



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

London Borough of Barnet - Fostering Service

**Barnet House
1255 High Road
Whetstone, London
N20 0EJ**

Lead Inspector
Tola
Akinde-Hummel

Announced
6 October 2005 @ 10.00 am

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
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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 Barnet - Fostering Service

Address Barnet House, 1255 High Road, Whetstone,
London N20 0EJ

Telephone number 020 8359 2000

Fax number 020 8359 5749

Email address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Marion Ingram for London Borough of Barnet

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Debbie Gabriel

Type of registration LA Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None

Date of last inspection 10 January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Fostering Service is made up of three teams. These are the Assessment and Training Team, the Over 12's Fostering Team and the Under 12's Fostering Team. The Assessment and Training Team are responsible for assessing and training applicants who wish to become foster carers, and for the support and training of carers. The Under 12's and Over 12's teams have responsibility for offering ongoing support to foster carers. The teams also undertake home finding tasks for children and young people in need of permanent placements. The Link scheme which provides services for children with disabilities is not currently part of the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service aims to provide placements in a family for children who cannot, either temporarily or permanently, be cared for within their own family. The London Borough of Barnet has approximately 127 approved foster carers, with a number of carers in the process of assessment. Due to a shortfall in their own resources to meet demand, the London Borough of Barnet commissions care through external providers which include Independent Fostering Agencies.

SUMMARY

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

Two Inspectors conducted the inspection over a total of 6 days. The days involving inspection activity included the 6 October (evening), 10, 11, 13, 14 October and 4 November. The first day of the inspection involved the Inspectors attending a foster carers support group the evening of 6 October 2005. The final part to the inspection involved observing the fostering panel and interviewing the panel vice-chairperson. This took place on 4 November 2005. The methodology followed included attendance at a foster carers support group, interviews with the Manager and two groups of staff, an interview with the Finance Officer, an interview with a member of staff responsible for foster carers training, consultation with children/young people, selecting and case tracking four foster care families which involved looking at six children's cases, visiting the foster carers and young people who had been selected for case tracking, surveying views through the distribution of questionnaires to children/young people and placing social workers, and foster carers, observing a meeting of the foster panel, interviewing the panel vice-chairperson, sampling the policies, procedures and systems in place and finding out how these are known, understood and implemented by carers, staff and young people.

Of the questionnaires distributed by the London Borough of Barnet, Twenty placing Social workers covering a total of sixty-eight children returned these. Foster carers returned twenty- three surveys and children and young people returned thirteen.

Two placing officers questionnaires raised concern about the ability of foster carers understanding the needs of children placed with them and the importance of facilitating contact with birth families. The general feedback is that foster carers provide a good service to those children placed in their care.

The foster carer surveys highlighted some of the issues found in the report relating to training, payments, communication within the department and levels of support provided to foster carers. However, the majority of foster carers were satisfied most of the time or very satisfied.

The young peoples surveys revealed that the vast majority know how to complain and who to complain to and they were generally satisfied with the care they received whilst being fostered and did not believe they were being treated unfairly. The general picture is a service that has some gaps that when rectified, would improve the fostering experience for both children and young people and foster carers supporting them.

What the service does well:

The service now has its full compliment of staff, many of who have a number of years experience. The newly appointed manager is keen to raise standards by reviewing the systems and processes currently in place.

Generally, foster carers spoken to felt that they were well supported by the social workers within the fostering service.

Staff spoken to indicated that they received appropriate supervision and support from their manager and were clear about their roles and responsibilities.

While it was positive to note that there has been progress made in the training provided to foster carers which they commented positively about, further work is needed in relation to ensure accessibility, that training provided matches both need and demand and that there are improved systems in place to monitor attendance and the effectiveness of the training. Foster carers training needs should be identified and used to inform the training programme put in place for them. More work needs to be done to ensure that those attending are appropriately matched as needing the specific training.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Now that all posts within the Fostering Service are recruited to, each foster carer now has a designated supervising social worker assigned from the fostering service. Foster carers confirmed that generally they now receive contact from their assigned social worker once every 4-6 weeks. This was confirmed in the records examined and through discussions with the fostering service staff. While there is a general pattern of foster carers reviews being conducted at a frequency of in excess of once annually, efforts have been made to catch up on those reviews that are overdue. Further work is needed in this area to ensure that the service provider operates in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

While there remains to be problems with administering payments to foster carers, the post of a Finance Officer within the department is a positive addition. Taking into account the Finance Officer's clear understanding as to the matters concerning finance that require attention and of the ideas spoken about by which to deal with these, it is hoped that improvements to current processes and systems in place will be made.

