



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Link

**159b Stoke Newington High Street
London
N16 0NY**

Lead Inspector
Kristen Judd

Announced Inspection
21st November 2005 9.45

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Foster Care Link
Address	159b Stoke Newington High Street London N16 0NY
Telephone number	020 7923 0330
Fax number	020 7923 1754
Email address	admin@fostercarelink.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Mr Mohamed Munaf Zina Mr Ismail Isa Amaan
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Peter William Howes
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 9th March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Link is an independent fostering service. The agency is based in the Stoke Newington area of the London Borough of Hackney. The Commission of Social Care Inspection registered the Agency in February 04. This is the agencies second inspection since registration.

The objective of Foster Care Link is to become the first alternative choice for placing authorities that are finding it difficult to effectively match Muslim, Asian Black and Ethnic Minority children from their own resources. At the time of inspection 9 children were placed by the agency.

The agency offers long, short stay and emergency placements.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over five days; the following methods were used to inspect the agency.

- Visit to three carer's homes.
- Discussion with three children/young people.
- Case tracking was undertaken.
- Samples of records were examined.
- Discussion with the registered manager.
- Discussion with one agency staff.
- Discussion with the registered provider

The inspector was satisfied that Foster Care Link offer a quality service that sufficiently meets the needs of those young people who access the agency's fostering service for placement. There have been 9 requirements and 8 recommendations made following this report. Verbal feedback was given on the 1st December 2005.

The inspector would like to thank the foster carer's, children/ young people and the staff team for facilitating this announced inspection and actively contributing to the regulatory process.

What the service does well:

The agency has a staff team that is committed to improving the quality of its service. Young People spoken to spoke highly of the care that they received. Foster carers stated that they were well supported by the staff.

The agency continues to work hard towards achieving the standards and is clearly focused on exceeding them in the future. The administration of the agency continues to be of a high standard.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Improvements were noted in the quality of the assessments and reviews presented to panel and clearly much work has been done in this area.

There has also been much work in the update of policies and procedures, all of which had been forwarded to the foster carers on completion.

What they could do better:

Individual support to foster carers was good, however the lack of opportunity for foster carers to meet collectively for support needs to be addressed.

The agency must investigate and implement ways of ensuring how the children/young people's opinions and views can be sought regularly.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The inspector believes that carers were fully aware of the health and development needs of the children and young people in their care.

EVIDENCE:

The policy on Promoting the Development and Health of Children in Foster Care provides clear guidance with regard to the carer's role in terms of helping to promote the health of any child in their care. Files indicated that children and young people were registered with a General Practitioner, dentist and any other relevant healthcare practitioners.

Health needs were clearly recorded in the Look After Children (LAC) documentation in children's files. The foster carers confirmed that they had received copies of the same, and that the information was sufficient. Additionally children's files viewed generally demonstrated monitoring of healthcare and medical needs during the foster carers supervision sessions however it would be beneficial if one central format to track any medical appointments or issues.

Carers visited confirmed that they are required to register their foster children with a G.P. take them to dental and optician appointments when required; help them to access the services needed; and give attention to health issues in the every day care of the children, including diet, personal hygiene and health promotion issues. The inspector was satisfied during the visits that carers were fully aware of the health and development needs of the children and young people in their care.

The inspector noted that the one young persons file the appropriate section of the LAC documentation (consent to medical treatment) was unsigned. This is an important issue, and the agency must ensure that all LAC documentation is appropriately signed.

Evidence was seen that all but one fosters carer had completed a first aid course in 2005. The foster carer in question confirmed that they were booked on the course in January 06.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3,6,8,9,15 &30

The inspector believes that systems are in place to protect and safeguard young people. The agency's fostering panels are efficiently and effectively organised.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was satisfied that the registered manager was fully aware of the responsibility to ensure that suitable people were recruited. The registered manager of the fostering service is a qualified social worker with extensive experience of childcare and fostering work. The inspector was satisfied through interviewing the manager and additional staff their suitability to manage the service.

Random selections of files were inspected and it was noted that necessary documentation was in place in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

At the time of the inspection, only one supervising social worker was employed by the agency. An additional agency member of staff is being used as present. The current post holder was also a qualified social worker. The inspector reviewed the personnel files. All files reviewed evidenced current and satisfactory CRB disclosure forms.

