



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service

Room FR4.06

Fell Road

Taberner House

Croydon

Surrey

CR9 2BA

10th to 28th January 2005

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 Croydon Fostering Service

Address

Room FR4.06, Fell Road, Taberner House, Croydon,
Surrey, CR9 2BA

Local Authority Manager

Mr Sammy Forbes

Tel No:

8686 4433 X 3718

Address

Room FR4.06, Fell Road, Taberner House, Croydon,
Surrey, CR9 2BA

Fax No:

020 8760 5665

Email Address

Steve_Liddicott@croydon.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

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

13/01/04

Date of Inspection Visit		10 th to 28 th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	James Pitts	090286
Name of Inspector	2	Barry Khabbazi	
Name of Inspector	3	Rin Saimbi	135561
Name of Inspector	4	Deborah Yapicioz	
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr S Forbes & Mrs J Donson	

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 Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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 CSCI in respect of London Borough of Croydon 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 CSCI 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.

Croydon Fostering Service caters for the needs of a community, which makes up the largest population of any of the London Boroughs. This results in the Authority needing to provide amongst the highest number of general and specialised home based care placements in London. At the time of the inspection the authority had a total of had 183 foster carers looking after 235 children (this is the combined number of carers and children placed in both services). The core function of the service is the recruitment, training and support of foster carers who can provide a range of flexible placements to match the needs of children from a diverse community. In order to maintain this service it provides a 24 hour support service, a mentoring support scheme for all new foster carers in their first year of fostering, a confidential counselling service, a support group for grandparents who have fostered their own grandchildren, a support group for long term foster carers, a newly developed support group for carers of children with a disability and a support group for foster carers of unaccompanied minors. It also has a remand fostering scheme.

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.)

Please note that the general fostering service has a separate management structure to that of the Children with a Disability Home Based Care service. For this reason there will be sections of this report which refer to each service separately and these sections will attract different National Minimum Standard Ratings where relevant in order to reflect the performance of the individual services against the National Minimum Standards and the associated regulations.

The experience of children and carers of the support they receive attracted a significant number of positive comments and many compliments. Children in the vast majority of cases were very happy with the care that they receive and foster carers were almost all complimentary about the face to face input and support from their supervising social workers. By far the most significant areas of concern that this inspection highlights are in areas that could be referred to as the "backroom support" and management of the services. There is a danger that the complexity of managing the sheer volume generated by such a large general fostering service could undermine the positive experience that carers and children reported. The children with a disability home based care service benefits from being a smaller service and by having the assessment team based in the same office, which undoubtedly assists with the speed and efficiency of communication. Operationally the logistics of the larger general fostering service means that it cannot benefit from similar arrangements.

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:

NO

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:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	30 (4) & 38 (2)	FS22	The requirement to have foster care agreements in place must be diligently applied in all cases.	31/05/04
2	30 (1)	FS25	An effective monitoring system needs to be introduced to ensure that all required information on the case records is in place and maintained (This requirement is outstanding from the previous annual inspection).	31/05/04

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	James Pitts	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	David Town	Signature	_____
Date	19/04/05		_____

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 are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	29 (2)	FS6	The service must review all foster carers at least annually and update immediately all reviews that the Inspection team have identified as having exceeded one year. These reviews must encompass an annual inspection of the carer's premises in relation to the continuing health, safety and welfare of the children placed.	28/04/05
2	33 (b)	FS8	The fostering service must ensure that the reasons why trans cultural / trans racial placements are made is transparent and that the reasons why a placement are made are clearly in evidence. This must also include clear evidence of what additional advice; guidance and services are to be provided to support the placement.	28/04/05
3	29 (b) (ii)	FS11	That the Fostering services must ensure that they can evidence that children's views are obtained in relation to review of foster carers.	28/04/05
4	20 (3) (d) (i) Schedule 1	FS15	The fostering service must confirm in writing with the Commission that the remaining supervising social work CRB checks have been received and of the outcome of these checks.	28/03/05
5	27 Schedule 3	FS15	All foster carers who have not as yet had a CRB must now have one taken up and the fostering service to inform the Commission in writing once this has been achieved.	28/03/05
6	29 (2)	FS16	Annual reviews of foster carers must take place consistently. The general fostering service must update all current out of date reviews and inform the Commission in writing once this has been achieved.	28/04/05

