



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

London Borough of Sutton Fostering Services

Civic Offices

St Nicholas Way

Sutton

Surrey

SM1 1EA

2nd February 2004 (Commenced)

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 Sutton Fostering Services

Address

Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 1EA

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

020 8770 4307

Address

Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 1EA

Fax No:

020 8770 4775

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

25/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		2nd February 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	James Pitts	
Name of Inspector	2	Barry Khabbazi	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) 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.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr Ian Lewis	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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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

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of London Borough of Sutton Fostering Services. 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.

Sutton Fostering services had at the time of the inspection 71 foster carers providing a range of placements and services. The range of services on offer included task centred fostering which covers assessment, rehabilitation, holiday placements for children at residential schools, short term placements and preparation for adoption. Other services provided include an out of hours service that means that foster carers can provide emergency placements, respite foster care for planned short term breaks, permanent fostering and a family link scheme for children with disabilities. A number of foster carers are also approved to look after the children of relatives in their extended family.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The Social Services Inspectorate inspected the London Borough of Sutton Children's Services in November 2003. That inspection encompassed aspects of the authority's work that would also normally be inspected as a part of the annual inspection of the fostering service. It was not reasonable to inspect these particular areas again in detail so soon after the SSI inspection; therefore, the findings of the SSI report will be referred to in relevant areas of this report.

Responses from the foster carers that the Inspection team visited indicate that there continues to be a clear understanding of the different roles of the Supervising Social Workers and the children's Social Worker. In respect of the fostering service working in partnership with the foster carers there was a unanimous response that this occurred very effectively. Unfortunately there were almost no responses received to questionnaires prior to the start of the inspection, however, subsequently there were responses received from 21 Carers, 13 from children using the fostering service and 30 from placing Social Workers.

The Inspection team would like to thank the children and foster carers who agreed to meet with them and the staff of the fostering service for their co-operation during this inspection.

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:

YES

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	11 (a)	FS14	The Fostering Service ensures that foster carers receive training and guidance in order that all the children receive age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.	19/09/03

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.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

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	17 (1)	FS14	The Fostering Service must evidence that foster carers receive training and guidance in order that all the children receive age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.	From the date of this inspection and henceforth
2	27 (2) (a) Schedule 3 and 28 (2) (a)	FS15	Tracking of information at the foster carer approval stage must identify any gaps in the required level and type of information that is available prior to approval being made.	01/05/04
3	27 (2) (a) Schedule 3	FS18	Criminal Record Bureau on foster carers must be of enhanced check standard in all cases.	01/05/04
4	17 (1)	FS23	The monitoring and recording of the training undertaken by individual carers must be improved upon.	01/05/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS 1	The statement of purpose Should contain the number of complaints and a break down of their outcomes.

2	FS 6	When removing choice, or using equipment to restrict access for the protection of the child placed, written risk assessments should be carried out to demonstrate how safety outweighs choice.
3	FS9	The fostering service should establish a means by which the unauthorised absence of children in fostering placements can be monitored in order to identify any trends that may emerge.
4	FS18	The Whistle Blowing Policy in the Foster Carers Handbook should include contact details and explanation of the National Care Standards Commission (to be replaced in April 2004 with the Commission for Social Care Inspection) involvement in the complaints or whistle blowing process.
5	FS23	The service should explore the establishment of baseline expectations that carers should undertake at least a certain degree of training to update their skills and to remain aware of developments. It is acknowledged by the Inspection team that the service is aware of these issues and recognise that improvements should be made.

* 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	11
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	02/02/04
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	78

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a Statement of Purpose is also available to the public and to foster carers within the Foster Carers Handbook, and has undergone revision. The Statement of Purpose clearly states what services are to be provided. The Local Authority has an overarching information guide for Looked After Children, which makes reference to fostering and adoption services. At the time of the previous annual inspection there was not a specific children's guide however this has now been developed by an independent children's organisation.

The statement of purpose contained one minor omission; the number of complaints and their outcomes were not recorded.