The inspector visited three foster carers in their own homes and was adequately satisfied with the quality of the accommodation and facilities provided for children and young people. It was noted that the homes were warm, adequately furnished and decorated: each child having their own bed and accommodation. All the young people spoken to during the inspection appeared happy with their accommodation and felt that there was enough privacy to meet their needs.

The inspector found that health and safety checks were undertaken at the homes of foster carers, which were reviewed periodically. These checks also follow up annual checks such as car insurance and maintenance of gas boilers. The agency repeated checks when carers moved home. Checks lists were completed and referenced on foster carers files. Actions required were recorded and were noted when actions were completed. It was noted that not all of the forms were signed by carers.

There was evidence of unannounced visits by the supervising social workers; the foster carers confirmed that the visits were undertaken. Newly approved foster carers were also aware that these unannounced visits would be undertaken.

Within the matching policy it provides guidance with regard to making placements and the accommodation considerations. In discussion with the registered manager and review of relevant files, the inspector was satisfied that every effort was made by the fostering agency to facilitate the effective 'matching' of Looked After Children with foster carers. Decisions being based on key factors such as ethnic background, religion, foster carers' approved status, the particular skills and abilities of foster carers.

The agency has written foster carer agreements in place all of which were signed and dated.

The agency has updated the child protection policy, which defines physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. The foster carers handbook includes the updated policies, which also includes information on definitions and indicators of abuse, disclosures by young people and allegations.

Child Protection training for foster carers is completed initially within the 'choosing to foster' course. A training consultant is completing further comprehensive child protection training. The inspector was informed that the training would be on a rolling programme. Most carers had completed the further training.

There is a bullying policy in place, which is comprehensive and includes indicators of bullying or different types of bullying. The missing child policy has been updated and provides clear guidance for the carer with regards to young people to continually abscond, and what to do once the young person returns.

Foster care agreements and the foster carers handbook clearly highlights that corporal punishment is not acceptable.

There is a system in place to collate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. There was one complaint made by a young person to the Local Authority Social Worker. The inspector noted that the complainant made certain allegations about a carer and as such should have been notified to the Commission.

There was no panel in operation during the inspection. The inspector had access to the minutes of the previous panel meetings; it was noted as being quorate. Evidence showed that prospective foster carer assessments were presented for panel approval, as were foster carer reviews. Panel membership included a cross section of expertise and independent members. Through the tracking of information on Form F's and reviews the inspector is satisfied that the panel are able to pick up issues and hold relevant discussions prior to recommendations being made. The inspector was informed that training for the Foster Panel has been undertaken since the previous inspection.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7,13 &31

The inspector is satisfied that the agency is committed to ensuring that the educational attainment of young people in placement is well promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors visited three foster carer homes. Observations and discussion with the young people indicated that their needs were being met. There was evidence to show that carers' are recruited from a range of ethnic backgrounds. It was evident from documents seen at the agency that the agency match children and young people with carers that can appropriately meet their ethnic, religious and cultural needs.

The agency is not able to provide specialist care and equipment to enable children with disabilities to be accommodated at this time.

The fostering agency provides foster carers written guidance addressing the promotion of educational achievement. Foster carers who spoke with the inspector were clear about their role and responsibilities with regards to school contact, creating an environment where learning is valued; establishing an expectation of school attendance and supporting the child's full participation in school life.

In some cases these attainments are extremely high, one of the agency looked after young people had recently gained an excellence award from the local authority for her recent exam results, which were excellent.

There was some written evidence however records did not reflect the input and support that carers verbalised to the inspector. It is recommended that the agency ensure that files contain good supporting evidence of the educational attainments of the young people and the support provided by the agency.

All of the young people stated that they were very well supported to achieve to the best of there ability.

The agency does not have any short-term placement at this time.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 & 11

The agency provides good quality and consistency of supervision to foster carers. There is an amount of evidence that agency staff were making contact with young people placed in regards to their views of how the placement is progressing. However there is a lack of organisational consultation with the young people placed.

EVIDENCE:

There is a policy on '*promoting contact*' for carers and this highlights the role and responsibilities of the carer. Many of the young people placed with the agency are asylum seekers and as such contact is limited.

However the carers spoken to during the inspection were aware of '*contact*' arrangements for the young people in their care if in place. Much of the contact is with friends or distant relatives. Transport allowances are incorporated into the weekly payments.

Evidence was seen of foster carers and supervising social workers attending reviews. The inspector saw evidence of one case being prepared for review which included questionnaires completed by the young people being cared for to comment on their satisfaction with the level of care received via foster placements. Reviews of young peoples progress take place at appropriate intervals.

