Making Social Care Better for People



inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Southend Fostering Agency (Family Finders)

Family Finders 283 London Road Westcliff on Sea Essex SS2 6TB

Lead Inspector Jacqueline Graves

> Announced Inspection 6th February, 2006 10:00

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

Reader Information		
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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 <u>www.dh.gov.uk</u> or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: <u>www.tso.co.uk/bookshop</u>

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

of places

Name of service	Southend Fostering Agency (Family Finders)
Address	Family Finders 283 London Road Westcliff on Sea Essex SS2 6TB
Telephone number	01702 354366
Fax number	01702 437217
Email address	
Provider Web address	www.southend.gov.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Southend Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Manager post vacant
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Southend Fostering Service is part of Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. The fostering service is managed within the Department of Children and Learning, Specialist Services.

The service is a significant aspect of the provision offered to looked-after children.

Of the children placed, a number are in independent foster agencies.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection began on 6th February and was concluded on 27th February, 2006. Jacqueline Graves and Ron Reeves carried out the inspection.

As part of the inspection methodology, questionnaires were sent to a sample of carers, children over the age of eight and placing social workers. Eleven carer and fifteen children's questionnaires were returned. Comments from these are incorporated into this report.

The inspector observed a panel meeting, observed training for panel members and spoke to the Panel Chair.

Three families, with children placed, were visited as part of a case tracking exercise.

Some records were examined and written information was supplied by the service in the form of a pre-inspection questionnaire and manager's self-assessment form.

Four staff were interviewed and managers spoken with.

The service name has been replaced with the new title 'Southend Fostering Service.' Unfortunately, it was not possible to change the title on this report, as the name had been pre-imported onto it.

The inspector would like to thank the staff, managers, carers and young people for their assistance with this inspection.

What the service does well:

Supervising social workers (previously known as 'link workers') are experienced, committed and child focussed in their work.

Some examples of outstanding care was observed by individual carers where they have made a significant difference to children's lives in providing love, acceptance, security, boundaries and the building of self esteem and confidence.

Carers were asked in questionnaires to describe the best things about the fostering service:

'Support given when needed.'

'To try and make a difference in children's lives.'

'The support I receive from my link worker.'

'Giving a reasonable amount of information about the children to be fostered.'

'Their timely responsiveness, training offered, attitude of staff (positive), professionalism, partnership/collaborative working with carers and children.'

What has improved since the last inspection?

Barnardos was appointed to supply training to staff, carers and panel members and to help develop the statement of purpose, forms and documents, policies and procedures to include a uniform, attractive look.

Those carer and children's files seen showed a better chronology and clearer recording of information.

The premises have been refurbished to a higher standard and now provide a comfortable environment.

Staff said they thought the appointment of a duty officer to be a very positive move.

Good written information on the policies and procedures of the service has been provided in the form of Staff Handbooks and Foster Carer Handbooks. Staff thought these an excellent tool.

What they could do better:

This has been a difficult time for staff as this has been a period without steady, permanent management, although the service has tried to recruit a manager. The stability of a permanent manager for the fostering team is the most essential improvement needed.

The availability of placements for adolescents is scarce and it is not always possible to keep large sibling groups together, so independent agencies are used to provide placements. More carers are needed to give a greater choice of placements and to replace those who have retired, who are about to, or those carers who are not able to meet the expectations of the service.

The agency has not been able to follow through all expressions of interest from prospective foster carers, including kinship carers, due to lack of appropriate paperwork and staff. Due to the length of time taken to follow up some expressions of interest, some potential carers have lost interest and gone elsewhere. Staff reported that the situation has improved towards the end of this year.

At the time of the inspection, due to staff vacancies, there were a small number of carers who were not allocated supervising social workers. However, regular telephone contact was maintained. A member of staff has now been allocated to follow up initial enquiries from potential carers and other staff were observed to follow up expressions of interest, particularly if they were for working with adolescents. A carer commented on the recruitment process:

'It obviously needs more bodies to speed up the recruitment process.'

A main concern for staff was insufficient staff to manage the work. All spoken to said it was hard to manage their caseloads in the time available.

