



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **City of Sunderland Services for Looked After Children - Fostering**

Penshaw House

Station Road

Penshaw

Houghton le Spring

DH4 7LB

14 February 2005

## 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**

City of Sunderland Services for Looked After Children –  
Fost

**Address**

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

**Local Authority Manager**

Steve Towers

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Spring, DH4 7LB

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0191 382 3165

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**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**

17 March  
2004

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		14 February 2005	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		10:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Trevor Jarvis	152617
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Steve Towers	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

**Description of Fostering Service**

**Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings**

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

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

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

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**Part D: Provider's Response**

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**D.3. Provider's agreement**

## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of City of Sunderland Services for Looked After Children - Fost. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

City of Sunderland Social services Department 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 aim of the fostering service is to recruit a range of foster carers to provide placements for children of different ages, abilities, backgrounds and assessed needs. The fostering service prepares, assesses, trains, supervises and supports these carers to look after children and young people in family based settings.

The fostering service has over 190 foster carers who care for children of all ages in their homes as part of their family on behalf of the Directorate. The service has a number of fostering options, these include mainstream foster carers, relative and friend carers, short break carers, permanent foster carers, foster care workers scheme, an immediate placement scheme and the Phoenix Project, a new initiative to provide foster carers for a small number of young people aged between 13 – 15 years who have lived in a residential establishment and will need this care until they can become independent.

## **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 inspection focussed predominately on the standards where there was a shortfall in the last inspection. As part of the inspection 36 Questionnaires were received from children, 38 from foster carers and 42 from placing officers.

### **Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide**

The Service has a clear and informative reviewed Statement of Purpose reissued in December 2004. The information provided to young people is understandable, attractive and informative.

### **Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service**

The managers have the appropriate range of skills, knowledge and experience to manage the service. The lines of accountability were very clear.

### **Management of the Fostering Service**

The service was well managed with clear lines of communication and accountability between management, staff and carers. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

### **Securing and Promoting Welfare**

There was evidence that carers were providing a good service to the children in their care. The agency still needs to ensure that all foster carer reviews are completed within the statutory timescale.

### **Employment and Management of Staff and Carers**

Recruitment and selection procedures ensured that suitably qualified and experienced staff were recruited. All registered foster carers follow an induction programme and are offered good quality child protection and safe caring practice training opportunities to enable them to care for Sunderland's foster children. Foster carers who had completed or were enrolled on the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Course for family care providers spoke highly of the TCI rationale and of the fundamental improvements that had been noticed in helping children learn constructive and adaptive ways to deal with frustration, failure, anger, rejection and hurt. An NVQ Level 3 qualification is available for those wishing to study whilst in employment.

### **Records**

Records maintained by the Authority and examined during the inspection were clear, well organised and securely stored.

### **Fostering Panels**

The panel was well organised, structured and independently chaired. The panel met regularly to ensure there were no delays. The panel had policies and procedures that governed its operation.

### **Short Term Breaks**

The agency had a number of short break carers. A designated worker is developing this area of work.

### **Family and Friends as Carers**

There were an increasing number of relatives and friends approved as foster carers. The agency had developed a format to gather information about these carers to present to Panel at the earliest opportunity. The agency is working on developing a flexible training package for these carers.

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

**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

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

The agency needs to ensure that it satisfies all of the requirements in relation to the review of foster carers.

## 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	

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

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	<b>Trevor Jarvis</b>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Second Inspector</b>	_____	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Regulation Manager</b>	<b>Gerard Morris</b>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Date</b>	_____		

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 29(2)	FS21, FS16	The agency must ensure that foster carers are reviewed at intervals of not more than one year.	30/10/05

### 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	FS23	The agency should develop and deliver a training package for relatives and friends approved as carers.

\* 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	9
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	17/03/04
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	72

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

Sunderland Fostering has a Statement of Purpose that meets with the regulations and standards and is regularly updated. The most recent version is dated December 2004. Foster carers who were visited as part of the inspection process were aware of the Statement of Purpose.

