

inspection report

Fostering Services

Newcastle Fostering Service

Social Services

Civic Centre

Barras Bridge

Newcastle upon Tyne

Tyne & Wear

NE1 8PA

1st November 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

Newcastle Fostering Service

Address

Social Services, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, NE1 8PA

Local Authority Manager

Ruth Rogan

Tel No:

0191 211 6307

Address

Social Services, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear, NE1 8PA

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?

NO

Date of last inspection

9.12.03

Date of Inspection Visit		1st November 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Dennis Bradley	074426
Name of Inspector	2	Glynis Gaffney	074449
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Paul Chadwick	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

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.
Newcastle Fostering Service is based at the Shieldfield Centre in Newcastle upon Tyne. The Service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs, including long term foster care and short-term placements for teenagers. The Service also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a Shared Care Scheme. At the time of the inspection there had been a significant increase in the number of children in foster care and the Service was supporting approximately 445 foster placements. The Service had a staff team of 19 people including the manager and administrative support staff. The Service also employed an independent Foster Carer Training Coordinator.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This is the report of an announced inspection.

The purpose of the inspections is

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

It was evident that a lot of work had been carried out to develop the Fostering Service since the last inspection and that there was the capacity to make further improvements. The timescale for action in relation to the requirements detailed in this report are advisory timescales.

Statement of Purpose

This Standard was met

The Fostering Service had a written Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Service.

Fitness to Carry on or Manage a Fostering Service.

1 of these standards was met and 1 was nearly met.

The Manager of the Fostering Service had significant experience of working with children at a senior level and a range of relevant qualifications. Arrangements had been put in place to have police checks on staff renewed every three years. Arrangements needed to be in place to ensure telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references.

Management of the Fostering Service

Both of these standards were nearly met.

Arrangements were in place to monitor the operation of the Service. Staff interviewed were clear about their roles and lines of accountability. Work was still required to fully integrate the information systems used by the Placements Team and the Fostering Team. Consideration should be given to appointing a member of staff who will deputise for the Manager of the Fostering Team.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

7 of these 9 standards were almost met and 1 was fully met and 1 was not met.

The assessment process for new foster carers was comprehensive and included a Health and Safety audit. The specific needs of children and young people were given consideration when foster placements are arranged but the limited availability of placements meant that often there was no choice of placements. A number of carers had been exempted to care for more than 3 children. There was evidence that young people were consulted about their care plans and that arrangements were in place to enable young people to voice their opinions about their experience of being in care. However, some children's social workers did not visit the child regularly. Foster carers received training about child protection and

safe caring as part of the assessment process. Safe caring policies need to be developed for each household. The Council had taken action to improve the support available to young people and carers where young people in foster care refuse to attend, or are excluded from, school. However, precise information about the number of children informally excluded was not available and PEP's were not always being completed or updated. Where appropriate the Fostering Service supported children and young people in foster care to maintain and develop family contacts. Training was available for foster carers regarding their role and responsibilities in preparing young people for independent living. There was evidence of delays in foster carers receiving information about the health histories and needs of children placed with them.

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

5 of these 9 standards were nearly met and 3 were fully met 1 was not met.

The Council's recruitment and selection procedures still needed to be reviewed to ensure compliance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. A formal system of supervision and appraisal was in place for all social work staff. A system was in place to provide regular supervision to foster carers – including family and friends carers. However, there was evidence that a number of carers had not had a supervising social worker allocate to them for some months. In addition, there were delays in assessments of carers being allocated/completed as well as delays in 'family finder' roles being allocated/re-allocated to social workers. A review of the staffing levels in the Fostering Team needed to be carried out and a suitable workload management system should be put in place. Foster carers were provided with information regarding relevant policies, procedures and guidance and these had been reviewed. Draft procedures were in place covering the assessment, approval and review of foster carers and in general these were implemented effectively. However the procedures for the selection and assessment of prospective carers should be revised to include clear timescales. Prospective foster carers are required to attend a course of training prior to their approval – although with family and friend carers this can be provided on an individual basis. All foster carers have access to a programme of post approval training. The Foster Carer Agreement had been updated as required. Social work staff had access to post qualifying training and felt supported by their line manager. It was not possible to confirm that unannounced visits to all foster carers had been carried out at least annually.

Records

Both of these standards were nearly met.

There were written policies regarding case recording and what information should be held on a child's file. Some of the children's files did not include the appropriate LAC documentation and there were delays in foster carers receiving relevant documentation. Foster carers confirmed that they knew why a child was placed with them and the basis for the placement. The children's register needed to be developed to include all the required information. The organisation of some foster carer files needed to be improve – records of children placed with each carer need to be kept up to date.

