



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **London Borough of Hounslow Fostering Service**

Fostering Team

Hounslow Social Services

Civic Centre

Lampton Road, Hounslow

Middlesex

TW3 4DN

25th November 2003 1st December 2003  
8th, 9th 10th 11th December 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**

London Borough of Hounslow Fostering Service

**Address**

Fostering Team, Hounslow Social Services, Civic Centre,  
Lampton Road, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW3 4DN

**Local Authority Manager**

Mr Tom O'Neil

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0208 583 3449

**Address**

Fostering Team, Hounslow Social Services, Civic Centre,  
Lampton Road, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW3 4DN

**Fax No:**

0208 583 3444

**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 ?**

**Date of last inspection**

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		25th November 2003	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		9.30:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	1	Lesley Pepler	G10LP1
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		Not used	
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		Not used	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Tom O'Neill	

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

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**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**

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**(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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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The London Borough of Hounslow's Fostering Service is located in an open plan office in the Civic Centre. The service provides short-term placements, kinship care and respite care. The length of the short-term placements can be four years. The long-term care service is part of the Adoption Team. A Team Manager manages the Fostering Service. He is accountable to a Service Manager who has responsibility for the Children's Placements and Futures Leaving Care Team. The Team Manager had been in post for three months. Previously he had been the Assistant Team Manager. He supervises the Assistant Team Manager Fostering, the Assistant Team Manager Placement Service, a Carers Consultation Officer and the Recruitment and Training Coordinator. There are two recruitment Social Workers, six Supervising Social Workers, a Placement officer, a Duty Social Worker and a Recruitment Assistant. Permanent staff fill the majority of the posts. A small number of agency staff cover vacancies. A recruitment campaign for new staff was planned for early 2004. The Fostering Service has adequate administrative support.

## 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.)

Hounslow Fostering Service has made many improvements since the previous inspection. The staff are striving to meet the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards. There are more permanent staff, the recording systems have improved, policies have or are being revised, the Fostering Service has its own out of hours support service, kinship carers are now treated in the same way as other carers and there is a stable management team. The Inspector heard few critical comments from staff and carers during this inspection. Staff were able to make constructive criticisms of the service and demonstrated a commitment to providing a safe caring service for the children. They acknowledged that the standard of the service had improved in recent months. The number of supervising social workers has increased since the previous inspection, their workload is now more manageable and the kinship carers now have allocated supervising social workers. Three children spoke with the Inspector. They had no criticisms of the care they received and indicated that they are treated as part of the carers' families.

The Fostering Service has a well constructed and well managed Fostering Panel. Steps need to be taken to ensure that the meetings are quorate to prevent delays in approving carers. The members who were present on the day the Inspector observed the Panel showed a commitment to their role. The Carers Consultation Officer makes a valued contribution to the service. There is effective external support available to the Fostering Service. The health and education provision for the children is good.

The Fostering Service is attempting to train the carers to be more professional. The Placing Social Workers indicated in questionnaires that the children placed by the Fostering Service are receiving a high standard of care and that they are making good progress in their development.

The Fostering Service has produced a Statement of Purpose since the previous inspection. It is working towards finalising a Children's Guide and a revised Foster Carers Handbook. These are due to be published in January or February 2004. The Inspector was concerned to know that a relative had removed the records of one child from the carers' home by mistake. Carers must be informed that no one except themselves can have access to the children's records in their homes. Due to difficulties in finding suitable long- term carers, short- term carers had cared for two children for four years. There appeared to be no maximum timescale for short-term care.