The fostering service had two colourful Children's Guides. The guides published in February 2005 were aimed at children in particular age groups. The Children's Guides were well presented in an attractive format.

## 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
<p>The manager of the fostering service is a qualified childcare professional and has substantial relevant experience. The manager has completed a Diploma in Management Studies course.</p> <p>Staff and carers commented on the supportive and approachable nature of the services management team and their professional expectations of the service.</p>		

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>A sample of files were inspected. These confirmed that the areas in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 were being met. Evidence was available to demonstrate that vetting processes (CRB checks) had been followed, two references were in place prior to appointment.</p>		

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The role of the manager was clearly defined and staff spoken to understood the lines of accountability and responsibility. The service was clearly located within the wider system of children's services.

Financial procedures were monitored and controlled by the corporate division of the council. A procedure for dealing with conflicts of interest was included within the staff guidance manual.

There was written information available in relation to payments made to foster carers. The revised foster carers handbook included a section about financial matters. The handbook still did not give details of the payment schedules. The agency should consider including this information in the handbook. It would need to be updated annually.

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

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

6

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

4

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

6

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The management structure of the service was documented in the statement of purpose.  
Levels of accountability and delegation were clear.  
There were arrangements for deputising in the absence of the manager.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Visits were made to a random selection of foster homes as part of the inspection process. All of the homes were warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The carers demonstrated an understanding of health and safety issues.</p> <p>Carers stated that a health and safety assessment had been completed as part of the initial assessment. Health and safety issues were covered in the pre approval training for foster carers. Post approval training on health and safety issues was available for carers. The handbook contained a section on health and safety.</p> <p>Carers had been supplied with the appropriate equipment for the children in their care. There was a system in place to check that carer's vehicles were properly insured.</p>		

### Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The agency has an Equal Opportunities Policy and training is in place. The policy was clearly set out in the foster carers handbook. There was evidence that carers knew about the policy. Carers were able to describe how they would fulfil the requirements of the policy. There was pre and post approval training available for carers to assist them in meeting the diverse needs of the children in their care.</p> <p>Children with disabilities are provided with appropriate placements with equipment and adaptations to the homes.</p>		

<b>Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)</b>		
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.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
There is a process to appropriately match children with carers capable of meeting their assessed needs. There was an officer responsible for managing the placement process. This officer ensured that the best possible match was achieved. The placement and resource panel met weekly. The panel included input from the Education Department. The placements officer actively managed the placement and matching process for all children in the looked after system.		

<b>Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)</b>		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>The agency has maintained a policy on behaviour management. The policy was included in the foster carers handbook. The handbook makes clear that staff and foster carers will ensure behaviour is managed effectively and adhere to the Sunderland Social Services No Smacking Policy. All carers are given the agency's policies and procedures and training is in line with safe caring. Therapeutic crisis intervention training is not only undertaken by foster care workers and immediate placement carers, it is also open to mainstream foster carers and some attended the first training course.</p> <p>The carers spoken to and questionnaires completed by carers stated that they felt the agency was child centred and that issues of harm, safe caring and behaviour training for all carers and a programme of essential courses, had been organised for the coming year.</p> <p>There is an anti-bullying policy in place.</p> <p>The agency had consistently informed the CSCI of all events which fell within the remit of Schedule 8.</p>		
<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	100	%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

3

The importance of family contact is promoted in the carer's handbook Supervising visits from link workers reinforced this. In interview foster carers provided an understanding of the contact arrangements in place as agreed in the child's care plan and discussed their largely positive, various experiences and efforts in supporting contact between children and parents.

**Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

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

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

3

Sunderland Social Services has a children's consultation officer. There was a strategy for consultation with children and families. The strategy included regular group meetings and individual opportunities for views to be heard.