Fitness of Premises for use as a Fostering Service

This standard was met.

Although very compact, the premises were adequate for the operation of the Service. Staff had access to quiet rooms in the Civic Centre for report writing.

Financial Requirements

2 of these standards were not applicable and the third was nearly met.

The Schemes of Allowances to fee paid and non-fee paid carers had been revised but remained in draft form. There had been an improvement in the promptness of payments to carers.

Fostering Panels

This standard was not met in full.

The Fostering Service Panel was observed to carry out its quality assurance role in relation to the assessment and review of foster carers. The Panel's procedure regarding decision-making should be reviewed. A system needed to be in place to ensure that Panel recommendations are followed up within the specified timescales.

Short Term Breaks

This standard was almost met.

The Short Break Scheme for Children with Disabilities has its own policies and procedures in respect of meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks. Arrangements needed to be put in place to reduce the delay in assessments being carried out prior to carers being provided with the aids and adaptations they require.

Family and Friends as Carers

This standard was nearly met.

The Service was sensitive to the pre-existing relationships when assessing and approving family and friends as carers. There continued to be delays in the assessment of some family and friend carers. Arrangements had been put in place to ensure that the support and training needs of these carers are assessed and met in the same way as for other foster carers.

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

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

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

[illegible]

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

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	
1	34 & 38	FS8	<p>The Provider and Manager must ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Placement Agreement is completed in respect of each young person and that a copy is kept on his or her file; • When placements are made outside of the age, numbers and categories for which the foster carer has been approved, the initial exemption is referred to the next panel meeting for approval. 	30.6.04
2	15	FS12	<p>Ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers are provided with appropriate information in respect of a child's health care needs at the outset of a placement; • The relevant documentation regarding the health care history and needs of each child is completed; • Appropriate action is taken to address the health care needs of each child. 	30.6.04

3	13	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, is sufficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have; • Ensure that a satisfactory procedure is in place for monitoring the school attendance of children placed with foster parents. 	30.9.04
4	5,7 & 20	FS15	All staff personnel records must contain the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations. Ensure Compliance with Standards 15.3 and 15.4.	30.7.04
5	38	FS32	Review the arrangements for assessing and approving family and friend carers to ensure that Regulation 38 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 is complied with.	30.8.04

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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	Dennis Bradley	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Fiona Millns	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

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 are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1.	34 & 38	FS8	<p>The Provider and Manager must ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Placement Agreement is completed in respect of each young person and that a copy is kept on his or her file; • When placements are made outside of the age, numbers and categories for which the foster carer has been approved, the initial exemption is referred to the next panel meeting for approval. 	
2.	15	FS12	<p>Ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers are provided with appropriate information in respect of a child's health care needs at the outset of a placement; • The relevant documentation regarding the health care history and needs of each child is completed; • Appropriate action is taken to address the health care needs of each child. 	

3.	16	FS13	<p>The Fostering Service Provider must take action to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The education provided for any child placed with foster parents who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, is sufficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have; • Personal Education Plans are in place for each child of school age and, that these are reviewed and updated on a regular basis • A satisfactory procedure is in place for monitoring the school attendance of children placed with foster parents. 	
4.	5, 7 & 20	FS15	<p>1. All staff personnel records must contain the information specified in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations.</p> <p>2. Ensure that telephone enquiries are made to follow up references.</p> <p>3. Ensure that, where a person has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, so far as reasonably practicable verification of the reason why the employment or position ended is obtained.</p> <p>4. Ensure that, in respect of people working in or for the Fostering Service, police checks are renewed every three years.</p>	
5.	38	FS32	<p>Review the arrangements for assessing and approving family and friend carers to ensure that Regulation 38 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 is complied with.</p> <p>The draft procedure 'Regulation 38 Placements' should be amended to clearly specify what must be done to ensure compliance with Regulation 38(2)(b) and Regulation 35(2).</p> <p>In addition, the draft procedure 'Referral for Short-term and Immediate Placements' should be amended to ensure compliance with Regulation 38(1) concerning emergency placements with approved foster carers.</p>	30.6.05

6	11, 15 & 17	FS7FS6	<p>Ensure that each child is provided with the individual support, aids and equipment they require as a result of their particular healthcare needs or disability and, that an assessment of their needs is carried out promptly by suitably trained staff.</p> <p>Ensure that, where appropriate, foster carers are provided with suitable training in moving and handling.</p>	
7	35	FS11	Ensure that children's social workers carry out statutory boarding out visits at the required frequency.	Upon receipt of this report.
8	19	FS17	<p>Regulation 19 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 states that:</p> <p>"The fostering service provider shall ensure that there is, having regard to-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it; and b. the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents, <p>a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service.</p> <p>Carry out a review of the staffing levels in the Fostering Service's Social Work Team to ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to meet at all times the needs of the Fostering Service in relation to recruiting, approving, and supporting and reviewing carers.</p>	30.6.05
9	28 & 29	FS18	Prepare and implement a policy and related procedures to ensure compliance with Regulations 28 and 29 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.	30.6.05
10	22	FS25	Develop the Children's register to include all the required information as specified in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.	30.6.05