What they could do better:

While the foster panel consists of a range of people from differing backgrounds and with varying expertise, more work is needed on how meetings are organised and how the fostering panel conducts business, in particular concerning the decision making processes in place.

Work must be undertaken to ensure that all foster carers understand the core policies, in particular those concerning child protection, care and control and unauthorised absence of a child in their care. Clear systems need to be introduced to ensure that the training needs of foster carers are assessed, used to inform the training programme, and reviewed and monitored both for attendance and value. Defining mandatory training for all foster carers should be considered.

Action must be taken to ensure that a review is conducted where changes to the terms of a foster carer's approval is needed and before placing children outside of a foster carers terms of approval, so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made in line with promoting the welfare of children. The service must ensure that all foster carers have been issued with the current foster care agreement that complies with the matters specified in schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, so that they are clear about the expectations on them and vice versa.

Foster carers recording of contact and other significant events needs improving and monitoring, as does ensuring that the contents and layout of children and foster carers files kept by the fostering service are consistent and well maintained.

A children's guide must be developed explaining the service being provided to the children and young people. While foster carers are supported by the fostering service social workers, the out of hours support available to foster carers needs to be better promoted so that they know about this resource.

In order to protect both foster carers and young people, while records are kept of complaints, improvements are needed so as to ensure foster carers are clear as to procedure in place for dealing with complaints. In addition, the service must monitor and improve the efficiency by which complaints received are administered and dealt with.

As required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 attention must be given to ensuring that there is a register showing the required details of each child placed with foster carers.

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.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12

Barnet foster carers are not consistently provided with enough information and training to ensure they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to the health needs of children and young people in their care. The shortfall in sufficient training in first aid to match demand does not assist in ensuring the health needs of children are fully met.

EVIDENCE:

The files of young people and reviews of foster carers examined, confirmed that the health needs of children and young people in foster care are considered. All four foster carers interviewed confirmed that children and young people are registered with a local GP and supported to attend other health appointments such as counselling, specialist health care and emergency medical care. The fostering service has good links with the health advisor for looked after children, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. These specialists contribute to the induction training available to new foster carers and are accessible for any health advice of the children looked after within the fostering service.

Foster carers advised that they do receive medical information relating to children placed with them but this is not always complete and not always provided at or soon after placement. One foster carer advised that a young person was placed with her who had epilepsy. No information was forwarded to her about the young persons health needs and that they were self-medicating. Another foster carer also advised that she was not made aware of the mental health needs of a young person in her care. The foster carer described this as difficult to handle with little support.

During the foster care support group and interviews with foster carers, it became clear that foster carers have some difficulty accessing training. Foster carers had applied to attend first aid training in July 2005 and this was

oversubscribed. Alternative training has not yet been arranged. This clearly highlights the need for the fostering service to ensure that sufficient training is available to meet demand.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9,15,30

A shortfall in foster carers understanding of the core policies and these not having been subject to recent review, combined with there not being any defined mandatory training for foster carers, places children/young people at risk of not being fully protected.

Work is needed to ensure that a review is conducted where changes to the terms of a foster carer's approval is needed, that systems in place for running the fostering panel and conducting business are reviewed, in particular concerning the decision making processes in place, so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made in line with promoting the welfare of children.

EVIDENCE:

The Commission has been notified of the relevant details of the person currently appointed by the Local Authority to manage the local authority fostering service, in accordance with regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

While the Barnet Fostering Handbook issued to foster carers contains guidelines and definitions on safe caring, bullying, child protection, and the action to be taken if a young person goes missing, not all foster carers surveyed demonstrated a clear understanding as to the contents of this handbook. The Safe Caring guidelines indicates that a 'safe caring' protocol will

be drawn up and should be reviewed annually by the carer's supervising worker and the child protection procedures outlines that foster carers will be provided with a copy of Barnet's Child Protection Procedures. There was no evidence to support that either of these had taken place nor had the Fostering Handbook been subject to recent review.

