holidays without children as they are difficult to cover. The aforementioned matters should be addressed with the carers.

There was clear evidence on visits records that action has been taken in relation to making at least one unannounced visit to foster carers per annum and this is also covered in the new foster carer agreement, as recommended in the previous inspection report. Foster carers have been issued with guidance about these visits.

The service runs a number of support groups for foster carers and there is also an active local Fostering Network group attended by a number of foster carers.

The fostering service has a system for logging complaints centrally and also a summary sheet system for each foster carers file. Only complaints made to the local authorities complaints and compliments service are logged on the central system. The summary system on foster carers' files is not being used consistently, making it difficult to track complaints and how they are dealt with and to identify any patterns quickly. There was an awareness of the local authority complaints system amongst foster carers, but less of an understanding about the NCSC's role in complaints. This was also reflected in young people's responses about complaints. The foster carers group the inspectors met with raised concerns about having a lack of confidence in the complaints system and expressed concerns about possible victimisation and worries about termination if they made a complaint. Whilst regulatory requirements in respect of complaints and representations apply to independent agencies and registered providers only, there is an expectation in this standard that local authority fostering services have an open culture regarding complaints and systems for recording and evaluating complaints that enable them to be used to inform future provision of services. It is recommended that further attention is given to this area of practice.

Matters regarding allegations are covered under Standard 9 of this report where a requirement and recommendations are made. There are draft procedures covering matters when there are complaints about a foster carer's standards of practice which are marked for updating. This should be actioned and the procedure formally ratified. This draft procedure does not include a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register and the processes for referral to the

Protection of Children Act List if reasons for termination indicate that the foster carer is unsuitable to work with children. A full policy and supporting procedure should be established.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

**The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**1**

Foster carers remain positive about training and development opportunities and a structured training programme is in place that covers induction, foundation and advanced training. This has been further developed since last year. Foster care agreements require foster carers to attend pre-approval training, mandatory training and further training recommended in their training profile. In practice the service is not enforcing this with foster carers, but the service plans to include a payment for skills in allowance changes currently being considered. All stranger foster carers receive initial training. There was considerable variation in uptake of training across information inspected. It was of concern that some foster carers advised that they remain unable to take up training, including that identified through the review process, due to their caring or work commitments or their language needs, but they are expected to care for children with complex needs. Some training has been given where interpreting support has been provided and one of the workers responsible for supporting Asian carers advised that further training was being looked at. It is also positive that the emphasis on training for friends and family carers has been given more emphasis, as these foster carers do not undertake the pre-approval training. This is mentioned fully in Standard 32 of this report. Childcare and travel costs are available for attending training and some training is put on in the evening and weekends. The identified training needs of foster carers who have specific language needs must be met. Increased consistency should be achieved regarding foster carers completing core training.

Comments are already made about progress with organising training for foster carers living outside the Kirklees area.

NVQ training forms part of continuous personal development for foster carers. The number of carers with NVQ level 3 has dropped since last year, 8 foster carers have this award compared to the figure of 9 given last year and 6 foster carers are working towards this award.

Experienced foster carers are involved in training and the lead inspector was able to meet a foster carer who has played a significant part in training other foster carers.

The timescale given in the fostering services action plan to address issues about support for foster carers children is April 2004. As yet no support has been established but consideration is being given to this, with an annual event during school summer holidays and a website and access for comments and suggestions being looked at. It is likely this will not be within this timescale and a revised timescale should be confirmed. Some foster cares mentioned this as an area that should be developed, by way of acknowledging the whole family's role in fostering. A need was also identified by the lead inspector from sampling foster homes for the service to consider offering training to the children of Asian foster carers who are involved as secondary carers and play an important role in the success of placements.

Exploration of some specific arrangements highlighted some concerns about the lack of clear structure to additional support and training a carer would need from both the fostering service and placing social workers, including keeping necessary records on children, the formal recognition of supporters roles to the success of placements and specific training packages for foster carers about particular disabilities. This must be addressed and plans must be clearly identified.

A standardised training profile has been established for carers for recording training completed, but this is not being used consistently on foster carers' files and was not being used on the friends and family cares files inspected.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Records on foster carers are held at the fostering service. Records on the children are held by the placing social workers who are also employed by the provider. Some of these placing social workers are based in the same office as the fostering service or in buildings in the same grounds, whilst others are based further away. The ease of access to children's records is therefore variable, but appeared adequate. This was facilitated swiftly for children's records requested for the inspection. The responsibility for maintenance of children's files lies with their placing social worker and the responsibility for monitoring lies with their line manager and not with manager's in the fostering service. The child would also arrange access to their file through their placing social worker. Shortfalls in Looking After Children information are already mentioned in this report, as are some children's records containing clearly identifiable information about statutory visits responsibilities being met. Overall the standards of organisation of information, completion of information and recording in these files was variable and this information should be passed to the relevant line managers by the fostering service.

