



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**City of Sunderland Services for Looked After
Children - Fost**

**Penshaw House
Station Road
Penshaw
Houghton le Spring
DH4 7LB**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Key Announced Inspection
11th September 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

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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

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Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Council of City of Sunderland
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Steve Towers
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 21st November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering Service is part of the City of Sunderland Social Services for Looked After Children, which comprises the city of Sunderland, the large new town of Washington and Houghton-le-Spring and Hetton-le-Hole. It provides foster care for children and young people who cannot live with their parents. The fostering service is located in Penshaw House, Penshaw, Houghton-le-Spring.

The fostering service provides placements for children of different ages, abilities, backgrounds and assessed needs. At the time of the inspection the service was providing placements for around 300 fostered children in 230 foster homes. The service has a number of fostering options, these include mainstream foster carers, short break carers, relative and friend carers, permanent foster carers and a fee paid foster care worker scheme to provide family placements for young people who would otherwise be placed in a children's home.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff for the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. The inspectors also want to thank children's social workers and other professional people who filled in forms or who told inspectors what they think of the fostering service. Staff in the fostering team, carers and children spoken to were very helpful and people spent time filling in surveys and sending them to the inspectors before the inspection. Information and facts in this report come from surveys sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers and from written information the manager gave inspectors as well as from the things seen and the people spoken to when they visited. Inspectors visited four foster carers with children living with them. Questionnaires were returned from 67 fostered children, 75 foster carers and the social workers of eleven of the children fostered through the service.

A team of two inspectors spent four days with the fostering service and gathered information by:

- Talking individually with children and foster carers;
- Group discussion with fostering staff;
- Group discussion with children social workers and their managers;
- Visiting foster carers' homes;
- Reading children's, carers' and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Interviewing a manager responsible for the services children's strategy;
- Interviewing the manager;
- Studying the surveys and other information sent back to us;
- Reading records of the meetings of the fostering panel and attending a panel meeting.

People who told inspectors what they think about City of Sunderland Fostering generally said good things. Most people said that support to foster carers and fostered children is very good. Foster children said things like, "My carers are always there when I need them, they always try to keep me safe and I am always well fed" and "I am constantly happy because I am treated very well by my carers and I feel like a real part of the family."

Although some foster carers said there are some things that need to be better most said very good things about the service. One said, "We have always been happy with the service and have no complaints. The workers do a very good job under a lot of pressure and never seem to be praised for it." Foster carers generally said that the service is good at supporting them and their fostered children and said good things about how it helps children with their health and education.

Children's social workers also said good things about the fostering service although some suggested how it could be made better. One social worker said, "The service provides a good standard of basic care with some increased understanding of birth family issues and needs." Another said about a foster home, "It provides a warm, stable, caring home for damaged children. A consistency of care most children in children's services need but don't receive."

27% of foster carers said that the service has got better over the last 12 months and 68% said the service had not changed. Only 5% said the service has got worse. Social workers agreed with this, 5 said it had got better, 3 said the service had stayed the same and none thought it had got worse.

When asked how the service could be improved the main thing people said was that communication between the social worker, fostering worker and the foster carer needs to get better but when social workers, foster carers and fostering staff were interviewed they said they think that communication is good.

It is good that people said that generally the service works well and though there were some problems mentioned that are written in this report, most people are very pleased with how things are going for them. One foster carer said "I would not dream of fostering for anyone else, even though I have been offered more money to move, because I get fantastic support from Sunderland and also am made to feel valued" and another said "I believe they do a good job, provide a good service for difficult situations."

Most importantly children said that they are well looked after and happy in their foster homes. They said things like, "We like our (foster) parents more than anyone else," "I am always helped to think about my future when I'm interested but right now I just enjoy being 13" and "I have never felt happier in my life."

What the service does well:

City of Sunderland fostering service is good at a lot of the things it does.

- The fostering service is good at working with people who want to foster to make sure that they are the right sort of people. New foster carers get checked out very carefully and get good training before they can foster. New foster carers cannot foster until a group of experts called a panel make a recommendation that they are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly. This panel is very careful, gets a lot of information and thinks very hard about people before it recommends that they can foster. This is good for children as it helps keep them safe and have a good life. Once people become foster carers the service keeps on doing a good job of making sure that carers keep on fostering children and caring for them well.

- The fostering service is good at making sure that children get to live in the place that is right for them. It makes sure that being fostered is the right thing for children before it lets them go to foster carers, then works very hard to make sure they go to carers who are right for them. Once children are in placements social workers, foster carers and fostering staff are good at working together and talking to each other to make sure that children keep being well cared for. The service also works hard to make sure that all children get good help in the way that is right for them depending on what needs they might have because of their background, race, religion or disability. Children said good things about foster care, like these comments, "My carers are always there when I need them, they always try to keep me safe and I am always well fed" and "I am constantly happy because I am treated very well by my carers and I feel like a real part of the family."

- The service is good at helping children stay healthy and well. Children get good advice about their health and get help to get doctors and dentists when they need them. It also makes sure that children get their health checked often. Children said things like "I get help about eating healthy foods and my hygiene care and to stay away from drugs if at all possible" and "I am helped to go to the doctors and dentists and to get my glasses." The service is also good at helping children get any special help or therapy they need and helping them deal, in their heads, with any problems they have had.

- The fostering service is good at helping children get a good education. It is good at helping children stay in school and helping plan the support they need at school. The service also has a lot of people who work to help children do well and get good grades at school. Children said things like, "My carer has sought advice from the leaving care team on lots of things about university entry in two years time" "My teacher and my carers have worked together for me. My carers and I talk about my education and what I would like out of life,"

- The fostering service is good at finding out what children think about things and using this to make their care better or to help the service do things better. Children said they are listened to by their foster carers and, most of the time, by their social worker; "My social worker and leaving care worker always ask me questions on what I like and dislike and write this down" and "My social worker does stuff for me." Children also have been able to help make better review forms for the authority to use for children's reviews.