While it was positive to note that a programme of training for foster carers is now in place, of those foster carers spoken to there was an inconsistent approach as to which foster carers had received core training and when. For example, one foster carer who had been a foster carer with Barnet for a number of years spoke about her recent attendance at Child Protection training. While she said that this had been very informative, she made comment to the fact that had she received it earlier she would have dealt with situations in the past differently. In addition, another foster carer who currently cares for a teenager chose to wait until the following morning when the young person failed to return home one night, rather than reporting them missing at the time. Another foster carer was unclear as to what details they should seek for their foster child who wished to occasionally stay overnight at a friend's house. Inspectors are of the view that a reminder by the Fostering Service to all their foster carers of the core policies and procedures in place, such as those related to child protection, accident reporting and the procedures to be followed when a child is absent without permission would be beneficial. In addition, as there is no mandatory training in place consideration should be given to developing a core group of training that all foster carers are required to attend. The surveys returned by children and young people revealed that just over half the children in foster care are taught about keeping safe.

While NMS 15 was not assessed in detail on this occasion, it was positive to note that the previous recommendation in relation to compiling a checklist to ensure that all staff files contain the required information and checks has been acted upon.

The fostering service undertakes detailed assessments of foster carers prior to approval. This is in accordance with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guidelines and format. The fostering service uses the fostering network workbook to contribute to the process of assessing prospective applications. Health and safety issues are covered in the workbook, but do not feature in the induction programme. Supervising social workers carry out health and safety checks on homes where foster placements are made. However, there must be evidence of follow up to ensure that any remedial work identified in relation to the health and safety of children and young people is carried out within a reasonable time.

The matching process of children and young people to foster carers was observed during the weekly placement meeting. This is held with the commissioning service, under 12's, and over 12's team managers. The purpose of the meeting includes examining the list of foster carers and any

vacancies then attempting to match these children and young people who require a placement. This was done taking into consideration the child's ethnicity, their needs, the skills of the carer and their location. Unfortunately, information about carers is not always up to date so can impact on the matching process. Information on reviews of foster carers placements and children's reviews reveals that any area where the match is not adequate is supported by other means. For example, foster carers will be given guidance about caring for the hair and skin care needs of black children. There is also evidence of promoting a positive male role model for young men placed in an all female household. The fostering outreach workers employed in the fostering service are an important point of contact for foster carers trying to meet the needs of children and young people. This support was confirmed in a survey returned by a young person.

An independent chair to the panel has recently been appointed and is due to take up the post soon. Therefore, for the purpose of this inspection the vice-chairperson who is an employee of the local authority was interviewed. The panel composition includes independent members, one of whom is a foster carer from a different service and two elected members of the local authority. A non-voting member of the panel provides medical expertise as required. The fostering service manager is also a non-voting member of the panel. At the beginning of the meeting, the panel considered the minutes from the previous but one panel meeting. A panel meeting had been convened two weeks previously to consider a number of overdue foster carers reviews, the minutes of which were not available.

While the first annual review of all newly appointed foster carers are referred to the fostering panel, the timing of all reviews taking place regularly exceeds an interval of greater than one year. During the panel observation, cases presented included both prospective foster carers for approval and reviews of existing foster carers. The decision maker is not a member of the fostering panel. This is in accordance with regulation 28(4) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

There is currently no system established by which to inform the panel either when a carer is exempted from the usual fostering limit, so that the exemption can be monitored, or in situations whereby carers are caring for children outside of their original terms of approval.

Upon examination of records it is evident that a number of foster carers are caring for children outside of their terms of approval, and without a review being conducted in order to change their terms of approval. This matter must be given urgent attention.

While the panel provided feedback on the quality of assessments, the written assessments and reviews completed by social workers and presented to panel varied and were not consistent in either layout or content. There is currently

no system in place for the panel to monitor the sufficiency and diversity of carers available to the area, in comparison with the needs of the children in the area. The fostering service manager made comment to this having already been identified by them and that work was planned in relation to providing the panel with more information. Currently there is a system in place by which the Divisional Manager will attend the panel on occasions to share information and discuss service matters.