There is a generic procedure for Kirklees Social Services about case record. Staff advised the inspector this has been supplemented with specific guidance for the fostering service staff about the contents of foster carers' files, as recommended in the in the previous inspection report. How this is reflected in practice is commented on in the next standard of this inspection report.

Arrangements made with fostering agencies were sampled. It was clear from responses to letters that agencies are sending notifications to the relevant placing social worker and have subsequently provided this information to the fostering service too, in response to their requests for this information. Agreements made with the agencies do not always specifically include responsibilities regarding notifications and the arrangements for record keeping about the child and the return of records at the end of the placement. A requirement is already made in relation to this under Standard 16 of this report.

Issues from foster carers regarding the provision of information about children placed have already been raised earlier in this report. The fostering service now has clear systems for picking up shortfalls, including reminders in the supervisory visits forms, but foster carers are still finding this an issues and sampling of information provided also found this to be incomplete. Use of these monitoring systems should be sharper so the gaps in information provided to foster carers are addressed swiftly.

Pre-approval training includes looking at the importance of children's history and backgrounds and it is positive that ongoing continuous professional development training has been extended to include direct work with children over 8 as well as that previously in place for under eights. Training in preparing children to move on to permanence is also included. The services base line standards also include information about expectations on foster carer to help children develop their identity including maintaining an archive of information about the child's life. Maintenance of such information varied. There were some excellent examples discussed by foster carers of age appropriate ways they put life story information together for children and young people and some evidence of social workers also trying to look at this with young people more directly. There were also some issues where this did not seem to be occurring for children and where the basic level of recording of information expected by the fostering service was not being met. Any alternative arrangements to address this were not clear and discussions with the supporting social worker for the agency indicated these matters had not been addressed. In questionnaires some comments were made by foster carers that an increased focus on life story work with children and young people would enhance the service on offer to children. Arrangements should made so the fostering service's base line standards on record keeping, including the gathering together of an archive of information for each child are met.

Foster carers are provided with a lockable filing box for the safe keeping of information.

**Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

1

The recruitment of an administrator to the service is already commented on in this report. The administrator has been in the post for a limited time, but is taking a structured approach to improving record keeping systems and the accuracy of information held.

It is positive that issues regarding the secure storage of records present at the previous inspection and subject to a requirement have been addressed.

Sampling of records found that there are still shortfalls in the requirements regarding records and monitoring system need to be more robust:

The register of children placed with foster carers provided with the required pre-inspection information contained inaccuracies regarding dates of placement and placement addresses, discharge addresses were not always being included and some children recorded on the foster carer's register as being placed with foster carers were not included in the children's register. The required information stipulated in Regulation 22 and Schedule 2 (1) The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 must be kept.

The register of foster carers provided with the required pre-inspection information had gaps in required information, such as foster carers' first names and dates of approval and reviews of approval. The register of foster carers must include all the information stipulated under Regulation 3, The Fostering Regulations 2002.

The information required under Schedule 2, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002, on the staff of the fostering service is held in the provider's personnel department and some of the information is also held at the fostering service's office base.



Prior to the inspection foster carers were sent out specific forms for logging accidents to children placed with them and this information is now to also be submitted to the fostering service. The service keeps a central log for recording accidents. It wasn't always clear from these records what action had been taken in response to the incident or how the accident had occurred. There should be further discussion with foster carers about what they need to include in accident notifications. Foster carers' files should also have a central sheet for logging accidents, but this was being used inconsistently.

The content and standard of foster carers' files inspected continues to vary and there was inconsistency regarding central sheets introduced to assist with logging particular matters. Social workers are not always using the standardised formats that have been introduced for recording supervisory visits. Shortfalls regarding foster carer agreements and notices of approval and termination are already mentioned. This includes agreements for placements made under Regulation 38. The required chronology of placements with foster carers are not being completed consistently, gaps were found in entries and some children placed were not included. The required gender of children is not included in the standard details. Extracts from fostering panel recommendations were not being included consistently in records. Staff advised files are not taken to supervision routinely, but that they were aware some checks were made by their supervisors. This was evidenced in counter signatures on standard documents, but it wasn't clear if audits of the files total contents are being undertaken. Information on foster carers having a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check was clear, although there are still gaps in dating checklists relating to statutory checks. These checklists were being used more effectively on records inspected of foster carers currently going through the approval process. Information about whether supporters to placements, such as those acting as sitters, have been CRB checked was not always clear on foster carers' case records. There were also shortfalls on checks being undertaken on adult children in the household, required under the assessment Schedule 3, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Evidence of the assessment is required under Regulation 27. Foster carers records must contain all the information required under Regulation 30, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002. CRB checks must be completed on all adult member of foster carers' households.