- The service is also good at supporting foster carers to look after children. Foster carers get visited regularly and get good advice about how to help the children they are caring for. Foster carers also get good training.

- The service is also good at making sure that the staff members that come to work for it are well checked out to make sure they are the right sort of people to work with children and have got the right qualifications and experience to do their jobs properly.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the authority has:

- Made sure that children get visits from their social worker more often and are asked what they think about their carers and the care they are given.
- The service has also got better at making sure it gets good information about children to help match children with carers. Some carers said this is still a problem but most said they now get information that helps them give good care.
- The service has got better at making sure that foster carers get reviewed every year and at making sure that all people including foster children are asked what they think about the carers for their review.

What they could do better:

Although the fostering service does a lot of things well there are some things it needs to do better.

- When children are placed with foster carers the service needs to make sure that the carers, child and social worker meet before the child moves to the carers (or very soon after if it was an emergency) to make the plan about how the child needs to be looked after and who should do what to help the child. This plan should be put on the child's file and everybody should get a copy. Some foster carers said that they do not get to know enough about the children before they go to live with them and the service needs to keep on working to make sure carers get to know as much about the children they are going to look after as possible.
- Most fostered children said they know how to complain if they are not being looked after properly but some did not know. The service needs to make sure that all children know how to complain and who to speak to if they have a problem.

- Most children were happy with their social worker but some said they have had too many social workers and they do not feel able to talk to them because of this. One child said, “I don’t feel listened to because I have not had a social worker for months” and another said, “Which social worker? I’ve had so many and they still keep coming.” The authority should keep on trying to stop there being so many changes for some children.
- The service needs to make sure that arrangements for checking that foster carers or their partners are the right sort of people to look after children are all done properly. This needs to be done to make sure that children are as safe as possible in foster care.
- The service needs to do fill out children’s Looked After Children (LAC) paperwork better. This is really important because these records say how children should be cared for and how well they are doing. It also keeps a record of the child’s history that is important for them to look at in the future.
- The fostering service gives carers good training but there are some things it needs to get better at. All carers need to have a first aid certificate and they should keep updating health and safety training to make sure they are up to date. It would also be good for the service to keep on working to get more of its carers trained by doing NVQ level 3 in childcare.

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 from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Children's physical and emotional health needs are well met by the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

People spoken to during the inspection reported good links between children's social services and health services and situations were noted where these links had benefited fostered children. Evidence provided by the fostering service showed that the percentage of fostered children with up-to-date annual Looked After Children (LAC) medicals is very high with over 90% of children receiving such a medical in the last year.

Case tracking during the inspection showed that therapeutic and health services are sought for children as they need them and that children are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians. Copies of letters to carers' doctors informing them that the carers will be fostering children and might bring them for a health check up are in place foster carers' files. This is good practice and will help ensure that fostered children can be seen by a doctor.

Information about children's health needs, in some LAC documentation examined, was not as detailed as it should have been, for example the medical and hospital information sections of in two of the four Essential information Records (EIR) examined were not fully completed so that foster carers and people working with the child did not have full information about the child's health. Additionally the Placement Plan (PP) Part 1 was not in the file of one young person so that arrangements for consent to medical treatment were not clearly identified.

Although some of the foster carers case tracked had undertaken a first aid qualification, training records showed that a regular programme of training to ensure that all foster carers have up-to-date first aid qualifications is not in place. Useful information is, however, included in the foster carers' handbook and all parties reported that there is good individual training and equipment provided for carers who work with children who have a health problem or disability.

All parties spoken to said that the service provides a high level therapeutic support for children including CAMHS support and other psychology and psychiatric services for children with placed with foster care workers (those carers dealing with the young people who are require most intensive support.) People said the easy access to advice and support provided in this area is very helpful in supporting and maintaining placements, although one carer and young person said that the therapy provided to the young person is not helpful and they are unable to access a different form of support. It is also positive that the authority's Placement and Resources Panel, that makes decisions about whether children should be fostered, which carers would be best for them and any alternative form of care to be considered, includes someone from psychology and child psychiatry services. This allows children's support needs to be considered at the beginning of the placement and included in the foster placement agreement.

When asked whether they get support and advice about being healthy, 72% of children said they always get help, 19% said they usually receive it and 9% said sometimes. No child said they are never helped. Comments from children about this included, "I get help about eating healthy foods and my hygiene care and to stay away from drugs if at all possible. My carers do everything they can for me," "I get healthy food and go swimming and for walks" and "I am helped to go to the doctors and dentists and to get my glasses."

18% of foster carers said the service is excellent at supporting them with children's health, 62% said the service is good, 18% adequate and 2% poor. Comments made by foster carers about this issue included, "Fostering service 'inspects' at regular intervals, asks questions and observes re physical activities and healthy diets," "They provide information on healthy eating and other health issues and training is available in these areas," "Yearly health assessments, involvement with child and family team if needed. Training and information is provided on healthy eating/lifestyle if needed" and "Regular medicals, check ups etc. Doctor available form children's service should you wish to discuss concerns." The few concerns expressed in this area were specific situations where carers thought they had not been given enough information about the child.

Social workers interviewed reflected the positive views of the carers as did the few social workers who completed questionnaires. Two social workers thought the service is excellent at helping children to be healthy, three thought the service good and two considered it adequate; none thought the service poor in this area. Comments from children's social workers included "Social, health and emotional outcomes for children are given a priority" and "The fostering officer liaises with carers and the social worker to ensure that (young person's) needs are being well met."

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 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Children's safety is promoted by effective matching arrangements and the provision of safe homes with foster carers who get good training in staying safe. The fostering panel provides a rigorous consideration of foster carers' assessments and reviews presented to it and the service is thorough in its vetting of staff and foster carers to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Some administrative issues should be improved.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers visited during the inspection welcomed inspectors and observation of their homes showed that they are comfortable and appropriate for children. Foster carers receive health and safety training as part of their assessment process and health and safety information is set out in the foster carers' handbook. There was, however, no evidence to show that foster carers are provided with periodic updates to their health and safety training. Some of the foster carers' files examined contained health and safety checklists completed at their initial approval and a subsequent reviews.