7	17 (1)	FS16	The general fostering service must establish clear expectations and protocols that ensure that all carers undertake the core training within a reasonable timescale after initial approval and that ongoing training and updates of core training are expected to be completed as required. Training must be clearly in evidence.	28/04/05
8	21 (4) (a)	FS19	Both Fostering services must clearly evidence that the annual Job reviews are linked to a clear and progressive system of staff development and training.	28/04/05
9	30 (4) & 38 (2)	FS22	The general fostering service must ensure that foster care agreements are in place for each child placed with a respective foster carer at all times.	28.1.05
10	29 (3)	FS22	It is necessary that both fostering services apply the necessary protocol and arrange for at least one annual unannounced visit to foster carers, and more frequent unannounced visits if there are concerns and / or a need to provide additional support and guidance for carers.	28/04/05
11	30 (1)	FS25	An effective monitoring system must be introduced to ensure that all required information on the case records is in place and maintained (This requirement is outstanding from the previous annual inspection).	28.1.05
12	26 (2)	FS30	The fostering panel should receive management information from both fostering services about the holding and outcome of reviews that are not referred to it. This is in order to discharge their functions in this regard.	28/04/05

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	For both the general and, even more specifically, the Children with a Disability service the children's guides should be expanded upon in other formats and media which would make this accessible to a wider range of children. The inspection team acknowledge that this is known to both services, however, the work that is required to achieve these now needs to be completed.
2	FS3	The Inspection team recommends that a specific question be asked of all referees' as to whether they have any knowledge that would suggest an applicant is unsuitable to work with children.
3	FS4	That the Service should monitor data base information in order to identify any shortfalls in performance and to ensure that data is updated to provide accurate management information.
4	FS6	The fostering service should include an explanation of the role of the CSCI in the induction training for carers and explain that carers may be visited as a part of the Inspection process.
5	FS7	The home based care service should be transparent with families and children about why specific service levels exist that may result in either a lack or reduction of service (reference to Freedom of Information Act).
6	FS10	The fostering service should explore the views of a number of carers that supervised contacts would best be held at a specific venue and that the safety of children and carers are considered as a priority in making contact arrangements. This is particularly relevant where a risk assessment suggests that genuine safety concerns exist.
7	FS11	That the fostering services establish a method of obtaining children's views on a more regular basis.
8	FS11	That both of the services completes the project in relation to the development of differing communication tools for children in general and those with a disability and implements these methods of seeking their views.
9	FS14	The general fostering service should take steps to address these concerns with the leaving care team about the quality of support that is provided to young people.
10	FS18	The children with a disability home based care service should produce written guidance for the out of hours duty service on how to respond to calls from carers that provide home based care to children.
11	FS18	Both the general and CWD fostering services should clearly evidence that foster carer supervision occurs.
12	FS21	That both of the fostering services develop an operational strategy that seeks to address foster carer reluctance in some cases to update their training. Additionally the fostering services should address the concerns that foster carers have about the quality of the out of hours duty support.

13	FS21	Many of the home based carers for children with disabilities stated that they would benefit from a self help group. They were unaware that a group had just been initiated and that all respite carer had received personal letters inviting them to the first meeting. This should be re-iterated to all carers by the service.
14	FS22	The purpose of a visit to a foster carer should be more clearly recorded.
15	FS23	Both fostering services should establish a system for offering support to the birth children of foster carers and publicise the nature of the support and it's availability.
16	FS29	The fostering service should verify at forthcoming supervising Social Work visits that all carers are aware of and understand the details about which allowances they may claim.
17	FS30	That both fostering services and the fostering panel develop and agree guidelines about the specific meaning in relation to approved age ranges for children placed with foster carers.

* 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	30
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• 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	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	10/01/05
Time of Inspection	10:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	225

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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 London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service has produced a clear statement of the aims and objectives, which includes all the information required under standard 1.4. At the time of this inspection the inspection team were provided with a copy of this document that indicated that it is the approved statement of purpose for 2005. This is the same as in the case of the Children with a Disability Service.

