



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Kingston Fostering Services

**The Guildhall
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT1 1EU**

Lead Inspector
Gavin Thomas

Key Announced Inspection
7th, 8th, 9th & 17th August 2006 10:00

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	Kingston Fostering Services
Address	The Guildhall Kingston upon Thames Surrey KT1 1EU
Telephone number	0208 5476042
Fax number	020 8547 6036
Email address	fostering@rbk.kingston.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Royal Borough Of Kingston Upon Thames
Name of registered Manager (if applicable)	Jenny Rigby
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 24th October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames Fostering Services is a Local Authority service that provides temporary and permanent Foster Carers for children and young people. The service is based in Guildhall 1, High Street, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EU. The Family Placement Team Manager is responsible for the management of this service. The principles upon which the Fostering Service operates are based on the five outcomes for all children enshrined in the Children Act 2004. This is coupled with the Council's six Strategic Aims as set out in its publication "Everyone Counts". Further details about this service may be obtained directly from the Fostering Service. The Aims and Objectives of the service are included in the Statement Of Purpose.

The types of services offered are: (a) Emergency (b) Short Term Foster Care, (c) Permanent Foster Care, and (d) Short Breaks Scheme.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was conducted by two Inspectors and took place over a period of approximately fifty-eight hours. The following processes and methodology were used which formed the basis of the inspection:

- A pre inspection meeting with the Manager and Practice Advisor.
- Observation of a fostering panel including interviews with the Panel Chair and panel administrator.
- Interviews and meetings with all members of the Fostering Team including the Family Placements Team Manager, Social Workers, Recruitment Officer, Finance Officer, Training Officer, Practice Advisor and Family Placement Team Administrator.
- Interviews with professionals who work with the Fostering Service.
- Visits to four Foster Carers homes, one of whom was a kinship carer.
- Inspection of a range of records and documents.
- A meeting with the Head of Children's Service and safeguarding.
- A tour of the premises where professionals are based. (Eagle Chambers)
- Feedback meeting with the Manager and Practice Advisor.

For the benefit of the reader, the Practice Advisor is the Deputy Manager for the Family Placement Team. The "Managers" referred to in this report are the Family Placement Team Manager and the Practice Advisor.

The Fostering Service was very well organised and prepared for this inspection. This included the availability of rooms for holding interviews and examining documentation, accessibility to records, arranging interviews and home visits and notifying all relevant persons about this inspection. Special thanks are conveyed to the Manager and Family Placements Team Administrator who were instrumental in coordinating the inspection programme.

For the purpose of this inspection, questionnaires were distributed to children/young people, Foster Carers and children's Social Workers to seek their views about the quality of service provided. The Fostering Service and/or other relevant senior personnel should address some of the comments made by Social Workers and Foster Carers. Some comments have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

A summary of the responses were as follows:

Children/Young People – Ten completed questionnaires were received.

All children/young people stated they felt well cared for by the their Foster Carers.

All children/young people stated that they knew how to make a complaint and who to speak to if they were not happy.

Nine children/young people stated that their Foster Carers listened to them and took notice of their opinions.

Nine children/young people stated that they were not being bullied.

One young person stated that they were being bullied in school but this has since stopped.

Specific comments made by children/young people:

"I usually get support and advice about being healthy-eating too many crisps and drinking pop".

"My Foster Carer makes sure I eat five a day".

"My Foster Carer talks to me about my future and my education".

" I have a lovely bed with lots of lovely comfy warm teddies".

"My Social Worker listens to me".

"I feel safe living with my Foster Carer".

" I am very successful in my education".

Foster Carers – Nine completed questionnaires were received.

Six Foster Carers rated the fostering service as being excellent or good. This included the involvement of children/young people in decision making, information received about the child/young person prior to the placement commencing, support for Foster Carers to maintain an sustain placements and training opportunities.

Specific comments made by Foster Carers:

- Children are involved in their reviews but alternate methods should be available to young people as opposed to form filling.
- Carers have felt unsupported at a time of crisis. Carers would benefit from independent counselling. The same Foster Carer commented that the fostering service has excellent training and involves carers in sharing knowledge and skills.
- The fostering service is quite good but could do better by cutting out so much red tape and procedures.
- The children have more rights and are rewarded for bad behaviour.
- This is a model service. It provides the best provision for children, families and their carers.
- The service is very good. The Supervising Social Worker keeps in contact regularly.
- The service is consistent regarding good practice.

One Foster Carer stated that the Fostering Service provides out of date information in the newsletters. The Inspector read six newsletters, which were distributed during the period 2005 – 2006. The newsletters were judged to be informative and gave advance dates for events and functions.