One file, however, had a health and safety checklist and dog safety questionnaire that were dated four months after the carer's approval date and after a child had been placed with them. The manager explained that these had had to be redone, as the original checklists could not be found.

This inspection has shown that that the authority's arrangements to match children with foster carers taking into account their specific needs are generally good. Social workers said that placements are always available and that the fostering team knows the carers' strengths well and is careful at matching. They said that emergency placements are always available but that the proportion of emergency placements is low. Figures provided by the fostering service showed that only 20% of placements overall are made on an emergency basis with this proportion falling to 11% for children aged 10 and over. Comments included "Placement choice is usually adequate but sometimes inadequate due to lack of availability" and "Level of choice appears dependent upon the needs of the child, children with complex needs appear to have an excellent level of choice, those with non-complex needs appears to be dependent on the availability of placements." Other social workers said the fostering service is "very selective with its recruitment of carers" and "very selective in terms of carer/child pairing. Can respond very fast." One social worker said that the way the service could get better would be to "identify more carers of the quality currently available."

Social workers told inspectors that the Placement and Resources Panel (PARP) that makes placement decisions is very robust in requiring alternative work to have been thought about before a foster placement is considered. They also said that the matches between possible carers and young people are considered at PARP before placements are needed so that matches have been planned in case the placement becomes necessary. A number of people also told inspectors that prospective carers who are nearly through the assessment process are brought together with placing social workers and information about children needing permanence is shared to help the matching process. Placement agreement planning meetings are arranged between the foster carer, social worker and fostering and adoption officer at the beginning of placements. All parties considered these to be very useful. A record is kept which shares all the information about the child discussed.

The local authority is developing three working groups to track children's care plans and the progress they are making, follow sibling groups and placement moves and identify and tackle any areas where drift is identified. This development is commendable and will help ensure good outcomes for children by following their care as it progresses. The local authority uses a very low proportion of independent fostering providers. A number of people spoken to during the inspection said that this is because the service can meet the needs for placements generally well in house, can keep Sunderland children close to the city and can manage quality more effectively.

Foster carers said that information they receive about the child prior to a placement being made varies. 49% of carers considered the information to be good or excellent but 51% said it was adequate or poor (22%). Foster carers comments included, "We get a good background on all children and also any health issues or other problems," "We had telephone and direct contact with previous carers, two meetings with social worker and link worker to discuss the child, welfare and information" and "Most of the information was up to date and relevant."

Other carers comments were not as positive, "We get a write up about the child we take but we get it with the child not before the placement," "The information arrived on the doorstep with our child which did not give us any time to prepare ourselves" and "Some social workers do not provide appropriate paperwork." Where carers considered the information received to be unsatisfactory, however, they generally qualified this statement by saying that information is not always known. "They can only tell you what they know" and "We found out lots of things about the child over time that the social workers did not know when they placed him with us, how could they have known these things?" One said, "Fostering and adoption are really good. Social workers are overworked and therefore have not got time to get to know the children they support."

Children's social workers' views about the information they receive about how a child is progressing in placement varied. Comments in the eight questionnaires received were equally divided between excellent, good, adequate and inadequate. Those social workers interviewed during the inspection were all very positive about this issue. One social worker said in the questionnaire returned, "Information is often out of date which is disappointing and not all workers attend LAC review." Other comments made, however, were positive and included, "The relationship between fostering and adoption and children social workers is very good in terms of communication," "Information is obtained direct from fostering officers and via training courses and seminars" and "Foster carers always phone when exceptions happen or when they are anxious about a child. Very responsive to children's needs and provide written/oral reports when needed." One said that information sharing is improved by having a "designated manager and workers in a stable team."

Social workers were generally very positive about how the fostering service promotes placement stability. One said, "Things would benefit from greater support to carers and stamina from carers when things are getting 'rough'" and another said, "There is overall positive support to carers by some workers. One downside is carers often seem overstretched and this affects stability and the quality of care given to children and young people." Others however made comments like, "There is a very low turnover in terms of carers or staff that allows relationships to bloom" and "They try hard to prevent placement breakdown and offer respite to the child and carers."

Most foster carers were also positive about the support receive to maintain placements and promote planned moves. "23% of carers considered this to be excellent, 44% good and 21% adequate. Only 4 people who responded in a questionnaire thought the support to be poor and none made a comment to explain this view. Comments made were very positive and included, "Fostering are very good at supporting all our family and the children to make the move a happy one and planned very carefully," "Any help we need is only a phone call away. We have found social services very helpful" and "All aspects of care were taken into consideration both to help the child and to help ourselves." One carer said, "Placements have all been planned and children have had full knowledge of where they were going" and another said, "We are currently 'maintaining' a placement. The fostering service has supported with more regular home visits to me and arranged care plan meetings etc. She is a strong support as the child is changing from a social worker to a leaving care worker."

All children spoken to directly said they are happy and well cared for where they are living now and all children who completed questionnaires confirmed this view. Children wrote comments in their questionnaires including, "My carers always have my best interests in mind," "My carers are always there when I need them, they always try to keep me safe and I am always well fed," "I am constantly happy because I am treated very well by my carers and I feel like a real part of the family." Children wrote, when asked why they feel safe and well cared for, "Because they (my foster carers) are lovely," "We like our (foster) parents more than anyone else," "I have never felt happier in my life" and "We love (carers names), we are happy now we are staying and have got permanence."