The statement of purpose should contain the number of complaints and a break down of their outcomes. {It would be expected that this information would be updated on an annual basis when the statement of purpose is reviewed.}

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

The Responsible individual (Mr Lewis) is appropriately qualified and experienced to undertake this role and informed the Inspection team that he is due to commence a management qualification equivalent to NVQ 4. Budget figures for the current financial year 2003/2004 were seen at the previous annual inspection in March 2003 and indicated a modest growth in the finances. This was reported at that time to be sufficient to enable future planned developments for the service to be achieved within the resources available to it. Through observation of the service throughout the inspection, feedback from foster carers and supervising social workers the service continues to be organised and managed effectively and efficiently.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The management and staffing of the service is changed from the time of the previous annual inspection, with four new recruits to Supervising Social Worker positions, a permanently appointed team manager and changes to the administrative team. The staffing records for the manager were seen at the previous annual inspection and it was evident at that time that the recruitment process was clear and appropriate records were retained. The appropriate references were also observed to be taken up. The system for Criminal Record Bureau checks remains in place as was also previously reported. Staff files had photos on them and there was evidence that the Local Authority had checked the identity records of the staff and copies of qualifications had been taken.

Many of the fostering service staff have been in post for many years, bearing this in mind the service manager is aware of the need to obtain Criminal Record Bureau checks after the three year expiry of any checks that were carried out under the previous police check system.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The job descriptions of the staff remain unchanged and as previously reported are clear and identify their responsibilities and roles. From interviews with specific Supervising Social Workers it remains clear that they continue to fully understand their individual roles, responsibilities and decision making authority within the organisation and between themselves and the children's Social Workers. The Social Services Inspectorate report noted that the authority has suffered some difficulties with regard to the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff in the Children Looked After Teams and this has led to some difficulty in allocating Social Workers to children placed with the fostering service. The SSI noted that there are promising signs for improvement to this situation. There has, however, been some knock on effect for the workload of Supervising Social Workers in the fostering service who have at times needed to go beyond their specific remit in order to support carers and children in placements. The commitment to supporting successful placements is noted by the inspection team and with the encouraging signs for improvement to staffing in the field teams the need for the fostering service to provide this additional support should diminish.

The activities of the service are monitored through regular staff supervision and monitoring of agreed performance targets. The fostering service also identifies annual performance targets for the whole service in respect of recruitment of foster carers and fulfilling the authority's statutory responsibilities. Progress on these is monitored quarterly and a written report is produced as a management tool.

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.

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

8

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

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 manager of the service has a clear job description identifying his role and responsibilities for the fostering and adoption service. There are team managers who take day to day responsibility for these services. The post of Fostering Service Team Manager post has now been recruited to. Almost all of the fostering services vacant posts have now been filled and recruitment to the remainder is underway.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Evidence from tracking visits to the homes of foster carers (5) and feedback from the carers, children and the fostering service indicated that the accommodation provided to children is suitable, safe and free of any identifiable hazards. Where physical standards are thought to compromise the safety of children in a carer's home these are now monitored and the service bring these issues to the attention of the fostering panel at each review.

Children with disabilities placed had appropriate adaptations specific to their needs. Some restrictions on these children's liberties and equipment to facilitate restraint were observed where required. These included, for example, stair gates to block off rooms and stable doors so the bottom half can be kept locked to keep the child in a specific room. Although this type of equipment was used to promote the safety and well being of the child placed, there were no written risk assessments available to evidence how safety outweighed freedom, and what other options had been explored, considering these items were not obviously age-appropriate.

When removing choice, or using equipment to restrict access for the protection of the child placed, written risk assessments should be carried out to demonstrate how safety outweighs choice.

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

The pre-inspection questionnaire stated that placements are made with carers who meet the foster child's religious and linguistic background wherever possible. The fostering service is continuing with the recruitment campaign that was referred to at the previous annual inspection in order to attract more carers from a variety of backgrounds. The fostering service also recruits from the gay community and has carers who are registered as people with a disability. The service continues to have a comprehensive marketing strategy in place to improve its list of carers from diverse backgrounds and to improve upon the level of retention of existing foster carers. The fostering service has a promoting diversity policy in the Foster Carer's Handbook. The foster carers address these issues during their preparation training.

