



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Durham Local Authority Fostering Service**

Durham Fostering & Adoption Service  
Social Care & Health, Durham County Council  
Littleburn Business Centre,  
Langley Moor  
County Durham  
DH7 8ET

24thFebruary-5thMarch 2003

## 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**

Durham Local Authority Fostering Service

**Address**

Durham Local Authority Fostering Service, Armstrong Grove, Aycliffe Young People`s Centre, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham

**Local Authority Manager**

Judy Stone

**Tel No:**

0191 3864411

**Address**

Social Services Department, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UG

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

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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**

N/A

<b>Date and Time of Inspection Visit</b>		<b>ID Code</b>	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Martin Keegan</b>	073546
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Peter Stone	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Interpreter/Signer (if applicable)</b>			

**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**
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**Part D: Provider's Response**

**D.1. Provider's comments**

**D.2. Action Plan**

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## 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 2001 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

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

The Fostering Services Regulations 2001 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 2001.

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

This is the first annual inspection of the Durham County Council fostering service which provides a county wide service for children in the looked after system. The County has two main fostering teams. One based in the south of the county and one based in the north. The service has been established for many years and has been the subject of major restructuring and a recent exercise has seen a further restructure that is aimed at modernising the service to be more responsive to the needs of children and their families, staff and carers.

The service puts children at the heart of what the service aims to achieve and generally has a good system in place to recruit and support foster carers across the County.

All foster parents are assessed and selected after a rigorous process to determine their suitability to meet the demands of looking after fostered children.

The assessment is professional, detailed and comprehensive. When an assessment has been completed this is presented to one of the two County fostering panels for approval.

The assessment includes references and appropriate checks on prospective foster parents and their families. The assessment includes detailed work on a prospective foster parents motivation to foster children, their ability to respond to the needs of children and a detailed assessment of the carers background and suitability to undertake fostering.

When an assessment is completed a fostering panel can approve or reject any assessment and upon approval a foster family will have to adhere to the conditions set by the service for the amount of children and young people they can look after at any one time.

The fostering service will annually review the carers and report to panel on any matters that may impact on the suitability of a carer and will hear any investigations as to the unsuitability of a carer and be able to deregister them or amend the conditions by which they look after children.

The service provides an initial induction to new carers and ongoing training is provided to help keep carers up to date with new initiatives on the fostering service. The staff provide support to all carers on a daily basis where appropriate and an out of hours service provides support when offices are closed in the evening and at weekends.

Carers have their own support group that meets fairly regularly and has the support of fostering service staff and management.

## **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.)

The Durham County fostering service is a very well established Local Authority service, which provides a structured and professional service to children and their families who use fostering services. The service is in a period of positive change and this will bring improvements to the service for young people in the looked after system and their families.

This will affect how the staff work and how the service is managed. The service will be situated in its own premises from summer 2003, which will bring benefits to fostering officers, support staff and management. It will bring benefits to how the foster panels operate and bring benefits to carers who will be able to have one main point of contact in the future for the fostering service. The move to new premises may also benefit children, carers and their families by enabling meetings, reviews, fostering panel hearings and training, to be held on the premises.

The management of the service have a sound strategy for the service, which is planned and consulted upon. It is broadly supported by staff in what it aims to achieve and the staff have demonstrated a strong professional commitment to the service and examples of good solid work were in evidence in the form of assessment reports, planning reports ongoing life-story work with individual children and pieces of group project work were also in evidence.

The fostering service is a busy hard-working branch of the Social services department, which has a clear view about the way forward for the management and staff within the service to achieve the strategic aims of the service.

As with any large service, there will always be ongoing areas to further develop. The Durham fostering service needs to ensure the strategy for recruiting carers is ongoing and will be able to meet the diverse needs of children who will present to the service.

