



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### London Borough of Harrow Fostering Services

**429-433 Pinner Road  
North Harrow  
Middx  
HA1 4HN**

*Lead Inspector*  
Angela Hunt & Sue Mitchell

*Key Announced Inspection*  
20th November 2006      09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	London Borough of Harrow Fostering Services
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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	London Borough of Harrow
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Authority Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      13th December 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

The Harrow Fostering Service Statement of Purpose outlines the services aims and objectives, their principles and values and beliefs, the services it provides, the types of placements provided, details of the role of the fostering panel and its management and staffing structure.

According to the Statement of Purpose, Harrow Fostering Service aims to provide stable and high quality family based care for children and young people of all ages who are unable for whatever reason to live with their own families, or for whom short terms breaks are needed to maintain them in their own homes.

The types of placements provided include short-term and long term (permanency) fostering placements, Kinship Care placements, and Family Link (Respite Care) placements.

The Fostering and Family Link team service is part of the Children's Services within the borough's Social Services Department. The main office is located in north Harrow and is within easy access by public transportation services.

The service is staffed by a group manager with responsibility for strategic quality improvement and assurance, a group manager for provision, a freelance service manager (Family Placement Service) post, an interim Fostering Team Manager, supervising social workers, Practice Manager (Family Link), a supervising social worker (Family Link) and support and administrative officers. The Kinship Co-ordinator and Placement Officer posts have now been recruited to.

The fostering service panel has members with professional experience in children social work and other relevant professions. The fostering service's decision maker is the Group Manager Plus, Children and Families Group.

Current charges for link carer sessions are £35 for 24 hours.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over a period of five days. In addition, three early evening visits to foster carers' households were undertaken. Two Inspectors conducted the inspection. It commenced on 20 November 2006 and was completed on 30 November 2006.

The inspection of the London Borough of Harrow's Fostering Service included meetings with the Group Manager (Fostering Adoption and Residential Care), the Interim Fostering Team Manager, the Independent Reviewing Officer, the Practice Manager (Family Link), a representative from the Children with Disabilities Team, the Service Manager (Family Placement Service), Social Work staff from both the Family Placement Service and the Family Link Service, Joint Health and Education Link staff/Managers, the Service Manager (Referral and Assessment and Leaving Care) the Group Manager (Safeguarding and Family Support Team) and the Service Manager (Service Manager Emergency Duty Team, Children in Need, Children Looked After Team). The inspection also involved case tracking 5 fostering cases, the key purpose being to assess the effectiveness of the assessment, and the visiting and monitoring processes in place to achieve better outcomes for children and young people who are fostered. The case tracking exercise included discussion with the young people where possible, inspection of foster carers and young peoples files and examination of policies and practice documents. The inspectors also observed the beginning of a morning skills to foster preparation session. One inspector observed a fostering panel meeting and also attended a foster carers association meeting. Inspectors visited three foster families, one of which is a kinship carer and spoke with two fostered young people in placement. The inspectors also attended a lunch at the Leaving Care Team and spoke to three young people who had previously been in foster care in Harrow.

Following this inspection the Commission will be undertaking further follow up work with the fostering service provider, with the aim of making sure that the provider takes the necessary action to address the shortfalls identified and to promote improved outcomes for children/young people.

## **What the service does well:**

The separation of roles resulting in there now being a separate supervisory and assessment team was spoken about positively by staff. It is good to note the work that has started on the backlog of assessments and of the recent improvements made in the overall quality of assessments conducted. It is also evident from speaking with recently approved foster carers, that there has been a change for the better in the quality and frequency of supervisory visits and a more formalised approach to the format of such visits. A recent initiative to invite prospective applicants to attend the fostering panel is good and it is

hoped that such practice to invite both prospective foster carers and existing foster carers to the fostering panel where appropriate continues.

While further work is needed in terms of recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff, it is good to note the gradual move to recruiting more permanent staff and therefore a lesser need for the use of agency staff for the fostering service.

Appropriate systems are in place to promote all aspects of a child's/young persons health and educational achievement.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Improvements noted include the quality of recent assessments and monitoring of the cases being presented to the fostering panel. The fostering service has now adopted a system whereby only the first Foster Care Annual Review or instances whereby there has been a significant change to a foster carers term of approval are presented to the fostering panel.

