



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

London Borough of Sutton Fostering Services

**Civic Offices
St Nicholas Way
Sutton
Surrey
SM1 1EA**

Lead Inspector
Barry Khabbazi

Key Announced Inspection
9th January 2007 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	London Borough of Sutton Fostering Services
Address	Civic Offices St Nicholas Way Sutton Surrey SM1 1EA
Telephone number	020 8770 4307
Fax number	020 8770 4775
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Sutton
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Post Vacant
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Two children's services provided by Sutton were inspected and are included in this report.

These are the general fostering service and where applicable, the 'Family Link' children with disabilities support service.

The Fostering service:

Sutton fostering service provides a range of placements and services. The range of services on offer includes permanent and task centred fostering, which covers assessment, rehabilitation, and holiday placements for children at residential schools, short-term placements and preparation for adoption. Other services provided include an out of hours service, which means that foster carers can provide emergency placements, and respite foster care for planned short term breaks.

A number of foster carers are also approved to look after the children of relatives within their extended family.

The 'Family Link' children with disabilities service:

There is also a family link scheme for children with disabilities. This service provides assessment-based services, which include respite care including overnight care and day care, domiciliary care and individual support workers, and access to 'Mencap' play schemes.

SUMMARY

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

All the key Standards, new key Standards, and those Standards pertaining to previous requirements were assessed at this inspection. The few non-key Standards not assessed this year were all met at previous inspections. Please see the 2005 reports for details of all Standards.

This inspection occurred over one week and was carried out by one inspector. Four days or part days were spent at the service's premises, interviewing staff/management and examining files. One morning was spent at the 'Family Link' support service for children with disabilities. Three days were spent inspecting 'off site', contacting or visiting foster carers and children placed, or reading questionnaires and other documentation taken away.

Due to consistency of inspector over the last 3 years, and to the continual assessment pilot that this service had been involved in {see below}, significant additional information and evidence has accumulated. It was therefore possible to reduce the actual inspection time at this inspection. The overall time needed at this main inspection was therefore less than that of a traditional 'single hit' inspection.

In addition to the actual main inspection period listed above, this fostering service had over previous years, participated in a pilot of a continual assessment model.

Additional contact during this period included attending foster carer and children's' barbeques/ fun days/ Easter egg hunts, and foster carer support groups. This process provided continuity of inspector, and better access between the inspector and all parties, providing a less formal environment for staff, foster carers and children, which promoted better communication and a higher level of involvement {please see the last report for more details}.

This service was found to be well run, with no major shortfalls or areas of concern. The service has consistently demonstrated many areas of good practice, additional resources and Standards exceeded.

All previous requirements have been implemented well, and there has been a doubling of training uptake for foster carers as a result of this.

Although there are four recommendations in this report, they only refer to minor shortfalls, and there were no shortfalls significant enough to trigger any new requirements in this report.

All the children and foster carers involved, and all the fostering service staff, are thanked for their participation in the in the inspection process.

Responses to surveys sent to children fostered.

{Note, numbers may not tally as not all questions were answered on all surveys.}

1 Do you get support and advice about being healthy?

Always [**9**] Usually [**3**] Sometimes [**0**] Never [**0**]

2,Do you receive the right help so you can be successful in education?

Always [**6**] Usually [**4**] Sometimes [**2**] Never [**0**]

3,Are you being helped to think about the future?

Always [**5**] Usually [**3**] Sometimes [**2**] Never [**1**]

4, Do your carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions?

Always [**9**] Usually [**3**] Sometimes [**0**] Never [**0**]

5, Do you feel cared for where you are living now ?

Always [**9**] Usually [**1**] Sometimes [**1**] Never [**1**]

6, Does your Social worker listen to you and take notice of your opinions?

Always [**10**] Usually [**1**] Sometimes [**0**] Never [**0**]

7, Do you know who to speak to if you are unhappy or have a personal problem?

Always [**9**] Usually [**1**] Sometimes [**1**] Never [**0**]

8, Do you know how to make a complaint?

YES [**7**] NO [**2**] Don't Know [**1**]

9, Are you being bullied ?

YES [**1**] NO [**8**] Don't Know [**0**]

What the service does well:

Standards Exceeded.

The following exceeded Standards each have multiple areas of good practice within them, that are all above that required in the related National Minimum Standard. {See identified Standard in the main body of the report for details of the multiple areas of good practice for each specific Standard listed here.}

Standard 11 - Children's opinions.

Standard 12 - Health care.

Standard 13 - Education.

Standard 21 - Supporting carers.

Good Practice.

