



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **London Borough of Waltham Forest Fostering Service**

Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team

1C The Drive

Walthamstow

London

E17 3BN

8th January – 12th February 2004

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

YES

**Name of Authority**

London Borough of Waltham Forest Fostering Service

**Address**

Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team, 1C The Drive,  
Walthamstow, London, E17 3BN

**Local Authority Manager**

Ms Carol Lander

**Tel No:**

020 8496 2419

**Address**

Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team, 1C The Drive,  
Walthamstow, London, E17 3BN

**Fax No:**

020 8496 2476

**Email Address**

@soc.lbwf.gov.uk

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

**Tel No**

**Address**

**Fax No**

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

**Date of first registration** N/A

**Date of latest registration certificate**  
N/A

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

28<sup>th</sup>  
February  
2003

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		8th January – 12 <sup>th</sup> February 2004		<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		1.00 pm		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Ms Vivienne Patchett	073809	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Mr Tim Weller	132517	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>			
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>			
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.				
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>				
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Carol Lander, Hilary Rock, Helen Pollard, Linda Collins		

**Introduction to Report and Inspection**

**Inspection visits**

**Description of Fostering Service**

**Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings**

**Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection**

**Statutory Requirements from this Inspection**

**Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection**

**Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings**

**(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)**

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

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

**Part D: Provider's Response**

**D.1. Provider's comments**

**D.2. Action Plan**

**D.3. Provider's agreement**

## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

## INSPECTION VISITS

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

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The aim of the London Borough of Waltham Forest's fostering service is to provide a quality fostering service to meet the needs of the diverse local community. They are committed to the provision of a range of placements and placement choice. Fostering services include task centred (short term), shared care/respice, pre adoptive and permanent placements and placements with friends and family for children between 0 -18 yrs who are looked after by the local authority under the Children Act 1989. Where the needs of children and young people cannot be met from within the local authority fostering service, provision is commissioned from independent fostering agencies. These agencies are monitored by the Contracts Officer linked to the Access to Resources Team and also through arrangements made within the Pan London Agreement, (this is an organisation comprising the London Boroughs who have come together to negotiate contracts and organise monitoring of children's services provided by the independent sector.) The London Borough of Waltham Forest embraces diversity and difference in all aspects of its work and strives to provide foster carers who reflect the racial mix of the local community.

## PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

### INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

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

The inspection of the London Borough of Waltham Forest Fostering Service was undertaken over a period from early January to mid February 2004. The inspection included Questionnaires, visits to foster carer's houses, attendance at support meetings for children and young people and foster carers, discussion with a range of staff and support personnel plus the chair of the Waltham Forest Fostering Association. One inspector observed the fostering panel, spoke with the panel members and interviewed the Chair of the panel.

The service subscribes to the UK National Standards for Foster Care, produced in 1999. These standards have no formal legal status but they represent best practice. These and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services form the basis for the revised Waltham Forest Handbook for Foster carers.

Feedback from foster carers, although mixed, was generally positive and indicated that the service had improved over recent months. Feedback from children and young people was generally positive about their experience of being fostered although many had had multiple placements and many changes of social worker.

#### **Statement of purpose (Standard1)**

The standard was partly met

The Statement of Purpose has recently been rewritten but needs some amendment. The finalised version should be approved by the elected members of the local authority and a copy sent to the Commission. The Children's Guide for the fostering service is being drafted in two different formats to be suitable for children of a range of ages and ability. Young people were involved in the consultation process on this document. Both documents must be kept under review and revised as necessary. The Statement must be made available on request to staff, foster carers, children and parents. The Children's Guide must be supplied to each foster carer and, depending on their age and understanding, each child.

#### **Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service (Standards 2- 3)**

**1 of the 2 standards assessed was met, 1 partly met**

The locum manager has many years experience in working with children and in the management of residential and personal social services. The locum manager and the team leaders are all qualified and experienced social workers.

#### **Management of the fostering service (Standards 4- 5)**

**1 of the 2 standards assessed was met, 1 partly met**

There have been several changes of manager of the fostering service in the last year and there has also been re-organisation within the Children's Services of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. At the time of the inspection there was a locum manager in post with a new permanent member of staff due to replace her in mid February. Although the new



manager was not present during the inspection, she was able to join the locum manager to hear the feedback from the inspection.

The Fostering Service team has worked extremely hard in recent months to ensure that there has been an improvement in the standard of service and the support given to both staff and foster carers, and throughout its practices the welfare of the child is of paramount importance. Staff described the service as much more focused with clear aims and direction. Action was taken immediately to address issues raised by the inspection.

### **Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)**

#### **5 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 4 partly met**

Staff obviously work hard to offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child, but successful placement is reliant on the availability of carers; sufficient, comprehensive information being received from the social work teams responsible for placing the children and placing social workers taking the advice of the Access to Resources team.

### **Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**

#### **(Standards 15 - 23)**

#### **4 of the 9 standards assessed were met, 5 partly met**

There have been difficulties recruiting suitable permanent social work staff, and, in the past, a high proportion of agency staff have been employed. Recently, more new permanent staff have joined the service. An extra, separate team leader/ manager post was created so there are now two teams, one for assessment and one for support of foster carers. The service is suffering from competition from independent fostering agencies and has been looking at ways to ensure continued recruitment and retention of a range of suitable foster carers. A new recruitment drive was taking place at the time of the inspection including a residential weekend for prospective foster carers.

### **Records (Standards 24 - 25)**

#### **The 2 standards assessed were partly met**

Urgent action is required to ensure that Foster Care agreements, placement agreements, the Foster Care Register and the Children's Register meet the Regulations.

### **Fitness of premises (Standard 26)**

#### **This standard was met**

From observation of the building the Inspector was satisfied that the premises are appropriate for the purpose in accordance with this standard and the Fostering Services Regulations. The IT system is to be upgraded in the near future.

### **Financial requirements (Standards 27 – 29)**

#### **2 of the standards assessed were met, 1 partly met**

At present the system for the payment of allowances and expenses is based on the child's age and also offers skill - based payments as the Foster carer/s become more experienced. Some foster carers complained that they had not been given the extra skill based payments despite this being recommended at their annual reviews. The system is being reviewed.

