



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

**North Yorkshire County Council
Fostering Service**

County Hall
Racecourse Lane
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL7 8DD

2nd 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

North Yorkshire County Council Fostering Service

Address

North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Racecourse Lane, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8DD

Local Authority Manager

Mr John Heron

Tel No:

01609 780780

Address

North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Racecourse Lane, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8DD

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

17.02.03

| | | | |
|--|---|-------------------|----------------|
| Date of Inspection Visit | | 2nd February 2004 | ID Code |
| Time of Inspection Visit | | 09:00 am | |
| Name of Inspector | 1 | Monica Hargreaves | 137644 |
| Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process. | | N/A | |
| Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable) | | N/A | |
| Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection | | Mr. John Heron | |

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

North Yorkshire County Council provides fostering services through the Children and Families Business Unit of the Social Services Department. There are 3 teams who are responsible for the recruitment, approval, support and monitoring of foster carers. Each team is managed by a Service Manager, who reports directly to the Group Manager, Child Placement.

The Fostering service offers the following types of placements:

- Task centred foster care
- Respite care
- Permanent foster care
- Family and friend foster care
- Specialist foster care
- Emergency foster care.

At the time of the inspection there were two foster panels for the county and with effect from the 1st March 2004, there will be three foster panels that will relate geographically to the work of the three fostering teams.

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.)

Statement of Purpose

(Standard 1)

This standard was met.

The statement of purpose is a clear document and has been approved by elected members.

Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering Service

(Standards 2 and 3)

One of these two standards was met.

Managers in the service are qualified and experienced in child care practice and legislation.

The Group Manager has yet to complete his management qualification.

Management of the fostering service

(Standards 4 and 5)

Both of these standards were met.

The service has clear systems for controlling and monitoring its activities and the authority operates effective recruitment and selection procedures. Lines of management and accountability are clear.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

(Standards 6 – 14)

7 of these 9 standards were met.

The foster service ensures that carers are properly approved and receive appropriate training. Carers are given written information about their role and the authority maintains proper records for foster carers and children and young people looked after. Due to a shortage of carers in parts of the county, the service from time to time experiences some difficulty in making appropriate locally based matches. This is being addressed through the provision of additional resources and a large recruitment campaign. The authority, as corporate parent, should give further thought to the education needs of a minority of young people which are not always adequately met by the current provision.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.

(Standards 15-23)

6 of these 9 standards were met

The service has robust procedures for the recruitment and approval of foster carers and all staff have regular supervision. Carers also receive regular monitoring and support visits from allocated link workers within the fostering teams. The locally based teams have individual service managers and staff reported that they feel supported by their managers. Carers feel supported by the fostering team itself, but stated that out of hours support is inappropriate and that the placements of some children can be adversely affected by the fact

that they do not have an allocated social worker

Records

(Standards 24 – 25)

These standards were both met.

Carer files seen during the inspection contained relevant checks, approvals and reviews and records of visits undertaken. Children's files contained appropriate Looked After Children documentation, including care plans and placement plans, although not all children's files held up to date chronologies.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

(Standard 7.

This standard was not fully met.

Provision is variable across the county. Although all offices have security systems and hold files and other information securely, not all offices have access to all the necessary IT equipment to enable staff to communicate effectively across the county. It was also reported that some office accommodation is cramped.

Financial requirements.

(Standards 27-29)

All three of these standards were met.

The fostering service is provided and financed by North Yorkshire County Council and is governed by their financial processes and systems. Foster carers receive payments promptly and there is an ongoing review of carer payments.

Fostering panels

(Standard 30)

This standard is met.

The work of the panels is carried out efficiently and effectively and contributes well to the work of the fostering service.

Short term breaks

(Standard 31)

This standard was not assessed as this service is contracted out to Barnardos and NCH Action for Children.

Family and Friends as Carers

(Standard 32)

This standard is met.