The following good practice list, identifies where a single element of a Standard, contains practice that is above that required.

Standard 13: The organisation supports higher education well by paying all university fees, giving the younger person their own computer and giving a weekly allowance, paying for accommodation and there is a book allowance.

Standard 14: The organisation has a preparing for independence scheme where some of their money is paid directly into a bank account in the child's name to promote budgeting and financial management skills..

Standard 15: 5 references or 5 years of references are collected to explain any gaps in employment and address when staff have left an organisation and worked for an agency to avoid references from the last employer.

Standard 16: Management support to supervising social workers and team working and support from peers were identified as an area of good practice by supervising social workers.

Standard 16+20: Supporting social work staff supervision occurs every three weeks.

Standard 17: The number of fostering staff in the team has been increased over the last few years. {in addition at the time of this inspection all fostering team posts had been recruited to

Standard 26. The children's services are on one site potentially promoting good communication and access to social work colleagues.

Standard 30: The fostering panel has completed foster panel member appraisals. The panel had also succeeded in recruiting a panel member that had been in the care system.

Standard 21: Staffing levels have increased. There is one new foster carer practitioner post,

Standard 18. There is a foster carer practitioner scheme which recognizes the experience of foster carers who have been working as foster carers for 2 years and have done 30 hours of core training, by offering them a mentoring role for new foster carers, a role in training foster carers and/or in the induction of new foster carers. Supporting social workers spoke of a more professional foster

care team. Foster carers reported that they felt more valued or included or professional.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Foster carers' training needs are now identified and recorded in training profiles.

Training has been made more accessible with weekend and evening training sessions provided and open learning is currently being explored.

To ensure that foster carers attend identified training in the skills required the fostering service now fully record, monitor and verify all training undertaken by foster carers effectively, although recording external training still needs improvement.

The fostering service training officer now attends early visits to potential and new foster carers to promote training and the authority's expectations of training. Foster carer reviews now focus more regularly on reviewing and identifying training needs.

The panel's role in monitoring quality has been expanded to take into account training and the outcomes of training of foster carers, this then is related to their approval category, and their continuing suitability as a foster carer is assessed if identified training is not undertaken.

The above changes regarding training have resulted in an increased priority for training, an increased expectation of the need to attend identified training, and has resulted in more than doubling the number of those who have attended over 30 hours of training since the last inspection, and numbers of carers that have had no training at all has reduced drastically from 52 to only 9 foster carers this year. Please see Standards 19, 23, and 30 for details.

The new policy giving guidance to staff regarding additional support for trans-cultural/ trans-racial placements is now better known by staff.

Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements do occur, foster carers now receive specific additional training, support and information to facilitate developing a positive understanding of the child's heritage and to develop the carer's skills to enable them to better meet all the child's needs.

The new tools used to raise practice in this area were the implementation of the new staff guidance above and the creation of trans-cultural/ trans-racial database which gives practical information regarding how to meet specific cultural needs. Please see Standard 8 for details.

What they could do better:

Although all foster carers had a Criminal Record Bureau Check, not all of these had been renewed within the three years stated in the Standards.

This was the case for one foster carer in the main fostering service and also the case for a 'Family Link' foster carer and members of their family.

Although a huge improvement in meeting the required frequency of unannounced visits to foster carers was seen in files sampled, these was still a very minor shortfall. Unannounced visits should occur annually for all foster carers.

Although the fostering service does notify the Commission of significant events, one event was not notified as it occurred at another service and it was assumed that they would notify the Commission. It was clarified that we need to be informed to guarantee all parties concerned do get the information.

The fostering service has improved training uptake greatly as recorded in the 'what has improved' section above. However some minor areas still need some improvement {see above and Standard 23}. It is felt that the continuing implementation of the new systems recorded above will eventually raise standards for all cases once it has had a chance to run for a while.

Good practice suggestions:

{ These are suggestions only and do not directly relate to the Standards }.

It is suggested that the Fostering Service continue to build on all the good work it has done in raising standards for children fostered in Sutton, and specifically with the recent raising of standards for both, training of foster carers and transracial/transcultural placements.

The service is in the unusual situation of being about to be fully staffed. It is suggested that the Local Authority should take this opportunity to maintain the currently high level of filled posts by prioritising any future recruitment needs for this service.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

Standard 12: Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children's health needs are effectively identified, and the fostering service promotes the health and development of children well. This Standard is exceeded.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has consistently demonstrated not only meeting this Standard, but also many areas of good practice, in promoting the health and development of children fostered.

The systems that the service has in place for monitoring and responding to the health care needs of children remain basically as those reported at the previous annual inspections, with additional updating to procedures and practices where required. These systems continue to be effectively applied.