The Inspector spoke with two Foster Carers about comments they had written in the questionnaires expressing dissatisfaction with aspects of the service. The Foster Carers did agree for their details to be given to the Fostering Manager who in turn will arrange for the Foster Carers to be contacted to discuss their views in more detail.

Social Workers – Nine completed questionnaires were received.

All nine Social Workers rated the fostering service as being excellent or good for enabling children to be healthy and have healthy lifestyles. Positive comments were made about Foster Carers acting responsibly in taking children/young people to medical appointments.

Eight Social Workers rated the fostering service as being excellent or good for making sure that children are well cared for.

Five Social Workers rated the fostering service as being excellent or good for ensuring stability for children and young people. One Social Worker stated that moves from Foster Carers are rare. If this is necessary, the move is done in a planned way.

One Social Worker stated that the Fostering Team and the Children's Social Work Team work well together.

Other comments and views of Social Workers have been included in the body of this report. These comments relate mainly to the recruitment of Foster Carers and working relationships between the fostering team and the Children's Social Work Teams.

The Inspectors take this opportunity in thanking everyone who contributed to this inspection.

What the service does well:

The Royal Borough of Kingston fostering service provides a good range of resources for children/young people. Foster Carers have access to a comprehensive training programme.

The fostering service is doing very well in generating new ideas and creative approaches to advertising the work of the service and for the recruitment of Foster Carers.

The Foster Carers visited were very complimentary about the support and supervision they receive from their Supervising Social Workers.

The skills, experience and expertise within the staff team and the fostering panel are an asset to this fostering service. This was demonstrated throughout the inspection.

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the previous inspection (24 October 2005), 11 requirements and 3 recommendations were made. Seven requirements were met and four were partially met. Work was being done towards fully achieving outstanding requirements as follows:

- The new ICS system should be in place by October 2006. This system should provide a better service for communicating and exchange of information between different departments.
- Training on trans-cultural placements for carers has been commissioned.
- The Foster Carers handbook was still in the process of being reviewed.

The new Directorate Head of Children's Services and Safeguarding is now the named Responsible Individual. (This position is required under Regulation 5(2)(c) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002).

Since the last inspection, the fostering service has visited different council departments with a Road Show. This was one of the methods used for raising awareness about the work of the fostering service and to improve communication between different departments.

A full time Social Worker has been appointed and due to take up post in September 2006.

A Buddies scheme has been introduced which will enable Foster Carers to exchange knowledge and information particularly for trans-racial and trans-cultural placements.

A new risk assessment pro forma was introduced in January 2006 and was still under review.

CRB checks have been carried out on all Foster Carers.

The Recruitment and Marketing Officer was actively promoting the work of the fostering service and implementing different strategies for recruiting Foster Carers.

Good outcomes have been achieved with the new systems now in place for recording, monitoring and verifying training undertaken by Foster Carers.

What they could do better:

It was evident on this inspection that the Family Placement Team could benefit from additional administrative staff. This would alleviate Social Workers from having to continuously carry out administrative tasks.

The lack of accommodation for meetings with children/young people and suitable accommodation for staff are matters to be addressed by the Royal Borough of Kingston.

Based on feedback given via discussions with Social Workers and via the questionnaires, the Royal Borough of Kingston should identify reasons as to why some staff feel that the working relationships between the fostering team and the children's Social Work Teams needs to improve. This includes exchange of information when placement referrals are made.

The Royal Borough of Kingston must act on the comments made whereby staff were of the opinion that the Borough does not have a clear value base for diversity and equality.

Vetting processes for panel members must be improved upon.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

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

The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.

The service works in partnership with other professionals and key agencies to further monitor and develop health care planning for children placed by the service.

EVIDENCE:

The health and wellbeing of the children and young people placed was given priority.

Children/young people's health needs were met via a good range of resources. Health related topics are included in the "skills to foster" training. Foster Carers confirmed this. Fosters carers spoken to, said that the fostering service was supportive in ensuring that children/young people's health needs were being met.

Kingston had adopted a holistic approach to health and recognised the direct links health would have for all aspects of the child's welfare, including safeguarding or preparation for independence, amongst others.

The Inspectors met with some of the professionals who provided specialist services for Looked After Children/young people. These professionals included a Substance Misuse Advisor, LAC Education Advisor, Mental Health Therapist - CAHMS, Children and Youth Participation Officer. Children/young people have access to a wide range of resources.