The Children's Guide for the general fostering service contains the necessary information that would be of interest to children and the contact details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The Inspection team were informed that a copy of the Children's Guide has been given to each foster carer and every child subject to their age and understanding. The children's guide for children with a disability home based care service was written in plain, simple language. It was commendable that the service had several versions of the document, in PECS, Rebus and a pictorial format. All versions were still in draft format, but once approved this will be a positive step towards ensuring that children with disabilities have a voice. The manager for this service informed the inspection team that there were plans to introduce 'carers booklets', which would give children with disabilities information regarding the care that they would receive. This was felt to be a positive step.

However, for both the general and, even more specifically, the Children with a Disability service these guides needs to be expanded upon in other formats and media which would make this accessible to a wider range of children. The inspection team acknowledge that this is known to both services, however, the work that is required to achieve this now needs to be completed.

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 management of the general fostering service remains unchanged from that which was reported at the previous annual inspection. The Responsible Individual is the Divisional Director of Children's Services Mr S. Liddicott (who has ultimate responsibility for both the general and Children with a disability fostering services) and the Manager is Mr S. Forbes who is the Service Manager for Children's Resources, which includes the Fostering Service. The team manager for the Children with a Disability service is Mrs Jane Donson. Both Mr Forbes and Mrs Donson showed an in-depth understanding of the complex needs of the respective fostering services, and have a detailed understanding of the challenges that the services face as well as ideas for how these challenges can be met. Recent amendments to the Children Act and the implementation of the Children's Bill will pose significant challenges to both services and with this in mind the local authority is piloting methods of establishing children's trusts, with this being piloted more specifically in the children with a disability service.

Both Mr Forbes and Mrs Donson have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry on the respective in-house fostering provisions. The budgets for both of the fostering services attracted a significant amount of comment during this inspection both at management and team levels and budgetary constraints are clearly one significant challenge that is faced.

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?

1

A full review of the recruitment practice for the employed supervising social work and management staff team of the children with a disability service was undertaken at this inspection as the Commission had not previously inspected this service. The recruitment of two new staff in the general fostering service was also reviewed. The take up of CRB checks gave the Inspection Team significant cause for concern and this matter has been referred to again under standard 15 and will result in a requirement being made under that standard. The Authority's personnel department has issued a recent management instruction that all references that are received must now be followed by a telephone call to the referee in order to discuss the contents of the reference. The Commission at the next annual inspection will review the application and effectiveness of this new protocol again.

The Authority's reference request format that is used for all social services staff is a standard document that, although it asks relevant questions, does not seek a specific view from the referee about the applicant's suitability to work with children. The Inspection team would suggest that a specific question be asked of all referees' as to whether they have any knowledge that would suggest

an applicant is unsuitable to work with children. By specifically asking a question along these lines the authority will be able to evidence that they have taken all reasonable steps and have asked all pertinent questions in order to attempt to safeguard the welfare of the children in their care.

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

Standard 4.4 requires statements of payments to be made to foster carers. Statements of payments are made, and foster carers said that the payments were timely. One issue raised by the foster carers at their meeting with the commission was that it is not always clear what additional payments have been made as these are not itemised. Although the procedures meet the standard it is suggested only that it may promote good practice and good relationships with carers for the fostering service to provide more detailed advice slips where additional payments are concerned.

One significant issue of concern to the Commission is whether there is suitable management provision and oversight about the operation of the general fostering service. Management information is now more clearly and adequately provided, however, shortfalls in the performance of the statutory functions of the service, for example, foster carer annual reviews and background checks is clearly not speedily identifying the issues that need to be addressed. There has been a change to the amount of delegated responsibilities within the management team, with additional responsibilities having been allocated. The Authority must be mindful that there needs to be a careful and ongoing evaluation of these changes to ensure that the diligent management of the service is not adversely affected by reducing the time available to provide oversight and operational management on a day to day basis.

Children with a Disability Service – Standard rating: 3

No significant issues were identified with the oversight of the children with a disability home based care service.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The management teams of both of the services have clear job descriptions identifying their roles and responsibilities. There are team managers who take day to day responsibility for the services and deputising arrangements are in place.

Challenges that the fostering services face are referred to in other areas of this report.

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?
---------------------------	---------------

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

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

Foster carers homes that were visited were warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness, as required under standard 6.3.

From files sampled it was evident that most of the foster carer's homes had health and safety assessments. However, in the general fostering service it was clear that for at least 34 carers who had reviews that were now out of date this also meant that health and safety assessments were also out of date as these are carried out as a part of the review procedure. This issue must be addressed without undue delay. Those foster carers homes that were actually visited were found in all cases to be free of avoidable hazards as required under standard 6.6. Foster carers training does cover health and safety issues as required under standard 6.7.