Evidence in files confirmed the views expressed about matching. One file contained a detailed consideration of matching issues about an arrangement in which permanence was being considered with a comprehensive Form E and Form F1 and 2 in place. The information recorded showed a close examination of possible alternatives and other issues and the record of fostering panel's discussion and decisions was detailed and contained the reasons for the recommendation made. The recording was not clear in some places in the foster carers' file, however and, although three children had been placed with carers approved for two children, there was no evidence of an exemption being sought until the foster carers' terms of approval were changed. In one foster carer's file it was noted that the placement agreement for a child placed in April 2006 did not take place until over a month after the placement date. The file showed that the fostering service had contacted the social worker to stress the importance of this meeting and to point out that it should occur within 72 hours at the latest. Placement agreement checklist records are very helpful in recording when information is gained from the social worker and passed to the carers though one seen was not signed or dated so its accuracy or relevance could not be checked.

One child visited told the inspector that she did not know her foster carers had a cat until she moved there and had been worried about this as she has asthma. She said that this has not caused her problems and that she likes the cat. Nevertheless that information should have been available for consideration and discussion at the time the match was considered.

Information about how to keep children safe, including child protection, unauthorised absence and behaviour management arrangements, is provided for carers in the foster carer handbook and foster carers receive child protection training during their initial assessment training. Ongoing training in child protection is provided by the fostering service, as is safe caring training, bullying and behaviour management. Children consulted reported only appropriate sanctions taking place. Examples included grounding, loss of treats and helping tidy their room. One said "When I have to tidy my room (carer) helps me and its good because we talk and I like my room tidy." The service has a good system in place for supporting carers in dealing with difficult behaviour. Records showed that no restraint takes place and all parties spoken to confirm that policy prevents any physical intervention in situations other than immediate physical danger. The fostering service manager has an effective system in place for monitoring allegations and complaints and ensuring action is taken to follow these through.

All children consulted said that they know who to speak to if they have a personal problem, 74% always and 20% usually. Four children said they sometimes know who to speak to. These children cited individual reasons why they had said 'sometimes', including, "I don't like talking about my problems but I can if I really need to" and "When I sometimes have problems I know who to talk to." Other comments from children included, "My foster carer, teacher or social worker, there's always someone I can go to" and "I speak to my carer, social worker and friends and am encouraged to do so." One said, "My social worker is always there for me."

79% of children said they know how to complain with the remaining percentage saying they don't know how to complain or they don't know whether they know or not. All parties spoken to said that children receive a young person's guide containing this information but the service should do more work to ensure that all children know how to make a complaint.

None of the children visited during the inspection said they are being bullied and 97% of those who completed questionnaires said they are not being bullied. 3% of children said that they sometimes get bullied when out with friends or at school. This information was passed to the fostering manager to ensure that children are being supported properly. No child said they are bullied in their foster home.

Foster carers' files examined had safe caring policies in place though two were not dated or signed and there was no evidence that they had been agreed with the supervising social worker or placing social worker. Placing social workers, however, said that safe caring policies are used at planning meetings to consider the suitability of placements. Social workers spoken to said that children are safe and well cared for. Six of the eight respondents to the questionnaire stated that children are cared for excellently or well with two considering the care to be adequate. Social workers comments included, "The fostering officer visits the carers on a regular basis and contacts the social worker to arrange joint visits as and when necessary" and "The young people I have placed recently are all with very professional carers and in placements where the standard of care is excellent."

One foster carer's Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) application had not requested the correct checks so the resulting disclosure certificate did not include information from the Protection of Children Act (POCA) List or a check with the Department of Education List. It is essential that a renewed CRB disclosure is sought in relation to this carer and that the service ensures that full checks have been done on all foster carers.

Recruitment records for staff examined at the last inspection demonstrated that a thorough, robust and careful recruitment procedure is in place. No staff members have been appointed since the last inspection. Staff employed in social work positions are appropriately qualified and trained. Those spoken to said that good levels of training and support are provided. The manager is suitably qualified and demonstrated a good understanding and knowledge of the service and its needs.

Attendance at a meeting of the fostering panel showed that panel is effective and robust in its consideration of cases presented to it and panel minutes examined confirmed this. Minutes of panel discussions were detailed and were clear in setting out the panel's specific recommendation and terms and the reasons it arrived at its decisions including any concerns or particular strengths noted. The panel gives detailed consideration to the needs of young people and provide clear feedback about the quality and completeness of information provided to it. In one instance observed, panel was robust in requiring social workers to undertake further work on an assessment and to provided a more detailed report of the situation in order for it to be able to make a good decision.

In the case of the assessment of one foster carer case tracked during the inspection the panel record was not sufficiently clear in recording who took part in the decision made about a foster carer's assessment in a situation in which the carer said she knew two panel members. Minutes of panel should record any discussions held about conflict of interest and make clear when people step down from the discussion and any quoracy issues that this raises for that item of business.

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 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Children are well supported educationally. Foster carers get good support to help them care for children with different needs and from different ethnic backgrounds and the service is working to improve its provision in this area.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides foster carers with good information about promoting equality and diversity within the foster carer handbook and issues surrounding this are covered in foster carers' approval training. Carers visited confirmed they had done this training. Good arrangements are in place to provide ongoing training for foster carers. The city population is predominantly white British and the service does not recruit high proportions of foster carers from black or minority ethnic backgrounds or place many children from these communities. The service is involved with the Sahara project, which provides support for the recruitment and support of carers from different backgrounds. Commendably there was evidence in the file of a young person who had been an asylum seeker case that the Sahara project had provided direct support and advice for the young person and carers and worked with them in a specific situation.

A social worker summed up the situation of the authority in this area with the comment, "(Young person) is white British as are his carers and he attends mainstream school. He is being brought up to appreciate multi-culturalism and he has friends from diverse backgrounds."

Carers' views about how the service addresses equality and diversity issues were positive. 28% thought the service was excellent in this area, 61% good and 11% adequate. None thought the service poor in this area. Comments from carers include the following views. "We fostered a child of mixed race and if there was anything she was unsure about they would always find out for her," "They have anti-discriminatory policies in place and bullying policies. They are non-judgemental" and "I once had an emergency placement of a child who was a Muslim. I was given brochures and write-ups on the child's culture."