### **Fostering panels (Standard 30)**

#### **This standard was partly met**

Clear written policies and procedures need to be developed concerning the vetting and appointment of the Fostering Panel; its administration, role and function and the conduct of its meetings. Training is required for panel members on a variety of aspects including the National Minimum Standards and Regulations. The panel must be able to demonstrate that it is robust in exercising its functions. Panel Members must not hold office for a term exceeding three years and may not hold office for more than two consecutive terms.

**Short-term breaks (Standard 31)**

**This standard was mostly met**

A small number of foster carers offer short-term breaks for parents of children with physical or learning disabilities.

**Family and friend carers (Standard 32)**

**This standards was partly met**

A major area for development is the service to foster carers who are friends and family. At present these do not receive the same support, training or funding as in-house carers.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State  
**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

YES

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

Work required to ensure that support and training is provided to friends and family carers, that registers are properly kept, and that the panel fulfils its functions.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

<b>STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS</b>				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report, which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	3 &4	FS1	The Manager must ensure that the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide are finalised and copies of each forwarded to the National Care Standards Commission.	1st June 2004
2	33, 34	FS8	To ensure that carers are only offered if they represent appropriate matches for a child, the Manager must ensure that all matters and obligations in foster placement agreements are ascertained prior to placement, as far as is possible.	1st June 2004
4	12,13,14, 15,16,17,	FS10	The Manager must ensure that the placement agreement and care plan are comprehensive and fully completed in order to comply with Regulations.	1st June 2004
7	17	FS18	The Manager must ensure that all foster carers receive an appropriate level of support at all times, and in accordance with the policies, procedures and statement of purpose. Also that the foster carers' handbook is reviewed and updated and given to all foster carers.	1st June 2004
8	28/30	FS22	The Manager must ensure that the Foster Care Agreements are in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations and ensure that all foster carer records comply with Regulation 30.	1st June 2004

9	34	FS24	The Manager must ensure that a comprehensive record is maintained for each child in foster care.	1st June 2004
10	22	FS25	To ensure that all records are accurate and up to date and that all registers are in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	1st May 2004

**Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.**

**COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**

**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

**Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

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

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation		Requirement	
1	10/7/8	FS3	The Director of Social Services, on behalf of the local authority, to confirm arrangements for the appointment of the new manager of the fostering service and provide evidence to satisfy the Commission that the person appointed meets Regulations 7 and 8.	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2004
2	34	FS8 FS16	Except in the case of an emergency or an immediate placement under regulation 38 for up to 6 weeks, the responsible authority must not place a child with a foster parent unless the foster carer is approved, the terms of his approval are consistent with the proposed placement, he has entered into a Foster Care agreement and a placement agreement is in place.	Immediate and ongoing
3	38/35/ 17/27	FS9	Staff within the local authority and fostering service must meet regulation 38 and regulation 35 [2].	Immediate and ongoing
4	19	FS17	A sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced staff must be employed in order to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster carers, including those placed with family and friends.	Immediate and ongoing

5	21	FS19	There must be a clear plan for the training in development of all staff through induction, post qualifying and in-service training. All employees must be kept informed of changes in legislation or guidance that is relevant to their jobs e.g. the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The effectiveness of training programmes for staff should be routinely evaluated and joint training should be held between fostering service staff and foster carers on a regular basis.	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004
6	17	FS23	Foster carer training to be reviewed and the effectiveness to be evaluated and reviewed annually.	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004 & annually
7	24/25/26	FS30	The Manager must ensure that the Fostering Panel operates in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, including considering annual reviews and approvals of permanent foster care placements.	1st May 2004 and ongoing
8	24/25/26	FS30	The fostering panel must be able to demonstrate that it is robust in exercising its functions: to recommend approval of foster carers and the terms of approval; to review the approval of Foster carers not more than a year after approval and as necessary thereafter; to advise on the procedures under which reviews of Foster carers are carried out by the fostering service and to periodically monitor of their effectiveness; to oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service and to give advice on such other matters or cases as the service may refer to it.	1st May 2004 and ongoing
9	24/25/26	FS30	Clear written policies and procedures need to be developed and implemented concerning the vetting and appointment of the Fostering Panel, its administration, role and function and the conduct of its meetings. Permanent foster placements must be approved by the fostering panel.	1st May 2004 and ongoing
10	24/25/26	FS30	Training is required for panel members on a variety of aspects including the National Minimum Standards and Regulations, of which they should have copies.	1st June 2004 and ongoing
11	24/25/26	FS30	Panel Members must not hold office for a term exceeding three years and may not hold office for more than two consecutive terms.	1st May 2004 and ongoing



12	17	FS32	Foster carers who are friends and family must receive the same support, training and funding as other carers.	1st May 2004 and ongoing

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	Foster carers to provide a mini guide for children in terms of what they offer in the placement. This mini guide could be of assistance to the Access to Resources Team and the placing social worker in trying to match a placement and also give a picture of the foster home to the young person prior to introductory visits or placement.
2	FS4	Since a local authority fostering service is not a registered provision under the Care Standards Act 2000, the requirements under Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 cannot be a "requirement" on the local authority. However, good practice would indicate that the Fostering Service should establish and maintain a formal system for the monitoring of matters set out in schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and for improving the quality of foster care provided.
3	FS4	The policies and procedures require some amendment to bring them up-to-date. It is recommended that these be dated and regularly reviewed.
4	FS14	The manager look at ways in which reliable information about potential options, particularly in light of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, could be available to young people in their early teenage years to enable them to look ahead and plan with some confidence.
5	FS17	Competency-based assessments to be introduced with training being provided for social workers, involved in the both the assessment and support/review of foster carers, and for panel members.
6	FS23	Support to be offered to the sons and daughters of foster carers e.g. in the form of a support group.
7	FS29	The current review of fees to foster carers to be progressed.