The fostering service ensures that all carers are properly approved and gives due consideration to the pre-existing relationships between children and prospective carers.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

| No. | Regulation | Standard | Required actions | |
|-----|------------|----------|------------------|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

| Condition | Compliance | |
|------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | |
| Comments | | |

| Condition | Compliance | |
|------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | |
| Comments | | |

| Condition | Compliance | |
|------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | |
| Comments | | |

| Condition | Compliance | |
|------------------|-------------------|--|
| | | |
| Comments | | |

Lead Inspector _____
Second Inspector _____
Locality Manager _____
Date _____

Signature _____
Signature _____
Signature _____

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 | 16 | FS13 | North Yorkshire County Council should give further consideration to the education needs of the minority of older children who experience serious difficulties with school attendance. | 1 st September 2004 |
| 2 | 17 | FS18 | The fostering service should develop further the system of out of hours support that it is able to offer to carers. | 1 st September 2004 |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

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 | FS2 | The manager should obtain a qualification in management at NVQ 4 or equivalent by 2005 |
| 2 | FS20 | The fostering service should implement the system of annual staff appraisals which has been planned |

| | | |
|---|------|--|
| 3 | FS22 | The local authority should seek to ensure that all children within the looked after system have an allocated social worker. |
| 4 | FS26 | The local authority to ensure that the current improvements being made to the system of IT support for staff is completed as soon as possible. |

* 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 | 6 |
| Survey of placing authorities | NO |
| Foster carer survey | YES |
| Foster children survey | YES |
| Checks with other organisations and Individuals | YES |
| • Directors of Social services | YES |
| • Child protection officer | YES |
| • Specialist advisor (s) | YES |
| • Local Foster Care Association | NO |
| Tracking Individual welfare arrangements | YES |
| • Interview with children | YES |
| • Interview with foster carers | YES |
| • Interview with agency staff | YES |
| • Contact with parents | NO |
| • Contact with supervising social workers | YES |
| • Examination of files | YES |
| Individual interview with manager | YES |
| Information from provider | YES |
| Individual interviews with key staff | YES |
| Group discussion with staff | 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 | YES |
| Date of Inspection | 02/02/04 |
| Time of Inspection | 9.00AM |
| Duration Of Inspection (hrs) | 50 |

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a Statement of Purpose that sets out the aims and objectives of the fostering service, in line with 1.4 of this standard. It has been approved by elected members and has been made widely available throughout the organisation. The service has developed a children's guide that the inspector was able to see at the time of the inspection. It is clearly written and accessible to children and young people using the service. This has yet to be given to children but is expected to be made available from the 1st April 2004.

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 manager of the service has the necessary child care qualification and management experience. He plans to complete an NVQ 4 (equivalent) qualification in Management by the required date. The individual service managers of the 3 fostering teams are appropriately qualified and experienced. There are clear lines of responsibility within the organisation. The service is managed professionally.

See recommendation no. 1

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

The local authority has procedures in place to ensure that staff employed are assessed as having the necessary expertise to manage the service. Procedures also ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken on all staff employed and on all foster carers approved. Records of checks carried out were seen on files during the course of the inspection.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The county of North Yorkshire is large and the fostering service is managed locally in three teams of Family Placement Officers, each managed by a service manager who is responsible to the Group Manager. The local authority has financial and reviewing procedures and is currently developing a contract for 'preferred providers' for placements found through Independent Fostering Agencies. The authority has a full range of policies and procedures that includes a policy on conflict of interest.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

3

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The manager confirmed that he has a clear job description. The lines of delegation and accountability are clear throughout the service and there are arrangements in place to cover any periods when the manager may be absent.

There has been a recent re-organisation of fostering teams to separate off adoption and fostering services, and a new service manager for adoption services has been appointed. Work is continuing to develop a centrally based electronic monitoring system as at present some records are held electronically and some held in paper format.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 3 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|
|---------------------------|---------------|---|

All carers are made aware of their responsibility in relation to health and safety matters during the course of their preparation and approval. Foster carer homes are inspected as part of the approval process and again annually as part of the reviewing process. Carers receive information in writing in the Foster Care Agreement. Carers who were seen as part of this inspection, confirmed their understanding of their responsibilities in this area.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 3 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|
|---------------------------|---------------|---|

All foster carers receive training in equality and diversity and family placement officers and social workers work with individual carers and children to ensure that children are encouraged to pursue interests and develop their skills. The case tracking exercise provided evidence on files of the work carried out and children who returned questionnaires also spoke about carers supporting their activities and interests.