## **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:**

- 1) The Local Authority has failed to notify the Commission of the officer appointed as the "responsible individual" to manage the service in accordance with The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, regulation 10 (1)(a)(b)
- 2) Foster Care Agreements do not contain all the information required by Fostering Services Regulations 2002, regulation 28 (5)(b), Schedule 5

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection fully actioned?

N/A

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 2001.

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>		

## 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 2001, 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.	FR 10(7,8 & 9)	FS 2 FS 16	The Local Authority must notify the Commission of the officer appointed as the "responsible individual" to manage the service in accordance with the regulations.	31/03/04.
2.	FR 28(5)(b) Schedule 5	FS 22.4	Foster Care Agreements must contain all the information detailed within Schedule 5.	31/03/04

### 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.	FS 1.4	The statement of purpose should be developed further to include details of the fostering service management structure.
2.	FS 1.5	The children's guide needs to be suitable for all fostered children.
3.	FS 4.5	The fostering service needs to inform carers, managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.
4.	FS 5.3	The service needs to ensure the level of delegation and responsibility of the manager and the lines of accountability are clearly defined.
5.	FS 6.7	Foster carers should be provided with up to date written guidance on their health and safety responsibilities.
6.	FS 6.9	Foster carers should be advised by the service that they may be interviewed or visited by the Commission as part of the inspection process.
7.	FS 8.5	Placement decisions need to consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the foster family.
8.	FS 9.2	Training for foster carers should include training in caring for children who have been abused.
9.	FS 9.3	Written 'safe care' guidelines should be provided for each foster home.
10.	FS 9.4	The service should make it clear by way of written information to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable, and this includes smacking shaking slapping and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment.
11.	FS 12.3	Before placements begin the carer must be provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of the child and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment.
12.	FS 14.2	Foster carers must be given clear written requirements of what is expected of them in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living.
13.	FS 15.4	Records must be kept of checks and references obtained and their outcomes. Police checks must be renewed every three years.

14.	FS 16.2	There needs to be a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability.
15.	FS 16.9	Staff and carers should undertake on-going training and development. Carers should maintain a training portfolio.
16.	FS 17.1	The fostering service should further develop its recruitment strategies to enable it to more constantly maintain an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and to maintain a sufficiently broad range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.
17.	FS 18.3	Out of hours management and support services should be available to foster carers.
18.	FS 19.4	All employees should be kept informed of changes in any legislation or guidance that are relevant to their jobs.
19.	FS 19.5	The effectiveness of the training programmes for the staff providing the service should be routinely evaluated, with training programmes reviewed and updated at least annually.
20.	FS 20.4	Staff should receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager.
21.	FS 21.6	There should be a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker.
22.	FS 22.9	Information about the [procedures to deal with investigations into allegations against foster carers should be made known to them and children and young people, and include the provision of independent support.
23.	FS 30.3	The service should ensure that criminal records checks are carried out in respect of Foster Panel members

\* 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	17
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	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	24/02/03
Time of Inspection	9:30AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	124

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.

## 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?**

2

The current statement of purpose provides a clear statement of the services that are provided for children and their families. The statement has been formally approved by the local authority elected members. The statement needs to be amended to include details of the fostering service management structure.

The service is in the process of providing a children's guide to meet the requirements of the Regulations. The guide must contain information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate and about how to complain.

The registered person must ensure the statement is maintained up to date and is available on request to carers, fostered children and their families.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering services manager who assisted with the inspection has a professional qualification in social work and extensive experience of working with children and families. The manager has been responsible for the fostering service since 2001 and has already implemented an extensive review of the service following a national review. The manager exercises good effective leadership of the service and it is well organised managed and staffed in a manner that is in keeping with the delivery of best possible childcare. However, the senior management structure needs to be confirmed to ensure it is clear who the “responsible individual” for the service will be, and the Commission notified accordingly.