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	FS4	The Provider and Manager should make arrangements for the integration of the information systems used by the Fostering Team and the Placements Team.
2	FS5	Consideration should be given to appointing a member of staff who will deputise for the Manager of the Fostering Team and, in their absence, assume managerial responsibility for the Service.
3	FS6	Amend the Foster Care Handbook to include reference to the Service's Health and Safety Policy and written guidelines on the health and safety responsibilities of carers.
4	FS7	Action should be taken to amend the Foster Care Handbook to include a specific policy on valuing diversity that covers the areas specified under Standard 7.
5	FS8	Review the arrangements for allocating the 'family finder' tasks within the Fostering Team to achieve a more even allocation. Consideration should also be given to identifying a specific social worker to be responsible for finding families for children assessed as requiring long term foster care.
6	FS8	Take action to ensure that, where exemptions are applied to the approval categories of foster carers, the Service's protocol regarding exemptions is complied with.

7	FS9	<p>Ensure that a written safe caring policy is put in place for each foster care household and that this is agreed with the foster carer's social worker.</p> <p>In addition to reviewing this policy on an annual basis, as part of the foster carer's annual review, it is recommended that the policy be shared with, and agreed by, the social worker of each child who is placed – particularly where placements are made in an emergency and there is little information available for the foster carer regarding the child.</p>
8	FS10	<p>Ensure that Foster Carer Agreements include a clear description of the contact arrangements for children and their families and that contact which may be beneficial to a child, is actively promoted.</p>
9	FS11	<p>In order to gain the views of children regarding their foster placements, consideration should be given to providing them with a questionnaire, in a suitable format, to complete as part of the foster carer annual review process. This should be issued to all the children who have been placed with a foster carer during the year prior to their annual review.</p> <p>The Provider should ensure that children's social workers carry out regular 'boarding out' visits in line with the Council's policy.</p>
10	FS12	<p>Action should be taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the guidance on health care in the Foster Carer Handbook to cover the areas specified in Standard 12.6; • Ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for foster carers to receive relevant information regarding the child/young person's health care needs at the onset of the placement or, as soon as is possible, after the placement commences; • Develop the guidance for carers regarding health care to cover all of those areas referred to under Standard 12.6.
11	FS15	<p>The Provider and Manager should review the Service's recruitment and selection policies and procedures to ensure that they comply with the National Minimum Standards and Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.</p>
12	FS16	<p>Ensure that the protocol regarding decision making in respect of arranging placements is incorporated into the Service's procedures.</p> <p>Develop the Service's policy and procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of carers to include suitable timescales.</p>
13	FS18	<p>In line with the Service's Statement of Purpose regarding the support of foster carers provide duty cover over each day. It is also recommended that the arrangements for the support of foster carers at weekends and in the evening, be reviewed.</p>

14	FS21	The Service's draft policy for supporting foster carers should be developed to specify how often supervising social workers should visit foster carers.
15	FS22	Put in place arrangements to ensure prompt payments to foster carers. Ensure that an unannounced visit to each foster carer is carried out at least annually. It is also recommended that a protocol should be developed in relation to unannounced visits and what they should include.
16	FS24	Ensure that an up to date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care. Ensure that foster carers are provided with the relevant documentation in relation to each child or young person placed with them.
17	FS25	Improve the organisation of foster carer files – including the provision of separate sections for allegations and complaints. Ensure that the record of children placed with each foster carer is kept up to date.
18	FS30	Introduce a suitable system that will ensure that panel recommendations are followed up within the specified timescales. BAAF guidance on the operation of Fostering Panel states that where the Panel is evenly balanced, with half the members agreeing to recommend approval and half not, the Chair should not have the casting vote. In view of this, it is recommended that the Panel's policy regarding decision making be revised.
19	FS17	Where a prospective foster carer has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults (including in a voluntary capacity) it is recommended that, so far as reasonably practicable, verification is obtained as to why the employment or position ended.