8	FS30	To ensure a quorate panel (Reg 25 (1)), each meeting to commence with identification of the roles of each member, and a formal determination that business could be conducted – this to be minuted. Minutes to also define other people present and their roles & the times that people change their role or go in & out of the room because of those changes e.g. team leaders acting as panel members or in support of a social worker or to present an item.
9	FS30	The inspection reports to be presented at panel for their consideration.
10	FS31	Specific written policies and procedures to be developed regarding the provision of short-term breaks for children.

\* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. FS10 refers to Standard 10.

## **PART B                      INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	10
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussions with staff, carers and young people	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	8/1/04
Time of Inspection	1.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	63.00

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

The Statement of Purpose has recently been rewritten but needs some amendment e.g. to include the numbers of children placed with friends and family and foster carers approved for this type of care; the qualifications and experience of staff. It is recommended that it should also include the following: the process of placing and approving placements with friends and family; the expectation that all prospective foster carers participate in preparation groups and all parts of the assessment process and that approved carers undertake ongoing training; arrangements for the attendance of prospective or approved foster carers at panel; detail of what is covered in the review of foster carer approvals. The finalised version must be approved by the elected members of the local authority and a copy sent to the Commission. The Statement should be dated and regularly reviewed and modified as necessary. It must be made available on request to staff, foster carers, children and parents.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest Social Services Department has developed a written Children's Charter and a separate guide for children and young people on how to complain, whatever type of placement they are in. These are comprehensive and attractively presented.

The Children's Guide for the fostering service is being drafted in two different formats to be suitable for children of a range of ages and ability. Young people were involved in the consultation process on this document, which is good practice. The written guide must be a guide to the fostering service and include: a summary of the Statement of Purpose, a summary of the complaints procedure, and the address and phone number of the Commission. The Children's Guide must be kept under review and revised as necessary, with copies supplied to each foster carer and, depending on their age and understanding, each child. Requirement 1 of the previous report therefore remains outstanding and has been restated with the new target date.

It is recommended that foster carers provide a mini guide for children in terms of what they offer in the placement e.g. this is us, our family, the kind of accommodation which we can offer, language/s spoken, any pets, general rules of the house or unusual aspects etc. Photographs may also be helpful. This mini guide could be of assistance to the Access to Resources Team and the placing social worker in trying to match a placement and also give a picture of the foster home to the young person prior to introductory visits or placement.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The locum manager has many years experience in working with children and in the management of residential and personal social services. The locum manager and the team leaders are all qualified and experienced social workers. From discussions with the Group Manager, the Team Leaders and staff, the Inspector was satisfied that the people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary skills and qualifications to manage the work efficiently and effectively. Also that they have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner. It was evident from discussions and from observation that the locum Manager is able to exercise effective leadership of the staff and the service in order to deliver an improving service. Management meetings are held weekly.

### Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service operates under the recruitment policies and procedures of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. From discussions with managers and staff and sight of recruitment documentation and the staff register, the Inspector was satisfied that schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are complied with, that CRB checks are being undertaken and will be renewed every three years. Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. The Inspector was satisfied that overall this standard was met. However, the local authority had not notified the Commission of the appointment of the new manager or the date on which the appointment was to take effect, as required by regulation 10. The Director of Social Services is asked to confirm arrangements on behalf of the local authority and provide evidence to satisfy the Commission that the person appointed meets Regulations 7 and 8.

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

The locum manager, whose title is Group Manager, Looked After Children, has responsibility for the Fostering Service, the Adoption Service and the Access to Resources Team. There is a team leader post for each of the Assessment and Support of Foster Carers teams, the Adoption Service and the Access to Resources Team so that there is a clear system of delegation of responsibilities and lines of accountability. The Fostering Service is located within the Resources Section of the Community Services, Children and Families and has functional links with the locality Family Support Teams and First Response Services. The Group Manager reports to the Head of Children's Services. Ultimate responsibility rests with the elected members of the local authority via the Director of Social Services.

In-house foster carers each have a link social worker to support and supervise their work. Most foster carers who are friends and family are not at present offered this level of support or supervision. The Fostering Services Regulations make no differentiation between the different types of foster carers in the assessment process or in the need for training, advice, information and support necessary in the interests of the children placed with them. This is therefore an area for urgent action. See standard 32.

The Handbook sets out the roles of the link social worker, the child's social worker and the foster carer. Feedback from foster carers, young people and others indicated that a high turnover of social workers in the past has meant that often the level of support for children, the number of visits etc has not met statutory requirements. This has therefore impacted on the service being offered by the fostering service and the overall service offered to looked-after children.

From discussion and observation, it appeared to the inspectors that the fostering panel could and should be taking a more proactive role in quality assurance. See standard 30.

There is a range of policies and procedures which require some amendment to bring them up-to-date. It is recommended that these be dated and regularly reviewed. Since a local authority fostering service is not a registered provision under the Care Standards Act 2000, the requirements under Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 cannot be a "requirement" on the local authority. However, good practice would indicate that the Fostering Service should define and maintain a formal system for the monitoring of matters set out in schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and for improving the quality of foster care provided.

<b>Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:</b>	0
<b>Death of a child placed with foster parents.</b>	0
<b>Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.</b>	0
<b>Serious illness or accident of a child.</b>	0
<b>Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.</b>	1
<b>Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.</b>	0
<b>Serious complaint about a foster parent.</b>	1
<b>Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.</b>	1
<b>Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	0
<b>Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:</b>	0

<b>Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)</b>		
<b>The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.</b>		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>There have been several changes of manager of the fostering service in the last year and there has also been re-organisation within the Children's Services of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. At the time of the inspection there was a locum manager in post with a new permanent member of staff due to replace her in mid February. The locum Fostering Service manager and the staff team have worked extremely hard in recent months to ensure that there has been an improvement in the standard of service and the support given to both staff and foster carers. Staff described the service as much more focused with clear aims and direction. Action plans are being developed on an ongoing basis to ensure shared goals and achievable targets.</p>		



## Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

As part of the inspection process, the Inspector visited the homes of four foster carers. All of the homes were warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and were free of avoidable hazards. Within the homes visited, all of the fostered children had their own bed and accommodation arrangements reflected the child's assessed need for privacy and space.