Children placed that were visited as part of the inspection process confirmed support to pursue their interests and talents, for example, attending a wrestling school, guitar lessons and extra academic support.

Children with disabilities were observed to have been supported to access a wide a range of activities and specialist support, and were placed with foster carers with experience and a good knowledge of their needs.

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 has a slightly less limited pool of foster carers with which to match the children. It is policy of the fostering service that in circumstances where a child is placed with carers who do not fall within the approval category to cater for the needs of a particular child these cases are taken back to panel for approval. Reasons for decisions being made in these circumstances are now more clearly evidenced in particular cases that were tracked by the Inspection Team. As an example, in the case of a child who was placed with a carer who did not match their racial or cultural heritage, the consideration of the other positive benefits of the placement were fully considered. The fact that the racial / cultural heritage did not match was not significantly detrimental in this particular case as other needs were more than catered for by the placement.

The placement of a child with disabilities {referred to in the previous standard}, was seen as a well-matched placement with good and appropriate support from the fostering service.

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?****3**

Foster carers are visited on a monthly basis by their Supervising Social Workers, or three monthly in the case of permanent placements. The children continue to have access to an independent advocacy service. The foster carers who were visited by the Inspection team are aware of permissible sanctions they can apply to children, however it would be advisable for the service to provide more specific training for carers about permissible forms of control with children. There is now a specific bullying policy and guidance to foster carers. There is a policy to follow in the event that children go missing from the home, however, trends for absences of children are not centrally monitored, which it would be advisable for the service to do. Foster carers reported that they are usually provided with all the relevant information to enable them to care for children safely.

The fostering service should establish a means by which the unauthorised absence of children in fostering placements can be monitored in order to identify any trends that may emerge.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

As reported at the previous annual inspection. There is guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook about how to work with birth parents. Agreements on contact are arranged in conjunction with the placing social worker and form part of the placement agreement. The fostering service continues to provide financial support to ensure that contact arrangements take place. Evidence from foster carers indicates that children are supported to maintain regular contact with their birth families and that this is actively encouraged where it is appropriate and safe to do so. Foster carers are expected to record and maintain records of the outcomes of birth parent visits. Information about how to complain to the National Care Standards Commission is now in evidence.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The children visited as part of the inspection process confirmed that they felt they are listened to although one foster carer commented that this had not always been the case in the past.

All children using services that are provided by the London Borough of Sutton have access an independent Advocacy Service. On a six weekly basis the Advocacy Service hosts a meeting between Looked After Children and the Executive Head of Children's Services and the Lead councillor for Looked After Children. The children also are able to make their views known via a magazine they edit called 'My Shout'. The Local Authority and the fostering service are once again commended for their commitment and approach to consultation with Looked After Children. Many other local authorities could learn from this approach.

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 systems that the service has in place for mentoring and responding to the health care needs of children remain as those reported at the previous annual inspection. These systems continue to be effectively applied.

Each child has a health monitoring form completed about them and any other significant information is drawn from the initial placement information and subsequent child Care reviews. The foster carers have comprehensive guidance in respect of their responsibilities regarding the health of the children in their care. The Local Authority makes available to foster carers a Health support Officer to promote good health. Similarly there is a Child Psychologist for Looked After Children to advise on child mental health issues. Foster carers are given financial support to encourage the children to engage in leisure activities. Responses from the children's questionnaire confirm that they are involved in regular activities. All foster carers continue to receive training in First Aid.

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

As reported at the previous annual inspection, the Local Authority has an Educational Support Officer to work with children and foster carers to improve on educational attainment. Financial support is still provided to children if they require extra tuition. There is a system in place to monitor school attendance. The fostering service supports children of school age by providing them with a computer and internet access. The case tracking exercise showed that each child has a Personal Education Plan, and the fostering service has introduced increased monitoring of educational attainment which will also result in an annual awards scheme to celebrate children's achievements. The fostering service was in the process of arranging this year's ceremony at the time of this inspection.