Each child has a health monitoring form completed about them and any other significant information is drawn from the initial placement information and subsequent child care reviews. The foster carers have comprehensive guidance in respect of their responsibilities regarding the health of the children in their care. There is a Health Support Officer to promote good health. Similarly there are two Child Psychologists for Looked After Children to advise on child mental health issues. Foster carers are given financial support to encourage the children to engage in leisure activities. Responses from the children's questionnaires and continual assessment confirm that they are involved in regular activities. All foster carers continue to receive training regarding health issues, including First Aid. There is an updated health and safety assessment form now in use. Foster carers demonstrate an understanding and implementation of their role in promoting the health of children placed.

With regard to the children with a disability service, there is clear and well documented information available to carers about the individual needs of children. Healthcare responsibility remains with the birth parents although information on how to respond to any specific health issues that may arise is provided to carers.

The following evidence of currently exceeding this Standard has been previously presented and was re-confirmed at this inspection.

Standard 12. Health care–

- The Local Authority makes available to foster carers a Health Support Officer {LAC nurse} to promote good health, provide support, health assessments and surgeries for 'Looked After Children'.
- There is are 2 full time Child Psychologists for Looked After Children to advise on child mental health issues. A positive outcome for this is that there is no waiting list.
- Foster carers are given financial support to encourage the children to engage in leisure activities and a leisure pass currently being sought.
- There is a joint funding approach developing into a joint funding panel involving Health, Education and Social Services.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

Standards, 3, 6, 8, 9, 15, and 30:

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

All people providing and managing the service are suitable, strive to meet standards well, and to continually improve services and exceed standards where possible.

The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.

The fostering service match children to carers well.

The fostering service does protect each child from abuse or neglect.

The people working in the fostering service are suitable to work with children. However, for the fostering service to do all in its power to ensure suitable staff are employed, new Criminal Record Bureau check should be acquired for all foster carers every 3 years.

Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively and now take on a greater monitoring and enforcement role with foster carer training.

EVIDENCE:

All people providing and managing the service are suitably qualified and have the required experience. The manager and providers are suitably qualified and experienced, and strive to meet standards well. Both the manager and service manager now have additional management qualifications.

The foster homes visited were indeed healthy and nurturing environments and could comfortably accommodate all who lived there. They were adequately furnished and maintained to high standards of cleanliness and hygiene. There were places to do homework and bathing and toilet facilities were good. There is a health and safety policy in the handbook giving foster carers guidance of their responsibilities in this area. Foster carers had been informed that they might be interviewed as a part of the inspection process. It is noted that those foster carers who were interviewed positively received the inspector and expressed confidence in the way in which the service both supports and trains them. This is a consistent theme that has emerged both at previous inspections and at this inspection.

At the last inspection a new policy giving guidance to staff regarding additional support for trans-cultural/ trans-racial placements and procedures for recording these had been produced. This is a clear and well thought out policy which addresses the issues relating to trans-cultural/ trans-racial placements well. However, at the time of last inspection some supporting social workers were not aware of the guidance in this policy. In addition, files, foster carers and some social workers recorded no additional cultural or faith needs as the child is not interested. This may be the case but there was no evidence {except from one social worker}, of exploring whether statements like this from the child were due to discrimination received, or a desire to assimilate, or due to experiences in the past that needed to be addressed.

The following requirement was then made to address this under Standard 8.6: Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements occur, and where required, foster carers must receive specific additional training, support and information to facilitate developing a positive understanding of their heritage and facilitate developing the carer's skills to enable them to better meet all the child's needs. This process must be recorded and supporting social workers must be made aware of any associated policies.

By the time of this inspection, supporting social workers were all aware of, and had implemented the new policy. There is now a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to providing support in this area with the new and known policy and guidance.

To provide a more consistent and informed approach to providing information a transracial/transcultural central information database has been set up. This

information database included the following information: Brief descriptions of the 5 main religions, information about associated places of worship, cultural music, art, clothing and hair care {including commercial outlets}, books regarding culture and religion, cultural role models, training courses available, resources for Gypsy, Roma, and travellers, community groups, cultural media, Embassy and consulate information, and places to acquire further information.

The additional training, support and information required, now can be more consistently met through the use of this central information database by supporting social workers and foster carers. The level of support is therefore no longer purely dependant on individual social worker's personal experience/background.

This ongoing piece of work combined with the new and now known policy more than meet the previous requirement set under Standard 8.

Foster carers reported that they are usually provided with all the relevant information required under Standard 9, to enable them to care for children safely. The fostering service monitors the unauthorised absence of children in fostering placements to identify any trends that may emerge.