* 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

11

Survey of placing authorities

YES

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey

YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

YES

- Directors of Social services

NO

- Child protection officer

YES

- Specialist advisor (s)

NO

- Local Foster Care Association

NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements

YES

- Interview with children

YES

- Interview with foster carers

YES

- Interview with agency staff

YES

- Contact with parents

NO

- Contact with supervising social workers

YES

- Examination of files

YES

Individual interview with manager

YES

Information from provider

YES

Individual interviews with key staff

YES

Group discussion with staff

NO

Interview with panel chair

YES

Observation of foster carer training

NO

Observation of foster panel

YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents

YES

Inspection of records

YES

Interview with individual child

YES

Date of Inspection

1/11/04

Time of Inspection

10.00

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

75

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

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

A Statement of Purpose was in place. This was informative, easy to understand and well written. The elected members of the Council had approved the Statement. A Children's Guide had also been prepared and issued to children and young people in foster care. The Guide was available in various formats including audiotape and large print.

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?

3

There was evidence that work was ongoing to develop the Service to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards.

The Service's Manager had a range of relevant professional qualifications as well as significant experience of working with children. He was undertaking training leading to the award of the Post Graduate Diploma in Management Studies. During the inspection the Manager, demonstrated an insightful knowledge of the operation of the Service and an open awareness of its strengths and areas for development.

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?

2

There was evidence that the Council and the Service Manager were suitable to run a fostering service. There was no recorded evidence, in the selection of staff personnel files examined, that telephone enquiries were made to follow up written references in respect of all staff, prior to their appointment. Arrangements were in place to have police checks renewed every three years for staff working in the fostering service.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that arrangements were in place to monitor the Service and the quality of its performance and that these arrangements were being developed. For example work was being done to identify local performance indicators in relation to foster carer assessments. Work was still required to fully integrate the information systems used by the Fostering Team and the Placements Team. Because this had not been completed the Service's policy regarding granting exemptions to carers' conditions of approval had not been followed.

Procedures were in place to monitor financial arrangements, there had been a recent internal audit, and information was available about levels of payments to foster carers. A new, simplified, scheme of payments had been produced. However, this was still in draft form. It was confirmed that foster carers would be consulted prior to the scheme being finalised.

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

3

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.

0

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.

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

Number of complaints made to CSCI 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?****2**

The Manager had a job description setting out his duties and responsibilities. An independent consultant had been employed to revise the Foster Care Procedures, to ensure they complied with current legislation and guidance and reflected how the Service had been re-organised. Although there were clear arrangements in place for the management of the Service in the Manager's absence, consideration should be given to appointing a member of staff to deputise for the Manager – particularly in light of the size of the Fostering Team.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Foster carers' homes are checked as part of their initial assessment and subsequent annual reviews. A health and safety checklist is completed that includes a section on the cars owned/used by the carer.

The foster carers' homes that were visited during the inspection were adequately furnished and decorated and were clean and tidy. However, because of the significant delay in an assessment being carried out by an occupational therapist, the Inspectors were concerned that suitable aids/adaptations had not been provided in one household, where the carer looked after a disabled child. In addition, the carer had not been provided with suitable training in moving and handling. This matter was the subject of separate correspondence with the Provider.

There was evidence of a significant delay in appropriate action being taken to re-house one foster carer, which meant that the young person who was fostered, as well as their baby, had to share a room with the carer's daughter for over a year.

The Foster Care Handbook should be developed to include reference to the Service's Health and Safety Policy and written guidelines on the health and safety responsibilities of carers.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Foster Care Handbook contained a policy on valuing diversity.

The assessment of prospective foster carers included an assessment of their capacity to parent a child whose cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic needs may be different to their own. The Fostering Team included two social workers responsible for recruiting and supporting black and ethnic minority foster carers and 10 carers had been recruited and were undergoing assessment. It is intended that some of these carers will provide support and assistance to other carers where appropriate. The preparatory training for new foster carers had been extensively revised and included a greater emphasis the principles of valuing diversity and anti-oppressive practice.

One carer who responded to a questionnaire indicated that they had not received support and information to help them understand and provide for the dietary, religious and cultural needs of one young person placed with them.

Foster carers and social workers confirmed that, where possible, matching considerations include deliberations concerning the way in which the specific needs of the children and young people could be met. This was also observed during the inspection.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

Although the recruitment of new carers had been given a high priority in the Service's Action Plan there continued to be a shortage of foster carers. This, and the increase in referrals for foster placements during the previous 12 months, meant that in most cases, particularly in respect of short term or emergency places, there was either very limited, or no choice of placement available to enable appropriate matching for children needing placement. Instead, the majority of children tended to be placed where there was a vacancy.

