



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Fostering Services (LBHF)

Barclay House

2nd Floor, Effie Road

Fulham

London

SW6

9th March 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

Fostering Services (LBHF)

Address

Barclay House, 2nd Floor, Effie Road, Fulham, London, SW6

Local Authority Manager

Mr Steve Miley

Tel No:

020 8753 2300

Address

Barclay House, 2nd Floor, Effie Road, Fulham, London, SW6

Fax No:

020 8753 2329

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

24/03/04

Date of Inspection Visit		9th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Wynne Price-Rees	075578
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Steve Miley	

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 Fostering Services (LBHF). 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 London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Fostering Service provides family placements for children and young people with carers recruited and supported by the service. Separate schemes are provided, within the service, for young people preparing to leave care and children with a disability. During the inspection there were two hundred and ninety seven children placed with two hundred carers. The service is located in the Fulham Broadway area with access to transport links and shares premises with other social service teams. The team has one Divisional Manager, four team managers, eighteen social workers and six administrative support staff.

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.)

This is a well-run service provided by a professional well-qualified staff team that makes the care and support of the children being fostered of paramount importance. Having said this there are areas that require work to make what is a good service into a very good service. There were nineteen foster carer questionnaires and twenty children's questionnaires returned.

Of the foster questionnaires the majority were positive with good support received and few negative responses. Some questionnaires felt there were shortfalls in training that some found basic and others not focused on their needs, varied expectations from different boroughs difficult to relate to the children, a lack of information given and sometimes not receiving full and accurate information regarding children being placed with them. Despite some negative comments most questionnaires felt the staff team were doing a good job under difficult circumstances.

The children's questionnaires stated they were happy with their placements and felt very well supported with good educational opportunities, activities provided and that their views were sought, taken into consideration by the carers and they were involved in decisions that related to them. They were also aware of the complaints procedure and most had been given a copy of the children's guide. On discussion with the Divisional Manager it transpires that the children's guide has not been finalised and they may have been referring to other information they received. A number said they had not been asked their opinions by the fostering service or been made aware of the NCSC whilst the responses were split one third each regarding social workers asking their opinions between often, sometimes and never. There was a wide age range of children returning the questionnaires and interviewed.

Statement of purpose

There is a completed statement of purpose that meets the standards. The children's guide is awaiting finalisation subject to consultation with children using the service. This was a requirement from the previous inspection. The standard in the this section was not met.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

The borough are fit to provide and manage a foster service although work is required regarding recording systems and keeping information up to date and accessible. Of the two standards in this section one was met and one not met.

Management of the fostering service

The service is well managed on a day-to-day basis although greater attention is required in monitoring quality through the recording system. Of the two standards in this section one was met and one not met.

Securing and promoting welfare

The children spoken with and those returning questionnaires felt safe secure and well supported in their foster placements. There were a number of areas that required some work to meet the standards surrounding information forwarded to carers prior to placement although this is in part due to the information not being made readily available from other

departments arising from lack of communication, carer access to support at times, not enough emphasis put on children's views during supervision meetings, lack of focused monitoring and unclear information systems. Of the nine standards in this section two were met and seven not met.

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

The recruitment, checking, management and training of staff were good. The service is working on improving the training and support of the foster carers with a new system being implemented. Of the nine standards in this section six were met and three not met.

Records

The staff and management acknowledged that work is required on the recording systems and their implementation and this had already been identified as an area for improvement. Of the two standards in this section neither were met.

Fitness of premises to use as a fostering service

The premises were fit for their purpose. The standard in this section was met.

Financial requirements

The financial requirements were met.

Foster panels

The foster panels were carrying out their function within the requirements of the regulations. This standard was met.

Short-term breaks

Appropriate short-term breaks were available. This standard was met.

Family and friends as carers

This was the main area of concern as the criteria for being a family foster carer was different from that of a scheme carer and many felt the training provided and carer forums was not focused on their needs and subsequently did not attend. This meant they were more isolated which was compounded by the views of many that the social work aspect of fostering was intrusive on what they perceived was their family life and the child within it. This standard was not met.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

YES

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

The service did not meet all the required standards.