The team of professionals spoke about the types of work they had done with groups of children and young people or with individual children / young people or carers which proved to be successful. They considered that the Local Authority was committed to promoting health for Looked After Children and had taken realistic steps, usually adequately resourced, to support children well. The Mental Health Therapist did express concern that accommodation was an issue and meeting with children/young people at a suitable place was not always possible due to shortage of appropriate rooms. The view was that this could deter children/young people from attending therapy if they do not feel comfortable with the environment.

Foster Carers confirmed that children/young people had access to primary health care services. Foster Carers also confirmed that children/young people were registered with a local GP.

Children/young people's health needs were recorded on file. Significant health needs were recorded on the LAC forms.

The Inspectors were advised that the approach to LAC medical examinations has now changed, thus making this process less formal for children/young people.

Discussion with the Managers showed how the service supported carers and monitored how they helped children and young people to receive the services, which met their needs. Carers would be given clear information regarding their role in terms of promoting health. The attitudes of carers and their ability to promote health, including in the everyday care of the child, would be appraised during the assessment process, during training, monitoring visits and at reviews.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15&30

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

Support services to placements are personalised to the needs of children and young people.

Child protection was at the forefront of the Fostering Managers' conduct of the service.

The service provider took steps to ensure that staff who worked for the fostering service would be suitable to work with children, although some gaps remained in the vetting procedure.

EVIDENCE:

The Inspector visited four foster homes. All homes appeared to be very well kept and homely. The Inspector met with one child who agreed for their bedroom to be seen. This was done in the presence of the Foster Carers. The standard of foster homes are monitored by Supervising Social Workers.

Health and safety training is included in the skills to foster training. Relevant information on health and safety is also included in the Foster Carers handbook.

Foster Carers are informed of statutory inspections via the Fostering Families newsletter.

Matching processes in place were thorough. A placements meeting is held weekly to discuss all new referrals and matching processes, which may include request for changes. Difficulties with existing placements are also discussed. A risk management record is completed for all children/young people placed with Foster Carers. The record covers three main areas: The needs of the child/young person, the carer's capacity and resources. This record was judged to be a very good tool for the purpose of matching a child/young person to a suitable carer.

Matching was the subject of strategic planning, with the Managers analysing the changing trends in needs and how to ensure that the service could meet these adequately. It was recognised that, being a small service, opportunities for specialisation had been lacking, but the interest of children would be promoted by appropriate use of external placements and the development of internal resources to meet changing trends. For example the service was considering how to recruit specialist Foster Carers to work with particular behaviours, on a one to one basis and the support and resources needed to make this successful. Some young people whose language needs could not be adequately met by Kingston carers, were placed with approved Independent Fostering Agencies who were able to offer a better match of carers.

It was recommended that the procedure followed, when placing children with carers, outside of the agreed terms of approvals, should be reviewed.

Supervising Social Workers were of the opinion that on occasions, they do not receive sufficient information about the needs of a child/young person via the placement request forms in order for them to match a child/young person with a suitable carer. The Royal Borough of Kingston must review the ways in which information is exchanged between the Children's Teams and the Fostering service to ensure that children/young people are matched to suitable Foster Carers.

The Fostering Manager said that the numbers of exemptions made for placements had decreased since the last inspection. Only two exemptions were made and approved since the last inspection. The fostering panel must monitor the numbers of exemptions requested and approved by the fostering service. This requirement remains outstanding from the previous inspection.

Joint working protocols were in place between the Children's Services and Safeguarding Directorate and the Child Abuse Investigation Team. The Fostering Service had good systems in place for acting on child protection matters, which includes notifiable incidents as required under Schedule 8 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

The Managers said that the fostering service had clear policies for the carers aimed at protecting children. It was made clear in the Foster Carer agreement that corporal punishment was not acceptable. There was a policy on counteracting bullying and one on what to do if children went missing from the carers' home.

Detailed discussion with the Managers, regarding care and protection, gave evidence of their commitment and expertise about safeguarding children. During the discussion the reasons for certain decisions or actions were explored and generally it was evident that the Managers took well thought out decisions aimed at promoting children's welfare. The discussion highlighted the emphasis the service put on thorough assessments of carers, their preparation and training. Carers would be made aware early in the 'skills to foster' course of the reality of abuse, whether physical, mental or emotional and would be offered early training about safer caring practices. This would also be regularly reviewed at monitoring / supervision visits. Health and safety checks for the premises would be conducted.

The Participation Officer considered that, overall, Looked After Children in the fostering service were aware of their right to complain and were appropriately consulted. She considered that the department had been effective in ensuring that children would be supported in raising any concern.