There was evidence of the regular use of exemptions being applied to the approval categories of carers in order to place children, often in emergencies. In some cases this had lead to some carers having significantly more than the usual fostering limit of 3 children placed with them. This matter was addressed in separate correspondence. There were also examples where children had waited for significant periods of time in the care of exempted families, for more appropriate placements to be identified. In one case an exemption had been applied for three months to enable the placement of a child in an emergency. However, the child continued to be placed with the carer 8 months later. One social worker said they were concerned regarding the vulnerability of one child in such a placement. The Service's procedure regarding exemptions was not always being followed.

The shortage of long-term placements, particularly for adolescents, meant that children often remained in 'short term' placements for lengthy periods of time. This was not a satisfactory outcome for the children and it also contributed to the difficulty in placing children who had been assessed as requiring short-term placements. Delays in long-term referral meetings and the allocation of 'family finders' contributed to this drift. As did the uneven allocation of family finder responsibilities within the fostering team and the lower priority given to this work by staff who were finding it difficult to meet other targets/responsibilities, because of the size of their case load.

There was evidence that foster carers did not always get sufficient information about the young person before a placement commenced. 6 of the 32 foster carers who responded to questionnaire indicated that they were not adequately informed about the backgrounds of children, including the reasons why they were in care.

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?****2**

Prospective foster carers received training about child protection issues and safe caring as part of the assessment process. Post approval training included refresher training in Safe Caring and a course on recognising and dealing with bullying. The Service's draft Safe Care Policy states that each household should develop its own written policy and that this should be reviewed annually or when circumstances change. However, some foster carers did not have written policies at the time of the inspection.

Management systems were in place to collate information relating to child abuse or neglect. Of the children's social workers who responded to a questionnaire, 107 indicated that they considered the child they had placed was safe in their foster placement and 2 indicated that they did not. One of these social workers explained that the placement was not safe because of the behaviour of the child and the other indicated that the young person needed a residential placement.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

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?****2**

Foster carers received written guidance and training regarding supporting foster children to maintain and, where appropriate developing, their family contacts. There was evidence that, particularly in respect of emergency placements, contact arrangements were not always clarified and agreed at the outset of a placement. The Service's draft Policy on Contact states that contact with family must form part of the placement agreement. However, although the new placement agreement format facilitated the recording of the arrangements for contact with families, these were not always being completed. Where such arrangements had been agreed and recorded, the foster carers interviewed were aware of this information and were complying with it.

In the sample of case records examined, the care plan for one young person referred to their wish to have contact with members of their extended family and stated that that this should be taken seriously. However, the records indicated that there was a significant delay in this contact being arranged.

In their response to a questionnaire, 59 placing social workers indicated that they considered foster carers worked 'very well' with the families of children placed with them and 28 indicated 'fairly well'. However, 4 indicated there was a 'poor record' of the carers working with the families of the children placed with them.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

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

The preparatory and post approval training for carers included sessions that focussed on listening to children. Of the 25 children who responded to a questionnaire 18 indicated that their foster carers 'often' asked for their opinions and ideas and 5 indicated that they were 'sometimes' asked. 2 indicated that they were 'never' asked. 19 of the children indicated that the people who run the fostering service asked their opinion about the foster carers and 13 indicated that they were asked how could the service be made better.

Some of the young people attended their statutory reviews and young people are encouraged to provide a written contribution for the review. The Service's Manager meets with the Reviewing Officer on a quarterly basis to discuss any issues raised by children in their reviews. The records of some reviews carried out in July and August 2004 did not contain a record of the discussion/decisions reached. This could lead to delays in progressing care plan objectives. Feedback about the Service was also obtained from a looked after children focus group. However, at the time of the inspection it was not clear how this feedback was used to inform the running of the Service.

Although some children were visited on a regular basis by their social worker – others were visited less regularly. Social workers are expected to complete Carer Interview forms on a monthly basis. However, the records for one young person indicated that none had been completed during the previous 11 months. There was also some evidence that, where children were placed with respite carers, the children were not visited by their social worker when in placement. 9 children indicated that their social worker 'often' saw them on their own to ask their opinions, 12 indicated 'sometimes' and 4 indicated 'never'.

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?****2**

There was evidence that:

- The health care needs of children and young people were given consideration when placements were arranged and at formal reviews of the placements;
- The preparatory training for foster carers included guidance regarding the health issues that arise for 'looked after' children;
- Post approval training for carers included courses on Sexuality and Sexual Health and First Aid – 14 carers had undertaken training in first aid during the previous 12 months;
- Some foster carers received very little information about the child being placed with them at the outset of the placement
- There continued to be significant delays in some carers being provided with the required Looked After Children documentation, including health records for each child and consent for the child to receive medical treatment. In some instances the documentation had only been partially completed, or contained only very basic information. For example, in respect of one group of siblings who had been in foster care for over a year,

there was no information regarding the immunisations they had received.