Staff said they felt under pressure to return children placed outside of the agency to the Borough because of financial constraints in the Borough. Managers said this was a misunderstanding and more to do with trying to use those Southend carers who have vacancies, where it was appropriate to bring young people back into the Borough.

Carers were asked in questionnaires to describe the worst things about the fostering service:

'Not enough staff.'

'Lack of funding to support the children.'

'Lack of continuity, shortage of staff and continual changes.'

Once a young person reaches 16.17 it sometimes seems that the foster carers are left out a little.'

`In the past, training has not been very regular but this has got much better.' `Often short staffed. Foster carers are not kept up-to-date with changes.'

Overwhelmingly, carers and young people complained about the lack of children's social workers:

'The big problem is the high turnover of staff dealing with the children. Until this is resolved the system can't improve.'

Staff reported difficulties of communication with the children's social workers, which had impacted on carers' ability to promote children's interests. Fostering staff say they take on extra tasks, which should be managed by the children's social workers.

Staff morale is low due to lack of permanent management; lack of supervision and team meetings recently, caseload pressure, insufficient administration support and a perceived lack of communication with management.

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

The report of this inspection is available from <u>enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk</u> or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy
Staying Safe
Enjoying and Achieving
Making a Positive Contribution
Achieving Economic Wellbeing
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Scoring of Outcomes
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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 at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The service promotes the health needs of young people.

EVIDENCE:

In questionnaires, young people described the help they get from their carers to stay healthy and look after themselves:

'She sits down with me and talks to me about how to stay healthy and why.' 'We eat three meals a day. Always have fruit in the house.' 'A choice of food, help with doctor's appointments, etc.'

Those carers spoken to promote the health needs of the children they cared for. A LAC nurse works with carers and young people. Training for carers on sexual health and adolescent issues has been provided.

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

The service will benefit from the stability of a permanent, experienced manager who can build on the strengths of the agency and address any shortfalls.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering panel was well-led and reached good quality decisions.

Through discussion with the panel chair and observation of the panel, it was thought the functioning of the panel could be improved by having independent members with expertise in education and health, from an ethnically and culturally diverse background and by further training. No representative from the local authority was present, although the chair advised that there is usually a representative.

It was also thought that asking people, who have been brought to panel, for their views on the experience might have a quality assurance function.

All homes visited were comfortable and clean. Carers were aware that they might be visited as part of the Commission's inspection process. They confirmed that health and safety checks are carried out on their homes every year. Three staff files were examined to check recruitment procedures. Some shortfalls in the required information were noted and one person had commenced work with a CRB check from previous employment, but such checks are not portable.

Members of staff, who had been recently employed, felt their recruitment process had been rigorous, with references followed up with telephone calls to ensure their suitability to work with children. Two members of staff told the inspector they did not have job descriptions.

Those foster families visited felt they had been well matched to each other. One child had been placed out of the carer's approved age range. In discussion with staff and the panel chair, the need to address somewhat restrictive age categories imposed when a carer is approved, was identified.

Examples were given by the agency of when children had been placed outside of approval in emergencies. The inspector was advised that decisions to make emergency exemptions are taken by senior managers and risk assessments are carried out on sharing bedrooms.

Carers spoke of the safe caring skills they have developed to promote child protection. In questionnaires, children described the kinds of behaviour management used by their carers:

'I have been grounded.' 'No behaviour problems but if there was we would discuss what's wrong first.' 'No pocket money.' 'No sweets, T.V.' 'Not allowed out during school time if suspended.'

Foster Care Agreements make clear that corporal punishments must not be used. In one questionnaire, a young person said they received a physical punishment. This information was immediately shared with the agency to follow-up. The agency advised that this concerned a kinship care placement and the matter would be investigated. At the time of writing the report, the inspector had not been advised if this was substantiated, so no requirement is made at this time.

Some carers were able to give examples where they had helped young people to deal with bullying at school; those young people spoken to thought it had been dealt with and not ignored. Training on bullying is to be provided in the coming year.