The Placement Officer's post which is currently vacant has been recruited to and agreement reached to advertise for two full time permanent social workers internally and a full time permanent Fostering Manager externally.

While further work is needed on catching up on the backlog of annual reviews and in dealing with the outstanding matters concerning foster carers who have been placed 'on hold', work has recently started in addressing both these issues.

## **What they could do better:**

There has been limited progress by the fostering service in acting upon the previous requirements made within the timescales specified. Of the five requirements and two recommendations identified at the previous inspection conducted 27 November 2006, two requirements remain unmet, two requirements remain partly met, and the two recommendations remain unmet. Action previously identified included the areas of training and support for foster carers on diversity, developing consultation between the service and foster carers, updating case records and supervisory review notes, better monitoring and review of foster carer placements, ensuring staff are provided with relevant and appropriate training and that the service is staffed appropriately.

While work has started on transferring written case note and foster carers information to an electronic recording system, there are a number of gaps in terms of the information that can be found on children and foster families on the new record keeping system. This inevitably made it difficult for inspectors to track cases selected.

Training is an area that continues to require attention, with demand outweighing available resources. Training in diversity and equality is an area that needs to be prioritised. There is a shortfall in there not being any mandatory training for foster carers, in identifying training and development needs of staff and foster carers, of individual programmes of training being provided, of outcomes being monitored and linked to the assessment of needs, and in the general lack of co-ordination of training provided and of the review and evaluation of this.

The handbook for foster carers is not fit for purpose and contains a number of policy and procedural guidance that while useful, is not specific to the role and responsibilities of foster carers. The foster carers handbook is cumbersome and lacks specific procedural guidance for foster carers outlining what is expected of them concerning core areas such as Child Protection, Accident/Incident Reporting, First Aid/Health Care, permitted and prohibited measures of Care and Control and what to do if a child/young person is absent without authority. Written policy for foster carers on acceptable measures of control, restraint, and discipline must be developed and implemented and behaviour management including restraint training must form part of ongoing training made available to foster carers. The foster carers handbook must be reviewed so as to ensure that it is more relevant and 'user friendly'.

It is evident that the fostering service has experienced problems with the structures and systems in place to ensure the assessments, approvals and reviews are managed and implemented effectively. While the quality of assessments has improved, more work is needed in respect of the reviews and supervision of foster carers to ensure that work that has started continues.

While there is some progress in terms of securing permanent posts, in the interest of both maintaining existing foster carers and recruiting, assessing and supporting new foster carers, staffing resources in respect of the Family Placement Service must continue to be given priority. In addition, the Local Authority must notify the Commission of the relevant details of the Local Authority Fostering Service Manager in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

While the fostering panel composition is in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, attention must be given to introducing a more efficient system in finalising draft fostering panel minutes and in making sure that recommendations made by the fostering panel are monitored and acted upon as and where appropriate.

Work is needed on looking at more fully utilising the Authority's own foster carers rather than using Independent Fostering Agencies, many of whom are reported to be outside of the local area.

Other areas requiring attention include the need to develop a policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline and to make clear to both staff and foster carers the process they would be expected to follow if a

fostered child goes missing without authority. In addition, where foster carers have been put 'on hold' due to either care practice concerns or an allegation, such matters must be dealt with as a matter of priority so that appropriate decisions can be made. Mandatory training needs to be developed and introduced for foster carers and work is needed on making sure foster carers are aware of the procedure in place for dealing with an allegation or suspicion of abuse. This procedure needs to be clear and followed by the fostering service provider in dealing with an allegation or suspicion of abuse made against any of their foster carers.

Finally, in terms of staff employed work must be undertaken to ensure that the required checks and references in accordance with schedule 1 of the regulations have been undertaken before staff are employed.

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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

## The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

### 12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Appropriate systems are in place to promote continuity of health care for children/young people.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 12

A specialist paediatric nurse is responsible for overseeing Looked After Children's healthcare needs in the borough. This includes supporting children and their foster carers to access health care resources, coordinating health assessments for Looked After Children and ensuring that appropriate healthcare practitioners carry them out promptly. The specialist paediatric nurse reported that GPs (General Practitioners) are no longer responsible for healthcare assessments and that these are now carried out by the health visitor, community nurse and consultants as well as by herself. The nurse relayed to inspectors that foster carers now receive copies of the children's health plans. There is monthly monitoring of children's health care needs that include whether appointments need to be made or followed up. This is recorded on the central recording system, which is accessed by the nurse as well as social workers. The specialist paediatric nurse said that she ensures that all children are registered with a local GP if they out of their area as well as other healthcare practitioners such as dentists and opticians.

