



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Perpetual Care t/a Perpetual Fostering

**31 Chorley New Road
Heaton
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 4QR**

Lead Inspector
Lynn Paterson

Key Announced Inspection
26th June 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Perpetual Care t/a Perpetual Fostering
Address	31 Chorley New Road Heaton Bolton Lancashire BL1 4QR
Telephone number	0845 1304748
Fax number	01204 394850
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Perpetual Fostering Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The service should employ a suitably qualified and experienced Manager who is registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
2. That the service operates only as a Fostering Agency for Children.

Date of last inspection New service

Brief Description of the Service:

Perpetual Fostering Agency is a newly established fostering agency, which is currently in its developmental stage. The service comprises a chief executive, customer relations and commercial director, fostering manager, HR/co-ordination manager, one social worker and two administrators who are part of the co-ordination team. Independent foster carer assessors are utilised as required.

The overall aim of Perpetual Fostering is to provide a high standard of quality care in a family setting and to provide a choice of foster carers for looked after children to ensure that all assessed needs can be met. Their stated principles and values include a continued commitment to ensuring that the most appropriate placements are offered to ensure they are successful. To monitor and develop the service on a regular basis to ensure optimum success for the placing authorities, foster carers and young people looked after. To train and develop foster carers whilst supporting them to ensure they provide the best possible care." Their mission statement is " delivering positive outcomes.

The service operates from a spacious property situated on a main road location close to the Bolton Town Centre which has full disability access

SUMMARY

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

This was an announced inspection, which took place over 4 days during 25^h June to 30th June 2006. The plan had already been agreed with Perpetual fostering agency and a timetable given to them. Five carers had been contacted by telephone for discussion about their perception of the agency and letters had been sent to three foster carers to gain insight into how they viewed the level of support provided to them from the agency.

Pre inspection questionnaires were also sent to Perpetual Fostering agency, which they completed and returned before the inspection commenced.

On the first morning the inspector met with the panel members for discussion and observed a fostering panel taking place. On the second day the inspector met with the people who run the service to talk about the management and practices of the agency and in the afternoon viewed files about the carers and children who were looked after.

Policies and procedures were also looked at during the inspection period and a tour of the premises was undertaken.

Foster carers and young people were spoken with together with supervising social workers.

Fieldwork also included discussions with health workers, social workers safeguarding officers, independent assessors and meetings with carers in respect of the training and assessment processes.

What the service does well:

The administration was very well organised and administrative staff spoken with were clear in their understanding of their role and the nature and purpose of the agency.

Staff interactions were most positive and staff stated that they all worked together as a team with nobody being precious about their roles.

The foster carers handbook had been produced in an innovative form using an A to Z system. The information in this document held up to date details about all aspects of fostering and gave guidance in relation to general child -care issues. This document was examined in detail and seen to be an excellent handbook and foster carers spoken with revealed that it was a most useful documents that gave clear jargon free information relating to child care and children and foster carers rights and responsibilities.

Recruitment procedures viewed were clear and the recruitment strategy has as a central element, the importance of recruiting foster carers who can meet the assessed needs of each child in terms of ethnicity, religious, sexual orientation, disability and cultural needs.

Record showed agency staff and foster carers, were checked by The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to the enhanced level and it was noted independent assessors were subject to the same rigorous checks.

Observations of the fostering panel revealed it was well managed and had a balance in terms of gender. Records indicated that all panel members had appropriate backgrounds and qualifications and undergo robust checks prior to their panel appointment.

Observation of the fostering panel in process revealed the panel under the direction of the chair were able to put the applicants at ease whilst utilising a thorough questioning process to gain valuable information to assist the in the final decision making.

Social workers observed in their practice and spoken with in interview exhibited strong professional ethics and identified that they at all times promoted diversity. One social worker spoken with said, "heritage is so important and an important part of foster care is to preserve and nurture the heritage of the young person looked after".

Whilst the agency is in its infancy the policies, procedures and protocols utilised were generally seen to be of good quality. A newly appointed fostering manager was spoken with and he exhibited a clear vision of how he would revise, review and update procedures as the agency develops in order to meet changing need. This included raising staffing levels to ensure that foster carers were provided with support and guidance from appropriately qualified staff.

Three foster cares files viewed showed that all information was in place to include references, checks and training details.