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:**

Under Section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Commission considers the Local Authority's Fostering Service fails to satisfy regulatory requirements, that they are not substantial.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection
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Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO
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**If No please list below**

<b>STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
2	3(3)	FS1	The Fostering Service must produce a Children's Guide as required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.	30/9/03
5	3(4)	FS1	Copies of the Children's Guide must be provided to the National Care Standards Commission, to all the carers and (subject to age and understanding) to each child placed.	1/10/03

**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>		

**Lead Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Locality Manager** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3(3)	FS1	The Fostering Service must produce a Children's Guide as required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.  This has been brought forward from the previous report.	27/2/04
2	3(4)	FS1	Copies of the Children's Guide must be provided to all the carers, to each child placed (subject to age and understanding) and to the National Care Standards Commission.  This has been brought forward from the previous report.	3/3/04
3	17(1)	FS7	The Fostering Service must ensure that carers receive training on providing culturally appropriate food to children of ethnic minority groups.	31/3/04
4	28 (2)(b) Schedule 5	FS22	The Foster Carers Agreement must comply fully with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service regulations 2002.	27/2/04
5	32(5)	FS24	The carers must have a secure place for storing written information, on the children placed with them, and this must be inaccessible to other people.	31/1/04
6	31 (1)	FS25	An accurate register of approved carers must be maintained.	31/1/04

### 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	FS6	The Fostering Service should ensure that the carers, homes are decorated to an acceptable standard and that there are curtains at the windows in the children's bedrooms.
2	FS14	The Fostering Service should develop regular meetings with the Leaving Care Team to improve partnership working and develop better outcomes for the children.
3	FS22	Carers should receive a copy of the revised Foster Carers Handbook by 31/1/04
4	FS22	The Fostering Service should listen to the views of the carers on the children. If the views are inconsistent with the assessments of the Fostering Service and the children's social workers, the reason for action on the views of the carers not being taken should be explained to them.
5	FS24	All information on children should be taken from the carers' homes when the children move to another placement.
6	FS24	Each child placed with carers should have Memory Book.
6	FS25	The records of complaints made to the Fostering Service should include information on the investigations into the complaints, the outcomes of the investigations, conclusions reached and any action taken following the investigations.
7	FS26	The staff in the Fostering Service should have access to adequate numbers of meeting rooms.

\* 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

6

Survey of placing authorities

NA

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NA
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	25/11/03
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	25

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
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The Statement of Purpose meets the requirements of the Fostering Service regulations 2002. It contains all the information specified in the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service regulations 2002. The elected members of the local authority had approved it. A copy of the Statement of Purpose had been sent to all the carers and had been given to all the staff. A Children's Guide was in draft form. This will comply with the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 when it is finalised. Looked after children had been consulted on the Children's Guide. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that it should be ready to be published in early 2004. There are plans to produce a welcome pack for children in various forms such as C.D.Rom and Video. The Fostering Service's policies had been revised since the previous inspection. The National Minimum Standards had been used when they had been revised.



## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Team Manager has a social work qualification. He is working towards achieving a management qualification by 2005 equivalent to NVQ Level 4. He has many years experience of working with children. He was the Assistant Team Manager before he was appointed as the Team Manager earlier in this year. The new Assistant Team Manager has significant childcare experience. It was apparent from observation and discussion that the Fostering Service is effectively managed and organised so as to provide a high standard of childcare.

### 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
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The records of the Team Manager and two recently appointed staff were examined. They contained evidence of checks and references made on the staff as required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

## 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

It was apparent from discussion with staff that there are clear lines of management and that they understand their respective roles. Lines of communication are clear. There are adequate procedures in place to monitor and review the finances of the service. The staff and carers have to declare any possible conflicts of interest when they are recruited. The Fostering Service is not required to notify the National Care Standards Commission of the events listed below.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

### Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Team Manager confirmed that he has a job description that set out his duties and responsibilities. He has clear levels of delegation. He is accountable to a Service Manager who is accountable to an Assistant Director of Social Services. The Assistant Team Manager manages the Fostering Service in the absence of the Team Manager.

## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The Inspector visited four carers randomly selected. The homes were comfortable, warm, safe and comfortable. There was adequate space for the children placed in the homes. All the children had their own bedroom. A health and safety check is made at the time of the pre-approval assessment and at the carers' annual reviews. Parts of one home were in need of redecoration and curtains were needed at one bedroom window. The Inspector informed the Team Manager of this at the end of the inspection. Carers receive health and safety training. There is information on health and safety in the Foster Carers Handbook. All the carers informed the Inspector that checks had been made to ensure their cars had adequate insurance cover. They had been informed by their supervising social workers that they would be interviewed by the Inspector as part of the inspection process.

### 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
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The Fostering Service strives to comply with this Standard. The Recruitment and Training Officer informed the Inspector that potential carers are asked for their views on diversity during the initial assessment period. There are a high proportion of children requiring foster care who are from ethnic minority groups. The service attempts to recruit sufficient numbers of suitable carers to meet the needs of these children but so far it has been unsuccessful. A new recruitment campaign had been planned. The Recruitment Officer informed the Inspector that carers willing to provide care to teenagers and sibling groups were also difficult to recruit. The Fostering Service was making efforts carers to meet these shortfalls. Training is provided on caring for black children. It was apparent to the Inspector that the carers she met respected the children's cultural backgrounds. A supervising social worker informed the Inspector that the carers and social workers enable children to have an understanding and knowledge of their backgrounds.

The Carers Consultation officer had provided guidance and support to one child, who has a learning disability, and to his carers. The carers had found this very helpful. All the children cared for by the Fostering Service have access to specialist services to enable them to lead as full a life as possible. Training on equality, anti-discrimination and diversity is provided as part of the pre-approval process. Carers receive practical advice on hair and skin care and on appropriate diets. A supervising social worker informed the Inspector that some carers need guidance on providing appropriate cultural food to children of different ethnic groups to themselves.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

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

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

3

The Fostering Service takes into account the recent written assessments made by the children's social workers when the placements are planned. This is not always possible for emergency placements. The carers informed the Inspector that they had received written information before meeting the child to be placed with them. They knew that they did not have to accept children offered to them if they thought they would be unable to meet their needs, or if the children would be unsuitable for their families. All the children seen by the Inspector had a Foster Placement Agreement. These had been drawn up with the carers, the children, social workers, supervising social workers and parents (when appropriate). The Fostering Service endeavours to place children where their needs can be met as fully as possible. When transracial placements are made the Fostering Service provides additional training and support to the carers. The carers and the children informed the Inspector that they had met each other before the placement commenced. It was apparent to the Inspector that the matching process cannot always be adequately achieved because the appropriate type of carer is not always available. This is due to the problems encountered in recruiting appropriate carers. The Fostering Service strives to match children and carers as closely as possible.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

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

2

Training is provided for carers in caring for children who have been abused. Safe caring guidelines are provided to the carers. Carers were aware of the children's family history where abuse had occurred. The Fostering Service makes it clear to carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. The forms on punishments used were acceptable. They included grounding, spending short times alone and not being able to use a computer for a short time. The children considered that the punishments were fair. Information on punishment is included in the information given to carers. Supervising social workers ensure that carers are aware of the vulnerability of looked after children. The training provided reinforces this. The Fostering Service uses the London Child Protection Procedures Book. The Inspector saw a copy of the Fostering Service's procedure on action to be taken if a child is missing from the home.

<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	100	%
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<b>Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)</b>		
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>	3
<p>The Recruitment and Training Officer informed the Inspector that new carers are made aware of the need for them to ensure that children maintain contact with their own families when their legal position allows this. The aim of the service is to re-unite children with their families. Carers have received training on working with families. The contact arrangements are discussed and agreed when the Placement Agreement is drawn up. The children are involved in this. The arrangements are reconsidered at the times of the children's reviews held twice yearly.</p> <p>The children's parents receive financial support to ensure that visits can be made to the carers' homes when children are placed outside of the locality. The children's social workers carry out risk assessments before contact with parents is made when this is appropriate. The carers and the supervising social workers inform the children's social workers of any issues prejudicial to the children's welfare regarding contact with their families. The supervising social workers help and support carers in dealing with any difficult contact issues as they arise. The carers have received training on recording information on the children, including contact with families. The Fostering Service ensures that children maintain contact with their families when their legal position allows this.</p>		