Issues in relation to the consistency of completion of complaints and allegations records are already mentioned in this report. The inconsistencies should be resolved so records meet the standard specified in 25.13 of this standard.

There is guidance available on access to records, but requests for access are not the norm. In relation to foster carers records, foster carers would have seen the majority of documents held, due to the service's practices in relation to information sharing. Foster carers signatures were missing from some of the records they are expected to sign.

The organisation's policy on access and retention of records has not been amended yet to include 15 years retention for records listed under Schedule 2, The Fostering Service Regulations 2002, as specified in Regulation 22. An amended draft was provided which is currently being considered. This only mentions one of the items in Schedule 2, the others records should be added. The procedures should also include 10 years for the retention of records about any people with whom children are placed under Regulation 38, as specified in Regulation 32 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Fostering panel members are given written information about the handling of panel information that they have to sign.

The information on payments given below only includes those to Kirklees approved foster carers. Payments being made to children placed by Kirklees via independent fostering agencies are not included.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			178
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			188
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			172
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			69
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			30
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	69.09	<b>Maximum £</b>	413.35

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

The fostering service shares a large office premises with a number of other local authority services. These offices are open to the public during office hours, but parking within the office grounds is restricted to employees due to lack of space, unless the visitor has a disability. Parking outside the office grounds can be difficult as the office is in a residential area. This arrangement causes inconvenience and some conflict with people living in the area closest to the offices. Further consideration should be given to the arrangements.

Within the premises the fostering service staff have their own section of the building which they share with the adoption service. Senior staff have individual offices and an additional office has been organised for the panel clerk when they commence work. This is currently available as quiet working space. All the other staff share one large open plan office space. This has been reorganised since the last inspection resulting in a little more space being created. The fostering service has a designated storeroom for equipment.

The fostering service has access to a number of meeting rooms within the premises via a booking system, as these are shared. Foster carers groups tend to be held away from the main office in more convenient locations for foster carers.

Currently administrative systems consist of both manual records and records held on an IT system. The IT system is accessed via personal passwords. There is more IT equipment since the last inspection and staff are being provided with IT training to help them improve their skills. There is flexibility with clerical support dependant on each staff members current IT skills.

The requirement made in relation to security of information in the previous inspection report has been addressed. Confidential information is stored securely and there is an established system for locking cabinets at the end of each working day.

Information about insurance has been provided since the last inspection.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

Not inspected as this standard does not apply to local authority fostering services.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

Not inspected as this standard does not apply to local authority fostering services.

### Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Issues regarding changes in allowances for foster carers identified in last years report are still under discussion and there has been consultation with foster carers about this since the previous inspection. It is hoped that resolution will be achieved shortly. Current proposals on allowances and skills payments were due to go to cabinet in February 2004. Changes in allowances since the previous inspection have resulted in the lowest allowances being increased by £26.14. This is significant as these foster carers received £42.95 prior to the increase.

Foster carers spoken to appeared aware of allowances and payments for expenses, although some remain reluctant to claim certain additional expenses still. This information is included in the fostering service's handbook which is currently being updated. It is also included on the fostering service's web site.

Financial monitoring includes fees and allowances. Foster carers advised these are usually paid in a timely fashion. Some specific incidents were mentioned by foster carers where there had been delays with payments, but these appear to have been resolved. It was positive to see that where a foster carer's income was from benefits, the social worker highlighted the need for prompt payment of additional expenses.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

1

The required work has been undertaken regarding panel membership. Although the timescales given in the fostering service's action plan to the previous inspection report were not met and there have been ongoing issues regarding appropriate membership and quorate panel meetings, a balanced and quorate panel meeting was achieved in February 2004 when the inspectors attended. The social worker panel member is a team manager from a field work team, and whilst this is permissible, recruiting a practising social worker is recommended. There is a good selection of independent members, including a foster carer for another provider, someone with experience of being fostered and members with a background in child health and education. It is important that panel membership allows for all future panels held to be quorate, as regulations do not permit panel business to be conducted unless the panel is quorate.