Social Work Staff were of the opinion that overall, Foster Carers do well in promoting young peoples safety. The Inspector was advised however, that one young person, who had made an allegation, was dissatisfied with the Local Authority for not providing a proper response. This included the length of time taken to investigate the issues raised by the young person. The Fostering Manager was aware of this case and agreed that the timescales for completing the investigation exceed the normal timescales. The Royal Borough of Kingston should take the necessary action to ensure that the young person is given proper details about the outcome of their allegation.

The Inspector observed a fostering panel on 26 July 2006 at 14.00hrs. The Inspector also interviewed the Panel Chair and Panel Administrator. Panel members present were as follows:
Panel Chair.
Panel Advisor (Fostering Manager).
Four independent members.
Medical Advisor.

Two Social Workers, one of whom was the Family Placement Team's Training Officer.

Two Observers (Strategic Manager of Children's Services and Safeguarding and Panel Chair Designate).

The panel was conducted in a professional manner. All cases presented to the panel were thoroughly examined.

The Panel Chair explained in his interview that he had taken up a different role with the Royal Borough of Kingston and had therefore resigned from his position as Panel Chair. The Strategic Manager for Children's Services and Safeguarding will now chair the fostering panel for the foreseeable future.

The Panel Chair had served a term of five years. Discussion with the Panel Chair included the following topics:

Length of time served on the panel.

Decision Making processes.

Quality Assurance and monitoring systems.

Quality of reports.

Key functions of the panel.

Panel Membership.

Diversity.

Some of the topics discussed included elements of work undertaken by the fostering team. The Panel Chair was of the opinion that the reports presented to the panel were of a very high standard. The Panel Chair was of the opinion that since the last inspection, the fostering service had worked hard to achieve good outcomes for children/young people and on going support for Foster Carers.

The panel administrator is employed part time and her weekly hours are deployed for both fostering and adoption duties. The panel administrator explained the processes for arranging panel meetings.

Processes were in place for assessing the suitability of staff and Foster Carers to work with children. There was in place a vetting procedure, which included all the statutory checks, although this had not been consistent for members of the panel.

The Manager said that all carers and adult household members would have enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks (CRB), renewed every 3 years. She also assured that such would be the case for all staff for whose appointment she had direct responsibility, including external members of the panel.

Regarding internal members of the panel (i.e. staff from other departments sitting on the panel), the Manager would not usually have access to the recruitment files, which would only be held by the Social Services Personnel Department. There were reasons for this, as those files would contain confidential information relating to the person's main job in the department, which did not come under the management of the fostering service. However this meant that the Manager could not be certain that all checks expected for people involved in the fostering service (and which might be different for the other, main position, they otherwise held), had been conducted.

In one case, it was noted from the file inspected that the person had been appointed to the panel without a CRB check having been conducted by the Local Authority, although there was a previous check from a different employer. It was discussed during the inspection that if the Manager has no access to internal members' personnel files, at least she would need to ask the Personnel Department for confirmation to satisfy her that all the necessary checks have been carried out, before appointing the person to the fostering panel.

Inspection of a selection of staff files (including external panel members), showed that, generally, internal staff would only be appointed after all statutory checks were conducted and the information received would be considered satisfactory. Recruitment checks for Social Work Staff were inspected as required under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. These checks were satisfactory.

External panel members' files did not contain evidence of all statutory checks in all cases and this would need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The Manager assured that this would be done. In particular gaps were found regarding:

Verification of written references by telephone call.

Explanation of any gaps in the study / work history.

CRB checks (as discussed above).

There were two cases noted where the member of staff had been asked to start before the CRB check conducted by Kingston had been received. The Manager explained that those were exceptional circumstances, not likely to be repeated and safeguards were put in place.

Recruitment policies and procedures were in place. These applied to both staff and Foster Carers. A fostering recruitment and retention strategy was devised in May 2006. This strategy sets out the key objectives for recruiting Foster Carers, stages of recruitment, retention, marketing, initiatives, budget details and important dates. The fostering service employs a part time Publicity and Recruitment Officer whose key responsibility is to implement the recruitment and retention strategy. The Publicity and Recruitment Officer has a background

in journalism and marketing. This is an asset to promoting the work of the fostering service and a positive impact for recruiting potential Foster Carers.

The fostering service was in the process of advertising to recruit more Foster Carers. The Publicity and Recruitment Officer showed the Inspector examples of how the methodology has changed to attract potential Foster Carers. Examples of advertising seen were colourful and attractive. The fostering service uses a wide range of resources for advertising and recruitment. These include appropriate websites, magazines, newspapers, display boards in retail stores, libraries and garden centres, local venues such as GP surgeries, dentists and schools. Information evenings are also hosted by the Fostering Service to raise awareness about fostering.