Three young peoples files viewed showed that a matching process had occurred prior to placement and all the young persons assessed needs had been addressed and systems put in place to meet need. This included

educational, health and mental health issues. One young person said "I like being with my foster carer, s/he is great and the agency social worker is great as well. They do their best to help me".

Foster carers spoken with were clear about their responsibilities and said they had received support from the agency.

Newly approved foster carers spoken with said the agency had carried out a thorough pre approval assessment and had provided intensive training, which they felt was both interesting and informative.

Placing social workers revealed that they had a good impression of the agency and of the ability of the approved foster carers. Comments included "The foster carer provides the young person with a positive role model and is sensitive to his complex needs", "the foster carer works alongside professionals to deliver a good but complex package", "the foster carer is working alongside professionals, attending meetings, obtaining the young persons wishes and feelings". "The foster carer is supportive of the care plan and has the support of his supervising social worker".

A meeting with the Agencies Customer Relations and Commercial Director revealed that he had implemented protocols for dealing with concerns/complaints and had been proactive in projecting the agency to enable them to recruit and approve quality foster carers.

The staff team spoken with said they welcomed the new fostering manager to his role and felt he was a person who was knowledgeable about all aspects of foster care and would help with the development of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

New service, therefore this section cannot be completed.

What they could do better:

Staffing levels appeared somewhat limited and records showed that social work staff had worked tirelessly to enable them to fulfil their obligation to the foster carers and young people looked after. This was discussed with the newly appointed manager and it was agreed that social work staff hours would be increased as appropriate to the development of the service.

It was noted also that administrative staff had been responsible for completing the matching process for foster carer and young peoples placements and for providing support to foster carers. Whilst this work had been carried out to a high standard the stated tasks should be undertaken by people who are qualified and experienced in this role. This was discussed with the manager and it was agreed that job specifications would be reviewed and clarified as a matter of urgency.

Whilst all the documentation held by the agency was seen to be of a good standard it was noted that there was an overlap of information held on varying files. This was discussed with the fostering manager and administration staff and it was agreed that all information about foster carers would be held on one central file.

Three Assessment form F documentations were examined as they were awaiting submission to the fostering panel. All three differed in their format and gave varying degrees of information about each applicant. As the agency currently use independent assessors for the pre approval process it was agreed that the agency manager would draw up guide lines for assessors to follow to ensure that information is provided in a consistent and appropriate manner.

Observations of the fostering panel process revealed that foster carer applications were being submitted to panel without the relevant CRB and health checks being carried out. This was discussed with the panel and with the agency manager and it was agreed that no applications would be submitted without checks being made to ensure all relevant checks had been undertaken prior to submission.

Panel observations also indicated that the circumstances of one applicant had changed between the initial screening visit and the application being brought before panel. This change of circumstance impacted unfavourably upon the applicant and it was necessary therefore to defer the application. It would be recommended that a final visit be made to all foster care applicants by an agency social worker prior to form F submission to panel. This process would act as a quality assurance process and also ensure that all information held within the form F documentation was an accurate reflection of the current situation in the foster carers household.

Agency staff advised that they were conscious that they were in the early stages of development of the agency and as a consequence continued to monitor and review their practices on an almost daily basis.

This inspection has revealed that the agency although in its infancy has worked well as a team and has many good practice procedures in place to ensure foster carers are trained and supported to provide quality outcomes for the children in their care.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service provides training and support to enable foster carers to promote the health and development of young people in their care.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence in records and discussion with young people and foster carers that the fostering service is promoting the health and development of children placed with foster carers. Records showed that children were registered with a GP, had access to such dental, medical and psychological advice, treatment and services as they require. There is evidence from the records that the health needs of children are taken into consideration when identifying a placement. Comments from placing social workers included “the matching process clearly identified that the young persons health needs could be met in this environment”.

There was sufficient information provided to foster carers around the health and developmental needs of children. Perpetual fostering service has a clear policy and guidance regarding medical consent; a copy of this is included in the Foster Carer’s Handbook.

The Foster Carer Agreement makes it clear to the carer that their role includes helping to promote the health of the children in their care.

First aid training is available to foster carers. This training is part of the essential training for all carers to complete following their approval.

The agency utilised the skills of a trainer to provide guidance to foster carers on the administration of medication and information about general medication management was found in the Foster Carers' Handbook.

The young persons guide to the service provides an overview in respect of health and well being and of the responsibilities of the foster carer to ensure that young people are kept safe, happy and healthy".