There is a good link with CAMHS (Children's Advisory Mental Health Service) and the specialist paediatric nurse is able to make referrals. When a child comes into care, a strengths and difficulties questionnaire is completed by the parent/ foster carer and is used by CAMHS to assess whether a child needs

support. One foster carer spoke of the support she had received from the supervising social worker to access this service to help the young person in her care.

The nurse informed the inspectors that she had organised a study day in January 2006 on the Health of Children Looked After. She said that the session had been well attended by foster carers and that the feedback following the day was very positive. The foster carers spoken verified this and said that they would like more sessions like this. The nurse also stated that she had attended the Harrow Foster Carers Association to speak about health needs and had also written some articles for their magazine.

On evaluating the completed children's questionnaires, there were no negative issues identified around either the aspect of being healthy or having a good diet. Comments contained on completed children's questionnaire around having support and advice about being healthy included response such as " *to help grow healthy and clean*" and " *My carer tells me I have to eat more salad and veg because I'm not eating enough*". Foster carers feedback forms indicated the following comments such as " *this area is checked thoroughly at reviews and that they would follow this up with the social worker*", " *that they have the main responsibility for the children's health*", and that " *medical check every year and check that he has been to the dentist every six months and to the opticians every year*". Overall, foster carers indicated satisfaction as to the support given to them in this area.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

## The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

### 3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Notification is required of the Services Fostering Manager. Appropriate systems are in place to make sure that fostered children/young people live in comfortable and suitable settings. However, in order to better safeguard children, attention must be given to ensuring that appropriate guidelines are in place for foster carers on acceptable measures of care and control, restraint and discipline, and unauthorised absence of a child. To reinforce such principles of care this needs to be underpinned by introducing an ongoing training programme for foster carers. Adopting a more efficient system of finalising foster panel minutes, of monitoring the outcome of such meetings and ensuring that recommendations made are actioned appropriately will inevitably improve the support provided to foster carers and ultimately the standard of care afforded to fostered children.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 3

It is positive to note that agreement to recruit a full time fostering manager has recently been granted and of the plan to advertise this post in the New Year. While recently a part time interim Fostering Team Manager has been

selected and is in post, the Local Authority have not notified the Commission of this as required by regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. This has therefore been identified as a requirement.

#### NMS 6

The information on the electronic record system (framework i- HOST) now in operation indicated that Health and Safety checklists are in place and completed, so as to assess the appropriateness of the foster families living accommodation. Annual reviews seen indicated that the environment was assessed as part of the review.

It was good to hear the decision recently taken by the authority to cease the use of shared rooms, with the exception of when siblings are placed. Of the three foster home settings visited, there were no apparent hazards observed. While a skills to foster preparation course is in place, there is no mandatory training in place for foster carers. The issue of transport for children and that a check of adequate insurance must be made in instances whereby foster carers provide the transport was not explored on this occasion.

#### NMS 8

The pre-inspection information provided by the Local Authority highlights that of the 95 approved places, 74 are filled, 19 are vacant and 13 are non-available places. In addition, there are 35 places that the Local Authority has purchased from Independent Fostering Agencies. On exploring with the Local Authority the rationale for not fully utilising their own carers' placements, it was identified that a number of them had been put on hold for an unduly lengthy period of time. While steps are now being taken to resolve and make decisions on those placements, further work is needed in respect of this. In addition, while the Group Manager (Fostering, Adoption and Residential Care) made reference to some form of analysis having been conducted by the Authority, which identified that some children/young people placed with Independent Fostering Agencies, could be moved back to their own carers in the area local to Harrow, work to progress this has not yet taken place.

In the case of one foster family tracked, the foster carers indicated that they had had to work hard in ensuring that the fostering service had fully taken into account the wishes and feelings of one young person placed with them. They also spoke of the Local Authority wanting to move the young person who was of dual heritage background because they believed that the child should be accommodated by a carer of a similar race to that of the young person, despite the young person having previously resided with their Caucasian mother.