The guidance for carers regarding health care was being developed to cover all the areas specified in Standard 12.6.

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

The Council had an action plan to raise the educational achievement of looked after children. The plan included providing written guidance to children highlighting the importance of education, as well as guidance on exam revision for those taking GCSE's. Targeted support had also been provided to some underachieving year 9 and 11 pupils. 83 computers had been distributed to carers with Key Stage 4 children to assist with schoolwork, although training in the use of the computers still needed to be provided to carers. Statistics indicated an improvement in the educational attainment of looked after children including the number achieving 5 GCSE's.

Written guidance and training on educational issues was available for foster carers. However, only 8 carers attended the 'Looked after Children and Education' training provided in 2004. A survey conducted by the Fostering Under Newcastle (FUN) Committee indicated that a significant number of carers were not aware of the procedure for excluding children. Further training was being arranged. Draft educational competencies had been prepared that will be used in the assessment of new carers and in supervision sessions with approved carers.

Improvements in the data-bases held by the Education and Social Services Departments meant more accurate information was now available regarding the educational attainment and exclusion of looked after children. This should facilitate the targeting of support to children who need it. However, accurate information regarding the number of children informally excluded from school was still not available. Members of the FUN Committee advised that there was still a significant number of informal exclusions taking place, particularly in respect of children who attend special schools, but carers often don't inform the EAHST Co-ordinator if the exclusion is only for one or two days. There was also evidence that children not attending school received variable and sometimes limited educational support. In addition, there was evidence that Personal Education Plans (PEP's) were not always in place for young people and, where they were, they were not always reviewed and updated. One social worker said that the lack of an up to date PEP and plan to help a young person move on to another school, had been a major factor in them not continuing their education after sitting their GCSE's.

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**

The Service's Statement of Purpose states that it will work with the Leaving Care Team to support young people making the transition from foster care to independent living. Written guidance was being developed, in consultation with the Leaving Care Team, setting out what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living.

Post approval training for carers included training on 'Preparing for Adult Life'. The Leaving Care Team has also provided a course of training to foster carers. There was evidence from discussion with foster carers that they were aware of the need to provide the children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. A Pathway Plan was not in place for one young person in the sample of records examined.

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?

2

A sample of staff personnel files was examined and it was noted that: there was no evidence that telephone enquiries were made to follow up references or, where staff had previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, verification of why the employment or position had ended. The records in place for a self employed person and an agency worker also did not contain the required information. There was no protocol regarding what information must be obtained in respect of agency and self employed staff. There was evidence that Criminal Records Bureau checks had been carried out for the newly appointed social work staff and the administrative staff. However, copies of the CRB certificates for staff employed since the last inspection were not available for inspection. It was the Service's policy to renew police checks on staff and foster carers every three years. However, there was evidence that, in respect of foster carers, this had not been complied with.

Total number of staff of the agency:

19

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

3

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?

2

A clear management structure was in place within the Fostering Service Team. Procedures were in place regarding the assessment, approval and review of carers. A competency based assessment format was used to assess prospective foster carers. The procedures for assessing and approving carers did not include timescales for, for example, the allocation and completion of screening visits or the completion of assessments. There was evidence of delays in assessments being allocated once prospective carers had completed their preparatory training. The assessment of mainstream carers took on average 25 weeks and for kinship carers it was 14 weeks. However, the actual time each took varied. The assessment and approval of one kinship carer took 15 months from when the application was made.

Staff interviewed said that there was an appropriate level of level of administrative and clerical support. However, social work staff were having to share computers.

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?****1**

The Service had difficulties in recruiting and retaining a range of carers to meet the needs of the children and young people. Interviews with carers, and respondents to a questionnaire, highlighted the importance of support to foster carers. However, there was evidence that the Service did not have sufficient social work staff to avoid delays in the assessment of prospective carers, or to provide the level of support to foster carers specified in its Statement of Purpose. This states that all foster carers will have their personal link worker. However, there was evidence that, in September 2004, 35 carers had no link worker allocated to them. The assessment of 3 prospective foster carers, who had completed their preparatory training in July 2004, did not commence until November 2004. In addition, 'family finders' had not been identified for had 13 children who were on the Service's long-term referral list.

75% of the foster carers who responded to a questionnaire indicated that they did not think there was enough staff in the Fostering Service. 16% felt they did not receive enough support from the Service.