In-house foster carers were aware that they may be visited as part of the Commission's inspection process but the friends and family carers did not appear to have been given this information.

The regulations require all foster carers and their homes to be inspected annually by the provider to make sure that they meet the needs of the foster children. Reviews were undertaken in 2003 to in-house carers but not for those caring for friends and family. See standards 21 and 30.

As part of induction training, health and safety issues are covered, including the provision of transport, and foster carers receive written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. The local Foster Care Association is also giving "refresher" advice and guidance. Overall, the Inspector was satisfied that this standard was met but there are some areas for improvement as noted above.

### Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

The children and young people who are looked after by the local authority come from a range of racial, religious and cultural backgrounds, as do the foster carers. From the inspection of records, observation of the fostering panel and from discussions with foster carers, some young people and staff, the Inspector was satisfied that the fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality. However, publicity material e.g. for recruitment is not routinely translated into community languages.

The inspector was satisfied that the fostering service aims, through written guidance, support given to foster carers by supervising social workers and ongoing training, that each child is encouraged to develop and maximise her/his potential and to lead as full a life as possible. However, feedback from discussion and a survey of foster carers and young people indicated that this is sometimes thwarted by the lack of support forthcoming from the

child/young person's social worker or, on occasion by a lack of financial support, especially for friends and family placements. See standards 8 & 32.

Several children have a range of special needs, including profound disability. Feedback from foster carers indicated that they would welcome more specific specialised training to meet individual needs but that this had not materialised. See standard 23.

**Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

During case tracking and discussions with foster carers and staff, it was evident that the aim was to achieve a good match but the reality was often dictated by the need for an urgent placement, the lack of appropriate information from placing or link social workers and the limited supply of foster carers. Examples of good practice were available with children are being offered introductory visits to proposed foster carers in a planned and structured way. See standard 1 re a mini guide of foster carers.

Comprehensive information was not always available prior to a placement. Some foster carers cited examples in emergency placements of the paperwork not appearing until after the child had moved on. It is essential that the Manager ensure that comprehensive information is received from the child/young person's social worker prior to the identification of a foster carer or placement. Some foster placement agreements seen gave very little useful information even when the child had been in care for some time. It is essential that written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration when agreeing the placement, and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and the foster carer. Also to include all other relevant information on health, education, family contact etc. Requirement 2 from the last report is therefore repeated with a new target date.

The Access to Resources team is staffed by qualified social workers with a spread of experience. The team was set up as the gateway to placements in both foster and residential care but had some concerns that placing social workers were, on occasion, bypassing the team to make direct placements e.g. with independent fostering agencies or placements not approved by the Fostering Service or Children's Contract team. There was evidence of this with regard to the Unaccompanied Minors team placing asylum seekers under 18years. This would appear to be contrary to regulation 34 and needs to be addressed urgently.

Historically there had been many instances of "drift" leading to "fait accompli" long-term placements but this appeared to have improved with the monitoring processes set in place by Children and Families service. There had been few disruptions of placements.

The Access to Resources Team identifies places with independent fostering agencies via the Pan London agreement, and again full information is required to ensure a "good match". At the start of the inspection there were approximately 70 children placed in-house among 52 approved carers, 90 placed via Pan London and 30 in friends and family placements.

**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Regular training sessions are available for foster carers and all in-house foster carers undertake training in the delivery of safe care to children. However, this has not been made available to Friends and Family carers. Training in child protection was due to be delivered in February 2004 although several social workers had considerable experience in child protection work from their previous employment. Training needs to be pitched at the respective skills and experience of staff and carers.</p> <p>Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcomes of all allegations or abuse of a child/young person in foster care. The service has clear policies on dealing with allegations of abuse, on agreed sanctions or punishments and for use if the foster child is missing from home, together with information on bullying. Procedures are in place to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying. However, some foster placement agreements seen gave very little useful information to assist the foster carer in protecting the child e.g. the child to have no contact with anyone in the family but the mother had been given the details of the foster home; no note of how often the social worker would be visiting.</p> <p>The Manager must also ensure that each foster carer is provided with full information about the foster child and his/her family, to enable the foster carer to protect the foster child, their own children and other children for whom they have responsibility and, of course themselves. See standard 8.</p> <p>There appeared to be considerable confusion within the local authority and fostering service about regulation 38 and regulation 35 [2], which needs to be addressed urgently. Records and discussion showed that children were being placed by Area or First Response teams with friends or family without appropriate interviews, inspection of the accommodation or initial assessment taking place and without written agreements being drawn up. Placements were exceeding the six weeks defined in regulation, sometimes by some months, after which the fostering service was being asked to approve the placement. Regulation 35 stipulates that any immediate placement under regulation 38 requires the child to be visited at least once a week during the placement. There was evidence that this was not the case.</p>		
<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	100	%

<b>Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)</b>		
<b>The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.</b>		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Whilst the Inspector was satisfied that the fostering service endeavours to make sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships, it was not evident that this was always in accordance with care plans and/or foster placement agreements since these were not always fully completed and updated by the child's social worker. There was evidence that, historically, some contact with family members had been allowed to diminish until it appeared hardly meaningful to the child. In other cases, contact was being held in the foster home so frequently e.g. daily, over such a long period that it was causing difficulties for the foster carer's own family or was felt by the foster carer to be positively damaging to the child or against the child's wishes. The fostering service needs to ensure that these issues are resolved by the relevant parties i.e. placing social worker, foster carer and supporting social worker working together in</p>		

partnership.

The Manager must ensure that in order to fully comply with Regulations 11 to 17 of the Fostering Services Regulations, a comprehensive and accurate care plan and placement agreement are received from the child's social worker, and that these are regularly updated. Evidence must be recorded on the file when information, care plans and placement agreements have been sought from the child's social worker and have not been forthcoming. Standard 10 requires the following: The views of the child or young person should be sought and given weight in determining contact arrangements. Risk assessments should be carried out. There should be clear procedures setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are established, maintained, monitored and reviewed. The fostering service should provide help and support to the carer in dealing with any difficult contact issues that may arise. The fostering service provider should ensure that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements, including any arrangements for the supervision of contact, are clearly articulated in the foster placement agreement. At present financial support to the carer to cover costs involved in ensuring contact takes place at the desired frequency and in the most suitable place comes out of the fostering budget but has to be initiated by the placing social worker. Foster carers must ensure that they record outcomes of contact arrangements and their perceived impact on the child; this information should be fed back to the child's social worker. The requirement from the last report is therefore repeated with a new target date.