Children with a Disability Service – Standard rating: 3

No health and safety issues were identified at the visits of these carers and all annual reviews were up to date and included health and safety matters.

It was noted that one of the carers with the children with disabilities team had a child who was giving up her own bed and bedroom for the child with disabilities receiving respite. This was only happening once a month. This situation needs to be monitored and actioned accordingly, particularly as the young person gets older.

One of the respite carers lives in a rather small house. The young woman placed with her has a degenerative condition and may require a wheelchair at a later date. The inspector was assured that this issue would be addressed on a regular basis. There are no concerns regarding the experience and level of care that is provided.

It is recommended by the Commission that: The fostering services should include an explanation of the role of the CSCI in the induction training for carers and explain that carers may be visited as a part of the Inspection process.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

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

Croydon supports a range of foster carers who represent diverse cultural, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds. The fostering services are aware of the range of carers it is short of. In particular, there are shortfalls in being able to provide matched placements for babies from black communities, however, it is evident that strategies are in place to attempt to address this.

The pre- foster carer training preparation group was attended by two of the Inspection Team. There were a diverse group of potential foster carers in attendance and should at least some of these proceed through the training and approval process then they will no doubt provide additional beneficial carer resources for the services. The pre approval carer training covers the need to promote diversity, race, culture and religion as required under this standard.

There was a lack of clarity about why a child with a diagnosed disability and in receipt of Disability Living allowance, was not receiving support from the children with a disability service. This child was instead placed within the general fostering service. The Children with a disability service has a set list of criteria for service provision, however, more clarity is needed as to why a service is offered in some cases and yet not others. The following recommendation is therefore made: The home-based fostering service, in liaison with the general fostering service, should be transparent with families and children about why specific placement decisions are made and why changes to demand result in service levels being either reduced or services not being offered.

Carers within the children with disabilities team acknowledged that they were provided with basic and essential equipment required by the children and young people. The examples cited were appropriate care seats and gloves to ensure hygiene. There was a broad acknowledgement that funding was not infinite in this area, and that on occasions placements had ended because the provision of specialist equipment was prohibitive and as an alternative the child may receive care in their own family home instead.

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**

The London Borough of Croydon now has a policy of placing children within the Authority's own local service provisions rather than using independent fostering agencies. The stated aim of this policy is to maintain as many placements in the local area as possible, except where the safety of a child would make this inappropriate. Although this keeps placements within the local area, which is accepted good practise, it does reduce the numbers and mix of carers available.

The Inspection Team noticed an increased number of out of category, over approved numbers and trans racial / cultural placements in the last year, which has undoubtedly been as a result of the above mentioned policy change. The commission does not have concerns about the increased numbers of out of category, out of numbers and trans/racial/cultural placements in themselves as with appropriate support such placements can still be highly beneficial for children. However, where this is occurring there was limited written evidence of what additional resources, support and information had been made available to the carers in order to support successful placements. As a result of this the following requirement is made :

The fostering services must ensure that reasons why out of category, out of numbers and trans/racial/cultural placements are made is transparent and evidenced. This must also include clear evidence of what additional advice, guidance and service are provided to support these 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?	3
<p>Training of foster carers includes training in the care of a child that has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour, recognising signs of abuse and maintaining and boosting a Childs self esteem, as required under standard 9.2.</p> <p>There are policies regarding inappropriate punishments and this includes the non use of corporal punishment as is also required under standard 9.3. These matters are also referred to in the foster carers hand book. It is also noted that where updates of this training may be required, or where issues that foster carers may have faced have been highlighted that the fostering panel refer to the need to update such training whenever a review is referred to them.</p> <p>Home based carers for the children with a disability service confirmed that their initial training consider many aspects of protection, such as signs and symptoms and what to do if they suspect any form of abuse.</p> <p>All home based carers have an awareness and understanding of the issue, and all could act appropriately in response to any concerns when required.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	0	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The importance of maintain family contact with birth parents and siblings in particular {where appropriate} is stressed throughout the foster carer induction process. The pre-foster carer training covered this important matter at an early stage contact is also specifically addressed in specific training that is provided.</p> <p>The feed back from a number of carers referred to safety concerns about contact where it needs to be supervised because of possible risks to the child and even a history of violence towards other people by the birth parent or parents. The Commission therefore recommends that the general fostering service should explore the views of a number of carers that supervised contacts would best be held at a specific venue and that the safety of children and carers are considered as a priority in making contact arrangements. This is particularly relevant where a risk assessment suggests that genuine safety concerns are in evidence.</p>		
Children with a Disability Service – Standard rating: 3		