However it was noted that some of the reports were requested many months prior to the case being taken to panel. One case in particular noted that the young people had completed the form some months earlier. Since the completion of the form the placement had broken down and the young people had made a complaint to their social worker regarding the carer. This was not documented in the young person form. All opinions of young people must be accurate and up dated as situations change.

Young people were aware of how to complain and felt that their concerns were listened to and acted on. Young people spoken to said they had been given information on how to make a complaint. The young people guide contains relevant information in addition about how to contact the Local Authority or the Commission directly.

The supervision records for fosters carers were fairly comprehensive and followed up any relevant issues. There was also evidence that supervising social worker speaks to the young people at least three monthly with regards to how the placement is going and any concerns.

The complaints procedure was seen. The inspector spoke with young people who were clear about who they would talk to if they had a complaint. The young people guide contains relevant information in addition about how to contact the Local Authority or the Commission directly.

One complaint was seen that was made by a young person to their social worker. An investigation was conducted however the outcome was unclear. All complaints/allegations must be appropriately investigated in line with procedure.

There remains no opportunity for young people to get together and no ongoing organisational consultation with the young people with regards to issues that are likely to affect their daily living or future.

It is a repeated requirement that the agency investigates and implement ways of ensuring how the children/young people's opinions and views can be sought regularly.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14 &29

The inspector is satisfied that young people are well supported by carers to develop their skills in preparation to moving on. Payments to carers are made promptly in line with the agencies policy.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was satisfied through discussions with the foster carers and young people that they were actively assisting in the young person's preparation for adulthood e.g. by supervising and offering advice on basic daily living skills. However there was a lack of evidence of the input that carers were doing with the young people. These issues should be clearly recorded on a clear plan for the young people and carers.

Young people spoken to were complimentary of the fosters carers and their families. Young people confirmed that they receive a clothing allowance. Young people were pleased that they were able to spend their pocket money when and how they wanted to.

There is guidance in place with regards to finance and payments to foster carers. The allowances include provision of clothing and travel. Young people receive £50.00 for birthdays in addition to an additional £50.00 per year for annual religious festivals. All the carers spoken to during the inspection stated that they were always paid promptly.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

1,2,4,5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28.

There are clear and effective procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. The management of the agency is effective and staff are generally well organised.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was satisfied that the Statement of Purpose clearly stated the aims and objectives of the service.

The children's guide has been produced in two forms; one aimed at younger children and one for young people. The guides have been further developed since the last inspection and are much improved.

The registered manager is a qualified social worker with thirty-three years social work experience. He is a professional adviser and has been a chair and trainer of adoption and fostering panels. During the interview the inspector was satisfied that the manager exercises effective leadership.

The management structure of the agency is clear. Staff are aware of the management structure and their individual roles and responsibilities. Staff have been managed and supervised by the registered manager. The office has the appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the size of the service.

There is a comprehensive Foster Carers handbook, which clearly explains the role of the carers and the responsibilities of the agency. There are clear and effective procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service.

Assessments seen appeared to have been conducted in a timely fashion. One newly approved carer spoken to confirmed this and stated that the assessment process had been a positive experience.

The inspector notes that the newly completed Form F's were of a better quality. They evidenced discussions regarding protection, abuse and dealing with challenging behaviour. The current registered manager has much experience within this field and is closely supervising the current staff and taking overall responsibility for the assessment and approvals. However there some concerns remain, as there is evidence that the assessors do not always address pertinent issues and they must ensure that questions are asked to clarify situations. The inspector acknowledges that the panel minutes reflected that some of these issues were addressed at panel.

Additionally the assessments showed some evidence of the applicant's self-reflection however this need further work. One assessment seen clearly stated that the prospective carer could not discuss sensitive issues with a male foster child although previously in the assessment it stated that the applicant had attained relevant training in this area. The inspector expects such inconsistencies to be further discussed openly and recorded appropriately in the assessment form.

At the time of inspection none of the carers were due for review. However some of the completed reviews were waiting to be taken to panel (which has not met since August 05) and as such were deemed out of date. The next panel was scheduled for January 06, the inspector raised concerns about the regularity of panel.

There is 24-hour support service provided for foster carers by the social worker. In addition the manager is contactable 24 hours a day. The inspector used the out of hours number and a response was made extremely promptly.