| | | |
|--|----------------------|----------|
| Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7) | | |
| Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer. | | |
| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 2 |
| <p>The fostering service managers and workers place great importance on the matching process and have recruited a diversity of carers across the county to meet the needs of the young people requiring placements. There is a duty worker who receives requests for placements and who is responsible for initially identifying availability. The county is large and the number of carers in any area does not always match the numbers of children requiring placements in that particular area. This can lead to difficulties in matching and placement of some children a considerable distance from their home or to the placement of some children out of the county with independent fostering agency carers.</p> <p>The previous inspection found that the authority was aware of the need to recruit more carers and the Group Manager has made a successful bid for an increase in the recruitment budget to enable this to happen. At the time of the inspection, the authority was in the middle of a recruitment campaign aimed at increasing the numbers of carers overall, but in particular of carers in those areas where there has been difficulty with placements. A dedicated recruitment and marketing post has been advertised and the manager was hopeful that an appointment could shortly be made.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|----------------------|----------|
| Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8) | | |
| The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation. | | |
| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 3 |
| <p>Carers are provided with safe caring guidelines and all carers receive training in abuse and child protection issues, both during preparation and in ongoing courses. All carers are made aware of the authority's policy on acceptable punishments/sanctions. Carers confirmed in interview and through questionnaires, that they have had appropriate training and are fully aware of the relevant policies and procedures. Carers also confirmed that they are routinely given necessary information on any child placed with them, although if placements are made in an emergency, this might be limited by the social workers' own knowledge of the family background. Looked after children documentation containing essential information was seen on files during the case tracking exercise. Written guidance is given to carers about the procedure to follow in the event of a child being missing from home.</p> | | |
| Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: | 100 | % |

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The size of the county and the shortage of placements in some areas, means that some children may be placed some distance from home. The local authority ensures that contact takes place (where this is part of the overall care plan) making resources available as necessary. It is anticipated that the newly recruited fostering support workers will assist in this work. The importance of family contact is stressed to carers and questionnaires received as part of this inspection demonstrated their understanding of this issue and willingness to facilitate contact.

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?**

3

There was evidence on children's and carers' files of consultation with young people at reviews and those questionnaires received indicated that children feel that their views are listened to. Questionnaires received from foster carers demonstrated that they had been made aware of the need to ensure that young people were consulted and some spoke about their role as advocates for children in their care. As part of the inspection, the inspector was able to attend a leaving care group where young people spoke about their experiences in foster care. A number of them confirmed that they had felt able to express opinions and knew how to use the complaints process.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There was evidence on files of Looked After Children documents with health plans. Carers interviewed clearly knew the importance of ensuring that all children were registered with a local GP and dentist and had routine treatment. The inspector attended a multi agency Looked After Children meeting. This group, organised by the local authority, meets regularly. Representation from health is The group also includes representatives from education, fostering and field social work. There is also an elected member, a foster carer representative and a care leaver on the group. This meeting routinely looks at the overall provision for children in the looked after system in the Scarborough/Whitby/Ryedale area. During the course of the inspection, evidence was seen of the effort made to develop links with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and carers spoke positively about psychologists' input in relation to behaviour management with children.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

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

Foster carers are clearly made aware of their role in supporting children in education, attending meetings at school and contributing to personal education plans. Fostering support workers and social workers also strive to make sure that children are able to attend school and the local authority makes transport available to ensure that there is continuity of school if placements have to be made far from a child's home. However, it was clear from talking to individual carers, fostering support workers and field social workers, that there are issues for a minority of children within the looked after system, with regard to school placements, particularly in secondary education. Carers and support workers alike, identified lengthy school exclusions as a major source of tension in households, contributing to placement disruptions. There is a limited role for the fostering service itself here and the inspection revealed the efforts workers and carers alike make to ensure that children as far as possible, are able to receive a full time education. The inspector was given to understand that education issues are to be raised within the Corporate Parenting Group.

See requirement no. 1.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

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

A Leaving Care team has been working as part of the local authority for up to two years and carers and social workers interviewed spoke highly about the commitment of this team. The case tracking exercise revealed evidence that young people aged 15+ years have Pathway Plans and there was evidence of close working between carers, fostering support workers, social workers and the leaving care team. There is an active and vocal Leaving care group. The fostering service has recruited a number of specialist carers to work predominantly with teenagers and older children and carers spoke about their role in helping young people to develop skills for independent living. Some care leavers spoke positively about relationships with carers who maintained contact with them for some time after placements had ended.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The local authority has sound recruitment and selection procedures for staff and the fostering service staff (managers and social workers) are knowledgeable, appropriately qualified and experienced workers. An examination of a random selection of staff files revealed that appropriate checks are undertaken prior to appointment. The authority is in the process of renewing CRB checks for all staff.