#### NMS 9

There is a Safe Caring Policy (dated 22 July 2006) outlining to whom an allegation or concern about a foster carer needs to be made. However, on looking at the contents of the foster carers handbook and on speaking with foster carers, it was evident that they were unclear as to the procedure to be

followed for dealing with an allegation or suspicion of abuse against a foster carer. The case tracking exercise conducted by inspectors indicated that there were several cases that had been put 'on hold' due to an allegation of a child protection nature or concern about care practice, that had not been dealt with within a reasonable amount of time by the fostering service. This shortfall was relayed during the inspection by Inspectors and acknowledged by the service as an area requiring attention.

While there is a document outlining the process to follow if a child or young person goes missing from home or care, fostering service staff and foster carers spoken to were unclear as to the process they would be expected to follow or of what and where a record would need to be made or who would be responsible for this. The policy document titled 'Children and Young People Missing from Home or Care – A Joint Protocol and Risk Assessment Scheme – Harrow ACPC June 2004' provided as part of the pre-inspection information is of a generic nature and does not make fully clear the expectations of foster carers or the procedure to follow if a child is absent from a foster carer without permission. While the policy document makes mention to the Senior Child Protection Person being informed if a child or young person whose name is on the Child Protection Register goes missing, staff were unfamiliar with who undertook this role or who the Senior Child Protection Person was.

Procedural guidelines for recognising, recording and addressing bullying are in place. While this guidance makes mention to an annual summary of any complaints being made to the Commission, there is no evidence in support of this occurring in practice.

While non-permissible measures of control form a part of the foster placement agreements, there was no written policy outlining the acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster carers.

#### NMS 15

The inspectors had evidence that the assessment process had improved, was of good quality and that applications were now being processed in a more timely fashion. One new foster carer spoken to verified that they had had a detailed assessment from the assessing social worker and had found the process and support given helpful. Questionnaires from other foster carers indicated that their experience in the past was not so positive; detailing that for some it had taken over a year for them to be assessed. It is positive that the timescale for completing initial assessments has improved over the past few months. The inspectors are of the view that splitting the team into two, one for assessment and the other for supervising foster carers has helped with this. The inspectors had sight of recent assessment documents, which were of a good standard. The panel chair commented on this improvement in her discussion with one of the inspectors.

## NMS 30

One inspector attended a fostering panel on the first day of inspection. The panel was quorate and was of the correct composition of individuals as specified in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. It was positive to note that the panel composition included a medical and educational representative, an ex-foster carer, an early years worker and a worker with a background in disabilities. The fostering service's decision maker who is not a fostering panel member is the Group Manager Plus, Children and Families Group. Social workers presented their reports in a professional manner and the overall quality of these reports was good. Two sets of prospective foster carers also attended as well as foster carers who were awaiting the outcome of a review of their terms of approval. It is positive to note the recent introduction of inviting foster carers to attend panel meetings and it is strongly recommended that this practice be continued. The Local Authority prior to the inspection provided the draft minutes from the last three fostering panel meetings to the Commission. On examining the contents of these, Inspectors judged these to be of poor quality and feedback was given during the course of the inspection about this. It was evident that a number of cases that were not ready had been presented to panel. This resulted in cases having to be deferred. It was reported that work had been undertaken in this area, with the aim of ensuring cases that were being presented had been completed and were in a position whereby the panel could make their recommendation to the service providers decision maker.

There was a lack of evidence in support of the service following up matters highlighted in the fostering panel minutes. For example, while diversity training was identified as being required for one carer none had been provided. Furthermore, the panel minutes went on to say that the department does not have any diversity and equality training. The current system in place for agreeing panel minutes is unclear with some minutes written having still to be agreed. While further copies of the minutes were provided as part of the pre-inspection information, the panel minutes of 2.10.06 and 16.10.06 remain in draft form, despite amendments having already been made by the panel administrator. Furthermore, panel minutes of 16.10.06 make mention to the minutes of 21.8.06 not being checked because the panel did not have enough time. It is clear that in order to facilitate decisions been acted on more efficiently if the panel minutes were circulated to the fostering manager soon after the panel meeting, action could then be taken in regard to training or staff issues such as the need to provide more detailed assessment/review reports. The minutes provided as part of the pre-inspection information clearly indicated a backlog in the signing off and agreeing of panel minutes. This is in need of addressing so as to ensure that recommendations made by panel members get referred to the agency's decision maker, and that then decisions reached are acted on promptly. The current system is inevitably causing a delay in ratifying the minutes and in appropriate action arising from the minutes being taken.