It was encouraging to see that a child placed with a learning difficulty is also to be recognised with an achievement award, and that the recognition of achievement is therefore proportional to ability.

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 Foster Carer's Handbook now provides guidance on preparing young people for independence and training in this area is also to be provided. The Local Authority has a Leaving Care Team who are expected to work with the foster carers to help the young people to move on to independent or semi-independent living. Each young person is meant to have a Pathway Plan, which should identify the necessary areas for development. When young people reach 16 they are encouraged to develop budgeting skills by being given an agreed sum of cash for which they are responsible. The fostering service should ensure that the proposed foster carer training proceeds in order to provide all the children in their care the age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. It is, however, positively noted by the Inspection team that the service has recently appointed a worker whose specific task is to examine the training and development needs of carers, and the work around planning for this training is already well advanced. Given these facts, the Inspection team are confident that the training that is necessary for carers should be achieved.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The staffing records are not kept at the fostering service office but at the Local Authority Human Resource offices at the Civic Centre. The files of all but five of the current staff were viewed at the previous annual inspection but were not done on this occasion. Any staff recruited through social work agencies have references taken up, Criminal Record Bureau checks and an interview with the Team Manager.

As part of the tracking exercise on the files of the foster carers it was noted that out of 8 files there was only one error in regard to either a police or CRB check. The check for one carer was a copy of a standard, rather than enhanced CRB check, which was raised with the Service manager who agreed to rectify this as soon as practicable (please refer to standard 18 for further comment). Tracking of information at the foster carer approval stage should, however, have picked this up. The service must ensure that errors in the standard of CRB checks are not missed.

Total number of staff of the agency:

12

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

1

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 fostering service continues to have clear lines of management accountability. Staff receive regular supervision and support from the Team Manager. The fostering service joint team meeting with the children looked after team was observed as a part of this inspection and was seen to discuss matters related to effective joint working. The core areas of work of the Supervising Social Workers are regularly monitored and the service manager is still seeking a method for improved data monitoring. Once a system is in place this should greatly assist the service in highlighting tasks that require attention as well as aid information gathering for statistical and management purposes. The foster carer recruitment and retention programme is achieving more success although the service recognise that more still needs to be done and to this end a marketing strategy has been developed.

The case tracking exercise identified that carers maintain a training profile. It was also identified that although carers had all undertaken the initial training for foster carers, carers do not generally undertake additional ongoing training, this is addressed with a recommendation under Standard 23 which can be referred to for additional information.

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**

As reported at the previous annual inspection, the full time staff employed are currently adequate to meet the needs of the fostering service. The fostering service staff that were interviewed were positive about the support and training they received and the way the service is developing. The recruitment of foster carers continues to focus at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children who are to be provided with a service. It is acknowledged by the Inspection team that the service recognise that further work in this area needs to continue. The service has identified the priorities for recruiting carers from diverse racial, religious and ethnic communities as well as carers for children with disabilities. There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the size of the service. There is a clear set out assessment process detailing all the qualities, competences and aptitudes expected from prospective foster carers.

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?****2**

The recruitment and employment practices continue to be generally sound in respect of both staff and carers. The file tracking process confirmed that the procedure is to ensure that foster carers are usually in receipt of enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks, although in one case this check was a copy of one carried out by a previous employer and was not an enhanced check as is required. The specific out of hours support service has been withdrawn in consultation with carers as this is now provided by the emergency duty team, carers can, however, contact other carers. Foster carers who were visited by the inspection team did not express any concern about this change. The fostering service has comprehensive health and safety policies for all those involved in the service and adequate insurance to cover all eventualities. There is now reference to a Whistle blowing Policy in the Foster Carers Handbook; however, this does still not provide contact details and explanation of the National Care Standards Commission involvement in the complaints or whistle blowing process.