#### **Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

A Children's Rights Officer runs a regular support group for looked after children and the Inspector attended one of these sessions. This was a lively group which has been used for consultation e.g. on the Children's Guide. The children were well informed of the issues regarding fostering and able to put their views across. They value the group and obviously enjoy the activities.

From discussions with foster carers and young people and from surveys undertaken with foster carers and young people, the Inspector was satisfied that the fostering service seeks to ensure that children's opinions and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future. However, one comment was that, although the young people are asked their opinions and people listen, things do not appear to change. The same feedback also indicated that it was generally the child's/young person's social worker who does not always seek, or listen to, the views of the child/young person. This appeared to be exacerbated by the frequent change in the young person/child's social worker or no worker being allocated, often for long periods.

#### **Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

Children have a written health record called "Health Fax". This has been developed by Waltham Forest Community Services and Waltham Forest NHS Primary Care Trust. It contains relevant information on the health needs of every child, the health services available and general health advice. In addition there is health screening and a nurse designated to work with looked after children. The handbook for foster carers contains information about health promotion, hygiene and first aid.

The Inspector was satisfied that the fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, and that children/young people are enabled to make informed decisions about health needs. As previously stated, the Manager must in all cases, ensure that the placement agreement, prior to placement, (or as soon as possible afterwards) contains a full description of the health needs of a child and clear procedures governing consent for the child/young person to receive medical treatment.

**Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

From case tracking, discussions with foster carers and staff, the Inspector was satisfied that foster carers provide an environment in which education and learning are valued. All foster carers are provided with a computer for use by the children/young people in foster care. There is a mechanism whereby attendance at school is monitored. Suggestions for the role of the foster carer if any child is not in school are included in the Foster Care Handbook but foster carers said that they were not given extra funds to provide the structured activities recommended. In addition, the role of the placing social worker in ensuring educational needs are met should be clearly laid out in the placement agreement. The Foster Placement Agreement should also identify where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment. See standards 8 and 10.

**Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)**

**The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

From discussions with foster carers, staff, information gained from a survey of young people and policies and procedures, the Inspector was satisfied that the fostering service ensures that foster carers help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living. Guidance is contained in the Carers' Handbook.

The fostering service aims to ensure that young people remaining within its remit, and who are preparing to leave care are consulted about their future and encouraged to be involved in decision-making and the implementation of the Pathway Plan. The service employs a worker to specifically support placements for those aged 16+ in planning for independence. Foster carers offering supported lodgings are also recruited. However, from discussion with some young people it appeared that there was some apprehension among teenagers about age 14 to 16 about the help and support they would be given from the age of 16 or after 18 years, particularly emotional and financial support. Some appeared unclear at this stage in their life what options would be available to them in 2 to 3 years e.g. saying they would be forced to leave their foster home and find work when what they wanted to do was to stay with their foster placement and attend college/university. Part of the anxiety shown appeared to be because there would be yet another change of social worker for them when they were transferred to the 16 plus/leaving care team. Most of the children had had multiple placements and many changes of social worker or long gaps with no social worker allocated to work with them so did not have positive models to reassure them. It was recommended that the manager look at ways in which reliable information about potential options, particularly in light of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, could be available to young people in their early teenage years to enable them to look ahead and plan with some confidence. The respective team leaders of the support team and the 16 + team meet monthly and the locum manager suggested that this issue would be discussed in this forum.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>From viewing documents, files, policies and procedures, from discussions with staff and foster carers and the chair of the foster panel the Inspector was satisfied that the people who work in, or for the fostering service, are suitable to work with children and young people, and they are recruited, managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The total number of staff indicated below includes administrative staff. All social workers and team leaders are qualified and experienced but few have a post qualifying qualification. Some are permanent appointments and some on short-term contracts or employed via agencies. Several are part time. One unqualified worker in the Access to Resources team works under the supervision of qualified social workers. The Fast Track Family Consultation Service, which offers a direct service to foster carers on behalf of the fostering service, has professionally qualified, trained and experienced staff.</p>		
<p>The service operates under the recruitment policies and procedures of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. From discussions with managers and staff and sight of recruitment documentation and the staff register, the Inspector was satisfied that schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are complied with, that CRB checks are being undertaken and will be renewed every three years. Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. The Inspector was satisfied that this standard was met.</p>		



<b>Total number of staff of the agency:</b>	14	<b>Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	X
---	----	--	---

**Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

**Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.**

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	2
----------------------------------	----------------------	---

There have been several changes of manager of the fostering service in the last year, a re-organisation within the Children's Services of the L. B. of Waltham Forest and a recent restructuring of the fostering service. At the time of the inspection there was a locum manager in post with a new permanent member of staff due to replace her in mid February. The Fostering Service team has worked extremely hard in recent months to ensure that there has been an improvement in the standard of service and support given to both staff and foster carers, and that throughout its practices the welfare of the child is paramount. A new team leader/manager post was created and separate teams were created for the assessment and the support of foster carers. Each team has a team leader, giving a clear management structure, levels of delegation and responsibility and lines of accountability. Weekly management meetings are held and regular action plans have been developed and progressed. There is a duty system to offer support to foster carers during the day and after hours. Administrative staff are implementing tracking systems. Staff described the service as much more focused with clear aims and direction.

At present there are delays in undertaking assessments, approvals and reviews of friends and family carers. This area has been identified in the fostering service action plan as requiring urgent attention. The manager has put in a bid for more staff to be able to undertake this statutory work. In the past, there have been delays in ensuring that reviews of carers are carried out and these have been a priority in recent months. Reviews due in 2004 have been rostered ahead for the year but this does not include friends and family carers. The feedback from foster carers indicated that the minutes of reviews are not always available to the foster carers and the recommendations are not being taken to panel e.g. for changes in approval terms or increases in skills payments. The register showed that several foster carers had children placed with them either above or different from their approval terms, which is contrary to regulation 34 and must be addressed urgently.