In interviewing the panel chair, they commented that the quality of reports presented to panel had improved. Training for the panel members and social workers is planned for March 2007 on exploring Kinship care. It was reported that the panel are due to start having appraisals. It was reported that appraisals had already been completed in respect of the Authority's Adoption Panel.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

## The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

### 7,13,31

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

While priority is given to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care, the training need for foster carers in diversity and equality remains unmet. This places the service at risk of not fully valuing diversity and promoting equality. While the short-break link scheme operates well and there is a demand for it, further expansion of the scheme is hindered by the deficit in allocated resources.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 7

It was reported that the service has done some work on targeting Asian and Black Carers and plans to work towards targeting White Carers to meet future demand. The service is using Mobile Promotions to assist in recruiting carers and has worked with them to set up a website to help with this.

It is clear that there is a deficit in providing equalities and diversity training for both foster carers and supervising social workers. Panel meeting minutes recorded that a carer would benefit from equality and diversity training but that there was none available. This is not acceptable and in order to ensure that the needs of children/young people are appropriately met action must be taken to address this shortfall. In addition, the foster carers handbook does

not have sufficient information on the expectation on how foster carers are to address equality and diversity issues. (See standard 23 for further details)

Foster carers reported that they had signed up for equalities and diversity course earlier in the year, but that it did not take place due to confusion about the venue. They commented that they had been particularly interested in this and were therefore disappointed. While Managers confirmed that the training arranged in equality and diversity had not taken place, no action had been taken to rectify this. This finding is concerning and must be addressed along with the additional identified training shortfalls indicated in this report. A mechanism must be put in place to inform the appropriate person when foster carers' training needs are identified and monitoring systems implemented to ensure that such needs are both met and subject to regular review.

### NMS 13

Inspectors met with an educational psychologist, the director of the Gatsby Project and the Educational Welfare Advisor to discuss how foster children are supported to achieve their potential within the education system. It was positive to hear from them about the work that is going on in the borough with looked after children and their foster carers. The educational psychologist, whose main role is with out of borough children, described her role with supporting children looked after in school and that of her teams' links with the social workers, to inform them of any issues of concern from the school about a child's psychological health. Training on the role of foster carers in supporting children with special educational needs was provided to foster carers in March 2006. Sixteen foster carers attended this training.

The Gatsby project has also run a number of courses for both foster carers and the children on areas such as reading road shows, a book of my own project, supporting literacy and numeracy workshops and skills for foster carers to help looked after children. A project called 'Tate Britain' was run in the summer holidays solely for foster children and a display of the children's work can be found in the Civic Centre. Foster children have written a young person's guide to the education system entitled "school talk". An event is planned for January 2007 for foster carers on understanding the education system. In September 2006 a new after school project for foster families began called "A Chance to Shine". This provides a weekly opportunity for foster carers, their birth children and fostered children to learn together to develop the whole families learning skills. The inspectors were informed that this has been well attended by foster families.

There is good support from the educational welfare service to promote and support foster children to attend and remain in school, with foster carers able to make contact with Educational Link staff directly. All looked after children's school attendance is monitored. All children attend a school placement. Where a child is waiting a tutor is provided by the Gatsby Project to go into the foster carers home to help the young person with their education. Inspectors

were informed that two education welfare officers work specifically with foster carers and support young people. A policy outlining the role of the foster carer and residential social worker in supporting the education of children looked after is in place. It was reported that all children looked after have a Personal Education Plan in place outlining the support needed to meet the educational outcomes for the child/young person.

#### NMS 31

Inspectors met with Family Link workers and the service manager for the Children with Disabilities team. The Family Link service provides short breaks /respite for children with disabilities and work closely with the Children with Disabilities team. The inspectors were informed that all Family Link carers have specialist training before they take on any child with a disability or special needs. Training is provided by the continuing care team at Northwick Park Hospital and Shared Care Network on aspects of care such as epilepsy, gastro care, and play. The staff stated that although specialist training on caring for a disabled child has been provided to foster carers via the Safeguarding Board, there was poor uptake of this. Family Link carers also attend the preparation to foster courses.