Upon enquiring with the vice-chairperson as to the decision-making process where disagreement arose amongst the panel, it was reported that the information relayed to the decision maker would include the numbers for and against a recommendation. There was no written guidelines or clear indication given as to how the panel would reach a consensus at times when all members of the panel are not in agreement. The panel observation showed that when cases were discussed panel members agreed on any additional information or further clarification they needed to assist them with their decision-making. The social worker responsible and the individual to which the case related to where present were then invited to attend the panel meeting. After the questions were asked, the vice-chairperson then relayed the panel's recommendation without further consultation or referral back to the panel to check that they were satisfied and in agreement with the recommendation being communicated to the social worker, and in some cases also to the prospective foster carer or existing foster carer. It is evident that further work is needed in relation to the running of the foster panel meeting, in particular in concerning the decision-making processes and how and when the panel's recommendation is communicated.

Once a recommendation is made about a prospective foster carer, there is no system currently in place by which to issue them with an induction pack to assist them with their role. While a fostering handbook is in place, it is lengthy and in a number of cases contains information that is in need of urgent review as does not accurately reflect the fostering service.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7,13,31

While training on diversity is now in place, an improvement in monitoring the uptake and effectiveness of this training is needed. This is so that the service can be confident that they provide foster carers with sufficient information to ensure their practice promotes the principle of valuing diversity.

There is evidence that foster carers see children's learning as important and that the service works hard to promote young peoples educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service comprises of three teams. These teams are made up of social workers from a variety of backgrounds with wide ranging experience in the welfare of children. This is valuable for services seeking to ensure that the equality and diversity of children in their care is promoted. The issue of identity is addressed in the foster carers induction training. Some foster carers have also completed the diversity training, which was introduced this year. One foster carer stated that this course was very useful in exploring the experience of children and young people and the need to maintain an understanding and contact with their culture. This process has only just begun to assist foster carers to help children and young people to develop the skills to deal with discrimination. One foster carer said that in her seven years of fostering, she has never been assisted to develop young people to deal with these issues.

The foster carers interviewed indicated that they have sufficient information on the ethnic background of the children and young people in their care and

attempt to meet their needs in consultation with social workers. One young person explained that he has a significant amount of contact with his relatives of the same ethnic background. The foster carer concerned knows of these relationships and the amount of time he spends with his extended family. These relationships appear to be positive and are encouraged. The young people were clear about which activities and interests they wished to pursue and how to go about this.

Two young people spoken to stated that they are supported with their education by their foster carers. One young person said that he is currently working but awaiting a place at college to study engineering. The young person explained that he was not focused enough last year to obtain a college place, but is now much clearer about his ambitions and how to pursue them. The other young person wants to have a career in hairdressing and recognises that she must complete full time education first. Surveys returned by children and young people confirmed that where necessary assistance with education was available.

The remaining younger people spoken to during the inspection are attending school regularly and were able to advise of some of the subjects and activities they do during the day. Reviews of foster carers, and Looking after children review of arrangements, looks at the educational needs of children and young people. This information highlights the joint attempts made to ensure that children and young people have access to education or receive tuition where necessary.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10,11

While the provision for the young people to maintain contact with family and friends where appropriate is good, foster carers recording of contact and other significant events is poor.

The lack of a children's guide makes it difficult for young people to be clear about what they can expect from the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Of the young peoples files examined, there was evidence that contact between young people and their parents, relatives and friends was promoted and encouraged where appropriate. This was confirmed in the discussions with young people.

The foster carers recording of significant events' including contact arrangements is generally poor. Whilst one foster carer kept excellent records the remaining three were unable to produce any up to date records.

While currently there are no young persons support group in place for young people accommodated by the local authority, the fostering service manager spoke about plans to involve young people in developing the children's guide and eliciting their views on the current recruitment campaign for foster carers. Of the young people spoken to, and the surveys returned, they indicated that they knew who to talk to should they have a problem and how to complain.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14, 29

Only limited progress has been made in addressing the difficulties foster carers were having with their payments and as a result foster carers continue to be dissatisfied with the payment arrangements in place.

While there is evidence of foster carers preparing young people for adulthood, incorporating training on preparing for leaving care within the training programme would inevitably better equip those foster carers working with teenagers.