Support services are accessible to foster carers to help maintain placements. There is a therapeutic team, which works with children with behavioural difficulties in order to provide stability to their placements and prevent placement breakdown. The focus of this work is direct work with children using ideas based on therapeutic approaches.

The agency provides "Therapeutic Foster Carers" who are trained to look after children and young people who may experience challenging behaviour patterns. Comments received from placing social workers about therapeutic foster care provision included "The foster carer is able to use her/his skills and experience to assist with the young persons needs", "the foster carer provides the young person with a positive role model and is sensitive towards his complex needs. S/he is a great ambassador for the young person and works alongside professionals to deliver a complex package of support". "The foster carer liaises and works with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to ensure the young person receives the help and support s/he needs".

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3.6.8.9.15.30

Quality in this outcome area is generally good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The people who manage the service are fit for purpose and provide suitable foster carers who are matched to meet the individual needs of the children placed in their care. Foster panels are organised and managed efficiently. However, foster carer approval applications were submitted without the full information being held on file. This disadvantaged the panel members and the applicants as the decision making process was unable commence.

EVIDENCE:

A sample of the staff personnel files contained records to indicate that they are suitable for the position for which they are employed. There was evidence that the appropriate checks had been made prior to employment. The fostering service has a clear written recruitment and selection procedure for appointing staff that follows good practice in safeguarding children. A sample of the fostering service staff files seen contained evidence that the recruitment procedures had been followed. Social work staff employed by the agency had an appropriate qualification to work within the fostering service. The independent social workers involved in the assessment and approval of foster carers were qualified and had experience of working within children's services to included the fostering arena.

During the course of the inspection five foster carers were spoken with and their files examined. The files inspected contained evidence that the foster carers' homes had been inspected within the last 12 months to ensure that they met the needs of foster children. There was evidence to show that where the foster carers provide transport for the child, the service ensured this is safe and appropriate to the needs of the child. The files inspected contained safe caring policies for specific children being looked after.

The preparation training for foster carers, covers health and safety issues. All newly approved carers are expected to attend the core-training sessions and foster carers spoken with said the training was extensive and covered all issues relating to safe care.

Staff advised that a health and safety check was completed during the assessment process and policies in place state that this health and safety check would be renewed every twelve months or in any change of circumstances. This process could not be verified as the agency was still in its infancy and had not yet been functioning for a twelve -month period.

The agency policy states that each looked after child, would have their own bedroom and a risk assessment would be completed prior to placement. Foster carers spoken with confirmed that this policy was practiced and that risk assessments had been completed in the home.

Records showed that child protection and behavioural management was provided for all foster carers and a behavioural management policy agreement was agreed and signed by the agency and foster carer.

Perpetual fostering service makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. This is clearly written in the foster care agreement and foster carers are asked to read this carefully and sign to show their agreement and understanding prior to a placement being made.

Children's files viewed showed that matching information was available. Discussions with foster carers agency staff and placing social workers identified that the matching process was through and the needs of the child were paramount. Comments received included "The foster carer is able to use her/his knowledge and previous work experience in relation to the young persons needs", "the foster carers background and life experience have made this placement most successful".

A discussion with fostering service staff indicated that information to determine a match between a child and placement is fully recorded.

The looked after children documentation was available on the children's files seen and in general contained all the relevant documentation.

Records show a variety of training is available to support carers in their protection of children.

Perpetual Fostering agency has a written procedure and guidance for dealing with allegations of abuse made against foster carers. This is in accordance with the appropriate provisions of Regulation 12 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The service had a policy in respect of allegations against foster carers.

However at the time of the inspection no allegations had been made.

Observations of a fostering panel meeting provided evidence that the fostering service had deferred the approval process of a foster carer where there was clear, documented concerns about her/his ability to provide suitable care.

The service has a clear procedure when a child is missing from the home. The fostering service has an anti-bullying policy, which is outlined the Foster Carers' Handbook. This policy recognises the vulnerability of looked after children to bullying and outlines advice for foster carers about how to recognise, record, report and address instances of bullying. All foster carers spoken with had knowledge and understanding of then policies and procedures as detailed above.