The Family Link social worker and the manager carry out the recruitment, assessment and supervision of Family Link Carers. They stated that all but two reviews have now been carried out. The majority of children placed receive regular respite/ short breaks on an agreed basis. This is normally for day care or after school care. There has been one request for a child to have respite care involving overnight stays. The service manager informed the inspectors that from April 2007 any child receiving 24 care as part of respite services would be deemed "Looked After". While Family Link carers do not receive payment as per permanent foster carers, they do receive payment for expenses.

The statement of purpose, information on the service and the children's guide were provided to inspectors during the course of the inspection.

It was good to note that the Children's Services Department has taken the positive move to support young people who are 18 to stay with their foster carers, if they are in full time education. This was seen as good practice with positive outcomes for the young people for their futures

# Making a Positive Contribution

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

## The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

### 10.11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Appropriate mechanisms are in place to support contact arrangements and to promote consultation with children, in order to ensure their views and opinions are listened to. While a complaints process is in place, work is needed to ensure that actual practice supports this, that foster carers are familiar with the process followed and that a clear record is kept.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 10

While National Minimum Standard 10 was not fully assessed on this occasion, information from foster carers and the young people indicated that contact arrangements are well supported and that transport is provided where needed.

### NMS 11

Although the fostering service does not have a specific support group for fostered children, there are other initiatives within the borough that they can be involved in. The borough has set up "npower" which is a cross party initiative with young people to enable them to have a voice/impact across the borough. This is open to looked after children. The next meeting of this group is due to take place on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2006, the theme of which is "give respect, gain respect" – what are the influences on young people in their communities? Other organisations in the borough are Young Voices, Connexions and the Leaving Care team. An after school project for foster

families is run in partnership with colleagues from Harrow's Adult, Community and Family Learning Support Services.

The borough has set up a software package called Viewpoint, which is used to enable children looked after to express their views online. The children complete questionnaires, which contribute to their reviews. The questionnaires received by the Commission from young people indicated that they felt that their carers and social workers listened to them and considered their views.

While there is a flowchart for fostering staff outlining the process for dealing with complaints, the complaints log examined did not support this process being followed. For example, while the flowchart indicated that a response letter was to be posted within 10 working days the records in place did not support this happening. Furthermore, while it was evident that foster carers had had cause to complain to the fostering service, details of these were not contained in the central complaint log presented to Inspectors. The current system for maintaining the central log of complaints made it difficult to gain a clear overview as to the process followed in addressing the complaint/concern, the action taken of the outcome of the investigation.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

### 14,29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Through foster carers understanding of the knowledge and skills needed in preparing for adult living and the support provided by social workers, fostered children are supported and helped to prepare for adulthood. There are systems in place to make sure foster carers receive prompt and agreed payments and/or expenses.

## EVIDENCE:

### NMS 14

Inspectors attended a lunchtime meeting with the leaving care team and met a number of young people, staff and a foster carer. Foster carers whose young people are now with the leaving care team spoke very highly about the support they and the young people receive from the team. Training has been provided for the foster carers to help them understand the move towards adulthood. Young people spoken to stated that they had received good support from their foster carers and the leaving care team.

### NMS 29

There were no issues raised by foster carers on the allowances they received. They informed the inspectors that a birthday and festival allowance is to be introduced in January 2007, with information on how to apply for this in the recent foster carers newsletter

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

**The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**

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

## **1, 16, 17, 21,22, 24, 25, 32**

Quality in this outcome area is poor. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

A Statement of Purpose sets out what the service aims to do and how. In order to ensure the service is appropriately managed, further work is needed to ensure that the work on assessments, approvals and reviews of carers continues and is managed and implemented effectively. Outstanding matters concerning those foster carers 'on hold' must be resolved and all supervising social workers made clear as to their duties and responsibilities, so as to promote the best outcomes for children. Training for foster carers must be given priority as well as ensuring foster carers annual reviews are completed at least once annually.

### **EVIDENCE:**

#### **NMS 1**

There is a clear detailed Statement of Purpose in place outlining the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of the facilities and services provided. The Statement of Purpose is next due for review in January 2007.

#### **NMS 16**

An Independent Reviewing Officer employed since June 2006 is undertaking reviews. As part of this they reported that they are also looking at the quality of social workers reports and following up recommendations made by the fostering panel, to check that appropriate action has been taken to respond to these.