This information is now collated and evaluated and a list sent to the Commission. The children continue to have access to an independent advocacy service. The foster carers who were contacted or visited were aware of permissible sanctions they can apply to children. There is a specific bullying policy and guidance to foster carers. There is a policy to follow in the event that children go missing. Foster carers reported that they are usually provided with all the relevant information to enable them to care for children safely.

At the last inspection it was identified that although all foster carers had a Criminal Record Bureau Check, not all of these had been renewed within the three years as required under Standard 15. The last inspection report therefore contained the following requirement under Standard 15:

All foster carers must have an up to date Criminal Record Bureau Check.

At this year's inspection it was again identified that although all foster carers had a Criminal Record Bureau Check, these had not been renewed within the three years required for one single foster carer in the main fostering service, and for a 'Family Link' foster carer and some members of their household.

This recommendation therefore remains in force.

Although it was considered that this shortfall did not significantly affect the outcome for this Standard last year, the recommendation has not only remained unmet, but the number of Foster carers without a renewed CRB has increased for the 'Family Link' service. The outcome and rating of this Standard have therefore been negatively effected.

The following evidence of good practice has been previously presented and acknowledged under Standard 15 and was upheld at this inspection:

5 references or 5 years of references are collected to explain any gaps in employment and address when staff have left an organisation and worked for an agency to avoid references from the last employer.

The fostering panel has clear written policies and procedures, including a written procedure to cover decision-making where all the members of the panel are not in agreement. No panel member starts until fully vetted and cleared. The terms of reference of the panel do now highlight the quality assurance function of the panel in terms of consistency of assessment of the foster carers and the monitoring the range and type of carers available in comparison to the needs of the children. The panel has access to medical advice although the Medical Advisor is not restricted to this role and is a full member of the panel. One of the panel members has direct experience of the care system. In all respects the panel is properly constituted.

The last inspection report recorded that although panel meetings attended were organised efficiently and effectively, the panel could take a greater monitoring and enforcement role with foster carer training. As there were also a number of additional issues regarding foster carer training uptake in the last report {see Standards 17, 19, and 23.} The following recommendation was then set to address this:
The panel's role in monitoring quality must be expanded to take into account training of foster carers.

Foster carers' take up of identified training is monitored at reviews and this information is now presented to panel. Where identified training has consistently not been taken up, the panel considers foster carers' continuing ability to effectively meet the needs of the type of placements they are approved for, with a view to reducing the range or removing approval completely.

This approach has included the panel in the monitoring and enforcing of required identified training and helped change the priority of training for supporting social workers and more importantly the foster carers. The associated recommendation is therefore now met.

The following evidence of good practice has been previously presented and acknowledged under Standard 30, and was upheld at this inspection: The fostering panel has foster panel member appraisals.

The panel had also succeeded in recruiting a panel member that had been in the care system.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

Standards; 7,13, and 31.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service does value diversity.

The fostering service does promote educational achievement very well. There is a clear recognition that children receiving care from the 'Family Link' children with disabilities support service, remain, where appropriate cases, the responsibility of their birth parents. This Standard {13} is exceeded.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is continuing to develop its recruitment campaigns in order to attract more carers from a variety of backgrounds and to improve upon the level of retention of existing foster carers. The fostering service also has a specific officer to monitor, co-ordinate and develop recruitment strategies.

Placements are made with carers who meet the foster child's religious and linguistic background wherever possible. Placements where exact matches are not possible, do occur appropriately where the needs of the child are assessed as being able to be met in that placement, with additional support, information and training for foster carers. {See Standard 8 for details regarding trans-racial/cultural placements.}

The fostering service also recruits from the gay community and has carers who are registered as people with a disability. New training for foster carers in the sexuality of younger people is now also available.

The fostering service has a promoting equal opportunities and valuing diversity policy in the Foster Carer's Handbook. The foster carers address these issues during their preparation training through regular supervision sessions with the supporting social worker.

There are foster carers on the register who provide specialist services e.g. to children who have disabilities. These carers receive extra financial support and are linked into additional community support services to ensure that these children's needs are met.

Evidence from the children's questionnaires indicated that the children felt they were supported in their education and were given opportunities and encouraged to take part in activities and interests.

Case tracking showed that each child has a Personal Education Plan and there is a comprehensive PEP manual. Individual Education Plans were in place where required for cases tracked.

The fostering service supports children of school age by providing them with a computer and internet access.