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	3	FS1	The children's guide must be finalised.	01/08/03
2	28	FS8	A foster carer agreement and placement agreement must be kept on each carer's file.	01/08/03
3	12	FS8	Carer's must be given essential information at the start of any child/young person's placement.	01/08/03

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	10	FS4	The department must keep up to date foster carer contact telephone numbers that are readily available.	09/03/04
2	26 (3) & 42 (3)	FS11	The service must ensure that the children understand the role of the NCSC, that they can contact the organisation if they are not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint investigation carried out by the council and how to contact the NCSC.	01/05/04
3	27, 17, & 28 (5), 19, 16, 15, 42 (3), 23 & 20	FS4	The service must check that the supervisory visits take place and staff use the same supervisory visits format and record this information in the same place so that case tracking and monitoring can take place. The visits must have a structure that identifies the key areas to be checked, give in-depth information focused on these areas and greater weight to the views of children receiving the service. Once concern areas have been identified these must be monitored within the supervision structure and appropriate action such as training focused on foster carer needs given.	01/05/04

4	17, 15 & 27	FS8	The council must provide thorough information for foster carers before a placement is made or as soon as possible afterwards by forging better communication links between the various departments who may hold the relevant information, such as appointed social workers, particularly LAC documentation including pathway planning.	01/05/04
5	14	FS10	The service must respond to foster carer concerns promptly.	09/03/04
6	27, 17, 28 (5) & 15	FS12	The information monitoring system must be reviewed so that the information forwarded, to the panel for re-registration, gives a full and clear picture of current placements and those that have taken place enabling the panel to make a more informed decision.	01/06/04
7	27, 17, 28 (5), 19, 16 & 23	FS6	All carers must undergo the competency-based assessment if this is the registration criteria adopted by the service.	01/08/04
8	10, 17, 22, 28 (5), 30, 31 & 32	FS2	The service must introduce a filing system that enables easy access to up to date information and provides it in the correct agreed areas. The files must then be kept up to date. Out of date information must be archived.	01/07/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS15	The CRB co-signatory should follow up the progress of CRB applications, as they are the only people that the CRB will give this information to.
2	FS7	The service should continue to recruit foster carers who reflect the cultural mix within the borough by trying to recruit more white carers.
3	FS1	A short document giving children information regarding individual placements should be made available prior to placement.

* 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	9
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	09/03/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	66.5

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

The statement of purpose contained all the required information and included an appendix of the details required to be included at the previous inspection. The children's guide information has been completed and is awaiting finalisation subject to consultation with children, receiving the service, to make it user friendly and appropriate for the age groups concerned. The children's questionnaires and interviews confirmed the children have comprehensive information regarding their rights, what to expect from the service and how to complain if necessary. It was suggested that it would be useful for a short document giving children information regarding individual placements should be made available. The majority of questionnaires indicated the children did not have knowledge of the NCSC or how to contact it if they wished to make a complaint.	
--	--

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?

2

In discussion with members of the staff teams, it was confirmed that the line managers within the management structure operated an open door policy and the teams felt well supported and able to seek clarification from their immediate respective managers and the Fostering Manager. Minuted supervision takes place approximately three weekly. Four foster carer and related children's care files were inspected from both teams and it was found that the level and type of contact with carers varied in the records. An example of this was the recording of three weekly supervision of carer meetings in their homes. In some files these were separate documents contained in the same file section as the contact notes whilst in others they were included as part of the contact sheets. This made case tracking difficult and indicated that the respective managers need to include the presence of case file information and how it is recorded during staff supervision discussion of individual cases and check that everyone is using the same recording format and system. The service are currently relocating their files. The Foster Manager's personnel file showed they met the requirements of the standard. They have extensive experience of working with children within a social services environment, have managed the Hammersmith and Fulham Fostering Service for the previous six years and are a qualified social worker.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Inspector visited the borough's social services Human Resources Department and examined the CRB checks for all personnel, within the department and found they had been suitably completed with one exception. This staff member was on long term sick leave had a police check that was valid until December 2003 and does not currently have direct contact with the children. An application for CRB clearance has been made. They cannot follow a contact role until clearance has been received. The Agency staff also provide evidence of CRB clearance. The Human Resources Department confirmed that all written staff references are now double checked, by phone, for authenticity. There were copies of CRB clearance checks on each carer's file inspected.