Some staff interviewed felt that they sometimes could not provide the support needed to retain carers and keep placements stable. This was also reflected in the minutes of team meetings. It was not clear how workloads for staff were determined and a clear workload management system should be introduced. The workloads of the supervising social workers were based on the number of carers they supported, rather than the tasks they carried out (such as screening visits, mini assessments and re-assessments of foster carers, assisting with training, as well acting as 'family finders') or the number of placement supported. In addition to the social work staff, the line manager of the clerical and administrative staff said that this team was working at full capacity.

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 Social Service Department's Emergency Duty Team (EDT) provided out of hours support to foster carers. Fostering Service social workers also provided afternoon duty cover during the week. This is not in line with the Service's Statement of Purpose which states that there will be a 'duty worker' available during the day. A number of carers spoken to felt that having a duty worker for only half the day was not adequate, particularly if their own support worker was, for example, on leave, or if they did not have one allocated. Some carers said that because social workers from the EDT team did not know them, or the children placed with them they could only provide limited support. Carers also received support from the Fostering Under Newcastle (F.U.N.) carers support group.

Disciplinary and grievance procedures were in place for staff and carers can use the Corporate Complaints Policy to lodge any formal complaints they may have about the Service. A draft Whistle Blowing Policy had been prepared but a representations policy for foster carers and prospective foster carers, needed to be prepared to ensure compliance with Regulations 28 and 29.

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**

There was evidence that:

- Social work staff had access to Post Qualifying training in Social Work and Child Care. However, one member of staff said that they had not completed the course because, even with a reduced workload, they couldn't do the training and effectively manage their workload;
- Staff appraisals had been used to identify the individual training and development needs of staff involved in fostering work;
- Supervision sessions and annual reviews were used to identify the training and development needs of carers;
- The training programme provided to carers is reviewed and updated annually and reflects the policies of the Service;
- Although there is a corporate induction scheme for all new staff, a formal induction programme for new staff involved in fostering work still needed to be put in place.

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A formal, structured supervision system was in place. Supervision sessions took place regularly for social work staff; • All staff had job descriptions and their duties, responsibilities and workloads were discussed during supervision; • Team meetings were held regularly and additional meetings were arranged when needed. The assessment team had regular allocation meetings; • A formal staff appraisal system has been introduced. 		

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The Service's draft policy for supporting foster carers had been reviewed. The policy states that a supervising social worker should visit the foster carer every two weeks during their first six months after approval. It should be developed to specify how often visits should take place after this. The role of the supervising social worker appeared to be clear to both the social work staff and the carers.</p> <p>Arrangements were in place for the development and training of foster carers. Annual reviews of carers' approvals were being carried out. Draft review formats had been prepared which should provide more focus and improve monitoring and data collection.</p> <p>There was evidence that there continued to be some difficulties regarding the availability of respite care for foster carers and that these placements were sometimes being arranged between carers, rather than by the supervising social worker. In addition, young people did not always have introductory visits.</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
<p>The Foster Carer Agreement and Foster Care Handbook had been revised but were in draft form at the time of the inspection. As indicated above some foster carers had not received regular visits from a supervising social worker. It was not possible to confirm that unannounced visits by support workers were taking place at least annually. The new annual review format should enable more effective monitoring of this. Foster carers spoken to said that there continued to be delays in the receipt of some payments – for example for mileage claims and payments for providing respite care.</p> <p>Procedures for investigating allegations were in place and a draft policy had been prepared that explained how investigations will be carried out and the support that carers will receive. Arrangements had been made for an independent agency to provide support to carers who are subject to investigation. The Council has a Complaints Officer for children. Corporate complaints procedures for children and other service users were also in place.</p>		

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 foster carers receive training as part of their assessment and their participation is evaluated and used to inform their overall assessment. The preparatory training, which involves 16 sessions, had been revised in line with the National Minimum Standards and to cover shared care and caring for children with disabilities. There is also a much greater emphasis on the principles of valuing diversity and anti-oppressive practice.

A range of post approval training opportunities was available for foster carers. This included the opportunity to undertake NVQ Level 3 training in Caring for Children and Young People. However, the uptake of post approval training was very variable. In order to improve this the Training Coordinator provided training in carers' homes for small groups, or for individual carers, at times convenient to them. This is to be commended. In addition, training was being targeted at groups of carers with specific needs such as caring for children who have challenging behaviours or an eating disorder. Arrangements had also been made for the Training Coordinator to follow up on training needs identified at foster carers' annual reviews.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was evidence that:

- Some of the young people's files examined did not contain all the appropriate Looked After Children (LAC) documentation. Some of the documentation had not been signed and dated by the relevant parties. Some of the documentation had been completed just prior to this inspection;
- Foster carers did not always receive all the relevant LAC documentation in respect of the young people placed with them. Although there was a policy on the records foster carers should maintain, a clear policy relating to the information to be retained in foster carers' homes should be prepared;
- Foster carers interviewed knew why the young people were in their care and were aware of the need to encourage, as appropriate, young people to reflect on and understand their past. Post approval training included sessions on 'Life Story Work' and 'Listening to Children';
- Consideration should be given to providing carers with suitable lockable storage for the records concerning the children in their care.