The service has amended the whistle blowing policy. However the policy must clearly indicate that whistle blowing can be made at any time to outside agencies directly including social services and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The inspector acknowledges that the policy (also known as confidential reporting) for foster carers does contain this information.

The fostering service keeps and updates separate records for staff, carers and young people. The carer's files were clear and well structured. Evidence was seen of the training undertaken by foster carers such as safe caring, child protection and first aid. Training courses for foster carers should be made available that addresses Life history work.

The inspector was informed that training programmes are being further developed and are to be on a rolling programme. Additionally the inspector was informed that all carers with placements are registered with the Fostering Network and subscriptions are paid by the agency. It is hoped that further training will be access through the organisation.

The inspector is satisfied that the agency is aware of the importance of on going training and this area will need further development as the agency grows. However the individual training development plans for carers need to be developed to developed skills and tackle any weakness. This is of particular important following any complaints, investigations or allegations.

Supervising social workers are expected to visit foster placements at intervals of not more than six weeks with at least one unannounced a year. This is to supervise, monitor and offer support to foster carers. The inspector saw documentation of signed supervisory visits. Reports were brief and through discussion with staff and foster carers clearly did not record fully the support being received. It is recommended that the supervision reports contain more detail; observations and that agendas are developed from the information retained on carers and young people files.

There are records of complaints and allegations maintained. As previously stated there was one complaint made by a young person to the Local Authority Social Worker. The inspector noted that the complainant made certain allegations about a carer and as such should have been notified to the Commission. This must be recorded as an allegation and the outcome must be recorded and a comprehensive report presented to panel for consideration.

A sample of children's records were inspected all of which contained the Local Authority care plans. However these were found to be lacking in specific detail. The agency has not developed their own placement plans; to highlight the individual needs of the young people, placed. There was concern in particular with regards to one young person who routine needed to be properly recorded to ensure that the carers were providing the right support and care. The inspector feels that adequate risk assessments must be implemented.

Foster carers all had placement agreements in place. The foster carers handbook provides guidance on relevant issues.

All carers spoken to during the inspection stated that everyone within the agency was approachable. The agency needs to focus on developing support groups in the agency as the number of carers increases. This will provide invaluable informal support for foster carers.

The financial records examined were well organised. The appropriate financial data was kept electronically. The agency's financial resources are satisfactory.

The agency premises are fit for purpose.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

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

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

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

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

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

yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS12	11	The registered manager must ensure that the placing authority completes all LAC documents, including medical information.	31/01/06
2	FS9	43	The registered manager must ensure that any allegation is notified to the Commission of Social Care Inspection without delay.	31/01/06
3	FS11	11.(b)	The registered manager must ensure all opinions of young people must be accurate and up dated as situations change.	31/01/06
4	FS11	11	The registered manager must investigate and implement ways of ensuring how the children/young people's opinions and views can be sought regularly. (Timescale 31/07/05 not met)	31/03/06
5	FS17	27.1	The registered manager must ensure that the assessments of prospective foster carers focus on the applicants' self-reflection particularly in areas where the applicant raises issues of concern.	31/01/06
6	FS18	12.2(f)	The registered manager must ensure that all policies relating to	31/01/06

			whistleblowing highlight that the Commission for Social Inspection can be approached at any time.	
7	FS22	12.2	The registered manager must ensure that the complaint referred to in this report be recorded as an allegation and the outcome recorded .A comprehensive report presented to panel for consideration.	31/01/06
8	FS24	11	The regsitered manager must ensure that the young people needs are clearly documented; this must be made available to foster carers to enable that the needs to be met.	31/03/06
9	FS24	12	The registered manager must ensure that any known risk be appropriately risk assessed.	31/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS12	It is recommended that the agency use one central format to track any medical appointments or issues.
2	FS6	It is recommended that all Health and Safety forms are signed in accordance with the agency's policy
3	FS13	It is recommended that the agency formalized recording to accurately reflect the attainments of the young people being looked after.
4	FS22	It is recommended that the agency develop the carers support groups to encourage foster carers to discuss issues openly and gain support from each other.
5	FS20	It is recommended that the supervision reports contain more detail; observations and that agendas are developed from the information retained on carers and young people files.
6	FS23	It is recommended that there are individual self-development plan for foster carers.
7	FS24	Training courses for foster carers should be made available that addresses Life history work.

8	FS30	It is recommended that the panel meet more frequently to ensure that assessments and reviews are presented in a timely fashion.
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