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

See standard two. There are procedures in place for monitoring and controlling service activities and ensuring quality performance although a number of areas require re-visiting. The evidence, on the contact sheets on file suggested a high level of contact with the carers although much of this seemed to be by telephone or e-mail. Of the files looked at all had supervision visit reports missing, even taking into account that they may be recorded elsewhere such as part of the contact sheets. This is not to say that the visits were not taking place, but it could not be evidenced that this activity was taking place. The team explained that there was a high level of contact encompassing many different types of visit and meetings such as the carers' forum. This was partially confirmed by the carers interviewed and level of contact the children received on a face-to-face basis varied depending on the social worker. Some said they had link worker visits on a weekly basis or as required whilst others said they had very little contact one said they had received only one visit in the past year. The level of response and telephone contact also varied with some carers saying the response and accessibility was excellent whilst others said they left messages that were never returned.

On one file the supervision notes were in place for each visit until the team member was off for a period of time and the case handed to duty during which time no supervision reports were identified. These resumed when the team member returned. The filing system is also currently being re-structured with the children's files located on a different floor to those of the carers and this has not contributed to the smooth running of the system and easy access to it. One staff member went to a draw to get a file to discuss with the Inspector and found that it was now located on a different floor. The Inspector requested a list of all carers that they could randomly pick from to interview. This was sent to the NCSC and a selection made. In one case the phone number recorded was not recognised when dialled. The Inspector contacted the department and a staff member very helpfully checked the files and gave another number and a mobile phone number. The second number came up as not recognised when dialled and the mobile phone was switched off when phoned on six different occasions to make an appointment. This was concerning as the staff member said they had taken the numbers from the carer's file. Another carer was contacted through their part time work rather than at home as this was the number supplied.

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

1

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

0

Fostering Services (LBHF)

foster home.

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2
1

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

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

1

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

See standards two and four. There is a clear organisational structure in place and the staff and management team understood their respective roles and responsibilities. Everyone had a job description that matched the areas of responsibility that they described. The feedback from the staff and great majority of carers interviewed and those returning questionnaires was that the service is efficiently managed within a supportive network. The Fostering Manager reports directly to the Assistant Director for Children's Services and in their absence duties and responsibilities are covered by the Fostering Team Managers' whose personnel files showed they are qualified and experienced to do so.

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?

2

The questionnaires returned and interviews carried out with the carers and children indicated that a safe, happy environment was provided that gave scope for development. There were two incidences, on file, that firstly indicated further work may be required surrounding the assessment of carers and from this the type of training required to provide information and knowledge focused directly on the areas needed to make what is a good fostering placement into a very good one. The second incident indicated a need for greater liaison of foster carers with schools and other educational establishments to identify attendance. These were discussed with the appropriate managers. The standards of the homes and behavioural expectations of the carers were high and suitable boundaries and rules agreed to maintain them within a caring, comfortable family environment.

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 importance of valuing diversity and promoting equality is included as part of the five day core induction training for carers, was indicated as a high priority within the department by the staff and reflected in the diverse cultural needs met by carers that reasonably match the make up of the borough community although the service teams identified a need to recruit more white carers. This concurs with the Statement of Purpose that identifies a commitment to provide placements which "Meet the racial, linguistic, religious and cultural needs of individual needs of children". During the interviews the Inspector asked the children about their interests, education and home life. From the responses given the inspector was satisfied that full encouragement and support was given, by the carers, to promote development. One child, in particular, was very proud of their success in learning the German language.

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 service has a matching policy and procedure for providing suitable placements and the carers available reflected the cultural and ethnic mix within the borough as far as possible. The placing procedure took into account the assessed needs of the children based on available LAC and other information supplied and contained in the case files. Some foster carers raised an issue surrounding the amount and timing of information furnished prior to a placement being made. They felt the main area of concern surrounded emergency placements where the information provided was scant. Although many added that this information was provided as soon as possible after the placement was made. One file contained a request for fostering with no fostering agreement and very little other information.		