The fostering service has introduced increased monitoring of educational attainment which will also result in an annual awards scheme to celebrate children's achievements. These achievements are not limited to direct academic achievements but also general educational improvements and other categories, so as to include as many children as possible.

The following evidence of currently exceeding Standard 13 has been previously presented and was re-confirmed at this inspection.

Standard 13 - Education.

- The Local Authority has an Educational Support Officer to work with children and foster carers to improve on educational attainment.
- Financial support is provided to children if they require extra tuition.
- There is a system in place to monitor school attendance. A call centre calls schools twice a day and reports absences.
- The fostering service has introduced increased monitoring of educational attainment which will also result in an annual awards scheme to celebrate children's achievements.
- There is a joint funding approach developing into a joint funding panel involving Health, Education and Social Services.
- The organisation supports higher education well by paying all university fees, giving the younger person their own computer and giving a weekly allowance, paying for accommodation and there is a book allowance.

There is recognition that children receiving home based care from the children with disabilities team remain, in all of the current cases, the responsibility of their birth parents. This is reflected in the policies and procedures of the children with disabilities service, which were most recently reviewed in February of this year.

Short-term breaks are offered to carers and children in the general fostering service, a fact that was positively commented upon during the feedback that was received at this and previous inspections.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

Standards: 10 and 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service promotes and supports contact arrangements so that appropriate links can be maintained with birth parents.

The fostering service promotes consultation well so that foster carers and children placed feel involved and listened to. This Standard {11} is exceeded.

EVIDENCE:

It was identified at previous inspection and re-confirmed at this inspection, that the requirements under Standard 10 continue to be met. This was also confirmed through communications with foster carers and children fostered. Evidence from foster carers indicates that children are supported to maintain regular contact with their birth families and that this is actively encouraged where it is appropriate and safe to do so. Foster carers are expected to record and maintain records of the outcomes of birth parent visits.

There is guidance in the Foster Carers Handbook about how to work with birth parents, in the case of both the general and children with a disability service. This was observed to be followed up at foster carer training sessions previously attended by the inspector. Agreements regarding contact are arranged in conjunction with the placing social worker and form part of the placement agreement. The fostering service continues to provide financial support to ensure that contact arrangements take place.

The London Borough of Sutton provides consultation questionnaires for foster carers, the children and younger people being fostered and the parents of children and younger people fostered. A survey has also recently been conducted. Children fostered that were spoken to confirmed that they knew how to make a complaint. Although 2 of the children's questionnaires indicated the child did not know {or remember}, this information is included in the children's handbook which all children fostered had received. Foster carers receive guidance and training in listening effectively to children.

The following evidence of currently exceeding this Standard has been previously presented and was re-confirmed at this inspection.

Standard 11. Children's opinions: – in addition to questionnaires and events-

- All children using services that are provided by the London Borough of Sutton have access to an independent Advocacy Service.
- The children also are able to make their views known via a magazine they edit called 'My Shout'.
- On a monthly basis the Advocacy Service hosts a meeting between Looked After Children and the Executive Head of Children's Services and the lead councillor for Looked After Children.
- The 'Jigsaw' advocacy project is also developing the involvement of children with disabilities in the running of the 'Children's Trust' that provides the 'Family Link' service.
- The birth children of foster carers also have events and there is a newsletter for this group. This area is also being further developed.

The Local Authority and the fostering service are once again commended for their commitment and approach to consultation with Looked After Children.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

Standards 14, and 29.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**,

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service promotes independence skills and health training to prepare younger people for adulthood.

The fostering service pays foster carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified to ensure that sufficient money is available to meet the financial needs of the children placed.

EVIDENCE:

The supervising social worker addresses issues pertaining to independence throughout the fostering period, with increasing emphasis as preparation for independence becomes more imminent. When preparing for independent living, pathway plans are used with young people who are encouraged to be actively involved in decision-making processes.

Specific training courses are now run in age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills, and these are being further developed. There is also specific guidance for financial arrangements for younger people aged 16 and over in foster care.

The following evidence of good practice has been previously presented and acknowledged under Standard 14, and was upheld at this inspection: The organisation has a preparing for independence scheme where some of their money is paid directly into a bank account in the child's name to promote budgeting and financial management skills.

There is a written policy on fostering allowances and this is available in the Foster Carers Handbook in the case of each of the respective services. There were no concerns expressed from the foster carers who were visited or contacted, about regular and prompt payments of fees. Allowances paid to friend and/or family carers are at the same rate as other foster carers.