The great majority of social workers who completed questionnaires said the service is excellent or good at addressing issues of equality and diversity and disability and supporting carers in this area. One said, "Every care is taken to address these issues within the constraints of the service" though a number said that the service would benefit from more carers from different ethnic minority groups. Social workers said that the service is good at supporting children with physical disabilities and gave examples of children receiving specific assistance with cultural needs.

Foster carers and social workers said that the service provides equipment and aids and adaptations for carers working with children with special needs and the majority were happy with these arrangements. Some people consulted expressed the view that sometimes arrangements to provide items of equipment did not happen as quickly as they should but all said that work has taken place to improve this situation.

The foster carers' handbook provides carers with good information about promoting education for fostered children and working with the different services involved. Sunderland's figures show a low level of fixed term school exclusions for looked after children, the great majority of whom are fostered and many people during the inspection reported very good support for children's education. Over 90% of fostered children have up to date Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and the authority has reported good levels of GCSE achievement. 31.25% of young people taking these exams in 2005 achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C and 87.5% achieved one GCSE at this level or a GNVQ. Carers spoken to provided confirmation of the high levels of achievement and support.

Children's files inspected contained PEPs and Statements of Special Educational Need (SEN) where necessary and these had been updated regularly. Files contained good information about children's education and their achievements including school reports and evidence of educational input into young people's reviews. Young people's achievements are monitored, recorded and promoted. Records showed the efforts made by a carer and service staff to ensure a young person got a SEN and the support arising from this. Carers gave good examples of work done with children to promote their independence and to support with the move to a senior school and described how they liaise with school and attend meetings, parents evenings and events. Foster carers consulted said they receive 'MAX' and 'Activate8' cards that allow them free or discounted entry into museums and leisure facilities in the area. The majority of carers considered these to be a very positive resource. Placing social workers spoken to were generally very positive about the support for children's education and the education team.

The local authority has developed a service to work closely with young people with significant attendance problems to support them outside school and to support their return to education.

72% of young people who returned questionnaires said they always get the right sort of help with their education, 19% said they usually get this help, with the remaining 9% saying they sometimes get help. Children also were positive about the help they receive to think about their future. 70% said they always get good help, 13% said 'usually' and 17% 'sometimes.' Children said things like "I get help off my teachers but mostly my foster carers," "My carer has sought advice from the leaving care team on lots of things about university entry in two years time" and "I get help with my homework." Others said things like "My teacher and my carers have worked together for me. My carers and I talk about my education and what I would like out of life," "My carers help me because we want to see the world and we want to do well" and "I am always helped to think about my future when I'm interested but right now I just enjoy being 13."

Foster carers' views about educational support for children were generally positive. 20% said that support is excellent, 41% good, 26% adequate and 13% poor. One carer said "Child at 18th birthday in March is expected to leave the placement just before final 'A' level examinations as foster allowance stops. This is unacceptable and very disruptive for any child." Other carers, however said, "Extra tuition classes were set up at school which was a help," "Foster carers are encouraged to take part in all aspects of school life" and "They help me to get the children into the best schools for their needs." Social workers spoken to were positive about the provision of educational support to fostered children, as were all but one who returned a questionnaire.

With regard to the level of support for children to undertake activities in the community, 17% of carers thought this support excellent, 33% good, 39% adequate and 11% poor. All social workers, apart from one, considered the support to be good or excellent, the other considered it adequate. Foster carers' views about whether the fostering service helps them create an environment that helps a child to prosper were also generally positive with 17% thinking the help excellent, 56% good, 22% adequate and 5% poor. All social workers thought that carers get good or adequate help in this area. One said, "All carers for children I am responsible for are very proactive in supporting contact and activities."

Carers' comments about the help receive in these areas included the following: "If I cannot take any of the children to activities then the fostering service will step in and take them for me," "Monetary support ensures activities can be undertaken. The service provides information about activities and venues in the community. The 'Max' card system, which allows a wide range of venues to be visited free is Fab! and so is the 'Active8' card for leisure facilities." Other carers gave other examples of good support, "The service offers books, musical instruments and activities for the children," "Children are given opportunity to do many activities by the fostering services, eg. Music and sporting activities" and "We have always been asked if we are suitably equipped to look after the child."

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 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Children generally get good support to maintain contact with their family and friends. Children are listened to and can influence the care they receive and the running of the service.

EVIDENCE:

The importance of promoting appropriate contact between young people and their families is set out in the foster care agreement and stressed in the foster carers' handbook. Foster carers spoken to during the inspection told inspectors about the actions they take to support contact and the support they receive from the fostering team and children's social workers. The work being done to find out about the parents of one fostered child was positive to note. Foster placement agreements contain information about the arrangements and responsibilities for contact and social workers and fostering workers said that these arrangements are discussed at the placement agreement meetings.

Foster carers' files and discussion with the carers showed examples of work with contact in a difficult situation where the foster carers' address was restricted to protect the children in placement.

All parties reported good arrangements for contact where it is in children's interests and foster carers and social workers questionnaires considered that children have good networks with their families where these are possible. Two foster carers were, in the questionnaires they returned, critical about situations in which contact arrangements were not stuck to because of social workers' other commitments but these were isolated views.

Children spoken to during the inspection who were able to comment, were satisfied with the way that they have with their care. Those children who returned questionnaires were positive about how they are consulted. 79% said their carers always listen to them and take notice of their opinions, 20% said they are usually or sometimes listened to with several of these saying their opinions are taken notice of when they are sensible! Only one child said they were never listened to and made the comment "My carer does listen but does not always understand." Other comments from children included, "Always sit and talk, I can choose where to go on days out," "I get asked every night about any problems and asked my opinion," "Overall my foster carers, who I call mum and dad are always there for me" and "When we get upset we talk to (foster carers) and they listen to us and help us." One young person said, "Sometimes we disagree but then we sit down and have a discussion and work through my problems and I always seem to get a good result."