The fostering service will be using the media later this year for promoting the work of the service and for recruitment purposes. A new leaflet about the work of the fostering service was also being devised.

The fostering service was carrying one vacancy for a qualified Social Worker at the time of this inspection. An experienced Social Worker has been appointed and due to take up post in September 2006. The Fostering Manager confirmed that all Social Work Staff appointed are qualified and hold a recognised social work qualification. The service does not employ unqualified Social Work Staff.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13,31

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

Diversity was valued and efforts made to accommodate children's individual needs, although this needed to be better supported by clear policies and statement of intent.

The service placed strong emphasis on providing suitable educational opportunities for young people.

Arrangements for short breaks were sensitive to the fact that parents remained the main carers.

EVIDENCE:

Policies and procedures were in place for diversity and equal opportunities. Foster Carers spoken to did not have any concerns about how the fostering service acknowledges and values diversity. Two Foster Carers spoke very positively about these topics and confirmed that they were included in the "skills to foster" training. Additional information is provided in the Foster Carers handbook. Foster Carers also confirmed that their Supervising Social Workers were always available to assist if they had any concerns regarding children/young people's needs such as gender issues, religion, ethnicity and culture.

Supervising Social Workers regarded diversity as an integral part of their work. The external professionals interviewed spoke about some positive outcomes for young people with diverse needs and how equality was promoted in their work.

The policies and intent of the department regarding the promotion of diversity in the fostering service needed to better describe how these would be enacted in practice. For example, although there was a brief reference to trans-racial and trans-cultural placements, there was not enough clarity about the circumstances when trans-racial or trans-cultural placements would be made. It was not clear also how issues around sexuality, race, ethnicity, cultural needs and religion would be satisfactorily addressed, so that the child would receive support in developing a healthy identity.

It was also suggested, when discussing the carers' supervision formats, with the Practice Advisor during the inspection, that a heading to assess how the carer was promoting equality and diversity in their everyday work with the children placed should be added.

Discussion with the Supervising Social Workers highlighted that they experienced some tensions in the department regarding diversity. Some staff did not feel safe in raising issues of equality or in challenging what they considered might need to be addressed. Some examples were given about why this, if not remedied, would ultimately impinge on the ability of the service to support well the diverse needs of carers and children.

The Managers and the external professionals interviewed gave evidence of the success of the service in supporting children and young people to achieve to the best of their abilities.

The Managers confirmed that all children of school age were in education. The service had clear expectations of carers' role in liaising with schools, supporting children with their homework and generally promoting their educational achievements.

The department had appointed an Education Worker who worked with the carers and individual children to offer additional support and tuition. She also commissioned external tutors as required. This, it was understood, had resulted in great improvements in school attendance and performance at examinations (GCSE's).

Three Foster Carers informed the Inspector that the children/young people were doing very well with their school attendance and education. One young person was preparing to move on to semi independence. The Foster Carer gave examples about how the young person was being prepared to move on. This included input from the young person's Social Worker and the Supervising

Social Worker. The young person had also done well in achieving good grades for a vocational course.

One foster family visited explained that the "skills to foster" training had helped them to develop a better understanding about supporting children/young people with their education. The toys and learning aids provided in this home were judged to be suitable and age appropriate. The Education Advisor for Looked After Children gave examples on how children/young people are supported to achieve a good education. This included practical resources and one to one support.

Children/young people can access information and advice via a website designed by the Royal Borough of Kingston, which is: www.younglavin.org.uk

Eagle Chambers is a familiar location in Kingston where professionals such as the Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Advisor and Education Advisor are based. In addition, other professionals are based there to provide advice, support and education to children/young people.

Short-term breaks was an area that the fostering service was developing, having recognised that this was a valuable service to support children with disabilities and their families. The target of the department was to recruit 8 short-break carers by 2007, although some were already approved.

The fostering service was working with the Children with Disability Team to ensure that full profiles of the children who would benefit from the service would be done, with the parents, so that their needs could be well met.

The Fostering Manager was considering how best to both support and empower the parents. For example, it would be common practice that parents would be choosing the carers and be fully involved in the care plans of the children. The fostering team was reviewing policies and procedures to make them more relevant to support this area of the service and fully recognise the role of the birth parents as the main carers.

The Manager explained that all short break carers would be fully assessed. They would also be expected to attend the mandatory courses targeted at promoting welfare and safeguarding children as well as any course to help them work with individual needs and behaviours.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10 & 11

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

Maintaining and developing family contact and friendships are integral to the service provided. This is emphasised through the training and support given to Foster Carers.

Children's opinions were sought, so as to enable them to contribute to important issues affecting their life and future.