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
<p>The Local Authority provides core training for its employees. Updated child protection training in light of the London Wide Child Protection Procedures, which have been adopted by the London Borough of Sutton, has been arranged for the fostering team. There is now identified training strategy for fostering service staff that was linked to the National Minimum Standards which encompasses elements of the Statement of Purpose and aims and objectives of the service. Individual staff training needs are identified through supervision and appraisal systems and current issues and legal developments are discussed at team meetings.</p> <p>The new foster carers' training co-ordinator is currently planning joint training with the fostering service staff and carers.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Evidence from staff interviews, and from employment practises that were reviewed at the previous annual inspection, show that all staff are conversant with the content of job descriptions which outline their roles and are aware of their duties and responsibilities.</p> <p>There is evidence to show that Social Work Staff who worked directly with children and foster carers are supervised at least monthly and records of these sessions are maintained. Staff meetings are also regularly held.</p>		

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?	4
<p>Evidence from the foster carers tracking interviews illustrates that foster carers are fully aware of the role of the Supervising Social Workers. Foster carers again commented very favourably about the level of support that they received. Foster carers are visited on a monthly (in the case of task centred placements) and no less than three monthly (in the case of permanent placements) basis. Regular telephone contact also occurs. The Foster Carer's Handbook continues to provide guidance in respect of all the areas identified in Standard 21.2.</p> <p>Carers who spoke with the Inspection team during visits and supporting social worker interviews confirmed that both groups had a clear understanding of their own and others' roles and responsibilities.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The foster placement agreements seen from the tracking exercise matched the service being provided in the homes of the foster carers who were visited. All foster carers have a named Supervising Social Worker who visits on a monthly to three monthly basis depending on the type of placement being provided. More frequent visits are made on occasions if additional support is required to promote a successful placement. All information necessary for foster carers to provide safe and positive practice, including information about complaints, investigations allegations and removal from the register is contained in the Foster Carers Handbook.

Systems of practical support for foster carers include prompt payments, support for foster care associations, access to social work support and the provision of respite care where appropriate.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

All foster carers undergo an induction training programme. There is a range of post approval training courses available for foster carers. Through interviews with carers it was again identified that number of foster carers have difficulty in getting on post approval training courses for a variety of reasons. The fostering service has identified that offering training courses at a variety of times in the day / evening and at weekends, and open distance learning would provide more opportunities for carers who have other commitments during the week. The fostering service manager's quarterly report identifies the level of training activity undertaken by foster carers and the data is more detailed. However, the monitoring of the training undertaken by individual carers is still in need of improvement. The service needs to explore the establishment of baseline expectations that carers should undertake at least a certain degree of training to update their skills and to remain aware of developments. It is acknowledged by the Inspection team that the service is aware of these issues and recognise that improvements should be made. It is positively noted by the Inspection team that the service has recently appointed a Fostering Development Worker whose specific task is to examine the training and development needs of carers, and the work around planning for this training is already well advanced. Given these facts, the Inspection team are confident that the training that is necessary for carers should be achieved.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

As part of the tracking exercise files of children placed were checked. No inaccuracies were found in respect of information on files and chronological filing is being maintained which makes the information readily and easily accessible. This was not the case for files from the children with disabilities team. The files are being checked on a quarterly basis by the Team Manager as part of the audit system. Files now have a guidance note at the front of them indicating what information should be contained and in what order. The foster carers who were visited by the Inspection team confirmed that they are supplied with all the relevant information they needed to provide a safe placement, and demonstrated an understanding of what records they are expected to keep.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Separate records are kept for staff (at the Civic centre) and foster carers, whilst separate files are kept in relation to the children placed. The Fostering Service Team Manager audits the foster carers files on a quarterly basis. The quarterly audit report by the Manager of the service is comprehensive and covers all the core activities of the fostering service from recruitment, preparation, training, support and presentation to panels of foster carers, the core activities of the staff and essential information about the children referred and placed. Statistical information from the previous quarterly audit is also included. The quarterly report should also include information about complaints and allegations, which it still does not. There is an access to information policy, which is contained in the Foster Carer's Handbook. Records are kept securely and the service is clear about the necessity to apply confidentiality procedures and those in relation to data protection.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

71

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

X

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

X

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

8

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

9

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

210

Maximum £

320

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?