Carers for the children with a disability service are provided with an allowance based on the numbers of hours that care is provided. Comments made by foster carers indicate that extra financial support and equipment is provided when the assessed needs of children in placement deem this to be necessary. Additional funding has been provided to specific foster carers for extensions / adaptations to properties, in order to facilitate maintaining long-term placements of children and or placements of children with a disability. A specific case which covered the above areas for children with a disability, was tracked over the last 3 years. This ongoing case tracking provided significant evidence of the additional financial support available to support children with disabilities who are fostered by Sutton.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**,

Standards: 1, 4, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24. **25**, and **32**.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service.

Staff are organised and managed effectively.

The fostering service has had an adequate number of staff and foster carers to meet responsibilities outlined in its the Statement of Purpose.

All staff are properly accountable and well supported.

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supports foster carers well. This Standard {21} is exceeded.

Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.

Foster carers are appropriately trained.

Case records for children are generally comprehensive so that most of the information needed to ensure a safe placement and good match is available.

Administrative records are maintained as required so that access to information is facilitated or protected as needed.

The Local Authority does recognise the contribution from family and friends as carers.

EVIDENCE:

Eleven Standards are inspected over this section. The seven key Standards and additional Standards where previous shortfalls, or good practice had been identified. In addition, there were a number of training issues over many Standards that are brought together under this section. Due to the unusually high number of Standards recorded in this section this year, each Standard will be identified to assist readability.

Standard 1: The Statement of Purpose contains all the elements required under Standard 1, accurately reflects the service, and is regularly reviewed and updated. The Statement of Purpose is also available to the public and to foster carers within the Foster Carers Handbook.

A specific children's guide has been developed by an independent children's organisation

Standard 4: There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Previously identified shortfalls with systems for monitoring and effectively addressing shortfalls in annual reviews and support visits were fully addressed by the last inspection and have continued to improve.

Although the fostering service does notify the Commission of significant events effectively, one event was not notified as it occurred at another service and it was assumed that they would notify the Commission. It was clarified that we need to be informed to guarantee all parties concerned do get the information. For example, the other service may fail to notify us, or may not require to as in the case of day centres. In addition the notification would have been made to a different office from a different service that may not report that child was also fostered and the associated passing of information to the relevant fostering inspector could fail.

As referred to above, Standard 4 is now well met and all other more clearly required notifications are made. To be proportional, as this is clearly an understandable one off anomaly, and all other notifications are forthcoming. Although the following recommendation is made for clarification, the outcome of this Standard is not negatively effected and will remain met.

When a fostered child has an accident at a resource that has its own responsibility to report the incident to Commission, the fostering service must also report the incident to the Commission.

Standard 16: The fostering service continues to have clear lines of management accountability. Staff receive regular supervision and support from the Team Manager. The Fostering service is now using the new 'Paris' electronic database. Once this system is fully bedded down, it should greatly assist the service in highlighting tasks that require attention, as well as aid information gathering for monitoring, statistical and management purposes. Staff have contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service. All staff interviewed have access to and have demonstrated a knowledge of the required policies and procedural guidance. Staff have had access to ongoing training and professional skills development. Staff that were interviewed were positive about the support and training they received and the way the service is developing. There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the size of both of the services.

The following evidence of good practice was presented and acknowledged under Standard 16:

- Supporting social work staff supervision occurs at a higher than average frequency of every three weeks.
- Team working, support from peers, and management support to supervising social workers, were identified as areas of good practice by supervising social Workers over the last two inspections.

Standard 17: The recruitment of foster carers continues to focus at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children who are to be provided with a service. There is a clearly set out assessment process detailing all the qualities, competences and aptitudes expected from prospective foster carers. Files samples demonstrated that all the required areas are considered in the assessments. Fostering social workers have access to ongoing training, professional skills development supervision, and have terms and conditions of service.

The following evidence of good practice was presented and acknowledged at this inspection under Standard 17:

- The number of fostering staff in the team has been increased over the last few years. For example, the foster carer recruitment and retention programme is now being additionally supported by the creation and recruitment to, of a specific additional post of assistant team manager who has a specific brief for this area.
- At the time of this inspection all fostering team posts had been recruited to, providing, at least temporarily, a lower than average staff vacancy rate.

Standard 19: Annual appraisals were also inspected and in place for all staff files sampled. Regular training courses are organised for social work staff. Some are general courses i.e. health and safety, child abuse and while others are specifics i.e. Post Qualification, detachment, challenging behaviours etc. In interviews, new staff confirmed that they follow an induction programme.

Foster carer training occurs at times to suit carers, for example in the evenings and weekends. Some open learning and other formats for learning are also available and e-learning is being developed.

Joint training with the fostering service staff and carers does occur.

Foster carers are also involved in presenting training.