During the inspection a fostering panel was observed. The panel was well organised and conducted itself in an appropriate and professional manner. There was evidence of all panel members' views being taken into account. The minutes from the last panel held were seen and taken as read. The panel minutes indicated that there is clear decision making which is fully recorded. The minutes also indicated that the panel is performing a quality assurance function in terms of decision-making around the approval and continued approval of foster carers and recommendations around future social work practice.

However panel observations also indicated that the circumstances of one applicant had changed between the initial screening visit and the application being brought before panel. This change of circumstance impacted unfavourably upon the applicant and it was necessary therefore to defer the application. It would be recommended that a final visit be made to all foster care applicants by an agency social worker prior to form F submission to panel. This process would act as a quality assurance process and also ensure that all information held within the form F documentation was an accurate reflection of the current situation in the foster carers household. Another foster carers application to panel was unable to be fully processed due to the lack of a completed CRB check on file. This again impacted unfavourably upon the applicant who could not be approved as a foster carer at that time. It is essential that all foster carer applications that are due to be submitted to panel

are thoroughly checked prior to submission to ensure that they are fully ready for the decision making process.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7.13.31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The fostering service values diversity and provides foster carers with support and advice to ensure that the education of all young people is maximised.

EVIDENCE:

Perpetual fostering agency has an equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice policy. The foster carer preparatory training and assessment take account of the prospective foster carers abilities to support and promote a child's religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic background. Follow on training provided to carers also looks at how foster carers are to meet these needs.

The fostering service has identified in its mission statement "The overall aim of Perpetual Fostering is to provide a high standard of quality care in a family setting and to provide a choice of foster carers for looked after children to ensure that all assessed needs can be met." Their recruitment plan indicates that an objective is to continue to recruit foster carers from ethnic minorities in order to achieve this objective. Records made available by the recruitment worker indicated that a number of strategies are in place to enable this. The service offers a package of financial support to foster carers to meet ethnic, racial, cultural and religious needs. It is recommended that the agency should continue to actively recruit carers from a wide variety of backgrounds and religions to enable young people to have more choice of placement and to ensure appropriate matches as the service expands.

A clinical psychologist and play therapist are also available to the fostering service on a part – time basis to work with children on cultural identity issues. Training around meeting a child’s emotional needs is provided to prospective foster carers. More in-depth training is provided following approval.

Discussions with foster carers, young people and staff showed that the fostering service gives a high priority to helping foster carers meet children’s educational needs. There was evidence from a young persons review minutes that foster carers were encouraging and supporting children’s education and working closely with their schools and educational professionals.

The foster carers spoken with had a clear understanding of the importance of education and learning. The foster carers had a clear expectation of school attendance to include school uniform provision, homework and support. However at the time of the inspection only one young person was in an agency foster care placement. This placement was seen to be successful with the foster carer being knowledgeable about educational needs of young people and working closely with the agency social worker, the young persons social worker and educationalists to ensure assessed needs were met.

The foster placement agreement and the foster carers “payment guide” identified where responsibility lies for school costs, including school trips, uniform and equipment. All foster carers spoken with advised that they had been provided with financial information both verbally and by way of the foster carers handbook, which they felt was useful and informative. However none of the carers spoken with had yet tested out the financial systems relating to school costs, school trips, uniforms or equipment due to only one young person being currently placed within the agency.

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The fostering service offers short-term breaks for children, however this facility has not yet occurred. A discussion with the team manager and fostering social worker indicated that this service would be provided to reflect the differing needs of children receiving this service. The emphasis would be very much on birth parents remaining central to the promotion of their child’s welfare and development.

Staff said that all short - term break carers would be subject to the same assessment as full time carers, provided with the same introductory training and offered the same follow-on training.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10.11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Record show the agency facilitates contact and ensures the views of foster carers and young people looked after are promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Records viewed showed young people were having contact with significant others, in accordance with wishes and needs. Records indicated that children's views with regards to contact had been ascertained and information was recorded as to how contact would best take place.

Records and discussions with a sample of foster carers, provided evidence that a variety of support was provided to foster carers in dealing with difficult contact situations that may arise. Carers were aware of the need to promote contact and the possible impact of this on children's lives.

Records show that financial support was provided to carers in order to ensure contact takes place.

Staff of the agency stated that they make every effort to ensure that all young people looked after are able to maintain contact with everyone who plays a significant part in their lives by way of direct or indirect contact. It is recommended however that the agency continue to seek opportunities to consult with young people in placement as the agency develops.