EVIDENCE:

All Foster Carers spoken to, were very clear about their roles in relation to children/young people maintaining contact with their birth parents and significant others. Two Foster Carers also confirmed that the Fostering Service provides support in dealing with any contact issues, which may arise.

Social Work Staff spoken to, confirmed that contact arrangements are monitored regularly, particularly when potential difficulties are known.

Foster Carers are supported financially when providing transport or meeting other costs involving contact meetings.

Foster Carers are trained and supported in listening and responding to children/young people's views. One foster family gave examples of how this training has helped them to communicate more effectively with children/young people. The Foster Carers also emphasised the support they receive from their

Supervising Social Worker who gives them the advice and support they need for interacting and consulting with children/young people with different needs.

The Local Authority had experienced a shortage of Children's Social Workers for some time, which impinged on the processes for promoting consultation and involvement of children. It was understood that the difficulties had ameliorated and the children were being visited regularly again.

The fostering service uses a variety of ways for consulting and seeking the views of children/young people. Children/young people are encouraged to contribute to their reviews. This could be done manually or on line via the younglavin website. Children/young people are also invited to various forums and meetings such as:

- Young People's Forum Meetings.
- Involving Young People in recruitment.
- Service Users involvement in Social Work Education.
- Options for Excellence – organised by the national children's bureau.

All children/young people are issued with information on how to raise a concern or complaint. This is included in the Children's Guide.

The Children and Youth Participation Officer plays a key role in providing opportunities for children/young people to speak about any issues, concerns and to share positive experiences. The Children and Youth Participation Officer also coordinates opportunities for children/young people to understand their rights and to get involved in planning and development services.

Children/young people can receive free younglavin news alerts direct to their mobile phones. Equally, this service provides help and advice and whats happening for young people in Kingston. This information can also be sent directly to mobile phones.

Out of the nine questionnaires completed by children/young people, six children/young people said that their carers "always" listened to them and took notice of their opinions. Two said that their carers "usually" listened to them and took notice of their opinions and one said that they were never listened to. The fostering service was aware of the reasons as given by the young person and action was being taken to address this issue.

Five children/young people said that their Social Workers "always" listened to them and took notice of their opinions; three said that their Social Workers "usually" listened to them and took notice of their opinions and one young person said they did not know if their social work listened to them.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

14 & 29

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

The fostering service had expectations of how carers should help young people develop the skills and knowledge necessary for adult living.

A more formal coordination of the individual young people's plans, amongst the different stakeholders, should make the plans more effective.

Robust systems were in place for processing, paying and monitoring Foster Carer allowances.

EVIDENCE:

The Managers said that all young people over the age of 16 years had a pathway plan aimed at ensuring that they would be supported in acquiring the competencies needed for semi-independent or independent living. One Foster Carer who was in the process of supporting one young person to move on to semi independence confirmed this.

Supervising Social Workers worked with carers, on an individual basis, to support and monitor how they provided age appropriate opportunities for learning independent skills.

Young people are encouraged to be actively involved in decision-making processes and implementation of their pathway plan.

The Managers explained that on occasions, although pathway plans were in place, there had not been a formal and objective protocol to assess them. At

times, when the young person's own assessment of competencies was quite different from what the carers thought, it was difficult to reach a decision that would both be in the best interest of the young person and respect the young person's own decision.

The Managers thought that a more formal procedure to ensure sound coordination of the pathway plans between the young person, the Foster Carer and the young person's social worker, should ensure more accuracy in assessing needs for the future. Carers could then be better supported and be more effective as they and the Supervising Social Workers would know exactly what they should be doing.

One Foster Carer who completed a questionnaire stated that teenagers have the tendency to "rule the house" and ignore any advice about taking care of themselves as young adults. The Foster Carer stated that the children's Social Workers are not truthful enough about what is a suitable placement for them once they move on from foster care. The Foster Carer was of the opinion that young peoples Social Workers allow them to do what they want as opposed to what is appropriate for them.

The Inspector spoke to the Foster Carer about these statements made. The Foster Carer gave examples about her experience in fostering young people whose Social Workers do not set clear boundaries with them. These comments were subsequently discussed with the Fostering Manager. It was advised that the Fostering Manager raise these comments with the Manager of the Children's Social Work Team who should explore these comments in more detail.

The Finance Officer manages Foster Carers allowances. A policy on Foster Carer allowances was in place. All types of allowances paid were very clearly set out.

All allowances are paid fortnightly. Fees are paid based on the Fostering Network recommendations.

Foster Carers are rewarded financially if they attend and complete training courses and have fostered for two years. These enhancements are paid on two levels:

Skill level 1 and
Skill level 2.