The managers of the fostering teams North and South of the County have an appropriate qualification in social work and have many years experience in working with children and families and in the Fostering service.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The managers and staff of the service are suitable people to run and manage a service concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The recruitment of staff is in keeping with schedule 1 of the Fostering Services regulations 2002. The service must ensure that all staff have an up to date CRB check at the enhanced level and that two written references are obtained for all new recruits to the service.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service are clearly understood by managers of the service. There is a clear line of accountability within the county council for the effective management of the service. There are clear roles for the managers of the fostering service and the county adoption service, which is managed within the same structure. The service has proper financial procedures and has a reviewing procedure to keep them up to date.

The fostering service must inform carers, managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest should they arise.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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?

2

Overall the inspection team felt the service was being well managed. It was evident from inspectors' observations that managers and staff strive, and succeed, to make the day-to-day operation of the service effective. It was evident from observations of team meetings, the fostering panel and in the written policy guidance available that the service is operating efficiently. The individual discussions with managers and staff within the service highlighted that the majority of them felt the service was well managed. Similarly, in individual discussions with carers and in-group discussions they stated they felt the service was effective and efficient. The managers do not hold a position of responsibility in any other organisation. The service must ensure there are clear lines of responsibility within the service and the level of delegation for managers is clearly defined.

## 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>The inspection team visited four families as part of the inspection process. The foster homes were comfortable, warm, well furnished and well decorated. They were well maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. Each young person had their own bedroom and these reflected the needs of each of child and were age appropriate. They were all able to personalise their bedrooms or if the child was an infant, bedrooms were well equipped with an appropriate array of soft toys. Discussions with young people highlighted how well they felt cared for. They felt they were able to have space if need be and sufficient scope for privacy also.</p> <p>The homes were free from any immediate risks or hazards. In one home a suitable nursery fireguard was in place and the child had a suitable baby chair and a rear-facing car seat. The Carers advised they had been given health and safety training as part of their induction. The service should ensure carers are issued with up to date written guidance as is necessary.</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>It was evident from discussions with staff, managers and carers that the service values the promotion of diversity and equality for each child or young person being 'looked after'.</p> <p>In particular, discussions with foster carers highlighted that they promote the needs of young people and seek to ensure they access the appropriate services for them. It was evident that foster carers respected and wished to preserve all ethnic, linguistic and cultural needs of young people whatever their background.</p>		

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**  
**Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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It was evident from discussions with staff and managers that every effort is made to ensure that each child and young person is carefully matched to with a carer. In most cases pre-placement meetings take place. The files that were seen by the inspection team showed that very good information was provided for foster carers when matching a child with them. In all the homes visited foster placement agreements had been agreed and were available. It was not possible to assess a wide range of cases during the inspection. Therefore, the service must ensure each child's placement decision is based upon the assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match them as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion culture and language of the foster family.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**  
**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>	<b>2</b>
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There was no indication throughout the inspection that the service did not fully protect all children being 'looked after'. The service must ensure that training for all foster carers includes training in caring for children how have been abused. Likewise, each foster home must have written up to date 'safe care' guidelines to access. Discussions with foster carers highlighted the need for the fostering service to ensure all carers are clear that corporal punishment is not acceptable and that this includes smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. This must be set out in written information for foster carers.