<b>Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)</b>		
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>	3
<p>Supervising social workers and carers gave information to the Inspector that clearly indicated that children are consulted and their views are heard. The children's social workers talk with the children on their visits to the homes and liaise with their families. The children are consulted before the two reviews held annually take place. Supervising social workers and carers are trained and experienced in communicating with the children. Three children who spoke with the Inspector said that they are consulted and their views are heard. Non verbal communication is used when children have communication difficulties. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that all the children are consulted about their needs and the services provided for them. The children are invited to complete consultation forms relating to the carers' annual reviews. Two of the four children who completed questionnaires indicated that they had been told how to complain. The three children who spoke with the Inspector said they would speak either to their carer or to their social worker if they were unhappy about anything.</p>		

**Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

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

4

The carers informed the Inspector that they had received adequate information on the children's health before the children were placed with them. This had not always occurred at the time of the previous inspection. Information on the children's health is included in the Placement Agreement Form. Carers confirmed that the children receive all the health care they require. They have annual health checks. Specialist services are available to children who need them. The Fostering Service has access to a nurse who provides guidance, advice and support to carers relating to health care. She ensures that the children receive all the health care they need. She provides information on health issues to children on a C.D. Rom. One carer informed the Inspector that she had found the nurse to be very helpful when she had had recent contact with the her concerning the health of one child. Information on the children's health is passed to their next placements when they leave a carer. The children's health is considered at their reviews. It was apparent to the Inspector that the Fostering Service ensures that the children's health care is more than adequately met.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

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

4

Each child has a Personal Educational Plan. The Fostering Service liaises closely with the Education Coordinator for looked after children to ensure that the children's educational needs are met. She is a member of the Fostering Panel. A supervising social worker informed the Inspector that the Fostering Service has good contacts with the Education Service in Hounslow. Carers attend Parent Evenings and other meetings at the children's schools. The children seen by the Inspector had a facility for doing homework or for studying in their bedrooms. The supervising social workers make sure that these facilities are provided. The carers of the younger children help them with their homework. The carers informed the Inspector that they receive an adequate allowance to cover the costs of school uniforms and other school expenditures. School reports are obtained for the children's reviews. At the time of the inspection none of the looked after children were excluded from school.

**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

The carers interviewed indicated that they are informed of what is expected of them in preparing the children to become independent. Two teenage children had started to do tasks such as washing, ironing and making snacks. Three carers had received training on preparing children to become independent. The children's future is discussed from when they are fifteen. They are referred to the Leaving Care Team prior to their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. The carers, supervising social workers and the Leaving Care Team work in partnership to promote the independence skills of the children who are approaching adulthood. Two staff informed the Inspector that the Fostering Service needs to develop regular meetings with the Leaving Care Team to improve partnership working and to develop better outcomes for the children.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

There are policies and procedures in place for the recruitment of staff. The Human Resource Section of the Social Services Department is responsible for recruiting staff. The records of three recently appointed staff were examined. All the staff had had interviews and there were records of these on the files. The necessary checks had been made such as CRB and contacts with other agencies. Two references had been obtained. All the social work staff have an appropriate qualification. There were no unqualified staff working as social workers in the Fostering Service.

Staff who are recruited from abroad are given written information in their induction on childcare legislation and other information they need. Training had been provided on the Care Standards Act. The staff interviewed by the Inspector were well aware of the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that educationists, psychologists and other professional staff involved with the Fostering Service are appropriately qualified.