When the Access to Resources team uses independent fostering agencies, they check the Commission inspection reports. They usually place through the Pan London Agreement, which is monitored by a worker employed part-time with the Access to Resources Team and part-time with commissioning unit. Staff felt that, in order to appropriately and successfully monitor all arrangements, a larger proportion of the time of this worker should be spent in the Access to Resources Team. Children were being placed by the Unaccompanied Minors Team in placements not assessed by the fostering service or agreed by the Access to Resources Team. This team is placed outside of Children and Families Service although it deals with young people under 18 year old. See standard 8.

There is a system of supervision and consultation provided for all staff and given to the social workers by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

The training needs for Carers are discussed at annual reviews and they are encouraged to undertake ongoing training. Several carers have NVQ level 3. Feedback at the support group for foster carers indicated that carers would welcome more professional training.

From feedback from staff and observation, there were sometimes difficulties arising from the lack of adequate office equipment or administrative backup e.g. limited IT hardware; insufficient fax facilities to ensure confidentiality; the post of typist had been deleted with the expectation that staff type their own work. As the appropriate forms are quite lengthy, this can delay the process of assessment and approval of foster carers. The relatively low level of clerical and administrative support seemed to be impacting on the keeping of statutory records e.g. the foster carers' and children's register and children's files. There was also no post of receptionist. As the premises are used for foster carer recruitment, preparation and training and for contact between children and their families, there is a great deal of traffic in and out of the building which needs to be monitored to ensure the safety of the children, young people, foster carers, parents and staff.

The fostering Service social workers appeared to understand the role of the children's social workers and to have a clear understanding about the need for fostering service social workers and children's social workers to work effectively together. However, from feedback, there seemed to be less understanding of this on the part of the children's social workers and their supervisors e.g. the locality social workers often do not ensure that the support social workers are invited to reviews of children placed or that foster carers are given timely warning of the reviews. Minutes are often not available. Children's social workers often do not tell the carers, children or the support social workers that they are leaving. The service has identified this as an area for urgent development and managers have tried to involve area team managers in lunchtime discussions. They also circulated information to area team's on the respective roles. Due to lack of progress they are considering roadshows.

**Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

2

There have been difficulties in the past around the employment of permanent social work staff and many were on short-term contracts or employed via agencies. Due to considerable efforts more new permanent staff have joined the team. The manager has been keen to recruit staff of a good calibre and this has taken time. All social workers and team leaders are qualified and experienced. Only one has a post qualifying qualification. Staff policies should encourage retention of staff. See standard 19 re post qualifying qualifications.

The managers considered the current number of social workers to be insufficient to provide a support service to friends and family carers or newly recruited carers and extra funding has been sought.

The Fostering service is facing considerable competition from independent fostering agencies in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The service has identified the need to recruit a range of carers and to ensure that they feel valued and stay with the service. At the time of the inspection, the service was undertaking a recruitment drive for new foster carers including an innovative residential weekend as part of the preparation/assessment/training process. The process is being monitored and tracked to identify when and why people drop out and evaluate the effectiveness of the process. Such developments are to be commended.

There is an assessment process which covers many of the areas defined in this standard.

However, the service has been considering implementing competency-based assessments. It is recommended that these be introduced as a matter of urgency with training being provided for social workers, involved in the both the assessment and support/review of foster carers, and for panel members. The competency-based assessments should help fully meet this standard and ensure a good ongoing basis for the review of foster carer's aptitudes and allied skill payments.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The fostering service uses the employment policies and procedures of the London Borough of Waltham of the Forest. Out of hours management and support services are available for foster carers and there are systems for carer supervision and support, although these need to be increased for friends and family carers. See standard 30. Public liability and professional indemnity insurance is in place. The Inspector was satisfied that the standard was met.</p>		

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>There is an induction programme, which staff had found useful and training is offered. However, some social workers had found that the training was not always as an appropriate level for their skill and experience. Most staff had significant experience but there was only one social worker with post qualifying qualification and there was no financial incentive for staff to undertake this training. Regulation 21 requires all employees to be enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. Supervision and appraisals look at training needs but there must be a clear plan for the training and development of all staff through induction, post qualifying and in-service training.</p> <p>In addition, all employees must be kept informed of changes in legislation or guidance that is relevant to their jobs e.g. the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The effectiveness of training programmes for staff should be routinely evaluated and joint training should be held between fostering service staff and foster carers on a regular basis.</p>		

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

From discussion with staff and viewing records, the Inspector was satisfied that all staff involved with foster carers and young people receive good support and supervision. Records are maintained and individual supervision takes place on a regular basis, together with an annual appraisal. Group supervision and staff meetings are held regularly within the individual teams and the unit. Staff have job descriptions and there are policies and procedures for the organisation. File audits take place.

**Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**

**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

There is a separate team headed by a team leader responsible for the support of carers. There are records of visits, telephone calls and e-mails although these have sometimes not been as regular as the manager would wish due to staff shortages and sickness. There is regular support group offering mutual support, input from speakers and ongoing training for foster carers. The local foster care association is encouraged to support foster carers and all carers are members of the National Foster Care Association through the Borough's corporate membership. Further support is offered by a variety of outside professionals including a nurse, and the Fast Track Consultation Service. There is a duty service during office hours and an out of hours service until midnight weekdays and from 9 until 12 am Saturdays and Sundays. The out of hours service is available for foster carers who feel the need for assistance or support. The fostering service intend in future to extend this to be more proactive e.g. checking with new carers or at the initial stages of a new or potentially difficult placement.

The regulations require all foster carers and their homes to be inspected annually by the fostering service to make sure that they meet the needs of foster children. Reviews were undertaken in 2003 (except for friends and family carers) but from documentation and discussion with staff and foster carers, it appeared that recommendations for increased skill level payments or changes in approval terms had not been to panel or been implemented.