<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	99	%
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**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
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Discussions with foster carers and children indicated that each young person is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts as appropriate in each individual case. Case records showed that appropriate contact arrangements have been established, maintained, monitored and reviewed. It was evident from discussions with children that their views are being sought about contact and this is age appropriate. Case records demonstrated that risk assessments are being carried out and arrangements are made for any appropriate supervision.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
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The fostering service ensures that the views of children are sought. This was evidenced by the inspection of records and discussions with young people who said they felt they were listened to about matters affecting their daily care and their future. The service ensures that all young people who are in foster care know how to raise concerns or complaints by issuing them with written guidance about complaints. Discussions with carers confirmed they are well able to listen to the young people in their care.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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Each young person is registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician. Written records showed that the foster home is not always provided with a written health record for each young person placed in their care. Therefore, before placement begins foster carers must be provided with as full a description as possible of the health care needs of each child and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment. Discussions with placing social workers indicated that records are kept up to date and good dialogue exists between them and carers. Each carer has been given basic training on health and hygiene as part of their induction training. Young people indicated they had good access to health care agencies and they had no outstanding health care matters. Case records showed that the liaison and links between the fostering service and health care agencies was generally very good.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
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Discussions with managers and staff highlighted that they all were keen to ensure each child fostered was able to have their educational needs met. Foster carers and staff ensure young people are in school each day. It was evident from home visits that carers are providing an environment in which education and learning is valued and encouraged for foster children. This includes the provision of any necessary assistance in getting to school and the provision of uniform and equipment for each child. Foster carers confirmed they are made aware of any alternative arrangements that need to be put in place if a child in their care is not in school. The foster placement agreement identifies where financial responsibility lies for all school costs.

**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?**

2

Carers were able to verify that the service generally enables them to develop skills to help foster children prepare for independent living. However, the service needs to ensure carers are given clear written requirements of what is expected of them to provide effective support to children and young people. Likewise, carers must receive training to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to a young person preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There were no concerns about the current staff employed in the fostering service. However, the inspection team felt the recruitment files should be kept in one specific file within human resources at County Hall.

All staff have received training in recruitment and selection and have very substantial experience in fostering work. The inspection team welcomed and supported the planned recruitment campaign for new staff and carers which was to be undertaken over summer 2003. This would help to ensure a full compliment of staff and the recruitment of new carers across the County.

All staff employed are qualified social workers and have the CQSW or DipSw qualification. A substantial number have many years experience in childcare and fostering services which is of great benefit to the service and the outcomes for service users and their families and carers. The staff that took part in interviews demonstrated a good knowledge of the aims of the fostering service. They had a good knowledge of the Children Act, relevant guidance and regulations, the regulatory requirements, the care Standards Act 2000 and adoption law.

Total number of staff of the agency:

24

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

0

### Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Based upon discussions with staff in the service, carers, young people and staff in other agencies the inspection team concluded the service was an effective and efficient fostering service. The management structure of the organisation was generally good. However, the senior management structure needs to be confirmed to ensure it is clear who the 'responsible individual' of the service will be. The management of the teams was thought to be good and facilitated the management of caseloads and delegation of tasks throughout the service. Appropriate structures are in place to ensure assessments, approvals and reviews are carried out. Professional supervision is available for staff by suitably qualified and experienced senior staff. The operation of the foster panels within the service was thought to be working very well. Observation of the panel and discussion with a panel Chair and other staff highlighted how well they were functioning within the service.

The service benefits from a good level of clerical and administrative support and administrative procedures are appropriate for dealing promptly with enquiries from

prospective carers and all other agencies that engage with the service. The offices currently used for the service have suitable equipment and infrastructure to provides the service from. However, the service is planned to move to a new office base in summer 2003 that will encompass all current sites that the service operates from.

The service must ensure that staff and carers undertake on-going training and appropriate professional development. All carers must maintain a training portfolio.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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The management of the service acknowledge that a full complement of staff is not always maintained and a recruitment campaign is being designed to combat this. Similarly, it is not always possible to maintain a sufficient number of suitably experienced carers to meet the needs of the children and young people who present to the service. The service recognises this and a foster carer recruitment campaign is underway to recruit more carers within the County.

**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.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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The inspection team concluded that the fostering service is a fair and competent employer with sound working practices. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy in place for staff, carers and young people. Public liability and professional indemnity is in place for all staff and carers. There is a whistle blowing policy which has been made known to all staff and carers. Out of hours management and support services for carers should be made available from within the current service.