In the vast majority of cases, children who are placed for short term home based care are in the full time care of their own family and contact issues are rarely an area that ever needs to be addressed.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The previous annual inspection report contained suggestions that children and young people made to the Inspection team for things that they think could be improved. These were as follows:

- Easier access to contact with their Social Worker when they have questions to ask
- To see parents and siblings more often
- That as fostered children they would like to have the chance to meet others in foster care as a group.
- That the Inspection should be more child friendly and that the children's group meeting should be held in a different venue (on the last occasion it was held in a Committee room at the Town Hall). Suggestions regarding types of food at this meeting were also made.

This years meeting between the commission and the children was held at a more suitable Venue. The food provided was also much more suitable. When asked if the venue or food could be improved upon even more the children said that they were happy with what had been arranged. The effort of the supervising social worker teams and carers in setting up and managing this event is appreciated and the Inspection Team would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved, and in particular the children and foster carers who attended. In addition to those that attended the meeting, the Commission received 24 written questionnaires from children who are placed with the services. In some instances these were completed with the help of a parent, specifically where a child is placed with the home based care service. Things that children and young people asked that Inspectors put in this report are that one wanted to get more help with their forthcoming GCSE's, one was worried that they may not carry on going to college once they move out from their foster carer's home and one child said how much they love their foster carer. In all cases the children and young people expressed satisfaction with the support they receive from their carers.

With regard to the children with a disability home based care service there was evidence that carers and supervising social workers are equipped the relevant knowledge and training to communicate with children with disabilities. For example, Makaton training was available and simple pictorial images were used for some children. However, there was little evidence that children were consulted routinely regarding their placements, nor was there an expectation that they would attend their own reviews. The Inspection team strongly suggest that some consideration be given to independence when reviewing the placements of these children, for example that a review be carried out by someone other than the allocated supporting social worker. In some situations it was found that link social worker had not seen the child in placement at all.

In approximately 50% of these replies to the questionnaires children and young people reported that they had never been asked about their views by the fostering service about their carer or about how to make things better.

With this comment in mind the Commission makes the following requirements and recommendations:

That the Fostering services need to ensure that they can evidence that children's views are obtained in relation to review of foster carers.

That the fostering services establish a method of obtaining children's views on a more regular basis.

And

That both of the services completes the project in relation to the development of differing communication tools for children in general and those with a disability and implements these methods of seeking their views.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

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

At the previous annual inspection it was advised that the authority should liaise with their own legal department to explore the position of foster carers in relation to no medical consent having been given by birth parents. It was also advised that the legal department of the Authority provide clear guidance to the authority as a whole as to what to do if signed consent can not be obtained from birth parents or legal guardians in the case of children who not the subject of care orders. The inspection team found no cause for continued concern for either the general or home based fostering services in this regard.

In effect the need for diligent application of health protocols and addressing medical needs has far more day to day relevance in the children with a disability home based care service. Due to the varying types of disability that children have, often associated with other medical conditions and very specialised methods of care, this service has a need to apply diligence in this area. The Inspection team are pleased to report that this diligence is clearly evident and that a great deal of emphasis is placed on meeting the children's health care needs whilst receiving home based care.

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
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

The Fostering Service still does not on a regular basis monitor the educational achievements of the children placed with its foster carers although Croydon has introduced a specific annual awards event that celebrates children's achievements in this area for which carers may nominate children for an award. The Fostering Service involves a Looked After Children Education Team to provide input in the training of foster carers and actively promote their educational attainment. Foster carers are expected to support the children in their education and where agreed liaise with schools. Foster carers also contribute to the children's Personal Education Plan, and from the cases tracked it is evident that there is more diligence from placing Social Workers in district Social Work teams to ensure that these plans are completed for all children and updated annually. The Fostering Service provides all foster children of school age with a computer, a fact that received a marked degree of

comment from children who responded to the questionnaires that were sent to them as a part of this inspection.