Staff revealed that they ensure any child in their care is listened to and their views taken into consideration both at the start of the placement and when any changes are need to be made. Records viewed showed that one young person had strongly disagreed with a proposal for change and as a consequence this change had not occurred.

Staff advised that they tried wherever possible to work with the young persons social worker to ensure that birth parents were up to date with all relevant information about the young persons place of residence without placing the young people or the foster carers at risk.

One young person spoken to said that s/he was asked for opinions about matters affecting day-to-day lives by his/her foster carers and social worker.

Discussions with staff and records viewed revealed that children who don't speak English as a first language would have access to an interpreting service to assist them in making their wishes and feelings known about their care. Staff said they would ensure that all other communication formats such as British Sign Language and non- verbal communication techniques such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems would be in place to aid communication and find out children and young peoples views.

It was identified that all children looked after have a copy of the Children's Guide, which contains information about the complaints system and other systems to enable them to communicate their feelings.

Perpetual fostering has links with an advocacy service for young people who are looked after.

Foster carers spoken with advised they had received training to enable them to develop their observation and listening skills in order to "pick up" on young peoples verbal and non verbal communications and to make sure all children looked after could make a positive contribution to their daily life.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

14.29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Information about foster carers allowances are provided in written form in foster carers information packs.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence on file to show that the fostering service was helping young people to develop the skills necessary for adult living. The foster carers spoken with understood the need to provide children with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. Foster carers advised that they were provided with information around the importance of preparing young people for leaving care, the Leaving Care Act and Pathway Plans.

Staff advised that these issues were detailed in the foster carers handbook were also discussed as part of the foster carers supervisory process.

The fostering service has a clear “payment guide” on foster carer’s allowances and expenses, which are reviewed on an annual basis. Staff advised that each foster carer’s received a weekly allowance, which included a reward and expenses for each child in placement. Records show that payments are detailed on the remittance advice for each individual carer.

Foster carers revealed that they were not supplied with full information about all payments and rewards until they were fully approved and whilst they said they were not “money motivated”, they felt that this information should have been provided upon application. In discussion with the fostering manager it was

noted that he had addressed this issue and full information about payments and rewards schemes is now provided prior to the foster carers approval.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17.21.24.32

Quality in this outcome area is generally good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The service is well managed and provides training and support for staff and foster carers. The foster carers handbook has been produced in an excellent format and is clear easy to read and contains full information about all aspects of foster care.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose for the fostering service is detailed and comprehensive and gives full information about the nature and purpose of the agency. The children's guide is well designed and informative and is provided in age appropriate format. The guide provides, information about the services available for children and contains information on how a child can access an independent advocate and about how to complain. The guide also contains information about how to contact the Commission for Social Care Inspection. (CSCI).

The foster carers handbook has been developed in an innovative format as an A to Z of foster care and related issues and as a consequence foster carers advised it is easy to access any information. The document is clear, detailed and jargon free and was seen to be a good practice guide to foster carers and young people looked after.

Since the agency was registered with The Commission for Social Care (CSCI) there has been a change of manager. The newly appointed manager has vast experience of working within children's services to include family placement. He is a qualified social worker who is registered with The General Social Care Council and is awaiting his approval as registered manger with CSCI. In discussion he identified that he had a clear vision of how the agency needed to move forward and continue to develop and expand.

It was noted that staff were managed and monitored by people who had appropriate skills and qualifications. Interviews with staff from the fostering service confirmed that there was a management structure with clear lines of accountability. Staff advised that due to the fact that the agency had been without a team manager it was difficult for them to arrange team meetings. However it was stated that team meetings have now been arranged and will be an ongoing process within the agency. The staff interviewed reported that they had now arranged to receive supervision on a monthly basis and that minutes of supervision will be made available. Records indicated advanced planning in relation to supervision. The staffing levels of the agency have been low with one supervising social worker being employed for approximately 21 hours to cover the roles of acting team manager, initial screening visits and supervising social worker duties. Workload management issues were discussed with the manager and it was agreed that the staffing levels of the agency must be reviewed to ensure that all staff have a work/life balance and are not over stretched with their duties.

From examination of records and discussions with the administrative staff it was evident that the records and general administration tasks were very well managed. Staff identified that they had great understanding of the nature and purpose of the agency and were knowledgeable about policies and procedures in place to ensure the agency "ran smoothly". All administrative staff presented as well trained and professionally qualified in their roles and were most impressive as a team.