Children were also generally positive about how their social worker listens to them and takes notice of their opinions. 64% said their social worker always takes notice, 18% said usually and 13% sometimes. 5% of children said their social worker does not listen to them or take notice of their opinions. Comments made in support of this statement suggested that, in these cases, it is not that social workers don't listen to children but that social workers change frequently and some children do not have an allocated. Comments made by children included, "I'm listened to when I see my social worker but this is not often," "I don't feel listened to because I have not had a social worker for months" and "Which social worker? I've had so many and they still keep coming out." Other children were much more positive and said things like "My social worker has got me contact with my aunt and a couple of cousins," "My social worker and leaving care worker always ask me questions on what I like and dislike and write this down" and "My social worker does stuff for me."

Children consulted know who to speak to if they have a problem with 94% always and 20% usually knowing who to speak to and the remaining 6% saying they sometimes know who to speak to. Children said things like, "My foster carer, teacher or social worker, there's always someone I can go to," "My friends would come first, then my foster family then my social and leaving care workers" and "I speak to my carer, social worker and friends and am encouraged to do so." One said, "My social worker is always there for me."

79% of children who responded said they know how to make a complaint though 10% said that they do not know how to complain and 11% were not sure whether they know or not. All children the inspectors had contact with had received a children's guide, which contains this information but the service needs to do more to ensure that all children know how they can make a complaint.

Foster carers' views about how well children are involved in decisions about their everyday lives varied. 11% said they consider this to be excellent, 50% said good and 33% adequate. Only 6% said this was poor. Comments ranged from "They always come and talk to the children," "We were invited to a summer barbeques and there are free day trips out for children and families. (Young person) has his opinions asked all the time" and "All of the placements I have had the children have been involved in decisions about their lives" to "Decisions were made about a child living with us at the moment and to date these are not forthcoming. I would like to see a big change in this area."

Social workers responses to the same question were as follows. Two considered the service excellent in this area, two good and one adequate. One social worker said, "Children and young people are encouraged to attend reviews and planning meetings."

When asked how they rated the service in involving children in how the fostering service is run a lot of foster carers said that they did not know much about this area. 3% said that they thought the fostering service is excellent at this, 43% good, 42% adequate and 12% poor. Comments from foster carers reflect this spread of views. One said "Most young people don't know much about the service" but another said "One of my young people attends '4UM' (a children's consultation group), this is very good and they are discussing how to improve children's looked after reviews at the moment. '4UM' are very good at offering transport to these meetings."

Social workers' views on the same questions were as follows. Four considered the service good, one adequate and another inadequate. Comments included "There is some delay in feedback and implementation of change when children are consulted" and "Children and young people are encouraged to write down and email their views."

Case tracking during the inspection provided evidence of the work done to provide consultation events and activities for children and also of a regular consultation group. Foster carers and children spoken to said there are support groups and activities for fostered children and that birth children are not left out. One carer said her birth daughter had attended a group, transport had been provided and that a friend had been welcome to go with her.

The service has a young people's consultation group that is working on developing better ways of seeking children's opinions for their LAC reviews and foster carers' reviews. Young people have been involved in designing new questionnaires for children for LAC reviews and the service is seeking their views as it develops the use of the Viewpoint system for consulting with children about their care.

Given the work being done to consult with children it is recommended that carers be informed more effectively about this work so that they can keep children informed of what is going on and how they can become involved.

All parties spoken to described how children's views are sought for foster carers' reviews and evidence was available in files and records to show that the views of birth children had been taken into account at their parents initial approval as foster carers and at their subsequent reviews. Files also contained evidence that the views of fostered and birth children had been taken into account in a situation where approval was sought for a long-term match between a child and foster carers.

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):

29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The fostering service has an appropriate system for making foster carer payments that enables carers to meet children's needs well.

EVIDENCE:

Sunderland fostering service has a structured payments scheme in place that includes a fee paid fostering scheme in which carers are known as foster care workers, as well a mainstream foster carers who receive fostering allowances. Information about payment levels and the system of payments is contained in the foster carers' handbook.

Evidence was available during the inspection to show that the service takes a flexible view of foster carer payments that allows special individual circumstances to be taken into consideration and to allow additional payments here necessary.

Foster carers who completed questionnaires and evidence gathered during a foster carers' consultative group meeting showed that financial support is available for equipment needed by carers to meet children's needs. Fostering and adoption workers interviewed said that, at the time of the inspection the budget for equipment, clothing and foster carers' mileage does not lay with the fostering team. They said that there is a requirement that requests should be dealt with in seven days but are sometimes not. They said that this budget is being transferred to the fostering team to ensure that quick responses to needs can be made.

A foster carer informed the inspector of a situation in which they had raised an objection with the fostering service about the circumstances in which foster carers payments might be withheld. Positively, this discussion had resulted in a change of practice by the fostering service though it was not clear during the inspection whether this change would be made retrospectively to cover the individual situation of the carers involved.

No foster carers consulted raised any concern about the level of foster carer payments and the great majority were satisfied with the system for payments though two respite carers said that payments can be slow as the amount of work they do varies so much from month to month.

Foster carers comments about financial support are summarised by the following comments. "Grants available for bedding and small items of furniture to help accommodate our child better, advice is offered also" and "They have given financial support to purchase equipment needed and are always there for advice."

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, 22, 23, 24 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service.

Arrangements for the support, training and review of foster carers are good though recording could be improved. The quality of recording in children's files is not always good enough to properly support the care provided to them.