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?	2
Children and Foster Carers' Registers were in place. However, the Children's register needed to be developed to include all the required information. The administrative records were generally comprehensive and well maintained but the organisation of some of the foster carer files could be improved to make them more accessible. The records of placements maintained on foster carers' files were not always up to date. The draft policy on records to be kept by foster carers should be amended to include reference to the retention of records when a placement ends. Foster carer case records were stored in lockable filing cabinets but the room in which they were held was not lockable. A system was in place for keeping records about allegations and complaints.			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			445
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			25
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

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?	3
<p>The Fostering Service was equipped with IT and communications systems and it was confirmed that appropriate security measures were employed in respect of the information held on the computer system. The Manager advised that the IT facilities required upgrading. The office accommodation was very compact. Social workers and some of the administrative staff shared an open plan office. Some social workers said that it was difficult to write reports in the office because there was no quiet area. However, quiet rooms are available at the civic centre. The kitchen/meeting room facilities were shared with other teams situated on the same floor. Consequently, the availability of the meeting room was limited. Disabled access to the floor that accommodated the Fostering Service was not available.</p> <p>The Shared Care Team was accommodated in a separate building. This meant that the supervising social worker in this team had much less contact with her colleagues in the Fostering Team.</p>		

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

Not applicable.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

9

Not applicable.

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

A draft revised Scheme of Allowances had been prepared. It is intended that the new scheme will be simplified to reduce the potential for inconsistency. There was evidence of an improvement in the promptness of payments to carers – although there were still some delays in payment of mileage allowances and payments for providing respite care. The Finance Officer advised that this had been due to problems with the Care Payments I.T. programme and that action had been taken to resolve this.

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?

2

The draft policy concerning the operation of the Fostering Panel had been revised. However, it is recommended that the procedure regarding decision making when all panel members are not in agreement, be revised in line with the guidance issued by BAAF.

There was evidence that the Fostering Service's Panel engaged in a thorough consideration of the information presented to it and had a structured decision making process. The quality of the reports provided to the panel, particularly in respect of kinship carers, varied and some did not contain the information required. There had been an improvement in the panel members receiving the necessary information, such as the reports of carers' medical checks, prior to the Panel meeting. There was a need to improve the system for following up panel recommendations within the specified timescales. The Fostering Team Manager provides monthly reports to the panel concerning developments in the Service

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Carers in the Shared Care Scheme are provided with a Foster Care Handbook and can access the training provided to other foster carers – including training on shared care/working with parents. The Scheme has its own policies and procedures in respect of meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks. A social worker had been appointed to concentrate on the assessments and recruitment of carers. The target was to recruit 5 new carers and 7 applicants were at various stages in the assessment process. The Manager of the Scheme advised that there was a need to recruit carers from black and ethnic minority communities.

Aids and adaptations are only supplied to carers in the Scheme following an assessment by an occupational therapist. The Inspectors were concerned about the significant delays in some of these assessments being carried out. It was also a concern to note that carers who had to assist the children and young people in their care to mobilise, were not provided with training in moving and handling. These matters were the subject of separate correspondence with the Fostering Service.

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?	2
<p>There was evidence that the Authority was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as carers. These carers received the same level of support from supervising social workers as other foster carers.</p> <p>The content of the initial training for family and friends carers is agreed between the carers, the child's social worker and the training coordinator. Carers can also attend the preparatory and post approval training provided to other foster carers.</p> <p>The assessment process for family and friends carers is different and shorter than for other foster carers and a revised draft procedure was in place. However, there was evidence that there continued to be significant delays in some assessments being carried out after a young person was in placement. There was no documentary evidence, on the file of one carer, of an agreement being completed to comply with Regulation 38(2)(b) of the Fostering Services regulations 2002. It was also not clear as to whether the children's social workers understood their responsibilities in relation to the immediate placement of a child with a relative or friend, under Regulation 38. There was no evidence in one case record examined that the social worker had visited the child at least once a week as required under Regulation 35.</p> <p>Discussion with staff in the Fostering Team indicated that they were sensitive to the particular needs of kinship carers and the children placed with them.</p>		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

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 1st November 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report.

NO

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 19th November 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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 CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI 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 Ruth Rogan of Newcastle City Council (Newcastle Fostering Service) 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	_____

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.

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