Children are provided with written information about how to make a complaint and feedback from the children's questionnaires confirmed that they knew how to access the complaints system. Information was included in the Children's Guide.

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

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

3

The promotion of health forms part of the induction and general training for foster carers. The foster carers handbook included a policy statement and comprehensive guidance on health care. Foster carers spoken to felt able to meet the health needs of the children and young people they cared for. All of the children case tracked were registered with a G.P and dentist.

The service ensured that carers had access to a consultant paediatrician, health visitor and clinical psychologist for looked after children to assist them in the delivery of this standard.

**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?**

4

The education needs of looked after children continue to be given a high priority within the service. The foster carer's training programme included input on education matters. The foster carer handbook included a policy and guidance on education. During discussion with foster carers it was evident that they have a high degree of commitment in supporting and promoting the educational needs of the children they cared for.

**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 foster care handbook and the training for foster carers covers aspects of preparation for leaving care and independence. Carers spoken to were aware of the need for such preparation and commented that they were involved in the process of pathway planning and promoting a sense of independence.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The staff team were appropriately qualified and trained. Staff interviewed were confident and knowledgeable about their roles and the function of the agency. The team were also able to show their understanding of the foster care and the needs of children. The agency had a staff recruitment and employment policy and procedures. A system is in place for ensuring CRB checks are renewed every three years.

Total number of staff of the agency:

24

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

2

### 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?

1

The management structure within the Children's Services division of the Directorate remains clear. All staff including independent practitioners were provided with an appropriate written contract and job description. The agency had an efficient administrative team who provide good administrative support to the fostering service. Social work staff receive regular supervision from their managers. The service has retained its strong commitment to training and this is reflected in the comprehensive range of training available, particularly to foster carers. At the last inspection the system for reviewing foster carers was said to be about to transfer to the independent reviewing unit however, the process is still in a state of flux. There was little evidence of foster carer reviews being held for at least a year, on a number of the files examined and a significant number of foster carers confirmed this was not happening. The agency must ensure annual reviews of foster carers are completed. Annual reviews must be presented to the fostering panel. Review information must reflect all requirements of the NMS.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

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

3

The agency had a satisfactory number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff. The agency has a recruitment strategy for carers. This was reviewed annually to ensure that it continued to match the profile of the children and young people needing placement. The agency had developed a number of innovative schemes to meet identified placement needs. There was a comprehensive assessment process used to assess the qualities, competences and aptitude of prospective carers and files examined had all information relevant to the stage of approval.

**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?**

3

Feedback from interviews with foster carers and questionnaires showed that the arrangements for provision of out of hours support was considered adequate. One of the new initiatives underway is to have a carer available out of hours on the end of a mobile telephone to directly respond to foster carers. The agency had a comprehensive health and safety policy and a whistle blowing policy. There was evidence that these policies were known and understood.

**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

Foster carers and staff reported that the service places great emphasis on training. A foster carer training session was observed by the inspector. This was informative and encouraged foster carers to share experiences and reflect on their own practice. Evidence was seen which showed foster carers have access to a range of training and development opportunities through provision of in service and external training. Managers and link workers are currently addressing ways of encouraging the participation of more long serving foster carers in training.

Staff needs are addressed through regular supervision and annual appraisals.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)****All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Staff continue to receive regular supervision from their manager. The team meet regularly and staff said they felt well supported by their colleagues and managers. Supervision was regular and planned in advance.

**Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)****The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The agency had a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. The handbook included a section on supervision and support.

Over fifty foster carers were contacted by telephone to clarify an issue about the level of support they received. It was confirmed that most valued the support of the supervising social worker, contrasting this to the frustrations voiced in questionnaires about referring social workers being inaccessible. With the exception of some of the carers who had been with the service for a long period of time, foster carers spoke of the benefits of local support groups, which are usually well attended.

Carers confirmed that they received regular supervision meetings and unannounced visits and that these are arranged in accordance with their need for support. Carers indicated that supervising social workers were good at anticipating their needs regarding respite.