It should be noted that in the vast majority of cases that children with a disability who make use of the home based care service are usually in the full care of their birth family. Children's educational support needs are therefore not something that this service would normally have a significant involvement with.

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?

3

As reported at the previous annual inspection, the London Borough of Croydon has a specific leaving care team to help prepare young people for independence. All foster carers with young people of 16 years of age and over assist in developing Pathway Plans to ensure that the young people are adequately prepared for leaving care. In some circumstances young people can also continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday in supported care arrangements or receive after care support provided by their foster carers.

During the foster carers meeting with the commission, and at one of the visits to a carer, foster carers raised concerns about the leaving care team being poorly staffed and not being able to provide allocated social workers for all of the young people. The foster carers believed that this, as well as other concerns about co-ordination and proper planning and preparation for independence {for example a lack of Pathway Plans} was having a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of leaving care strategies.

A requirement is not made at this time, however, the general fostering service should take steps to address these concerns with the leaving care team. This concern raised by the foster carers will be monitored by the Commission and will be examined in more depth at the next annual inspection. If progress is not made then this standard will attract a statutory requirement at that time.

(Please note that this standard is not specifically applicable to the home based care service)

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?

1

The Inspection team must report that significant concerns arose at this Inspection about the lack of diligence of the London Borough of Croydon in taking up CRB checks. This is in relation to a failure to do so in some cases for members of staff who are employed by the Authority (Details of which have been provided to the Authority) but also in relation to the uptake of CRB checks on carers. Although the checks on employed staff have now been applied for, in all but one instance, the fact that the Authority has not shown the degree of diligence necessary in taking these up far earlier amounts to a serious failure. There are also 5 carers who have had no application for a CRB made and 9 where a check has more recently been made and a reply to the outcome of the check is awaited. In the case of one carer there is also no confirmation of references on their file.

The authority is therefore required to do the following to address these issues:

The fostering service must confirm in writing with the Commission that the remaining fostering services staff CRB checks have been received and of the outcome of these checks.

All foster carers who have not as yet had a CRB must now have one taken up and the fostering service to inform the Commission in writing once this has been achieved.

The matter regarding the failure to take up the necessary references for the foster carer identified to the children with a disability service must be addressed. Confirmation was received in writing in response to the draft inspection report with regard to the authority having completed outstanding CRB checks on staff. This will be verified by examination of personnel records at the next annual inspection of the service.

Total number of staff of the agency:

25.5

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

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

1

Supervision records for supervising social work staff were examined. These showed that supervision is regular and that it covers casework, training, operational issues, issues arising, and are conducted by a member of the respective services management team.

An area of specific concern is that a total of 34 carers have not had an annual review within the last twelve months. In a majority of these cases the review is over 3 months late and often in excess of 6 months, and even in excess of two years in eight cases. Annual reviews of foster carers must take place consistently. The general fostering service must update all current out of date reviews and inform the Commission in writing once this has been achieved.

Another area of concern that must be addressed is that the general fostering service must establish clear expectations and protocols that ensure that all carers undertake the core training within a reasonable timescale after initial approval. Another expectation should also be established that ongoing training and updates of core training are expected to be completed as required. Training must be clearly in evidence for all carers.

Children with a Disability Service – Standard rating: 3

There were no concerns identified with this service in either reviews or training and therefore a higher performance rating, standard met, is given.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Croydon's foster carers are from diverse backgrounds and Croydon fostering service is aware of the type of carers it is short of. Namely carers for babies for black communities. Strategies are being implemented to address this area. This is complicated by the need for at least one carer for a baby needing to be at home all of the time, which affects their ability to continue working. The success of the implementation of these strategies will be examined at the next inspection.

The full time staff employed are currently adequate to meet the needs of the fostering service. The staff interviewed were positive about the support and training they received and the way the service supports staff, however, all are very mindful of the challenges that the service faces.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

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

General support from supervising social workers was an area of good practice and much positive comment that was again raised by the foster carers. The consensus of carers that gave their views to the Inspection Team is that the face to face support is appreciated and does much to support the placements of children.