While recent efforts have been made, the previous structure and system in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively was poor. Some annual reviews were well overdue in so far as they were last conducted as long as 3 years ago. The fostering service has had to employ someone to help social workers to both understand the role of the supervising social worker and to assist them with completing these. While work has been undertaken to catch up on annual reviews, it was reported that there are at least 10 foster carers whose annual review needs completing between the time of this inspection and the end of January 2007. In addition, there are a number of cases whereby foster carers have been put 'on hold' and whose cases remain both unaddressed and/or unresolved. For example, on one case tracked it indicated that there had been an allegation made against the foster carer. While a letter dated 10/3/06 indicated that the case was to be presented to panel, neither had this taken place nor the foster carer updated as to the action being taken or the reasons given for the delay in dealing with the case.

#### NMS 17

A company called Mobile Promotions are used to assist with the recruitment of foster carers.

While it was reported that the supervision arrangements of staff employed by the fostering service has stated to improve, supervising social workers indicated that this area remains a shortfall.

The current staffing arrangements in place for the fostering service is one part-time interim manager who while has had previous experience in Children and Families work has had limited experience of fostering, one part-time permanent supervising social worker, 1 full time permanent assessment social worker and 1 permanent supervising social worker, the latter who is currently off sick. While there are currently agency social workers and two freelance workers employed in the fostering service, it was reported that agreement had now been granted to advertise 2 full time permanent social workers internally and to advertise externally for a full time permanent Fostering Team Manager in the New Year.

#### NMS 21

Work is currently underway to assist social workers in being clear as to the role of the supervising social worker. While more recently approved foster carers commented positively about the level of support provided by the fostering staff, overall feedback received from foster carers indicated that support, training and supervision provided by the service was inadequate. Foster carers spoken to say that the communication between the agency and themselves was poor and that this had led to a number of them either leaving or thinking of leaving to work for an alternative fostering service provider. While it was evident that more foster carers were leaving the service than joining, upon enquiring as to why the Local Authority thought this was there was no evidence in support of any evaluation having been conducted, neither of there being a plan in place in an attempt to retain existing carers.

#### NMS 22

While the frequency of supervision provided to foster carers has improved, a copy of the format completed detailing the issues discussed and any agreed action points is not provided to foster carers. It was acknowledged by the foster service provider that while this was not happening it should have.

Foster care agreements are in place and contain those matters specified in accordance with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Notwithstanding this, while foster care agreements make mention to training being provided, the findings of this inspection do not support this part of the agreement being met.

#### NMS 23

The individual who previously maintained an overview as to the training both offered and needed by foster carers left in October 2005. The inspectors are of

the view that this has inevitably had an impact on there not being a co-ordinated approach or overview as to training needed and provided. On checking this out during discussions with staff this observation was agreed with. Foster carers comned that prior to this personleaving training was well organised. While some work has started recently on assimilating the training provided to foster carers and drafting a proposed training programme, formal arrangements in respect of delivering this has not been made at this stage. Training was an aspect that was identified at the previous inspection. At the time of this inspection little progress has been made in this area. Therefore training for foster carers in the skills required to provide high quality care remains an area of concern.

#### NMS 24

While a case record is maintained in respect of each child, the electronic system in place for maintaining such records made it difficult for inspectors to fully evidence that the required records in accordance with the service specific regulations are being maintained. This was due to some records being incomplete and the difficulty in navigating the system to find the relevant details and records. It is acknowledged that the work in transferring records from a manual file to an electronic system is in the early stages and subsequently a number of staff are having to become familiar with using the new system and the expectations on them in terms of future recording.

#### NMS 25

Separate records are maintained for staff, foster carers, fostered children, complaints and allegations. Further work is needed in respect of the record of complaints to make sure all complaints are recorded, that appropriate timescales for dealing with complaints are adhered to, and that records maintained clearly indicate the action taken and the outcome of the investigation. A number of cases sampled indicated a prolonged period in dealing with issues of complaint and action must be taken to ensure a much more efficient and pro-active approach is taken.

Staff spoken to demonstrated a clear understanding as to managing confidential information and the code of conduct in place in respect of confidentiality as staff members.

#### NMS 32

Overall, there is a relatively small proportion of carers who are family and friends of the child placed. Of the cases sampled, Inspectors visited one Kinship carer. There was evidence in support of the local authority fostering service being sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing friends and family as foster carers. The Kinship Coordinator post is curenly vacant.