However it was noted also that administrative staff had been responsible for completing the matching process for foster carer and young peoples placements and for providing support to foster carers. Whilst this work had been carried out to a high standard the stated tasks should be undertaken by people who are qualified and experienced in this role. This was discussed with the manager and it was agreed that job specifications would be reviewed and clarified as a matter of urgency.

Perpetual fostering service had a recruitment strategy and a dedicated staff member whose task was to recruit foster carers. The agency utilised independent social work assessment officers who held responsibility to carry out form F assessments on prospective foster carers. An examination of a sample of assessment reports of foster carers recently approved and being presented to panel for approval and records of what the preparatory training and assessments included indicated that the assessment process covers the issues outlined in the National Minimum Standards and accompanying regulations. However Form F assessments were seen to vary in the detail and information provided. This was discussed with the manager who stated that he had also noted inconsistencies and had drawn up an assessment check- list, which he would add to the form F document to ensure that all assessments hold consistent information.

The fostering service has a clear strategy for supporting carers to include training, provision of information; support from an allocated fostering service social worker, supervisory visits and support services. The Foster Carer Handbook was also seen as a great source of support to the foster carers. However due to the agency being in its infancy, approved foster carers are located over a wide area with some foster carers having difficulty attending the agency training centre. It is recommended therefore that as the agency expands the agency consider offering more training in areas to which the foster carers have easier accessibility.

Discussions with foster carers and fostering service social workers revealed they were aware of the role of the supervising social worker. Foster carers said they had received good support from the supervising social worker and from the agency staff in general. Records showed that the agency employed one part time supervising social worker, who had worked tirelessly to ensure that foster carers received support visits and were contacted on a regular basis. In discussion with the manager it was agreed that staffing levels must be increased to meet the anticipated expansion of the agency.

The sample of files inspected contained foster care agreements that covered the information detailed in Regulation 5 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The "looked after children" document regarding the placement plan provided the basis for the placement agreement. An examination of a sample of foster carers' files evidenced that in general this document provided the information detailed in Schedule 6 of The Fostering Regulations 2002.

Three, form F documentation viewed were all different in their format and gave varying degrees of information. This was discussed with the manager who advised that he would draw up guidelines for assessors to follow to ensure that all information gathered and recorded was consistent.

It was noted that foster carers records were held in locked cabinets and five records viewed were well maintained, held full up to date information were clear and easy to read.

Children's files examined were also well maintained and held all relevant information.

The fostering manager advised that he had a clear job description, which included lines of communication and support. All staff had written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service and had full access to all the policies and procedures utilised by the agency. In discussion staff revealed that they were delighted that a new manager had been appointed to the agency and they had benefited from his arrival by way of the re introduction of structured supervision and team meetings/briefings.

Discussions with foster carers revealed carers understood the importance of keeping personal possessions, memento's and photographs of a child's life and ensuring that these move on with the child. Foster carers also appreciated the need to keep information about children held securely.

The administrative systems utilised by the agency including IT and communication systems were of a high standard. Foster carers advised they were always able to make contact with the agency and records showed that the agency had an on call rota to enable foster carers to be supported at any time of need. All administrative staff spoken with identified they were qualified and professional in their practice and had in depth knowledge and understanding of the nature and purpose of the agency.

A tour of the premises identified that they were fit for purpose and records showed that the fostering service was adequately insured and had public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

Staff spoken with revealed that all foster carers were provided with membership of The Fostering Network upon approval to ensure they can obtain independent support and advice if required.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NO.

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS17	21	The registered person must ensure that the agency has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.	30/09/06
2	FS17	21	The registered person must ensure that staff employed by the service carry out the role as described in their job description	30/08/06
3	FS30	28	The registered person must ensure that all information provided to panel is done so after the completion of all relevant social, health and police checks have been undertaken.	30/08/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS7	It is recommended that the agency continue to recruit carers from a wide variety of backgrounds and religions to enable young people to have more choice of placement as the agency expands.

2	FS11	It is recommended that the agency continue to seek opportunities to consult with young people in placement as the agency expands.
3	FS21	It is recommended that a pro-forma is introduced for foster carers pre approval process to enable the form f to hold consistent relevant information about the applicants and individual pre approval and post approval details are held together.
4	FS23	It is recommended that the agency provide training in identified local areas.

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