The last inspection report contained the following requirement under Standard 19.3: Foster carers training needs must be identified and recorded in training profiles. The outcomes for this need to be monitored and relate to their approval categories.

Foster carer training needs are now more regularly assessed by supporting social workers, records of identified training needs were in files sampled, the training officer also now attends initial meetings with new Foster carers to promote training links, and the panel now monitors and enforces identified training and links this to approval {see Standard 30}

This recommendation and this Standard are now both met.

Standard 21: Evidence from the foster carer tracking interviews illustrated that foster carers continue to be fully aware of the role of the supervising social workers. Foster carers again commented very favourably about the level of support that they received. Foster carers are expected to be visited monthly (in the case of task centred placements) and no less than three monthly (in the case of permanent placements) basis. Regular telephone contact also occurs. The Foster Carer's Handbook continues to provide guidance in respect of all the areas identified in Standard 21.2. Carers who spoke with the Inspector, and supporting social worker interviews, confirmed that both groups had a clear understanding of their own and others' roles and responsibilities. Foster carers again commented very favourably about the level of support that they received.

The following evidence of currently exceeding Standard 21 has been previously presented and was re-confirmed at this inspection.

Standard 21 - Supporting carers.

- Support has been an area of good practice consistently raised by foster carers.
- Extra funding has been made available to support foster carers to maintain positive placements.
- Support visits are as needed and where required weekly visits occur.
- There is a fostering development worker post for the general fostering service, and a new carer support post in the 'Family Link' scheme.
- The organisation has developed a new and additional post of assistant team manager for the general fostering service. This post has a specific brief to monitor and support recruitment and retention of new foster carers.
- The 'Family Link' scheme also has a new assistant team manager post.
- There is one new supporting social worker post.

Standard 22: The foster placement agreements seen from the tracking exercise matched the service being provided in the homes of the foster carers who were visited. All foster carers have a named supervising social worker who is expected to visit on a monthly to three monthly basis depending on the type of placement being provided. More frequent visits are made on occasions if additional support is required to promote a successful placement. All information necessary for foster carers to provide safe and positive practice, including information about complaints, investigations allegations and removal from the register is contained in the Foster Carer's Handbook.

Systems of practical support for foster carers include prompt allowances payments, support for foster care associations, access to social work support and the provision of respite care where appropriate.

The last inspection report contained the following recommendation under Standard 22: **Unannounced visits should occur annually.**

Although a huge improvement in meeting the required frequency of unannounced visits to foster carers was seen in files sampled, these was still a

very minor shortfall {2 foster carers had missed their unannounced due date following a staff period of absence.}

It is accepted that monitoring systems have improved to the degree to that they have greatly improved the frequency of unannounced visits where reasonable, and to the degree that there were clear records of this known to management. The remaining shortfall was an therefore evidenced as an unpredictable anomaly that was known to management and is therefore being addressed.

Bearing the above and proportionality in mind, and that the outcome of this Standard is being met, although the recommendation technically needs to remain in force, it is assessed that the Standard is now met.

Standard 23: A comprehensive training programme is offered to all foster carers managed by a specific post of training officer. Foster carers have the opportunity to also train with social work staff and foster carers are also involved in presenting training. All new foster carers receive pre-approval and induction training. All training fits within an anti-discriminatory framework. Foster carer reviews covered training needs and this assessment is recorded. Over the last 2 years the fostering service has explored and expanded methods of training. Training has been made more accessible with weekend and evening training sessions now provided and open learning being explored.

There are baseline expectations for training of 30 hours per year. This is also clarified in the Foster Carers Handbook. Childcare support, bonuses for attending set amounts of training, and access to a foster carer practitioner mentoring scheme are all also available as incentives to take up training.

The last report recorded the following under Standard 23;

'There is currently no recording of identified training needs, or a system to compel foster carers to take on training.

Some external training was not recorded in training profiles and no identified training needs were recorded in training profiles. Records provided showed that over a third of foster carers had had no training.'

The following 1 requirement and 3 recommendations, were made at that time to help the service address these shortfalls. These are all recorded below to draw together all the training recommendations for clarity, and under the relevant Standard. Actions taken to meet these are also recorded below:

Training related requirements and recommendations:

2006 -Requirement – {Standard 23} The fostering service must ensure that its foster carers attend identified training in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child placed in their care.

The fostering service training officer now attends early visits to potential and new foster carers to promote training and the authority's expectations of training. Foster carer reviews now focus more regularly on reviewing and identifying training needs. The panel now monitors and enforces identified training and links this to approval.