Total number of staff of the agency:

44

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The organisation has a clear structure of line management and accountability. The fostering teams run from distinct geographical areas of this large county. Each has a manager, who reports to the Group Manager. The recruitment and support of carers in this localised way can help to develop good support links for carer groups. The inspector was able to be present at a carer support group in Scarborough that was well attended by carers. Staff confirmed that their professional support is good and they have regular supervision. The teams have a two week timescale for an initial visit to follow up the first contact from a prospective carer and the manager and staff confirmed that this is met. IT systems are said to be somewhat variable across the county, although the authority is putting in extra resources to improve this. Staff in the Scarborough/Whitby/Ryedale area confirmed that administrative support is adequate and that training is available. There is ongoing training for carers.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

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

The fostering service has sufficient suitably qualified and experienced staff to undertake its work. There has been a recent separation between fostering services and adoption services with recruitment of an adoption service manager and additional adoption workers. After being successful in its bid for increased funding, the fostering service has also recently advertised the new post of recruitment and marketing worker within fostering and is recruiting to the post of fostering support worker – one post within each of the three teams. The current level of foster carers within the authority has not always been sufficient to meet the needs of local children, but there is much evidence of increased resources and activity within the fostering service, which it is hoped will increase the numbers of carers, particularly in the Scarborough/Whitby/Ryedale area.

The organisation seeks to recruit a range of carers to meet the needs of a range of children. Carers are thoroughly vetted and the assessment process covers all the issues set out in NMS 17.6 and 17.7. Foster carers interviewed and those completing questionnaires, indicated that they felt the approval process was very thorough.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

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

The organisation has a range of policies to deal with the appraisal, supervision and support of carers and staff. There is a health and safety policy covering all legal requirements. There is a whistle blowing policy that is made known to all staff and carers. Carers confirmed to the inspector their knowledge of this policy. Staff stated that they are well supported and carers felt that their link workers within the fostering service supported them very well. A minority of carers responding to the questionnaire, felt that social workers supporting children were not always as available, due, they thought, to pressure of caseloads. A majority of carers who responded to questionnaires and the majority of carers interviewed, felt that the out of hours support system was inadequate leading at times to pressure on placements.

See requirement no. 2

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| Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7) | | |
| There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments. | | |
| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 3 |
| <p>Staff interviewed as part of this inspection stated that training is available within the organisation although the distance of travel to venues can be a problem. They also said that the service makes information available to keep them up to date with current requirements and changes in legislation.</p> <p>The service offers regular training events throughout the year to all carers. These are arranged locally. Staff within the fostering team, believed that training for carers could be enhanced by longer induction training for all newly approved carers. Those carers who were interviewed and those who responded to questionnaires, indicated that initial training sessions were very thorough. They confirmed that various training events are made available which those who had attended, felt were helpful. Some stated that training organised during the day can be difficult to attend, although it was also said that attendance at evening training could be even more problematic..</p> | | |

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| Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) | | |
| All staff are properly accountable and supported. | | |
| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? | 2 |
| <p>The organisation has a policy on supervision and staff and managers confirmed that supervision is regular, planned and deals with relevant issues. Sessions are recorded. Staff felt that they are properly supported and that they have access to the authority's policies and procedures. The inspector was able to see the policies relating to children and family services that are being re-drafted and updated.</p> <p>Staff and managers stated that annual appraisals have not yet started, although the schedule of training for managers has begun.</p> <p>See recommendation no. 2</p> | | |

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| 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? | 3 |
| <p>Staff interviewed as part of this inspection confirmed that the service strategy for working with and supporting carers is clear. Carers stated that they feel supported by their link worker and in their absence, by other members of the team. There was evidence on carer files of annual reviews containing discussion of training and support issues. There was also evidence of annual carer reviews being considered at Foster Panel.</p> | | |

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

All foster carers have on file a foster carer agreement in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001. At present carers do not have a handbook, but the inspector was able to see the newly devised carer handbook that will be given to all carers in April 2004. This is comprehensive and clear. All carers have a qualified, social worker allocated to them, who acts as their link worker. Carers confirmed that they receive regular visits from their identified link worker and carer files contained written records of these visits. Carers also confirmed that they knew the procedure for complaints and that payments were received promptly. The authority has a Specialist Foster Care scheme, which attracts enhanced payments and at the time of the inspection the fostering service was re-assessing the level of its payments to all carers.