Many foster carers at the meeting with the Commission, and at visits, raised the quality of 'Out of hours support'. There was a mixed response to this with some foster carers feeling that response times were varied while others were completely satisfied. It is recommended that these views be taken up with the out of hours social work service. More specifically it is recommended that the children with a disability service provides clear written guidance for the out of hours team about how they should respond to home based carers enquiries or requests for advice and support. The children with a disability home based service should also ensure that all carers are made fully aware of the contact details for the out of hours emergency duty social work service.

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**

The appraisal system that is used by the London Borough of Croydon is called the 'Job review'. This was designed before the National Minimum Standards were implemented and therefore does not totally meet the requirements under this standard. For example, a record of possible future training is recorded but there is no record of previous training to help identify what training gaps there may be which would help to set the future training needs agenda. It is therefore required that both Fostering services must clearly evidence that the annual 'job reviews' are linked to a clear progressive system of staff development and training. Staff members of both services did however report that they receive positive support to undertake post qualification awards in social work, many of whom have now completed these qualifications.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

As reported at the previous annual inspection, all staff have clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them. The policies and procedures of the organisation are contained in overarching policy documents for children services. All the staff receive regular formal supervision as well as informal discussions and consultations. There are weekly team meetings in both services.

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?****2**

The quality of the face to face support to carers from both services supervising social work teams received a high degree of praise from carers at both the meeting that was held and from other feedback that was received.

Foster carers files examined demonstrated some reluctance in foster carers to attend core training. For example, in one general foster carers file, the first part of first aid training had been completed in 1999 and the second part had not occurred to date. Both of the Fostering services must develop an operational strategy that seeks to address foster carers reluctance in some cases to update their training and to make training a clear expectation of new carers.

Many of the home based carers for children with disabilities stated that they would benefit from a self help group. They were unaware that a group had just been initiated and that all respite carer had received personal letters inviting them to the first meeting. This should be re-iterated to all carers by the service.

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?****1**

Another area of concern is that there is a lack of consistency with ensuring that foster carer agreements are in place in the general fostering service. The general fostering service reported that these agreements are expected to be written by placing social workers, however, it remains a responsibility of the London Borough of Croydon to ensure that foster care agreements are in place for each child placed with a respective foster carer at all times. This requirement remains outstanding from the previous annual inspection of the general fostering service. (Please note that foster care agreements were in place in the cases of all children and carers that were tracked in the children with a disability home based care service).

There is a distinct lack of clarity across both services about the purpose and function of specific support visits to foster carers. Contact reports that are written do not sufficiently or consistently describe the reason for these visits and whether they are the generally required support visits or for other purposes such as to provide supervision and guidance to carers. This requires consistency and clarity that could be readily achieved by the correct use of the format that is available to record such visits.

Each carer is expected to be visited at least once per year on an unannounced basis. This occurs on occasion in the general fostering service but far less frequently in the children with a disability home based care service. In some situations it was found that supervising social workers had not seen a child with a disability in placement at all. The Commission recognises that the logistics of doing unannounced visits to the children in placement with a disability can be difficult as these children are often only infrequently cared for and this is often at evenings or at weekends. However it is necessary that both fostering services apply this protocol and arrange for more frequent unannounced visits if there are concerns and / or a need to provide additional support and guidance for carers.

The foster carer handbook, it was reported by carers, is provided and updates of any information and guidance that it contains are provided.

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**

Two members of the Inspection Team attended the first session of the pre approval training for potential foster carers. This session including the beneficial input of three existing and highly experienced carers as required under standard 23.2.

Training does occur at alternative times to meet the needs of all carers as required under this standard. For example Training also occurs in the evenings and weekends.

One suggestion from the foster carers and Inspection Team meeting was for other methods of training to be explored, for example, recording non formal training from the supporting social worker and open learning opportunities, use of videos, books etc.

Foster carers raised the need for more support to be made specifically available for the birth children of foster carers as the lives of these children are also impacted upon by the presence of foster children in their family home. This is a very important issue to raise and for this reason the Commission recommends that both fostering services should develop a system of support for the birth children of foster carers and publicise the nature of this support and it's availability.

Please also refer to Standard 21.2 where a recommendation regarding some reluctance to attend up dated training is commented upon.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The degree of information that is kept directly by the fostering service varies considerably. The Inspection team were provided with access to the district Social Work files of specific children who were randomly selected as a part of the case tracking exercise. The amount of information that was present has improved since that which was available at the previous annual inspection and generally consisted of the required information. The children with a disability service does not use the LAC (Looked after children) documentation format as the vast majority of the children that use this service are in the full care of their birth families. The assessment format that is used is, however, sufficiently detailed and provides all of the necessary information that is required. In addition there is a booklet that is designed from the individual child's perspective about who they are, what preferences they have about how they are cared for and about other needs that they have. The Inspection Team is impressed by the effort that is put into developing this information from a child's eye view.