EVIDENCE:

Of the foster carers and young people surveyed, one young person indicated that due to the lack of preparation work they felt hesitant in moving on from the foster carers home. For those foster carers caring for young people over the age of 12 years, there was no specific training they were required to do in order to assist the gradual transition of a young person from dependence to independence. The accessible availability of such training to foster carers who are caring for the older age range would inevitably help the young person preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living. The Inspectors are of the opinion that in reflecting good child practice, preparing for leaving care should be incorporated in future training programmes and be mandatory for those carers choosing to care for teenagers, so that they can help young people to be properly prepared for leaving care.

The recruitment of a finance officer has clearly been of positive benefit to the fostering service. From discussions with the Manager and the Finance Officer, it is evident that problems with maintaining the information on the IT database system (SWIFT) combined with the Core Financial System (SAP) now in place

has resulted in some difficulty in ensuring foster carers receive the correct payments and that they receive payments on time. The lack of itemising billing has made it difficult for foster carers to monitor the payments being received, particularly those providing short-term placements. Foster carers spoken to expressed frustration at the fact that since the previous CSCI inspection there had been limited improvement by the Fostering Service in administering payments to carers. In addition, while there is a list of fostering allowances, entitlements such as the foster child's holiday allowance is not automatically paid. The current system is that this allowance is only paid to foster carers when they request this through their supervising social worker and according to foster carers is often late in being received. Notwithstanding the current difficulties being experienced in administering payments to foster carers, both the Fostering Service Manager and Finance Officer demonstrated a clear understanding as to the matters concerning finance that required attention, spoke of the strategies they were considering by which to deal with these and indicated that they were committed to improving the current processes and systems in place to improve the situation for foster carers.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 17, 18,21,22, 23,24 25,32

There is no children's guide in place to explain the service being provided to the children and young people. While foster carers are supported by the fostering service social workers, the out of hours support available to foster carers needs to be better promoted. Staff members are supported well by managers with staff canvassed demonstrating an awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Work is needed to identify foster carers training needs and monitor training undertaken, improve the frequency of foster carers reviews,

review the foster care agreements in place and ensure reviews are conducted prior to placing children outside of a foster carers terms of approval, so as to ensure foster carers are provided with the full range of support available and young peoples well-being is safeguarded.

In order to protect both foster carers and young people, while records are kept of complaints, improvements are needed to ensure foster carers are clear as to procedure in place for dealing with complaints and that the service monitor and improves the efficiency by which complaints received are administered and dealt with by the service.

In order to ensure young peoples needs are appropriately met, attention must be given to ensuring that there is a register showing the required details of each child placed with foster carers and that young peoples files are maintained in good order, including in a consistent and methodical manner for ease of reference.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service has a Statement of Purpose in place that outlines their aims and objectives and the services provided. While section 3 of Barnet Fostering Handbook mentions that there is a children's guide aimed at the 6-11 year age group and one for those 11 years and over, these were not in place. A children's guide that includes those matters listed in Regulation 3(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is required and therefore a statutory requirement has been made.

Overall, foster carers surveyed confirmed that they felt well supported by the fostering service social workers. Staff spoken to confirmed that they visit foster carers once every 4-6 weeks to provide supervision and support to the carers. While generally foster carers spoken to verified this as being the case, there were instances whereby foster carers had not received regular home visits by their supervising social worker. This may have been due to a major shortage of staff approximately ten months ago. This has since improved and all foster carers now have a supervising social worker. It was reported that there are currently no vacancies in the fostering service.

The fostering service has reviewed its recruitment method of foster carers and have embarked on a new campaign called "Open the door for a child". This includes an information booklet for new foster carers and aims to attract carers for the older age group where it was reported that there is a demand. The assessment process for carers comprises of the Fostering network workbook and the BAAF assessment. This covers all areas required in the regulation and the eight assessments examined were detailed and relevant. Where assessing social workers had concerns there was evidence that had been explored sensitively during the assessment process. All foster carers files examined had

evidence of criminal records checks being undertaken on themselves and other adult members of the household.