3

The Team and Service Manager have separate offices in the same building. The plan for the remainder of the team to relocate to larger offices within the same complex, which was reported at the previous annual inspection, has been achieved and the service now operates from more spacious facilities. All other fostering service activities, training, panel meetings and foster carers support groups continue to be carried out in different Local Authority buildings. The fostering service has efficient administrative systems and a new IT system is being introduced across the authority, although the service manager acknowledged that much needs to be done to this system to make it fully suitable for the needs of the fostering service.

It is recognised by the inspection team that having most of the fostering and looked after children's teams based in the same complex contributed to ease of information sharing between different disciplines across the children's service.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service continues to be provided with annual budget that is normally increased in line with inflation. As reported at the previous annual inspection, the Service Manager had taken up Central Government funding under various initiatives to recruit to specific posts to improve services to Looked After Children in fostering service placements. This is undoubtedly having positive benefits for the service. The service has also now improved the allowances paid to foster carers in order to keep them in line with other Local Authority fostering services and Independent Fostering Agencies that operate in the same geographical area.

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

A budget and financial position document for the fostering service was provided. The overall budget is allocated to specific budget headings and the Local Authority internal financial section monitors these regularly. The ability of the fostering service to achieve its agreed development targets for 2004/2005 is dependent on the priorities of the Local Authority Social Services Department, although it is noted that significant improvements are being planned, not least in the area of foster care training and development.

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 on fostering allowances and this is available in the Foster Carers Handbook. There were no concerns expressed from the foster carers who were visited by the Inspection team about regular and prompt payments of fees. Fees to foster carers are reviewed annually and an increase in payments to carers has occurred in the current financial year. Payments to Kinship Carers are now paid at the same rate as other foster carers. Comments made by foster carers indicate that extra financial support and equipment is provided when the assessed needs of children in placement deem this to be appropriate.

Additional funding has been provided to specific foster carers for extensions / adaptations to properties in order to facilitate maintaining long-term placements of children.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Executive Head of Children's Services appoints and terminates the appointment of panel members as well as being responsible for making decisions on the recommendations that arise from panel meetings. The Fostering Panel has clear written policies and procedures, which have recently been updated, including one covering decision making when the panel is not in agreement. The terms of reference of the panel do now highlight the quality assurance function of the panel in terms of consistency of assessment of the foster carers and the monitoring the range and type carers available in comparison to the needs of the children. The panel has access to medical advice although the Medical Advisor is not restricted to this role and is a full member of the panel. In all respects the panel is properly constituted. A new chair of the fostering panel has recently been appointed and additions to the panel have resulted in a diversity in its membership which is beneficial to the functions which the panel perform.

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?
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The fostering service has a policy and procedure in place for referral and decision making process in respect of the placement of children for short-term breaks. The Service Manager has identified the improved recruitment of foster carers to provide short-term and respite care as one of the targets for 2003/2004. There has also been a recruitment drive for foster carers for children with disabilities. Foster carers recruited for this task are used in the Family Link Service.	3
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.**

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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As reported at the previous annual inspection, the fostering service has recognised the contribution of Kinship carers and has removed the anomaly that they were paid at a lower rate than other foster carers. Placements are made with relatives and friends following an interview, the foster carers home being inspected and appropriate checks being carried out. If the placement is longer than six weeks the carers have to be assessed and approved by the panel. Contact arrangements with extended family and friends are agreed with the child's placing Social Worker as part of the placement agreement. A specific Supporting Social Worker post has been created to work with friend and family carers although an appointment to this position is being sought.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(Not applicable at this Inspection)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

NO

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

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

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:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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