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
Any abuse issues and concerns identified play a large part in the decision of the most suitable placement for the children and these are discussed with the prospective identified carers prior to the placements going ahead. The history of new foster carers is tracked over a ten-year period and core induction training includes an introduction to child protection and allegations. Part of the induction training focuses on support provided to carers if an allegation is made against them and they found this particularly useful in preparing them to foster children as it highlighted that they should not feel isolated. The carers confirmed that the service had made it clear to them verbally and as part of written guidance that no form of corporal punishment is acceptable and the key to a successful placement is mutual respect based on established boundaries and behavioural expectations that are recognised by the child and carer. There is also written guidance made available regarding the procedure to follow if a child is missing from home without prior arrangement. One problem area identified was the information flow between the children's social workers and those within the department. There is often a time lag between information forwarded, updated and this makes it more difficult to assess placement appropriateness. To alleviate this problem and make the service provided more efficient and focused better communication channels are required inter-departmentally. See standard eight.		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The service has a policy and procedure to promote the maintenance of appropriate family contacts as set out in the children's care plans and foster carer agreements that were in place. These generally take place in the foster carer's home although alternate visits can be arranged at the family home or elsewhere if this is deemed acceptable within the care plan. Contact promotion and the correct procedure to follow is part of foster carer training and is the responsibility of the designated social worker to monitor. One carer who was fostering a member of their family stated they had encountered a problem whereby an agreed arrangement was in place for the child to visit a parent on alternate weekends. The child went to visit but the parent could not be located and they left a message for the social worker to ascertain where the parent was. The contact was not returned. The Carers and children interviewed or returning questionnaires stated the contact arrangements generally worked very well. Financial provision is made for transport and other costs to be met to maintain contact is maintained.

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 children spoken with and interviewed felt that their views were listened to and taken into account by foster carers and that acceptable behaviour was explained and boundaries agreed with them. They were aware of how to make a complaint and who to within the environs of the borough complaint procedure although were unaware of the role of the NCSC and how to access the organisation. See standard one. The questionnaires returned by children and interviews carried varied widely regarding the depth of their views sought by the service and this tended to depend on the individual social worker. Some felt their views were a large part of the supervisory visits whilst others thought their views were secondary to the visits with the focus being more on the opinions of the foster carers. This was reflected in the supervisory reports that were on file. In many instances it was unclear if the criticism of consultation were regarding the children's designated social workers or those within the fostering service. The children were aware of how to access advocacy services.

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?**

2

The children interviewed and those returning questionnaires felt their needs were met, secure and enjoyed their placements. Most of the files indicated there was information in place and the carers said they had been made aware of health needs. They also said they had been made aware of their health care responsibilities. Some supervisory meeting minutes indicated that health and educational needs were monitored whilst others made little or no reference although this may reflect an intervention style of recording with no entry being made if it was not required. However there were two files that demonstrated a lack of knowledge of nutritional needs in one instance and of school attendance in another. In the first instance this was only picked up in the written hand-over to a new placement and was not mentioned in the supervisory reports whilst in the other there was a note stating a child had only 50% school attendance and that the carer had not been aware of this. Both foster carers had been recommended for re-registration. The panel review and re-registration assessment meetings were focused to a large degree on promoting and meeting health needs and educational support and achievement although the decisions were dependant on social worker reports based on the supervisory visit meetings as well as the pre-panel meetings that take place. As previously outlined these were not complete or difficult to locate and therefore it was difficult for a social worker who was not familiar with the placement or had not written the visit reports to give complete information to the panel if required.

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?**

2

See standard twelve. The children interviewed were all very proud of their educational achievements and took time to explain them to the Inspector. The questionnaires returned said that the service was supporting them to attain educational achievements. In general there was evidence that the foster carers took their role regarding school contact and promoting educational development very seriously explaining how they discharged their responsibilities to the Inspector. The supporting documentation regarding the supervisory meeting records varied and this could be as a result of the recording styles used as outlined in the previous standard. The service has made provision for computers and internet access for the children's use were it was deemed appropriate. They have found this very useful in progressing their education.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The service provides access to a number of carers who are enrolled on the pathway scheme that provides support to young people aged sixteen and above who are preparing to leave care. There is also a specialist social work team working with this age group. One emergency placement had been made for a young person in this category with little general information and no LAC information on file. A social worker thought this information may be kept on the young person's own file rather than the carer's. It was not included on that file and is possible that it had not been forwarded by the service making the referral. On another carer's file there was LAC information regarding one young person but not another. In all instances there was no pathway plan information available.

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

See standard three. The Managers and social workers within the service are all suitably qualified including agency staff who have had their qualifications and experience verified. The council has a thorough recruitment policy and procedure that adheres to current equal opportunities legislation and is followed. A sample of staff files were checked and found to contain contracts, terms and conditions and job descriptions that matched the work they carry out. All staff have CRB clearance or it is pending with acceptable other documentation and do not have direct contact with children if clearance has not been received.

Total number of staff of the agency:

42

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

7

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There are clear lines of accountability that staff confirmed they have understood. The management structure in place enables them to receive support as and when required and the management team operate an open door policy. Workloads are monitored during regular minuted staff supervision and during team meetings. The staff felt they work very well together within the two teams, as a whole and receive excellent management support. This was observed during the course of the inspection and the Inspector found the empowerment of staff to discuss issues arising from individual files directly with them a good working practice that displayed the confidence of the managers in all team members. There is dedicated administrative support and a duty team.