NMS 19, & 4

While NMS's 4 and 19 were not assessed during this inspection previous requirements relating to these standards were reviewed and have therefore been restated in the action identified following this inspection.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	2
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	1
<b>9</b>	1
<b>15</b>	3
<b>30</b>	2

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	1
<b>13</b>	4
<b>31</b>	3

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	2

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

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS3	10(2)	The fostering service provider must notify the Commission of the name of the person appointed as manager; the date on which the appointment took effect and that the individual appointed fulfils the requirements of regulations 7, 8 and 9 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	31/03/07
2	FS7	17	That training in equality and diversity is provided to both foster carers and staff	31/03/07
3	FS8	33	Where appropriate the fostering service provider must do further work to more fully utilise their own foster carers where there are vacancies.	31/03/07
4.	FS8	33, 34	The fostering service provider must ensure that the placement matching criteria is kept under regular review and that this is consistently followed with each placement made. Account of the child's wishes, feelings, religion, culture and language and the Responsible Authority's requirement to promote children's health,	31/03/07

			education, leisure interests and family contact must also be taken into account in matching children with carers. (previous timescale not met)	
5	FS9	13	The fostering service provider must develop and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline and make sure that both foster carers and staff are familiar with this. Behaviour training including restraint training needs to be a part of the ongoing training arranged and offered to foster carers.	31/03/07
6	FS9	13	The fostering service provider must ensure that both staff and foster carers are clear as to the process they would be expected to follow in instances whereby a child goes missing without authority.	01/05/07
7	FS9	12	The fostering service provider must ensure that where foster carers have been put 'on hold' due to either care practice concerns or an allegation having been made, where any of these remain outstanding that the matter is dealt with in an efficient manner so that appropriate decisions/action may be taken.	31/03/07
8	FS9	12	The fostering service provider must ensure that there is procedural guidance in place on how the service will deal with an allegation of abuse against a foster carer and that both foster carers and staff are familiar with this.	31/03/07
9	FS17	20	The fostering service provider must make sure that all staff employed to work in the fostering service have had the required checks and references as specified in schedule 1 of the	31/01/07

			Fostering Services Regulations 2002, prior to commencing employment.	
10	FS23	12	That mandatory training is introduced and that there is an ongoing training programme for foster carers in place that includes core areas such as child protection, first aid, health and safety, behaviour management and diversity and equality. The fostering service provider is required to provide the Commission with an agreed training programme detailing the training planned.	30/04/07
11	FS11	18	That an up to date record is kept of complaints, including the action taken and the outcome of the investigation.	28/02/07
12	FS30	42	There must be a system in place for monitoring the quality of fostering panel minutes. A more efficient system must be introduced to finalise the minutes and ensure that recommendations made and matters arising from foster panel meetings are acted on.	01/01/07
13.	FS17	19,21	The fostering service provider must ensure the service is adequately staffed at all times and that adequate staff are available to help monitor the placements and support to foster carers.  Appropriate arrangements must be put in place to ensure staff receive appropriate and regular supervision. (Previously identified as a requirement – in progress)	28/02/07
14.	FS19	21	The fostering service provider must ensure that all staff are provided with relevant and appropriate training and development to help enhance	30/03/07

			their skills and professionalism. (Previous timescale not met)	
15.	FS4	35, 42	The fostering service provider must continue to ensure that the reviews of foster care placements and foster carers are carried out within adequate time scales and in line with regulatory requirements. The service must also ensure that improvement is made in the timescale of initial assessment of foster carers and presentation to the panel. (Previously identified as a requirement - partially met)	31/03/07
16.	FS25	22, 30, 43	The fostering service provider must ensure that all case records and supervisory review notes are up to date and the views of all looked after children and young people are recorded in the case files. (Previously identified as a requirement- partially met)	31/03/07

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS7	The fostering service should ensure that foster carers are provided with additional training and supervisory support about valuing diversity and differences.
2.	FS11	The fostering service should ensure that further work is carried out to help develop the consultation between the service and foster carers.
3	FS30	It is strongly recommended that the practice of inviting prospective and existing foster carers to attend panel when their case is being presented continue.
4	FS21	It is strongly recommended that the foster carers handbook be reviewed.

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