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

25

**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?

3

The management structure of the Fostering Service is included in the Statement of Purpose. The Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager supervise the social work staff. They have received training on supervising staff. A Business Manager supervises the administrative staff. Staff confirmed that they receive supervision monthly. This is recorded and they receive a copy of the supervision notes. The workloads of the social workers are monitored monthly. Weighting is given to complex cases and the workloads are not based on numbers only. Staff have annual appraisals. Planning and Reviewing Officers of the Social Services Department, monitor the service provided by fostering agencies. Training is provided for staff and carers. There is adequate administrative support in the Fostering Service. At the time of the previous inspection staff informed the Inspector of inadequate numbers of telephones and IT equipment available. This situation had not improved but detailed plans were being considered to introduce new ways of working. This should result in a reduction of the current difficulties encountered by staff. A new IT system will be in place in the near future.



**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The Team Manager informed the Inspector that there are adequate numbers of social work staff in the Fostering Service. The number had increased since the previous inspection. This has resulted in the Kinship Carers now being allocated to supervising social workers. This had not occurred at the time of the previous inspection. 50% of the social work staff are long-term agency staff. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that he intends to have a recruitment campaign in 2004 for permanent social work staff. A new system for attracting and retaining staff is to be introduced by the local authority in 2004. The Fostering Service has adequate systems in place for recruiting and assessing carers. This includes discussion with the carers' children. The systems used for recruiting carers had been produced to comply with the National Minimum Standards. Information on the recruitment of carers is included in the Statement of Purpose.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

**The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The local authority has sound employment practices in place. The Fostering Service applies national agreed recruitment practices for the carers. At the time of the previous inspection the out of hours service for carers was the Social Service Department Emergency Duty Team. A requirement was made that the Fostering Service must provide adequate out of hours support to carers. The Fostering Service now has its own out of hours service provided by the managers of the service. None of the carers interviewed by the Inspector had needed to use the service since the new system has been in place.. Carers confirmed that they receive support from the supervising social workers. They had had frequent changes of supervising social workers until recent months. At the time of the previous inspection carers had criticised the Fostering Service for this. None on them did this at this inspection. They all stated that they find the supervising social workers very supportive. Carers have annual reviews. Health and safety checks on their homes are part of the assessment process and they are carried out at the times of the annual reviews. The Inspector saw a draft revised Foster Carers Handbook. This will be published by early February 2004. The Inspector saw a copy of a Whistle Blowing Policy.

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

**There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.**

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

3

The Team Manager informed the Inspector that new staff receive induction training within the Fostering Service and also attend Social Services Department induction training. In service and external training is available for staff in the Fostering Service. One supervising social worker informed the Inspector that she will start a Child Care Award course in 2004. Training is discussed at the staff's annual appraisals. Staff are informed of changes in legislation. They are aware of the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and the role of the Inspector. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that there is a review of the training programme for staff and carers. The training reflects the policies of the Fostering Service. Joint training is arranged for staff and carers.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

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

3

Staff confirmed that they have Job Descriptions. They knew their duties and responsibilities. All the staff receive supervision and have annual appraisals. See comments in Standard 16 on supervision. Team meetings are held weekly. Staff informed the Inspector that the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager have an open door policy and that the Fostering Service is well managed.

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

There is an annual training programme for the carers. The programme is drawn up following consultation with the carers and the supervising social workers. It complies with the specifications of the National Minimum Standards. Carers confirmed that they are supervised and supported by the supervising social workers and the Carers Consultation Officer. The role of the Carers' Consultation officer is to give guidance, advice and support to carers on dealing with the problems they encounter in caring for the children placed with them. She meets carers during their pre-approval training. She visits carers when the first child is placed with them. Carers confirmed that they receive the guidance and advice they need. Respite care is available if they need it. The carers have annual reviews. The first and third annual reviews are presented to The Panel.

The carers and supervising social workers had a clear understanding of the role of the supervising social workers. New carers are informed of this during their pre - approval training. A support group for carers meets monthly. A recruitment social worker informed the Inspector that the Fostering Service takes action to ensure that there is good communication between the service, carers and the children's social workers. A newsletter is used for sharing information with the carers.