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

There are currently forty-two staff members, ten of which are agency. The staff are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out their designated duties. Three carer recruitment drives take place annually and are focused on local recruitment. This has been relatively successful with two hundred carers currently available although the teams feel that more white carers are required to fully reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity within the borough. Carers spoken with said they were very impressed with the information available and way it was delivered finding it helpful in making the initial decision if they wished to foster or not. After an initial social worker discussion visit information packs are sent to prospective carers. Prospective foster carer preparation groups take place from which selected applicants undertake assessment prior to a registration recommendation being made to the Foster Panel. A social work team manager visits the carer as part of the assessment process. If the panel approves a recommendation is made to the Assistant Director who is the designated decision maker.

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

The staff spoken with found the service to be a fair and competent employer with a comprehensive recruitment procedure that adheres to current equal opportunities legislation that has sound employment practices including a whistle blowing policy and provides a good support structure, particularly at departmental level. Each carer's annual review includes a health and safety audit and this was documented on the files examined. The reviews are forwarded to the Fostering Panel as part of the annual re-registration of carers' process. Out of hours support procedures are in place for carers.

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

Staff confirmed they have access to training pertinent to their needs as part of the council's rolling training programme and these are discussed during supervision, team meetings and as part of annual appraisals. The Fostering Manager supervises the Team Managers who in turn supervise their respective teams. The staff felt the training provided is focused on their identified needs and adequate induction training enabled them to carry out their roles and responsibilities on joining the team. Carers have access to a wide range of training including child protection, allegations, communicating with children and group work. Preparation courses are running and a number of carers are under-going NVQ courses. They felt the courses were very useful and the only criticisms were that the training is geared to the council's training programme and therefore timing is not always convenient and foster carers who foster members of their own family do not have access to the NVQ training as those on the fostering scheme. There was a split

between those who foster family members who generally did not attend the foster carer forums, as they did not feel they met their needs and those on the fostering scheme who found them useful for information sharing and as a support mechanism. The scheme foster carers tended to have far more evidence of training and carer forum attendance than those who foster family members. A condition of the re-registration of two co-habiting carers was that they attended the carers' forum regularly. There was little evidence that they had met these criteria and are currently still fostering although the service is reviewing the situation.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

See standards five, sixteen and eighteen. All staff were aware of their areas of responsibility and accountability and this had been outlined in their job description as well as part of induction training and discussion during supervision.

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

See previous standards. There is a written strategy and procedure for working with and supporting carers that has clearly defined boundaries and is discussed in team meetings. These are also outlined in the Foster Carer agreements that detail the support they can expect to receive. The carers have access to the emergency duty teams and are entitled to expect a minimum monthly supervisory visit from a named social worker. An annual carer review is completed by the named social worker and team manager from the supervisory meeting notes that is forwarded to the panel for consideration for re-registration.

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

See standards two, three, four, ten, twelve and nineteen. There are procedures in place for the supervision of foster carers and the onus is on designated social workers, within the department, to supervise and support them. The main supervision takes place as part of the three weekly visits that are accompanied by a report. As previously outlined due to the diverse way these visits have been recorded, with some social workers using the agreed format, others recording them within the contact sheet system and some visits not having been recorded, it was difficult to ascertain how successfully the foster carers' have been supervised. The foster carers interviewed and questionnaires returned gave conflicting views

regarding this with some saying the supervision process worked well with training needs identified, useful guidance given and the social worker and duty team available to them as required. Whilst others said the supervisory visits were intermittent and when they did take place they consisted of a quick chat that was not necessarily focused on the support given to children or required by the carers. One questionnaire said that the social worker had spent the bulk of the interview talking about a holiday they had taken. There was generally a split between the scheme foster carers, who were very positive saying the social workers were very helpful in addressing their needs and supporting them and the family foster carers who felt the visits at best did not serve a useful or were intrusive. It was difficult to ascertain if some of the criticism was levelled at the team link social workers or the original designated social workers that had passed the cases over to the fostering services.