The majority of Foster Carers are paid via the BACS system. Cheque payments can be paid if requested. Cash advances are paid depending on the circumstances of the placement.

Allowances are revised annually. The Finance Officer confirmed that all Foster Carers are advised of the revised allowances in writing.

The electronic system seen for recording, paying and monitoring Foster Carer allowances was very well maintained and detailed. The fostering service also has a robust system in place for ensuring that correct allowances are paid.

One Foster Carer who completed a survey stated that the fostering service failed to provide a proper break down of the allowances they were paid. In particular for providing respite placements. The Fostering Manager and the Finance Officer explained that in addition to a summary attached to their allowance, all Foster Carers are provided with a full breakdown of their allowances if this is requested. The Fostering Manager advised that Foster Carers would be reminded that this information is available on request.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 2, 5, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 26 & 32

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. However, the views of Children's Social Workers need to be addressed in order to sustain positive working relationships between the two teams.

There is a strong, consistent and well-qualified and experienced management team. Managers demonstrably provide good leadership to the staff team and a clear and comprehensive Statement of Purpose exemplifies this.

There was a well-implemented strategy for supporting and supervising carers. This included family and kinship carers with recognition of their need for some specialised support.

EVIDENCE:

A Statement of Purpose was in place. The content of this document was in keeping with the criteria as set out in standard 1.4 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.

The Fostering Manager confirmed that elected members formally approved the Statement of Purpose. A Children's Guide was in place. This document is issued to children/young people at the start or soon after their placement. The Children's Guide is also available on CD-rom.

The fostering service is led by a Manager who is suitably qualified with a social work qualification and a Diploma in Management Studies level 4. The Fostering Manager has substantial experience in social work and management. The fostering team spoke of the Fostering Manager as having strong leadership skills and very methodical in her approach.

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently. This judgement is based on the information examined and discussions with staff. Lines of accountability are clearly defined. In the absence of the Fostering Manager, the Practice Advisor (Deputy Manager) is the designated person in charge.

Social Work Staff confirmed that they receive regular one to one supervisions and annual appraisals. Systems were in place to prioritise and monitor workloads. One administrator was in post who covered a range of administrative duties for the Family Placement Team. This included fostering and adoption. There was clearly a shortage of administrative staff for this team. Social Workers were doing administrative duties which included: making up fostering packs, filling envelopes and mail outs, file management, photocopying, updating standard letters, writing up the minutes for team meetings, managing phone-calls and updating information on SWIFT.

Other one – off clerical duties were outstanding which cannot be achieved with the current numbers in the workforce. An analysis of prioritising workload carried out by the fostering service for May/June 2006 demonstrated that the administration tasks done by the Duty staff was equal in volume to Social Work Staff. The outcome of this exercise clearly indicates that the Royal Borough of

Kingston must provide the necessary financial resources to enable the Fostering Manager to appoint additional administration staff, which would then enable Social Workers to focus more on the tasks they are employed to do.

The fostering service Social Workers were clear about their role and that of the children's Social Workers. However, responses from some of the questionnaires completed by Children's Social Workers indicated that there are matters to be addressed regarding working relationships between the two teams. Some of the comments made by Children's Social Workers were as follows:

- The fostering service needs to recruit more culturally appropriate Foster Carers.
- The fostering service needs to liaise more closely with Placing Social Workers.
- The fostering service needs to develop better working relationships with Social Workers from the children's teams.
- The fostering service could improve out of school provisions for children in foster placements.
- Three Social Workers stated that the duty system should start from 8.45am and not 11am.
- One social worker stated that duty hours should be more flexible and operate during lunch times and evenings.
- The fostering service should obtain information from SWIFT or ICS rather than requesting Social Workers to fill in forms.

These comments were discussed with the Fostering Manager and brought to the attention of The Directorate Head of Children's Services and Safeguarding. The Fostering Manager did advise that duty times would resume to an earlier start once the newly appointed social worker takes up post in September 2006. The Fostering Manager also advised that the Emergency Duty Team would normally respond to any calls and queries outside normal office hours. In light of these comments, the Royal Borough of Kingston must take the necessary action to ensure that Children's Teams and the fostering service maintains positive working relationships.

Robust procedures were in place for assessing prospective Foster Carers. Completed assessments inspected were very well written. The assessment process takes into account the criteria as set out in standard 17.6 and 17.7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

The fostering service provides a range of support services for Foster Carers. Foster Carers visited made very positive remarks about the support systems in place.

The fostering service introduced a "buddy" scheme for Foster Carers in the spring 2006.