Not all the children placed within foster care have an allocated social worker. Carers stated that the team's duty worker makes the required visits. There was evidence in children's files of the recording made by duty workers at the time of such visits. One family in particular spoke highly about the input of the duty worker who had provided consistency by making more than one visit and undertaking additional tasks. Other carers who responded to questionnaires however, felt that the lack of an allocated for a child in their care led to difficulties in placements.

See recommendation no. 3

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?**

3

All carers must complete pre-approval training during the course of which they are able to meet established, experienced carers. Those carers who were interviewed and those who had responded to the questionnaires, said that they had found the approval process informative and helpful. All training is delivered within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Annual carer reviews incorporate consideration of training attended and future training needs. Issues of safe caring are covered in the preparation phase of training and are continually reviewed during individual support work with carers and in formal training sessions.

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?

3

The case tracking exercise provided evidence on carers' and children's files of essential information, care plans and records of visits undertaken. Carers stated that they were given information about the children in their care and young people from the leaving care group confirmed that they understood they were able to have access to their files. The fostering service ensures that carers understand the need to keep records about children in their care and to maintain these securely. Linkworkers ensure that they are encouraged and supported to do so. Visits to carers homes showed that they are keen to keep memorabilia for children.

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?

3

The fostering service maintains all the necessary administrative records. Some of these records are kept electronically and other records are held in paper form at locally based team offices. Files seen showed evidence of all checks and references undertaken and their outcome and confirmed that information is recorded in an appropriate manner. The local authority has a policy on file retention and files that are no longer current, are archived securely in accordance with this. The inspector found that not all of the children's files seen during the inspection contained up to date chronologies.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

292

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

204

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

200

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

45

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

24

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

69.75

Maximum £

532.11

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 three fostering teams work from five separate locations across the county. Office accommodation varies, although all premises have security systems in place and are covered by the county council's insurance policies. All files and documentation are securely kept and IT systems equipped with password protection. The Scarborough team has recently moved into a newer building and has sound IT systems in place. Other offices are less well provided for both in terms of space and IT systems. This has been identified as an area for further development and the authority has in place a strategy to update and standardise IT equipment across the county.

See recommendation no. 4

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service is part of the North Yorkshire County Council Social Services Department's Children and Families Business Unit. Managers have made recent successful bids to provide additional resources for the service. A review of foster care payments is under way and carers interviewed confirmed that payments are received promptly.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The financial systems of this service are those of the County Council. There are in existence clear financial policies and procedures in relation to financial matters.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service has a written policy on carer allowances that is widely known. Payments are made promptly at the agreed time and there was evidence on files of additional payments requested and agreed. As referred to earlier in this inspection report, the current scheme of allowances was being reviewed at the time of the inspection and it is anticipated that there will be an increase in allowances made to all carers.

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? | 3 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---|
|---------------------------|---------------|---|

At the time of the inspection there were two foster panels covering the work of the county. However, the inspector was made aware that a third panel is being developed and will start work on the 1st March 2004. The inspector was able to attend a foster panel and spoke to the Panel Chair, an experienced manager within the Social Services Department. Panels are properly constituted, all members are subject to proper checks and training is given to panel members. Each panel has an advisor from the fostering service. It was clear from the Panel meeting attended, that Panel members are able to contribute fully to the discussion and that decisions reflect the views of those attending. Panel papers seen at the time of the inspection contained full information and assessments and the Chair confirmed that reports presented are thorough and of a good standard. . The Agency decision maker supported the view that documentation supplied for the Panels is comprehensive.

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? |
|---------------------------|---------------|
|---------------------------|---------------|

| | |
|--|---|
| North Yorkshire County Council contracts with Barnardos and NCH Action for Children, for the provision of short-term breaks for children with disabilities. This contract had been renewed at the time of the inspection and these services are the subject of separate inspections. | 9 |
|--|---|

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? |
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| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? |
|---------------------------|---------------|
|---------------------------|---------------|

| Key Findings and Evidence | Standard met? |
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| The fostering service approves all family and friends carers and staff and managers stated that these carer households are increasing in number. All family and friends carers are subject to the same references and checks as task centred carers and are supported and reviewed accordingly. Throughout the process staff remain sensitive to any pre-existing relationships and take these into account when making recommendations to Panel. The inspector was able to read reports and observe discussions about such an approval at the Foster Panel attended as part of the inspection. | |
|---|--|

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Not Applicable

Lay Assessor

N/A

Signature

Date

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 2nd February 2004 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

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

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

YES

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.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ 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 _____ 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.