Feedback from foster carers was generally positive but varied in terms of their personal experience of support. Many made very positive comments about their supervising social workers but communication with and support from the social workers for the children was often an issue. The children placed were often not clear about the different roles of the respective social workers.

Feedback from foster carers indicated that the need for respite care was an issue for some of them. If they are sick or do not have a placement they receive no income. Some would welcome a retainer fee in these circumstances. Other suggestions were babysitting/ buddying/twinning of foster carers.

A recurrent theme in the feedback from foster carers was the need for acknowledgement, praise, respect and sufficient money to reflect the job that they do. The service has requested an increase in fees to carers and is looking at ways to recognise the contributions of individual foster carers and their achievements in specific placements. These new initiatives are to be commended.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Most of the feedback from the foster carers was very positive about the supervision and training that they receive. However some carers had not had such a good experience, especially those living at a distance. The supervising social workers aim to visit once a month and telephone every week although this has not always happened due to lack of staff, sickness etc. The out-of-hours support service has been extended so that a duty worker is available by telephone, backed up by a manager, in evenings and weekends. An aim identified in the current action plan is for the out-of-hours support service to be more proactive e.g. phoning new foster carers on the day of placement.

There is a local Foster Care Association, which meets after the regular support groups organised by the fostering service. Foster carers are members of the National Foster Care association through the Waltham Forest corporate membership.

The format of the foster care agreement was out of date, referring to the old regulations and, those seen, did not include all of the information required by regulation 28(5)(b) and schedule 5, in particular the terms of the foster parents approval, the procedure for the review of approval and the amount of support and training to be given to the foster parent. Requirement 8 from the last report is therefore repeated with a new target date.

**Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Some training is offered as part of the assessment process and ongoing opportunities are given to foster carers for training. Some have NVQ 3. Foster carers at the support group voiced strong views on their ideas for additional, more professional training especially for experienced carers, and on the timing, flexibility and content - with a focus on the foster carers' needs as well as those of the children and the need for specialist training. Training needs are discussed as part of the foster carers reviews. Those visited seemed unclear about the expectations on them with regard to record keeping and would welcome training in how much to write, what to include, what to pass on with the child and what to retain, how long records should be kept by them etc. See standard 24 and its requirement.

Members of the Fast Track Consultation Service would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the pre-approval, induction and ongoing training of foster carers. Existing foster carers contribute to the training at present but expressed the wish to be paid for this.

Records indicated that where 2 adults in one household were being assessed or had been approved as joint carers, both had not necessarily completed all training.

In the recruitment campaign, taking place at the time of the inspection, the sons and daughters of foster carers were being included in preparation meetings. However, from feedback, this had not necessarily happened in the past and existing children would welcome more support e.g. in the form of a support group.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

Case records are kept for children placed with in-house carers but not for those placed with family and friends. Case file audits take place. A more comprehensive record needs to be maintained in order to detail the nature of quality of care provided to the child and contribute an understanding of his/her life events. The requirement from the last report is therefore restated with a new target date. Some foster carers had been given individual notebooks for each child in their care but most of them were not clear on the use or content of these records. Carers should be trained and provided with the necessary equipment to record significant life events for the child and to encourage the child to make such recordings, including photograph albums. See also standard 23. The fostering service should ensure that carers have facilities to store information in a secure manner and understand what information they are expected to keep and what information needs to be passed on to the fostering service.

### Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

Accurate registers required by regulation were not being kept. The register of foster carers had not been completed between April 2002 and April 2003 and did not include foster carers who were friends and family. It did not include the information required by regulation 31. The register of children placed at foster carers did not include those placed with friends and family or placed under regulation 38(2).

During the inspection there was a discussion about possible methods and formats for keeping registers. Regulations 31[1], 22 and schedule 1 require separate registers "kept for the purpose" to be maintained, containing specific details of foster carers and of all children placed with foster carers. Regulation 32 states that all records and registers must be kept securely and must not be disclosed to any person except in particular circumstances.

The registers of children placed with foster carers and staff employed to work in the fostering service must be kept for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. The register of foster carers and the case files of approved carers, including placements under regulation 38[2] must be kept for at least 10 years from the date on which approval was terminated. A record must be kept of each person not approved as a foster carer by the fostering service or who withdraws their application prior to approval - these records to be retained for at least 3 years from refusal or withdrawal. Regulation 32[4] states that these may either be kept in

original written form or as a computer record. The wording of these two regulations seems to indicate that archived records can be kept on a computer but that the current registers and records should be kept separately from any central system and should be in written form.

The records relating to foster carers looking after friends and family were being kept in different places and were not accessible to the inspector. Records must be available for inspection at all times.

Requirement 10 of the last report regarding records and registers therefore remains outstanding and has been restated with the new target date for compliance.

X indicates that this information was not available at the time of writing.

<b>Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:</b>			100
<b>Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:</b>			X
<b>Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £</b>	78.00	<b>Maximum £</b>	357.49

## Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

3

From observation of the building the Inspector was satisfied that the premises are appropriate for the purpose in accordance with this standard and the Fostering Services Regulations although there was no room large enough for meetings in excess of 25 people. The IT system is to be upgraded in the near future.



## **Financial Requirements**

**The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:**

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

<b>Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)</b> The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
The service operates in line with Waltham Forest policies and procedures with regard to financial systems. Feedback from the manager and staff indicated that, on occasion, the supply of necessary equipment e.g. stationery, fax machines, and the printing of the Children's Guide had been delayed because of insufficient funds. Overall, however, the inspector was satisfied that this standard was met.		

<b>Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)</b> The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
The service operates in line with Waltham Forest policies and procedures with regard to financial systems. Overall, the inspector was satisfied that this standard was met.		