The Family Placements Team has a part time training officer. The training officer has revised and updated the training programme for prospective and existing Foster Carers. Training profiles are maintained for all Foster Carers. Tracking records were also in place for all core training undertaken by Foster Carers. This is judged to be good practice. In addition to attending core training, ten Foster Carers had also achieved the NVQ Level 3. The training officer said that there has been an increase in the numbers of Foster Carers who have attended training during the last year.

The course content for the skills to foster training was comprehensive and covered a wide range of topics.

All records examined for the purpose of this inspection were accessible, very well maintained and in good order. Confidential records were stored appropriately in locked cabinets.

The Family Placement Team is located on the second floor in Guild Hall 1. The team Manager and Practice Advisor have separate offices. All other staff including the Finance Officer, Recruitment and Marketing Officer, Administrator, Panel administrator and Social Work Staff are all accommodated in an open plan office. It was evident from discussions with Social Work Staff that they would benefit from an additional room for quiet working such as report writing. This was a recommendation in the previous inspection report. As stated earlier in this report, the fostering service would benefit from a designated room where children/young people could meet with professionals for one to one meetings and therapy. Social Work Staff indicated that the accommodation is very crowded and unhealthy during humid periods in the summer season. Staff also explained that they do not have a dedicated area for taking proper breaks. These working conditions should be reviewed.

Family and kinship carers were assessed, supported and supervised by the fostering service, although a few long-term carers were still supported by the adoption team. Discussion with the deputy about this area of the fostering service indicated that the Local Authority's procedure for assessing, supervising and monitoring carers were applied to kinship and family carers, to ensure that children would be safeguarded.

While kinship carers were expected to keep up to date with training, so as to better meet the needs of the children, the requirement regarding training sessions had been used more flexibly for kinship carers, so as not to alienate them or discourage them from fostering.

A live issue, at the time, was that of accommodation needs for kinship carers. This was a difficult issue to resolve and the service had experienced delays in reaching agreements even when an urgent resolution might have been critical in supporting a placement. It was positive, though that there was a mechanism in place for liaising with housing at a senior level.

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	3

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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	X
5	3
16	2
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	3
24	3
25	X
26	2
27	X
28	X
32	3

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	FS7FS7	11(b)	The provider must ensure that children and their families are provided with foster care services, which value diversity and promote equality. The fostering service must have clear policies about trans-racial and trans-cultural placements and a clear statement about how equality is promoted in the fostering service.	31/12/06
2	FS8FS8	26(2)(c)	The fostering panel must undertake the role of monitoring exemptions to approved placement numbers and categories. Timescale of 01/04/06 Not Met.	30/09/06
3	FS15FS15	20	The provider must ensure that any people working in or for the fostering service, including panel members and other external staff, are suitable people to work with children. The provider must ensure that no staff are appointed until all statutory checks to assess suitability, (as specified in the Regulations) are completed by	31/10/06

			<p>the provider.</p> <p>Checks must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criminal records certificates - Identity - Obtaining a full work and / or education history - Exploring any gaps in the curriculum vitae - References - Verification of qualifications if relevant - Verification, if reasonably practicable, of reasons for leaving previous positions involving children or vulnerable 	
3	FS16FS16	19(a)(b)	The Registered Provider is required to facilitate the provisions for appointing additional administrative staff.	31/10/06
4	FS26FS26	23(1)	<p>The Registered Provider must undertake a review of the accommodation for the following reasons:</p> <p>To provide an area where staff can take a proper break from their work.</p> <p>To provide a separate room for staff to carrying out tasks such as report writing.</p> <p>To provide a room which is suitable and consistent for children/young people when meeting with therapists and other professionals.</p>	30/11/06

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	FS7FS7	The Registered Provider should consult with the Social Work Team about their views on equality and diversity.
2	FS8FS8	A review should be undertaken regarding the way in which information is exchanged between the Children's Social Work Teams.
3	FS8FS8	The procedure used when placing children with carers, outside of the agreed terms of approvals, should be reviewed to ensure that the process is consistent with the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
4	FS9FS9	The Registered Provider should ensure that one known young person is given proper feedback about the outcome of the investigation undertaken regarding the allegation they made.
5	FS14FS14	A formal procedure should be established to ensure sound coordination and objective review of the pathway plans between the young person, the Foster Carer and the young person's social worker, to ensure more accuracy in assessing needs for the future.
6	FS16FS16	The Registered Provider should take the necessary action to ensure that positive working relationships are established and maintained between the Children's Social Work Teams and the fostering service.
7	FS32FS32	The Registered Provider should continue in its efforts to establish effective liaison between the fostering service and the housing department to consider the needs for housing of kinship carers.

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