<b>Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)</b>		
<b>There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Generally, training for staff and carers was adjudged to be good. There is training available to enhance individual skills and keep staff up to date with new developments.</p> <p>Discussions with staff highlighted the need for some staff to be kept informed of the changes in legislation and guidance that is relevant to their jobs, including these National Minimum Standards. The effectiveness of training programmes for staff providing the service needs to be routinely evaluated and reviewed.</p>		

<b>Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)</b>		
<b>All staff are properly accountable and supported.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>All staff interviewed felt they were properly accountable and were clear about their duties and responsibilities. Staff were able to describe aspects of policy and procedure that is outlined in the staff handbook. Staff meetings are held regularly and planned supervision takes place on a regular basis. Discussions with staff highlighted the need for all staff to receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager.</p>		

<b>Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)</b>		
<b>The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>The service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. There are support groups set up across the County that meet on a monthly basis. There are local groups in most districts within the county that meet on a regular basis. Discussions with the fostering officers and social work staff highlighted the need for an improved system of communication between them.</p>		

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

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

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

2

A comprehensive foster care handbook is available within the service. All foster carers have a written agreement. The foster families visited as part of this inspection were able to state what was expected of them. They had a named qualified social worker and a fostering officer assigned to them. The supervising social workers interviewed were able to describe how each foster carer understood and responded to standards and policies within the fostering service. The written agreement must comply with schedule five of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, including details of the need for foster carers to reasonably cooperate with the National Care Standards Commission.

Foster carers advised that social work visits were generally made on a regular basis and meetings usually had a specific purpose. Social work staff verified that there are also visits made to foster home unannounced throughout the year.

Information about the procedures to deal with investigations of foster carers were not clear to all of them and should be reinforced. There were no current allegations of abuse within the service.

The service has benefited from the implementation of many of the recommendations of the recent Laming report and the establishment of the Corporate Parenting Panel in the recent past.

**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 service has a training programme in place that fits within a framework of equal opportunities, anti-discriminatory practice and is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by carers. It focuses on the skills needed by carers in order that quality services can be delivered to meet the needs of children placed in foster care. This training is provided for carers being assessed, those who have been approved and by way of induction and further on-going training opportunities. The training for carers includes key areas of child development, loss and separation, emotional and physical abuse, children's safe care and protection. All carers have the opportunity to attend other specific training such as health and safety and first aid.

Some carers have been registered for the NVQ 3 training programme. They will receive support from a specially recruited coordinator and receive individual help plus be able to attend group-training sessions. They are able to attend local events and support groups from time to time. Each carer's training needs are determined in conjunction with their respective fostering officer.

Discussions with staff and foster carers highlighted that whilst training is available it can be somewhat patchy and intermittent.

The service needs to ensure each carer is taking up the training and development that is available and this needs to be assessed and documented annually. Appropriate training on safe care should be provided for the entire foster household.

Specific consideration needs to be given to help the sons and daughters of foster carers.

## 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

In meeting this standard in relation to record keeping it is acknowledged that the local authority service maintains some records within other parts of the social services department rather than in the fostering service as such. The individual records sampled within the service and in the wider social services department were very good. The individual case records sampled were a comprehensive record were very well written and well maintained. Evidence from tracking of carers and children demonstrated that good relevant information is also being maintained across the service. Discussions with staff, carers and young people indicated that a lot of information is shared with carers as to why young people are fostered but some foster carers indicated that they are not always as fully informed as they should be. All carers should be trained and provided with the necessary equipment to record significant life events for each foster child, including items such as photograph albums.