<b>Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)</b> Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>2</b>
<p>Discussion with the manager, foster carers and children indicated that there were several issues regarding the payment of foster carers. The current system is a basic fee plus a skills enhancement for the more experienced carers. However, experienced carers with NVQ 3, dealing with complex placements were still at level 2 (the lowest) and they stated that their skills level had not been upgraded despite the recommendation of their annual review. Everyone, including the children, was aware of foster carers leaving the service because they could receive more money from independent fostering agencies. Holiday pay is only £100 and there is no pay for foster carers during sickness. There are no extras for children with special needs or where a child is excluded from school. The payments for foster carers of friends and family are lower than those of in-house carers. One child, when questioning this, was told by their social worker that they were "in a different category".</p> <p>Foster carers said they wanted to be recognised for doing a difficult job with high expectations. The locum manager has put in a bid for higher payment for to carers, which the Director of Social Services is supporting.</p> <p>Foster carers complained that, on occasion, they had not received reimbursement e.g.</p>		

agreed extras; for the physical damage amounting to some hundred of pounds done by a child placed; for short emergency placements. Foster carers were sometimes unclear about what they were entitled to (they felt this was not clear in the Handbook) or what they had received as the paperwork accompanying the payment does not identify how much they have received for which children, when an increase for age is included or what is included for extras. This should be clearly detailed.

Foster carers said they would welcome advice regarding fostering payments, tax, insurance and welfare benefits.

## **Fostering Panels**

**The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:**

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

**Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Fostering Panel convened on 13/01/04 was observed as part of this Inspection. The panel was well formed in terms of its comprising both genders, and a culturally diverse membership reflective of the community it served. It was also positively noted that membership was largely independent of the Fostering Service. However, the specialist input of education, health and a former service user were not represented. The Service recognised that this was an area for development. Past minutes show that there is not usually input from legal advisors and there had not been attendance at panel by a senior manager since November 2003. Access to medical expertise was described as not being readily available to the panel. Although a panel member was medically qualified, this was not the role this panel member fulfilled. The medical practitioner providing this role had resigned from the panel and, although documents were being checked by a medical practitioner, attendance at panel had not been replaced at the time of the Inspection. It is recommended that, to ensure and record the necessary constituents of a quorate panel (Reg 25 (1)), each meeting commence with identification of the roles of each member, and a formal determination that business could be conducted – this to be minuted. Minutes to also define other people present and their roles & the times that people change their role or go in & out of the room because of those changes e.g. team leaders acting as panel members or in support of a social worker or to present an item.

Recently applicants had been invited to attend panel and panel members felt that this was highly beneficial to their arriving at recommendations. However, training had not been given to panel members on how to deal with foster carers attending panel. It is suggested that questions for both the presenting social worker and/or applicant are determined by the panel before these parties are invited to join the meeting. This only happened in respect of the cases where the applicant was present. It is further suggested that 'interview skills' are addressed as training needs for panel members.

The panel effectively identified shortfalls in the completion of Form F's and raised these as part of their consideration of the evidence presented. Whilst there were weaknesses with all Form F's presented (in some cases considerable gaps (no CRB, medical clearance, attendance at pre-approval training sessions)), the panel declined to use its remit to defer the application pending appropriate completion. Panel therefore made recommendations 'in lieu of' complete/accurate information, which constituted a less than robust process, and failed in terms of its function in assuring quality.

In minutes of previous Panel meetings it had been noted that the panel had not received feedback from the last NCSC Inspection (2003) of the Fostering Service. This was raised with the Team Manager after the meeting and the previous Inspection Report was produced. It is appropriate that, as a public document the report on the conduct of the Fostering Service is shared with all relevant parties and it is unfortunate that the Panel did not benefit from sight of remarks and recommendations made.

Panel members were not aware of local written procedures determining their specific role, and these were not available to the Inspector at the panel. Neither Chair nor members had copies of National Minimum Standards, or the Fostering Guidance document. It was noted, and panel members freely admitted, ignorance of elements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (specifically cited Regulation 38) and training in this area was requested. Panel members reported that there had been no training for them in the 12 months prior to

the Inspection. The manager said that they were trying to obtain training via BAAF but the Fostering Service must remedy these omissions as a matter of urgency.

Since November, the panel had not received feedback from the Fostering Service regarding their prior recommendations to the decision maker. The Chair was not aware of who the decision maker was at the time of the Inspection.

As yet the panel had not undertaken the Annual Review of any approved Foster Carers. Reviews of foster carers are required by regulation after one year or where there is a change e.g. of approval terms or recommendation for increase in skill payments. In the past, approval for permanent foster placements has been going to the Adoption/permanency panel. These must be approved by the fostering panel.

## Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

A few foster carers provide short-term breaks for children although there appear to be no specific written policies and procedures. These need to be developed. The Inspector was satisfied that the arrangements for short-term care recognised that parents remain the main carers for the child.

## Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The fostering service was sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers but the staffing and systems were not in place to ensure that their needs were assessed and met in the same way as the other carers. Arrangements within the local authority for placing children with friends and family were not meeting regulation 38 (e.g. emergency placements being made without social workers visiting beforehand or obtaining foster care agreements) or regulations 34 and 35 (e.g. planned placements being made with friends or family but not involving an assessment by the fostering service). The mechanisms within the fostering service for the support, training and review of these carers were not meeting regulations 14,15,16,17 and 29. At present support is only given to friends and family carers on request. A bid has been made for extra social worker staffing and an increase in fees for these carers. Meantime the acting manager has some ideas for increasing the support e.g. a support group for the foster carers.</p>		
<p>The Statement of Purpose, Children's Guide, policies and procedures and records of the service must be revised to address the needs of this group adequately. The policies and procedures of the local authority and the processes of the fostering service for recording, of assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers who are family or friends require urgent attention in order to ensure that regulations are met.</p>		



**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

**Lay Assessor** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Thank you for the draft report. I have consulted with staff and Panel with regard to factual inaccuracies and I attach some queries as Appendix 1. to this.

Also, please find attached Appendix 2, which is our Action Plan.

I think that for this year it will be best for the report to be published without any other additional comments from us. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your help and assistance with the inspection.

Barbara Foster

(The report was amended in light of appendix 1 copies of which, with the action plan, are available on request).

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

YES

**Note:**

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

**D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.**

**Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:**

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

**Public reports**

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

**D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT**

**Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.**

**D.3.1 I \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

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

**Or**

**D.3.2 I \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:**

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

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