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

The fostering service procedure provides initial training prior to approval and registration. This takes place over five days. There were training details recorded on the carers' files. The depth of training varied greatly with some carers having attended a number of training courses whilst others had attended very few. A file recorded only one training course attended for preparation for adult life. The service has changed from using the BAFF form F1 system to a competency-based assessment and the first carer is due to go before the panel on 5th April 2004. This is designed to identify gaps in knowledge and identify training needs. The instance of the carers who did not provide nutrition appropriate to two children in their care, outlined in standard twelve, was discussed with one of the team managers who said the carers had been provided with literature that gave guidance on appropriate diet for age groups and this had been discussed with the carers, who did not follow it. This highlights a problem with the quality assurance system that identifies the appropriateness of placement and the placement monitoring system as this was not picked up within the supervisory visits or if it was, it was not recorded.

The competency-based assessment is compulsory for scheme foster carers but optional for those fostering a family member although a recommendation can be made to the panel that they undergo the assessment as part of the registration criteria. Standard thirty-two states that "The support and training needs for family and friend carers are assessed and met in the same way as for any other carers". It must be stated that some family foster carers interviewed and those who returned questionnaires felt the need for training was an questioning their parenting skills.

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

The sample of case files examined contained varied quality of information. Some had scant information whilst others had much duplication and there was also a lot of out of date information that required archiving. Some of the information that should have been maintained on the children's files was found in carer files. This included sensitive information and in some cases information pertaining to children that were no longer receiving a service. This made it very difficult to access up to date information and individually case track. The service is currently undergoing a restructure of its filing system.

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

See standard twenty-four. Separate records systems have been set up for staff employed, carers, children, complaints and allegations. However it was found that much information regarding children, carers, complaints and allegations were duplicated in these files or misfiled. This made case tracking extremely difficult as it was unclear where the pertinent information would be found. In some instances sensitive information regarding children were found on carers' files and information pertaining to children no longer receiving a service was also retained. Complaints had also been misfiled. The team said they were aware of the problem and were working on restructuring the system so that it is easier to use.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

224

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

439

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

376

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

39

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

22

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

117.11

Maximum £

3100.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service is securely located, on two floors, within council offices that have disabled access, suited to the purpose and are well served by transport links. The building is also occupied by other social work teams for children and the social services training department.

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?

9

This standard does not apply to local authority fostering services.

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?

9

This standard does not apply to local authority fostering services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The foster carers confirmed they receive their full allowances promptly and have not experienced any problems with payments. Retainers and holiday payments are also available. They have received financial support to make justifiable purchases to meet the needs of children in their care including computers to help in educational development. Full allowance guidance was given as part of the induction process. The carers are covered by the council's insurance.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There are policies and procedures in place that evidence shows are followed. The panel meets each Monday between 10.00 am and 4.30 pm. It is currently chaired by the Council's Principle Officer for Looked After Children and Quality Protects who has recently returned to panel membership. There are two panels, one statutory and one non-statutory that have different functions. These consist of different members. The statutory panel complies with the Fostering Regulations 2002 and includes a former looked after young person, two foster carers from another authority, elected member, panel advisor, two fostering managers and an LAC social worker. The panels receive written information prior to sitting that enables panel members to ask structured questions in areas such as the annual review of carers. In these instances the information is supplied by the carer's supervising social workers and are dependent on the supervisory visits that have taken place. See previous standards. A review has taken place by the Chair to ensure that the required level of independence is maintained.

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 are policies and procedures in place to provide short-term breaks for children in care and there are a small number of carers available to provide this service. One family foster carer interviewed explained that another family member had been designated as a support carer by the service and provides occasional overnight or weekend stays if required.	3
---	---

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

The service recognises the particular relationships between family foster carers and children being fostered. Having said this the majority of criticism of the service came from the carers in this area. In some instances they felt under supported and had difficulty accessing designated social workers whilst in others they felt the social work role intrusive. There seem to be two systems and criteria in place for scheme foster carers and family foster carers. The scheme carers have to undergo the competency-based assessments whilst it is voluntary for family carers. See standard twenty-three. The family foster carers did not feel the foster carer forums and type and level of training were of use to them and subsequently did not generally attend. The reason for this was that they were fostering one family member, would not be fostering other children and therefore much of the training given was not relevant. They viewed their roles as those within a family context rather than as a foster parent and tended to feel that the foster criteria did not apply to them as it would not be in place within the normal family environment. At the same time they did voice some animosity at the diversity in the allowances received by them and payments to foster carers on the scheme. In the main the family foster carers felt more isolated than the scheme foster carers, but in many instances this was through choice.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

A Lay Assessor did not attend this inspection.

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

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

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

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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.