**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?****3**

The Foster Carer Agreement used by the service was clearly written and contained the information required under Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations 2002.

Carers had a completed foster care agreement. The agreement now covers all of the matters listed in Schedule 5 of the Regulations.

Foster carers are provided with a handbook that contains information on complaints and representations.

All of the foster carers stated they had established long-term professional relationships and trust with their link/supervising social workers.

**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?**

2

The agency had a pre and post approval foster care training programme relating to childcare practices and carers support. There was evidence that most carers had received a high level of good quality training.

Foster carers confirmed that they are encouraged to undertake NVQ training in Caring for Children and Young People.

As stated earlier some carers of long standing had not been involved in a training programme. The importance of continual training and development should be reinforced with carers and the service will seek to address this. The service is considering the merits of developing a training pack that could be delivered in the carer's homes.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The case files of four children were examined as part of the inspection. The case files contained all of the information required. Carers held information about the children in their care in a confidential folder that they kept securely stored. Foster carers commented that they understood the reasons for the child being in foster care and understood the basis of the placement. Files and records were addressed in the foster carers handbook. The agency has developed additional training for carers in relation to recording about 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?

3

The agency kept the separate records required in the standard. The required security measures were in place for the storage of records. Administrative records inspected appeared well organised, up to date and well indexed to enable easy access.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

333

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:

X

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?**

2

Whilst the premises provided an equipped base from which staff could reasonably work, it was recognised that the buildings premises currently used by the fostering service are no longer suitable for purpose and are not used solely by the service.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The local authority maintains management of the fostering service finances at a strategic level.

The manager stated that the service was financially viable and has sufficient resources to meet its obligations.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The pre-inspection information showed that there are systems for ensuring the service's financial processes are appropriately maintained and audited.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

The service has written information on current foster carer allowances. The majority of carers stated that they had not experienced any difficulties in receiving their full payments within the agreed timescales. Payments to carers were reviewed annually. The rate was set having taken account of inflation and the recommendation of the Fostering Network organisation.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

During the Inspection a panel meeting was observed. The panel was quorate and made up of individuals with appropriate and mixed expertise in relation to the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

The panel has an experienced independent chairperson, whose was appointed following completion of all appropriate checks including CRB. Another member of the panel has been identified to act as chair in her absence. The chairperson was able to clearly demonstrate awareness of her role and responsibilities. Observation indicated that the panel was carried out in a professional and sensitive manner. Members were obviously well prepared and knowledgeable of the cases, with discussion and planned questions agreed before social workers and prospective carers joined the meeting. Minutes of the previous panel were inspected and were appropriate.

Written procedures are in place that provides guidance on decision-making when not all the members are in agreement.

The quality and range of discussion observed confirmed that panel also provided a quality assurance function in relation to the written assessments and the assessment process.

There is a process for feeding this information back to the Social Services Department at appropriate levels. Issues in relation to assessments are discussed and recently the panel have identified that some assessments are still coming to panel before all statutory checks have been completed.

## 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?	3
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The service continues to offer short breaks to children with disabilities and has policies and procedures in place relevant to this aspect of fostering. The manager reports that the service has been successful in recruiting more carers and expanding its short break service for children with disabilities. The Services for disabled children team assess the child's needs and present to the resource panel any request to meet those needs. A recommendation from the panel becomes a referral to the fostering service. Following matching considerations, carers are identified and a planning meeting is held where the looked after children paperwork is completed.

## 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?	3
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The family carers who responded to questionnaires indicated that they had received a good standard of support from the fostering service. The fostering panel is used to approve placements with family carers.

**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 on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

**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 14 July 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

**Public reports**

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

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

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

**D.3.1 I Dr G Jones of Sunderland City Council confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

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

**Or**

**D.3.2 I Dr G Jones of Sunderland City Council am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:**

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

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

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