EVIDENCE:

Sunderland fostering service employs a team of suitably qualified social workers and information gained during the inspection showed that this team is sufficient in number for the needs of the service. A number of people told inspectors that independent social workers are used to carry out foster carers' assessments in situations where permanent staff are too busy. Staff members interviewed really appreciated this and other support provided, which they said is very good. A number of people said that the workload of children's social workers is very high and that this sometimes affects outcomes for children or the quality of communication. One foster carer said, "Sometimes the fostering and adoption officers and social workers don't seem to communicate well but social workers are very busy." Other evidence gained during the inspection showed that the communications between children's social workers and supervising social workers is generally very good. Professionals commented on the good information provided and the positive support provided. Social workers said that fostering and adoption officers help them by carrying out some of the work with children for them. One social worker said that the best thing about the service is the "Positive communications and support between carers, support worker and social worker." A group of fostering social workers spoken to said that the authority provides good internal staff training but that external, more advanced, training for experienced fostering and adoption social workers is more limited.

Foster carer assessments viewed were thorough and detailed and foster carers spoken to said they felt the assessment process was thorough and appropriate. One said, "Although our assessment kept getting delayed, our fault not theirs, we felt it was thorough and really enjoyed the process. We would have struggled when we first fostered without the training and support during our assessment." Assessments cover applicants' competences and childcare skills and experience as well as attitudes and relationships and good training is provided during the assessment process and good work had been done to consult with birth children during the process. Good exploration of family networks and support arrangements was also evident. In one initial assessment viewed there was no evidence to show that the referees had been visited but an assessment carried out for a permanent matching arrangements contained very detailed recording and analysis of visits to referees. This situation also demonstrated very careful matching and consideration of the suitability of carers for the child being placed. Although, generally, a good process of thorough checks on foster carers is in place, in one situation a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check had not requested the correct information to be disclosed and another check had not been updated when an assessment for permanence had been carried out. The check undertaken on these carers at their first approval was two and a half years old at the point where permanence was being assessed.

In another situation a family and friends carer was approved with on the basis of a CRB check from her job. Fostering panel noted this however and stated that a new disclosure was required as was one in respect of the applicant's partner. CRB checks must be carried out on all relevant people during the assessment process and whenever new assessments are carried out.

Arrangements are in place for the management and support of carers that include training, information, supervision and support, respite care and reviews. Carers receive a handbook, which contains useful information and guidance about their roles and problems they might face, including signposts to other sources of help. Carers consulted were generally very positive about how the service ensures they meet the needs of the children they foster. 19% considered the service to be excellent at this, 67% good and 9% adequate. Only 5% of carers though the service is poor at ensuring they can meet children's needs and questionnaires returned did not contain a consistent reason for this view. Positive views from carers included, "This area is focussed on every month by targeted questions about health, education and interests to ensure (young person's) needs are being met," "They have given financial support to purchase equipment needed and are always there for advice" and "I have regular supervision and they hold wonderful training every year."

Social workers said that the service is good at ensuring children's needs are met. One said, " Fostering officer supports the carers, fostering service provides training for the carers. Fostering officer liaises with the social worker and attends reviews and other planning meetings to help plan what is best for the child."

The service's procedure for foster carers' reviews is effective with all carers being reviewed six months after their approval and then reviews scheduled on a yearly basis. The first review is taken to fostering panel for consideration; subsequent reviews are taken back to panel if there are any changes or issues of note. Reviews documentation examined showed that the review process is thorough with views being sought from the foster carer, supervising social worker, placing social worker, birth children and fostered children. Health and Safety checklists and pet questionnaires are updated at each review and records are maintained of the frequency of visits to the foster home and unannounced visits made. Records viewed showed that foster carers receive good levels of visiting by their supervising social workers based on their needs.

One foster carer's file examined showed that reviews had not been undertaken on a yearly basis. The carer, approved in 1995 had only had reviews in 1998, 2001, 2004 and 2005. A number of people spoken to confirmed that there had been a problem with foster carers' reviews but that the process is now managed by the safeguarding unit and there is a new system in place using SWIFT (the authority's computer system) to schedule reviews and ensure that paperwork is sent out in time. People told inspectors that the service is now reducing the delays it had experienced.

It was noted that one foster carer's review report did not cover that amount of training carried out and required in sufficient detail. People interviewed told inspectors that new foster carer review forms are being developed that will include a record of achievements and be more robust in recording training requirements.

The service is developing a 'buddying' system for foster carers to support each other. This is a useful development that foster carers involved were appreciative of. Fostering panel takes place on a Friday and buddies are identified immediately so they can make contact and offer new foster carers support if they have any worries or concerns over the weekend after their approval.

Some areas of recording observed did not evidence sufficiently well the support given to foster carers. In one situation, in which a placement of a child was made under the arrangements for immediate placements with family or friends, an agreement at the time of the placement stated that support to the carer would be monthly. File recording showed only three support visits taking place between the child being placed in April and the inspection in September. In another file there were no case records in the file from November 2005 until June 2006. In these cases inspectors could not be certain whether visits had taken place and were not recorded or whether no visits had occurred.

Foster carers were generally very positive about the arrangements to help them care for the children placed with them. 17% considered this support excellent, 63% good, 14% adequate with only 6% considering the support poor. One of the foster carers who was unhappy with the arrangements for her support said, "I've had a bad year with social services so have decided to take no more kids apart from (young person) who is living with me till he is 18." Other comments, however, were much more positive and included, "The relationship with our link worker is strong and supportive," "I have always been supported in a good manner with any assistance I may need" and "The service gives good financial and emotional support, constructive advice when required."

Arrangements for the supervision of foster carers are effective and foster carers' files examined contained records showing that supervision often takes place on a monthly basis. Foster carers spoken to confirmed that supervision takes place and said that they receive excellent support including regular and unannounced visits. Records of foster carers' supervision seen were detailed and covered a wide range of topics including the progress and needs of the child and areas relating to the support and development of the foster carers. Foster carers made comments about supervision including, "Support is always available if you need it. There is always regular supervision every month" and "They give me fantastic support."

The manager has an effective system for monitoring any complaints or allegations made and the service has an effective system in place to support foster carers both in and out of working hours during office hours.