While reviews of foster carers are taking place, these are generally taking place in excess of more than a year. In accordance with regulation 29(2) a review of each foster carer shall take place at intervals of not more than a year. A reviewing officer now undertakes the review of foster carers. This post is managed by the Listening to Children Division to promote the independence of the role. The Assistant Division Manager, who is also the designated fostering service manager, stated that the most overdue reviews have now been completed and work is being done to complete those outstanding whilst meeting the timescales for all others. The foster care service has out of hours support which is accessed via the out of Hours duty service between the hours of 6pm to midnight Monday to Friday and 9am to midnight Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. Out of hours Social workers have access to the contact details of the fostering services supervising social worker on duty. A senior manager also on duty supports the supervising social workers should there be a need. Supervising Social Workers and managers confirmed that the service is rarely used. Foster carers spoken to were aware of the Out of Hours duty service. However, only one of the four foster carers visited is aware of there being access to a member of the fostering service out of hours to give advice. The inspectors are of the view that the informal way in which this service is communicated to foster carers has resulted in a limited number of calls. The fostering service should consider advertising this service more openly to foster carers and monitor if this results in increased use.

Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. While a Foster Carer Agreement is in place, some foster carers files examined contained copies of a previous agreement issued under the previous legislation. The less recent Foster Care Agreements do not contain all those matters and obligations as specified in schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. In addition, one case where a revised Foster Carer Agreement has been issued and the carers concerned are neither signing nor agree to comply with its contents, there was evidence to support that the matter is currently being dealt with by the Fostering Service Provider.

Of those cases tracked the majority of cases indicate that children/young people have either currently and/or previously been placed outside of their terms of approval. In the event that the original terms of approval no longer continue to be appropriate, a review must be undertaken and the appropriate process followed in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The placing of children with carers outside of their terms of approval was an aspect of concern raised during the previous inspection conducted 10 January 2005.

A designated team manager is responsible for the training programme for foster carers and the assessment of new foster carers. They have completed a

yearly training programme for foster carers, which include a three-day induction for all foster carers approved in the last year, record keeping and planning for independence. The training on offer is varied. The fostering service does not have an effective system in place by which to monitor the training offered. In addition, there is no evidence in support of the needs of foster carers influencing the training programme on offer. There is no monitoring in place to ensure that all foster carers have completed core training. The fostering service was unable to provide any clear indication of mandatory training such as Child Protection, First Aid, and Safe Caring. The foster carers consultation paper also asks carers if they can think of any resources that would make it easier for them to care for a child/ young person. It is not clear how this information is collected and fed into the training programme.

The training organised fails to establish who has taken part in training and if the training is relevant to them or more relevant to other foster carers. The training manager is well aware of these issues and has developed a training programme that she is hoping to expand and incorporate some of the issues highlighted. This is inevitably difficult given time constraints and minimal administrative support.

Work needs to be done to ensure that supervising social workers have a standard method of advising the designated team manager of training needs of foster carers. During visits to foster carers and the foster care support group, carers highlighted the difficulty in obtaining places on courses and when oversubscribed, being advised of when another course would be available. Foster carers also found that travelling to different venues for training was a problem and often some distance from where they lived. Those foster carers who work stated that consideration is not given to organising courses outside of normal working hours to allow them to attend. Again, work is being done to try and address these difficulties. Despite the shortfalls identified, the new system of organising training is applauded by foster carers, managers and supervising social workers alike, but more needs to be done to ensure that it is effective and meets the needs of the foster carers who will in turn have good underpinning knowledge to provide better care for children and young people looked after.

While a log of complaints is now being maintained by the service, the records examined do not contain details of the outcome. In addition, records indicate that complaints are not being dealt with efficiently. For example, records presented of a complaint raised by foster carers during a review meeting on 14.7.05 indicate that it remains unresolved, a letter of complaint from a foster carer received 23.6.05 does not indicate any outcome, a letter of complaint received 25.5.05 from a foster carer indicates that a home visit will be conducted on 20.7.05 but the records do not indicate if this took place or of the outcome, a complaint of 12.1.05 does not indicate the action taken or of

any outcome, and a compliant raised by foster carers in a meeting on 11.2.05 fails to indicate any outcome.

While there is a section in the Barnet Fostering Handbook on problems and complaints and whistle blowing, there was no evidence in support of foster carers being given a copy of the London Borough of Barnet's leaflet on comments, compliments and complaints.