**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**

The Foster Carers Agreement does not fully comply with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service regulations 2002. Each carer has a named supervising social worker. They visit the carers every 4 to 6 weeks. Both announced and unannounced visits are made. Carers informed the Inspector that they had had fewer changes in their supervising social workers in recent months. Previously they had had frequent changes. The increased number of permanent staff in the Fostering Service and the efforts to be made to recruit more permanent staff should ensure that carers have the same supervising social workers for a long period of time.

A Handbook for Foster Carers is given to carers when they approved. This was being revised at the time of the previous inspection and was almost ready to be published. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that it would be issued to carers by 31/1/04. The Inspector examined the draft Handbook. It was comprehensive and contained all the essential information carers need. There are adequate systems in place for providing practical support for the carers. Information on dealing with complaints and representation is given to the carers with the Foster Carers Agreement. Carers informed the Inspector that they receive training on child protection procedures.

The four carers who met the Inspector informed her that the Fostering Service does not always listen to them adequately and their views regarding the children are not always heard.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

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

3

The Recruitment and Training Officer informed the Inspector of the pre - approval training provided for carers. Existing carers participate in this training. Induction training for new carers is included in the pre- approval training. Training fits within a framework of equal opportunities and anti – discriminatory practice. When both partners are approved as carers they are both expected to attend the pre - approval and post- approval training. There is specific training available to meet the needs of male carers. The carers training needs are discussed when the visits are made by the supervising social workers and at their annual reviews. Carers are expected to attend five training sessions and all the mandatory training over a two year period. The Recruitment and Training Officer informed the Inspector that all the adults living in carers' homes receive training on safe caring of children. A sons and daughters group provides support to the carers' children. The carers' children are involved in the assessment process for new carers. They meet supervising social workers who are allocated to work with the carers. Information on the training provided to carers is included in the annual report of the Fostering Panel.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The Fostering Service has a policy on recording information on the looked after children. Carers are expected to keep records on the children and to record information at a minimum of once weekly. Training had been provided for carers on record keeping since the previous inspection. The Inspector examined the records maintained by three carers. Entries had been made almost daily and were satisfactory. This was an improvement since the previous inspection when no records were made. Information on children previously placed with carers was still in one carers' home. The supervising social workers check and sign the carers' records when they visit. The records at the fourth carers' home were unavailable. The carer informed the Inspector that her sister had taken them home by mistake when she recently visited. The Fostering Service must inform carers that no one must have access to the children's records and that they must be stored in a secure place. One carer kept her records in an unlocked container in her sitting room. She had been offered a locked cabinet for storing the records but had not received one. Records should be kept in a secure place inaccessible to visitors.

The carers were aware of why the children were in foster care. Some carers had started to maintain a Memory Book of the placement for the children. The National Minimum Standards specifies that carers should do this. The carers informed the Inspector that they receive the necessary information on the children before children are placed with them unless it is an emergency placement.

### Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The Inspector examined the records of staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. The records of staff, carers and children contained essential information and were well maintained. There was inadequate information recorded on the investigation, the outcomes of the investigation, conclusions reached and any action taken following the investigation. The Inspector made a good practice recommendation to the Team Manager that the records on complaints should include this information. The Fostering Service has a policy on complaints. Details of the procedure to be followed when a complaint is received are included in the complaints record book. The Team Manager and the Assistant Team Manager audit the records kept by the Fostering Service. An officer of the local authority external to the Fostering Service also audits them. There are secure systems in place for storing information in the Fostering Service. There is a policy on record keeping for staff. The

Fostering Service maintains separate lists of short-term carers, respite carers and kinship carers. The lists given to the Inspector were inaccurate. The names of short-term carers were on the list of respite carers. The Inspector informed the Team Manager of the need to keep accurate lists of carers.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>				72
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>				45
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>				39
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>				4
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>				9
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>		246.22	<b>Maximum £</b>	308.95

## 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

The Fostering Service is located in Hounslow Civic Centre. It is an open plan office. Staff informed the Inspector that there are inadequate numbers of telephones and IT equipment. See Standard 16 for comments on this. There are adequate systems in place for storing records securely. Staff informed the Inspector that there is inadequate number of meeting rooms available in the Civic Centre. This presents problems for the staff. A new system of working for staff was being considered. This should result in better working conditions. The premises are adequately insured.

## Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

9

This Standard is not applicable as the Fostering Service being inspected is not an Independent Fostering Agency but is a local authority fostering service.

### Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

The finances of the Fostering Service operate within the local authority's budgetary system. The service receives an annual budget. The Service Manager, the Team Manager and the Business Manager meet monthly to monitor the budget and the service's expenditure.



**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

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

3

There is a written policy and a booklet on fostering allowances. These include a breakdown of the allowances for specific items and expenditure such as pocket money. One allowance is paid to cover all expenditure. Carers said that they prefer this, as they do not have to request payments for specific items. Extra payments are paid to the carers in exceptional circumstances such as when a child is very destructive. Carers informed the Inspector that they receive their payments promptly. Children are encouraged to open savings accounts. Carers are asked to keep receipts of expenditure on the children. The four carers interviewed indicated that they considered that their allowances were adequate.

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

2

The Fostering Service has produced a Handbook for the members of the Fostering Panel. A copy is given to Panel members. The Inspector observed the morning session of a fostering Panel Meeting. A new Chair of the Panel had been appointed and it was her first meeting she had chaired. She is an independent person with senior management experience. She had relevant previous childcare experience and qualifications.

All the members of the panel have CRB checks and they cannot vote at the meeting until these have been cleared. The Panel has access to medical expertise. The Inspector was informed that the Panel members will receive annual training in future.

The Panel receives and considers the first reviews of the carers and then every third annual review. Any changes to the conditions of approval are presented to the Panel for approval. Carers are invited to attend the Panel when their reviews are presented. A Fostering Panel Annual Review was presented on the day the Inspector observed the Panel. This included a section on the Panel's Quality Reviewing Function. The Panel had a member with expertise in education and one with expertise in child health. A member of the Panel, who had been placed with foster carers in the past, had recently been recruited. A carer from another authority had been recruited.

The Inspector is of the opinion that the members of the Panel showed a strong sense of commitment to their responsibilities and duties. They had read and considered the written information sent to them on the cases to be considered. They spent a long time considering one case that had no clear solution, in a sensitive manner and showed great concern for the future of the looked after child. The Panel showed a commitment to reviewing the quality of the placements made by the Fostering Service. The Panel is often not quorate. This delays the decisions being made on recommending to the Assistant Director of Social Services that new carers should be approved. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that the Fostering Service would be recruiting more members to the Panel to ensure that it is quorate in future. An effective administration team supports the Panel.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Fostering Service has a pool of eight respite care carers. They are used when birth parents need a break lasting a few days or weeks to prevent family breakdown. The parents remain in control of the health and educational needs of the children placed with respite carers. Carers also use the respite care when they need a break from caring for children who present severe problems. This is done to prevent breakdowns of the placements. The placements are planned. Placement Agreements are drawn up when respite care is provided. The respite carers are trained and approved in the same way as other carers. Respite care for children with disabilities is provided by an Independent Fostering Agency.

## 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.

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
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The Fostering Service encourages children to be placed with family members or friends if this is appropriate. When this occurs the kinship carers are assessed in a similar way to other carers and they are presented at the Fostering Panel for approval. The kinship carers are identified by the children's social worker when it is recognised that the children need to be looked after. The Team Manager informed the Inspector that there had been an increase in the number of kinship carers in the last year. The Fostering Service had made improvements to the kinship carers since the previous inspection. They now have an allocated supervising social worker and receive the same training and support as other carers. They are invited to attend social functions provided by the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service has acknowledged that kinship carers have the same needs as other carers and they are meeting their needs.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **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 <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

No response was received.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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:**

No providers agreement was received.

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

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