The panel has a medical advisor and the service is now clear this person cannot also be an independent member.

The team manager who acts as panel advisor has a system for bringing these non-quorate decision back to panel. This is being progressed, but it is important that this is completed within the next 6 months.

It is positive that the panel is made aware of children being placed with independent fostering agencies as part of its role in monitoring the range and type of carers available in comparison with the needs of children. The inspector became aware that in the year 2002 to 2003 the panel had taken on a function of approving some particular foster carers for independent fostering agencies. This is not in keeping with regulations. The matter has been discussed and the fostering service is taking steps to rectify this with the agencies concerned.

The fostering service's team manager responsible for advising the panel has set up a clear records system which gives information about panel members including whether they have had a Criminal Records Bureau check. All current panel members have had a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Most of the panel members participated in some recent training specifically provided for panel members by a specialist training organisation. Annual training events are likely to be held. Panel members are now also provided with a checklist for matters they are presented with for panel. The panel chair advised that a glossary of terms was going to be put together to assist panel members with social work terminology. A more active fostering panel was

evident and there was a very good level of discussion at the panel observed. There was also a good system for using of foster carers' competency based folders of evidence in informing panel recommendations, in addition to assessments, other records provided to panel members in advance of the panel meetings and social workers and some foster carers attending the panel.

The panel's role in quality assurance is developing and an action plan is in place for developing the panel. The panel chair advised that there are systems for feeding back if there are delays in Regulation 38 carers being presented to panel for approval as friends and family carers and if social workers do not attend the panel to present information, resulting in decisions having to be delayed.

A panel clerk has been recruited and is due to commence work in February 2004 when recruitment checks have been completed. The administrator took the minutes for the February 2004 panel the inspectors observed.

Some draft panel procedures have been developed since the last inspection, as those previously in place were not sufficient and did not correlate with regulatory requirements about the panel membership. These need to be ratified and some developments have been suggested which are being taken forward.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The short break policy covering eligibility criteria mentioned in the previous inspection report remains in place. The recommendation to develop particular policies and procedures further for short breaks has not been actioned. Respite and short break carers were not visited as part of this year's inspection sampling, but respite foster carers made comments through the survey questionnaires about a lot of the information being distributed routinely to them not being applicable. They also indicated an awareness of the differences in responsibilities from those relevant to children being fostered for longer periods. Issues about equipment and transport for children with disabilities having short breaks are already mentioned in this report.

There are some specific support groups and training for these foster carers and they also complete some general foster carer training.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	1
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Positive developments have taken place with friends and family carers since the last inspection. Training for friends and family carers has been given more emphasis, as these foster carers do not undertake the pre-approval training. Social workers taking a lead role with friends and family carers advised that there is now an expectation that these carers undertake the following training, safe care, health and safety, health and hygiene and education. Some specific training has been held for these carers. They are now also being encouraged to attend main training sessions to enable more choice and social work staff they know are going to all or part of the course to give them support. A forum for these carers was held last summer and a specific support group has been established

Changes in the allowance structures have increased the allowances provided to these carers significantly. To receive a payment for skills they will have to complete a portfolio of evidence of competency.

There are clear processes regarding the practice for assessment of friends and family as carers, with timescales being set by the fostering panel for full assessments to be returned which enables tracking of assessment work between their move from Regulation 38 status to approval as friends and family carers. It is not possible to complete a full assessment within 6 weeks and it is recommended that a base line of what must be achieved within the initial 6 weeks is agreed to ensure a safe enough initial approval is made pending a full assessment being completed.

Some specific matters are raised elsewhere in this report where a requirement is made about shortfalls in documentation relating to approval and foster carer and foster placement agreements, the processes of termination of these carers and statutory visits being undertaken in relation to these placement when they are made under Regulation 38 initially. It is due to this that a scoring of 1 is given and despite this it is important that fostering services achievements in development work already mentioned in relation to family and friends carers is also recognised and acknowledge.

The unit manager advised she is planning further discussions with the social work teams responsible for placing children with foster carers about processes, expectations and joint working in relation to friends and family placements. This is encouraged.



**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor**      NA                      **Signature**      NA  
**Date**                      NA

**D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.**

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2 - 13 February 2004 of Kirklees Family Placement and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note:**

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

**D.2**

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

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I \_\_\_\_\_ of Kirklees Family Placement confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**D.3.2 I \_\_\_\_\_ of Kirklees Family Placement am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:**

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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