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?

1

As data protection currently requires CRB checks to be destroyed following their purpose being met, and having been seen by officers of the Commission at Inspection. The inspection team suggest that a list containing reference numbers be set up which is signed once vetted by the service and signed once checked by the inspector. Once this has been for those CRB checks that were seen at this Inspection these CRB's could then be destroyed with only new CRB disclosures then kept until seen at the next inspection.

A Total of 12 foster carer files were tracked as a part of this inspection. An auditing system is in place, however, it is evident that in a least some cases this is failing to highlight gaps in information or the action that needs to be taken to remedy this (please refer to other areas of this report where specific details are given in regard to CRB checks, references and updates of annual reviews). This issue remains an outstanding requirement that has not been addressed since the previous annual inspection.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			235
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			16
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	127	Maximum £	387

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

Each of the fostering services operates from an open plan office. They have access to private rooms for meetings and consultations, which provide adequate space for team meetings. All other fostering service activities, training, panel meetings and foster carers support groups are carried out in different Local Authority buildings. The fostering services have generally efficient administrative procedures and appropriate IT and communication equipment and a new IT programme continues to be implemented.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard is not applicable in business terms to these fostering services as a local authority operates them.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A budget and financial position document for the fostering services was provided. The overall budget is allocated to specific budget headings and the Local Authority internal financial section monitors these regularly. The ability of the fostering service to achieve its agreed development targets for the current 2004/2005 financial year is dependent on the priorities of the Local Authority Social Services Department. It is noted that budgetary constraints received a significant amount of comment during this inspection. The Commission will continually review whether the effectiveness of the services is impacted by these constraints.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

During the meeting with foster carers and the Commission, as well as in other forms of feedback that were received, some foster carers said that they were not clear about all the additional payments and allowances that were available. Although both of the services have written guidance regarding allowances and payments systems this is complex by its nature and could be difficult for some carers to fully understand. In order to address any confusion that may exist the Commission recommends that the fostering services should verify, at forthcoming social work visits, that all carers are aware of and understand the details about which allowances may be claimed.

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

During the panel meeting one member had a different view of what 0-2 years approved age range meant to the others. I.e. is this an approval from birth until the Child's second birthday or is it from birth to a day before the child's third birthday? This lack of a consistent view was further demonstrated in the team meeting attended by one of the Inspectors. For this reason it is recommended that both the fostering services and the fostering panel develop and agree guidelines about the specific meaning in relation to age approval categories.

This panel meeting, which was attended by two of the inspection team, noted that the panel was well conducted, efficient and effective. The Chair commented that the fostering service was now more effective with acting in accordance with the Panel's recommendations. Quality assurance systems (particularly monitoring) were said to be being introduced at the time of the previous annual inspection. However, considering the significant delays in reviewing carers, even those that are not due to be presented before the panel, the Commission recommends that the Authority clarify the panel's role with regard to the receipt of management information and the need to provide a quality assurance function for fostering services.

It is also strongly advised by the Commission that a representative from the children with a disability home based care service sits on the panel or is at least available to offer professional advice to the panel.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

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

There is recognition that children receiving home based care from the children with disabilities team remain, in the vast majority of cases, the responsibility of their birth parents. This is reflected in the policies and procedures of the children with disabilities service.

Short term breaks are offered to carers and children in the general fostering service, a fact that was positively commented upon during feedback, which was received by the Inspection Team.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

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

The families of children placed under Regulation 38 (Family and friends as carers) who provided feedback to the Inspection team were unanimous in feeling supported by the general fostering service. The fostering service points out that family and friend carers are not expected to provide some of the services that other carers do, for example to be on the rota of carers to provide placements out of hours. This results in a lower level of expectation upon them that would otherwise be expected of carers who accept children who are unknown to them as family or friends.

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 commenced on 10 January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are currently working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

NO

Note:

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

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

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

S0000053222.V159314.R01

© This report may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection



The paper used in this document is supplied from a sustainable source