Separate records are kept for staff, foster carers, children/young people, complaints and allegations. The central records of complaints and allegations had been developed following the previous inspection conducted in January 2005. While a file audit system has recently been instigated, the foster carers and young peoples files viewed were not maintained in a consistent manner. Also, one foster carers file contained a contact number that is now obsolete. Several files examined contained duplicate information and in some cases triple copies of an identical document. The lack of a clear layout of information in foster carers files and children's files made it difficult for Inspectors to readily locate core information, such as the contact details of foster carers and details of the children placed. A number of records in files contained correction fluid (i.e. Tippex). This is clearly unacceptable practice and in accordance with good recording practice any amendments in future should be scored through and initialled. There is no record in the form of a register as specified in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

While the office space is limited, files were seen to be appropriately stored. Staff confirmed that the cupboards in which files were stored are kept locked at times when the office is unoccupied.

There are a number of family and friends who are carers, some as full time carers. The Fostering Service Manager confirmed that 'kinship' carers are assessed and go through the fostering panel as per other foster carers. It is evident through discussions with the Manager that kinship carers may have different support and training needs to that of other carers. While they would be expected to comply with the relevant Fostering Services Regulations 2002, inevitably they may benefit from a more specialised approach specific to the role they perform.

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	2

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

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	2

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS12	15(2) (d) 17 (1)	The fostering service provider must ensure that all foster carers receive basic training on health and hygiene issues and First Aid	01/05/06
2.	FS9	12	The fostering service provider must review the contents of the fostering handbook to ensure that all policies and procedures are up to date. Specific attention must be given to those related to the protection of children.	01/06/06
3.	FS30	26	A review must be undertaken on the functioning of the fostering panel, in particular relating to the decision making processes both in respect of applications and reviews submitted to the panel and also to cover instances when all members of the panel are not in agreement.	01/02/06
4.	FS1	3	The fostering service provider must produce a written children's guide to the fostering service. This must include those matters specified in regulation 3(3) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01/06/06
5.	FS22	28,29	The fostering service provider must ensure that children/young people placed are within the foster carers agreed terms of	01/03/06

			approval. In the event that the terms of approval no longer continue to be appropriate, a review must take place and include an appropriate process in accordance with regulation 29 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Appropriate action must be taken relative to those carers who are caring for children outside of their terms of approval.	
6.	FS22	29	The fostering service provider must ensure that a review of the approval of each foster carer takes place at intervals of not more than a year.	01/02/06
7.	FS22	28	The fostering service provider must ensure that all foster carers enter into a written agreement (foster care agreement) which covers all the matters specified in Schedule 5.	30/04/06
8.	FS23	17(1)	The fostering service provider must ensure that there is an ongoing programme of training for foster carers which is easy to access, encourages foster carers to develop their skills and recognises the needs in the foster carer's annual review. Previous timescale of 30.9.05 not met. Further work must be done to undertake an analysis of training to determine which foster carers have completed training and which foster carers still needs to attend training to continue to meet their terms of approval. Further work must be undertaken to ensure that the fostering service provider identifies the training required and that the relevant people attend.	01/03/06
9.				

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.	FS9	It is strongly recommended that the fostering service provider reminds their foster carers of the core policies and procedures in place, in particular the expectation they have of their carers in following these.
2.	FS22	It is recommended that all foster carers are provided as part of the fostering handbook a copy of the Local Authority's leaflet on comments, compliments and complaints which outlines the Authority's approach to complaints.
3.	FS22, FS25	The fostering service provider should introduce a system in which to monitor the matters listed in schedule 7 to the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, in particular specific to complaints and their outcomes. These matters have been highlighted during the previous inspection of 10 January 2005 and have not been fully acted upon.
4.	FS25	It is strongly recommended that a review of the contents of the childrens and foster carers files is undertaken and that the fostering service provider gives consideration to developing a contents proforma for the layout of files.
5.	FS29	Continued efforts should be given to addressing and resolving the shortfalls concerned with the payments to foster carers.
6.	FS9	Consideration should be given to developing a core group of training that all foster carers are required to attend.
7.	FS18	It is strongly recommended that the fostering service advertise its out of hours service more openly to foster carers and monitors its use.
8.	FS10	It is strongly recommended that foster carers are reminded of the importance of keeping up to date records of children in their care. These must be monitored by the supervising social workers during their regular visits to foster carers.
9.	FS14	It is recommended that the fostering service conduct a review of all young people placed within the context of ensuring that foster carers are better equipped to prepare young people for adulthood. Consideration should be given to incorporating this within the ongoing training programme for foster carers.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Solar House

1st Floor, 282 Chase Road

Southgate

London N14 6HA

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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