The outcome of this has been higher expectations of training attendance from the training officer, supporting social workers and new and existing foster carers. The take up of training is now much higher. The number of those who have attended over 30 hours of training has more than doubled since the last inspection, and numbers of carers that have had no training has reduced drastically from 52 to only 9 foster carers this year. In addition some of those 9 may be new or on hold.

The requirement under Standard 23 and the desired outcome, are therefore very well met.

2006 Recommendation- {Standard 23} The fostering service must record, monitor and verify all training undertaken by foster carers effectively, including external training.

{This information is essential to facilitate good training needs assessments.}

There are now systems to record, monitor and verify training undertaken by foster carers effectively, known as the learning log system. Records of this were seen and were more up to date. However there were still people whose external training was known to the inspector but was not recorded.

Bearing in mind that systems to address this recommendation are now in place, and that the desired outcome of this group of training requirements and recommendations has been met. This recommendation will be considered as met, and the following recommendation set to facilitate continuing implementation development of the new effective practices:

The fostering service should continue the implementation of its new systems for the recording of foster carers' external and informal training.

As the desired outcome of this group of requirements and recommendations is met and the outcome of Standard 23 is now met, this recommendation does not effect the Standard rating.

2006 Recommendation- {Standard 19.3} Foster carers' training needs must be identified and recorded in training profiles. The outcomes for this need to be monitored and relate to their approval categories.

Foster carer training needs are now more regularly assessed by supporting social workers, records of identified training needs were in files sampled, and

the panel now monitors and enforces identified training and links this to approval {see Standard 30}. This recommendation is therefore now met. {See also the specific Standard of 19 for further details.}

2006 Recommendation- {Standard 30} The panel's role in monitoring quality must be expanded to take into account training of foster carers and the outcomes of this training.

Foster carers' take up of identified training is monitored at reviews and this information is now presented to panel. Where identified training has consistently not been taken up the panel considers their continuing ability to effectively meet the needs of the type of placements they are approved for, with a view to reducing the range or removing approval completely.

The associated recommendation is therefore now met. {See also Standard 30.}

Training related requirements and recommendations conclusions:

All training related previous requirements and recommendations have been met. Levels of foster carer training are no longer so low that they are creating shortfalls in meeting any of the Standards relating to training.

The service is to be commended for changing attitudes to foster carer training at all levels of service. This has resulted in more than doubling the number of those who have attended over 30 hours of training since the last inspection, and numbers of carers that have had no training at all has reduced drastically from 52 to only 9 foster carers this year.

Standard 24: Foster carers visited were aware of the importance of record keeping and the need to keep records in a confidential manner. The Foster Carers' Handbook and pack contains a section regarding the foster carers' responsibilities for record keeping. A new recording information pack is currently being introduced which includes new documentation, for example, a new foster carer health and safety self assessment form which is to be used in conjunction with the social workers health and safety assessment.

The foster care service maintains a case record for each foster child or young person in their care and also for the foster carers. These records were available for inspection. The fostering service is now using the new 'Paris' electronic database and also maintaining traditional files for some documentation for example CRB's.

The foster carer files examined demonstrated that entries were made of supervision visits by supporting social workers. A record of training and all panel minutes and reviews were present. These files contained all the relevant information and documentation and contained no obvious omissions. The fostering service manager audits these regularly. The children's files examined at the time of the inspection also contained no obvious omissions.

Standard 25: Confidential records are kept securely and safely in locked cupboards and are accessible to authorised staff only. Written entries on the files made by staff in the unit were generally legible and professional. The fostering agency is subject to the local authority's Access to Files policy and the freedom of information act, barring exemptions. Separate records are kept for staff, foster carers and children. Management information is kept regarding complaints. There is policy and guidance regarding confidentiality and this is clarified for foster carers in the Foster Carers' handbook. Records are kept for complaints, incidents and allegations. Records of staff vetting were available for inspection.

Standard 32: The foster families of children placed under Regulation 38 (Family and friends as carers) who provided feedback to the Inspection team reported that they felt 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. However, support and training, and indeed payments are provided on an equal basis to the authority's own foster carers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
31	3

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

NO

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

NO NEW REQUIREMENTS WERE NEEDED ON THIS OCCASION.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS15	All foster carers must have an up to date Criminal Record Bureau Check. {This recommendation now also applies to the 'Family Link' Service.}
2	FS22	Unannounced visits should occur annually
3	FS23	The fostering service should continue the implementation of its new systems for the recording of foster carers' external and informal training.
4	FS4	When a fostered child has an accident at a resource that has its own responsibility to report the incident to Commission, the fostering service must also report the incident to the Commission.

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