The fostering service provides carers with a wide range of training needed to help them undertake their roles. Pre-approval training is very thorough and a good range of ongoing training is provided in areas including child protection, bullying, behaviour management, behavioural intervention, life story work and emotional abuse. Placing social workers described how carers are provided with specific training based on the needs of the individual children placed with them. Supervising social workers said that there is a requirement for foster care workers to undertake a range of mandatory training courses but that take up of training in other carer groups can be variable. Fostering staff said that they use foster carer support groups for some training activity and are planning to extend the training provision to run at out of hours times. Training in dealing with allegations is to be provided to all foster carers on a mandatory basis and will be provided at a range of times including evenings and weekends. Foster care workers (the authority's specialist fee paid carers) complete a training workbook as part of their assessment, based on three weeks full time work with placements undertaken in children's homes. This is a very positive training and assessment tool, which helps ensure that new foster care workers have the skills they need to care for children with highly complex needs.

One foster caring couple visited during the inspection said, and records confirmed, that they do very little training. It was noted that the consideration of training at their supervision and review was not robust and did not evidence any work being carried out to engage these carers in training. The training section of a number of supervision records seen did not demonstrate sufficient emphasis being placed on training in the supervisory discussion. Training records did not provide evidence that carers are provided with first aid training which is updated as required.

The fostering service has eleven carers who have achieved NVQ level 3 in child care with another seven currently undertaking the training. A number of carers have relevant alternative qualifications at this level or higher. The service has plans to increase the number of carers with NVQ 3 and it is recommended that a priority is given to these plans.

Examination of young people's files during the inspection showed that, in most cases, all the required LAC documentation about the child was in place. In the case of one young person case tracked the information was not in place but these had been requested and all parties said that the documents had been completed and were being signed by the foster carer. In another case all the documents were in place and were completed fully with good detailed information.

Not all the LAC documents were completed fully or in sufficient detail however. In one young person's social work file the Placement Plan Parts 1 and 2 were completed in February 2006 though the placement was made in May 2004 the plans were not signed by anyone and it was unclear who had been a party to the plans or who had agreed them. A chronology of events was in place in the same file but this did not contain specific dates of a move to foster carers and did not record who the carers were and a LAC Care Plan dated February 2000 and updated in March 2006 was not fully completed or signed. A City of Sunderland care plan, however, was in place along with the young person's birth certificate and an up-to-date PEP. In the case of another young person there was no reference to his respite foster carers on his file or any records of visits to them, additionally the young person's file had a Care Plan and Essential Information Record Part 1 in place dated in September 2006 but these contained no information at all. This young person's file had no record of contact since January 2006, no correspondence after March 2006 and no fully completed LAC documentation showing the child's circumstances. In another file there was no record of any statutory visits taking place despite the fact that the carers and young person said they had occurred.

There was, however, evidence to show that reviews take place within timescale and records examined showed that the process is thorough and gives a detailed consideration of and planning for children's needs. Foster carers get useful guidance about recording and the passing of information.

Arrangements for the assessment of family and friends under the arrangements for emergency or immediate placements regulation are generally effective with the service making good efforts to comply with the timescale requirements set out in the regulations. The service is increasing its numbers of family and friends carers as a policy of maintaining children with their extended family or established friends where possible. In one situation a 'family and friends' assessment was carried out for a child to be placed with someone who, at the time, was working with the child in a children's home.

During the assessment, before the child was placed, the child was taken to the foster carer's home to spend some time. Recording showed that it is not normal practice for children in homes to visit the homes of staff working with them and that this was a special situation. However, the recording of the special agreement sought for this to happen was not robust enough to demonstrate that the needs of all parties concerned had been fully considered.

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	2
9	2
15	3
30	3

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	X
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	3
23	3
24	2
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

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	FS12 FS24	17, 34	The local authority must ensure that Looked After Children documentation is completed in full and with sufficient detail to properly support the care of the child concerned. All records must be on file and include dates and signatures of all people involved.	08/02/07
2	FS11 FS9	11	The service must ensure that all fostered children know how to make a complaint about the care they receive.	22/12/06
3	FS8	34	Exemptions must be sought and retained on foster carers' files whenever children are placed with carers outside the terms of their approval.	22/12/06
4	FS8	34	Placement agreement meetings must take place and records produced before placements are made or, in emergency situations, within 72 hours.	24/11/06
5	FS9 FS17	27	The service must ensure that correct CRB disclosures including all the checks necessary for people working with vulnerable children are received for all foster carers and partners.	24/11/06

			Checks must also be updated when new assessments are carried out on carers.	
6	FS30	25	Panel minutes must demonstrate the panel's quoracy for each item of business and record any situations in which members step down for certain areas of business.	24/11/06
7	FS21	17	The fostering service must ensure records contain evidence to show that foster carers receive appropriate support in line with their foster carers' agreement.	22/12/06

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	FS12 FS23	The fostering service should ensure that all foster carers hold an up-to-date first aid qualification.
2	FS8 FS12	The service should continue to work to ensure foster carers are provided with as much information as possible about children placed with them at the time the placement is made.
3	FS11	The service should ensure that foster carers and fostered children are aware of the children's consultation that is happening.
4	FS11	The authority should continue to work to reduce the number of changes of social worker experienced by some children.
5	FS6 FS23	Foster carers should be provided with periodic updates to their health and safety training.
6	FS6	Health and safety checklists and pet questionnaires should be completed prior to approval and any children being placed and a record of these checks maintained.
7	FS9	Safe caring policies should be dated and signed and agreed with the supervising social worker and the child's social worker at the time of the placement.
8	FS17	The authority should consider whether it is able to make more advanced, external training available to experienced

		fostering and adoption social workers.
9	FS23	The service should robustly discuss training needs with carers and encourage them to engage in appropriate training this should be evidenced within their supervision and review records.
10	FS23	Priority should be given towards increasing the number of foster carers qualified to NVQ level 3 in childcare or equivalent.
11	FS32	Clear, detailed and signed consents and risk assessments should be in place where children living in children's home go to staff members' houses for visits.

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