<b>Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)</b>			
<b>The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.</b>			
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>		<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The fostering service maintains good administrative records on all carers and a register is maintained and is up to date. Separate records are maintained for staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. These are kept in the relevant area office or at county hall. The quality documentation team monitor the quality and accuracy of records and prompt remedial action as necessary. All confidential records are properly stored and a clear policy is in place for the access to any documents within the service.</p> <p>There is a permanent private and secure record kept on each child and carer. This can be accessed, in compliance with any legal requirements, by young people, parents and carers. The procedure for managing and storing confidential information for panel members, staff and specialist advisers was good.</p> <p>The arrangements for maintaining records is in keeping with the local authority looked after system. The children in placement have access to foster parent records. This was evidenced by the inspecting officers during visits made to foster parents homes as part of the inspection process. Good procedural guidance is available from children's services in respect of how staff deal with any allegations or complaints. The service has the support of a relevant senior officer within children's services on how to deal with specific complaints and allegations within the service.</p>			
<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			299
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>		X	<b>Maximum £</b>
			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
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The service currently uses a number of premises at county hall and at various area offices around the county. This is acknowledged within the service as being far from ideal and the service has identified a set of new premises where it will bring together the various premises into one building in the near future. This is planned to be up and running by summer 2003 and staff will be relocated from county hall and area offices to Langley Moor on the outskirts of Durham City. This should prove to be advantageous to the staff, service users and carers of the service and will provide suitable office premises for the purpose of the fostering service. The office will be equipped with a suitable modern IT system and facilities for the secure storage and retention of records will be available.

The fostering service managers were looking forward to moving to the new premises and were confident this will provide an adequately equipped base for the service to operate from. The local authority will appropriately insure the premises and its contents.

## 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?**

0

N/A

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?**

0

N/A

**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?**

**2**

All foster carers receive an agreed allowance and expenses where appropriate. Payments are normally made promptly and at an agreed time for each foster carer. There were no concerns raised by foster carers during the inspection about particular problems with on time payments. There are three bands currently with a basic payment and two additional payments beyond the minimum allowance. The scheme 'Payment for Skills' is under review and new proposals to create a banding system will be presented to the social services committee in the near future. The proposals if implemented will make the criteria for payment much clearer and linked more closely to a more explicit Foster Care Agreement. All foster carers who receive payments must be approved by the fostering panel and have a child placed with them under the Fostering services regulations 2001. The receipt of allowances and expenses remains under review and new proposals should be implemented as soon as it is possible to do so. There was concern from some foster parents that the guidelines for allowances and expenses could be construed as unfair and inconsistent.

## 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**

There are two fostering panels operating in county Durham. They have clear written policies and procedures which enable them to make good decisions about how foster carers are recruited, assessed, approved, monitored and reviewed across the service. It is evident the panels are providing a very good quality assurance function for the service and that they are very well supported by staff and management of the service and other relevant agencies. They monitor and review the work of assessment process very well. This was evident from the work of the foster panel observed during this inspection, the documentary evidence available and from the positive comments received from staff and foster carers about how well the fostering panels operate. The panels are staffed by professionals from different agencies including health, education and social services. The panels have access to independent medical advice from a local senior health professional as required. The panels include independent members who have relevant knowledge of the fostering service. However, there is a need to develop how service user, parents and carers can make a more significant contribution to the panel process than is currently evident. Discussions with the panel chair confirmed they receive the appropriate management information to enable them to monitor foster care annual reviews. The service must ensure all members who sit on the panels have an up to date Criminal Records Bureau check prior to April 2004.

## 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

A short break family placement service is provided in conjunction with a local voluntary agency. This was reported to be functioning well and meeting the needs of children receiving short-term breaks. When foster care is provided the arrangement recognises that parents remain the main carers for children.

## 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

The service recognises family and friend carers. The policies and procedures of the service recognise the contribution that is made by family and friend carers and are flexible enough to take account of the input family and friend carers can make to fostering. The service has assessed, approved and continues to support a number of carers who wish to care for a named child or children. The service has updated procedures to reflect this work and is in line with the national fostering minimum standards.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

N/A

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Lead Inspector** Mr Martin Keegan **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**PART D**

**PROVIDER'S RESPONSE**

**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 24<sup>th</sup> February 2003 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 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** \_\_\_\_\_ of Durham Local Authority Foster Agency confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

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

Or

**D.3.2 I** \_\_\_\_\_ of Durham Local Authority Foster Agency 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** \_\_\_\_\_

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