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7,13,31

Recruiting further carers, from varied backgrounds, to meet the needs of the children is vital to the development of the service. Carers promote and support education.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was advised that all staff and carers attend compulsory training on valuing diversity. Carer's attitudes to working with children from backgrounds different to their own are explored during assessment.

In discussion with carers and young people, it was apparent that some foster carers provide excellent support to develop young people's hobbies and interests and so build their confidence and feelings of self-worth. Some outstanding work was noted of carers advocating for young people and encouraging their individual interests.

The service recognises that further carers of varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds must be recruited to provide good matching for children. Staff said that where there are shortfalls in matching, training is used to help carers meet children's individual needs; links are made where possible within the local community or extended family.

There are still insufficient carers to provide a service for all who need shared care. The inspector was advised that the service is heavily reliant on the private sector.

Carers spoken to described how they supported children's education, by attending school meetings, encouraging attendance at out of school activities and the completion of homework. One young person spoke of their ambition to attend university and had requested further information on funding this.

In questionnaires, young people described the help they get from their foster home with school/college:

'Help with work if I find it difficult. Support if things are not going to plan.' 'She helps me when I'm stuck.'

'Making sure all homework is complete. Checking and signing school diary.' '(Carer) helps me with my spellings and what's the right way to go. She always makes time for me.'

Not all young people are in school. The inspector was advised that individual education programmes are devised with the local college for children under the age of sixteen who are not attending school. Training on improving educational outcomes for young people in care has been devised with Barnardos.

One young person did not have a personal education plan (PEP).

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10,11

Contact arrangements are well supported by carers. Children said their opinions are asked for and listened to by carers.

EVIDENCE:

Some sensitive, professional work done by carers to promote contact between young people and their families was reported. Young people spoken to knew their contact arrangements and felt they had been listened to when they had wished to change contact arrangements.

In questionnaires, children were asked if their foster carers asked them for their ideas and opinions. Eleven said, 'They often ask me', two said, 'They ask me sometimes,' and one said, 'They don't ask me very often' Children described some of the things they are asked about: 'Where to go on holiday.'

'Am I happy. What can I do to help you?'

'How I feel in the placement. If I feel comfortable with a new child moving in.' 'I just get asked my opinions all the time.'

`Things I like to do. Things I like to eat. Choose the colour of my bedroom and what I want in it.'

Records showed that young people are listened to and considered in reviews but that the lack of a social worker, or difficulties contacting one, sometimes means their wishes are not carried out.

Some young people spoken to were not aware of the complaints procedure, as they had not received a children's guide. The inspector was advised that the children's complaints leaflet is being revised and will then be made available to all young people.

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)

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 the following standard(s):

14,29

Reviewing allowances and the structure of payments would provide greater clarity for carers. Support provided to young people near to leaving care shows improvement, but could be bettered by ensuring Pathway Plans are in place for all who need them.

EVIDENCE:

Some carers said they are paid allowances, for example for petrol, promptly. Others reported delays in getting agreed payments, for example for agreed school trips or holidays, or not getting finance to help support children's interests, for example dancing or music lessons.

Carers suggested reviewing the payment scheme as a means of improving the recruitment of carers.

The agency confirmed that fostering allowances and the structure of payments are to be reviewed with the aim of making them clearer for carers to understand.

There was generally positive feedback on the involvement of the leaving care team in supporting young people once they reach sixteen. Young people gave examples of how carers were helping them gain skills to help them become more independent. One young person had no knowledge of a Pathway Plan for his future and none were on his record.

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

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

1,5,16,17,19,21,24,25,26,32

Written information on the service has been improved. If staff cannot carry out enough assessments of potential new carers in a reasonable time, the problem of recruiting sufficient carers will not be resolved.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose has been redesigned and updated. It is clear to understand and contains all the required information in an attractive format.

The children's guide has also been updated and attractively redesigned. The inspectors and some staff felt not all information was suitable for the age group it is intended for. As the document is still out for consultation, managers advised that this would be further developed and provided in a format suitable for all children fostered through the service. Some children visited said they had not received a children's guide.

The premises were refurbished at the end of last year's inspection and are a great improvement on what was previously available. Confidential information is stored securely.

Staff spoken to said there was sufficient IT equipment but they would like to have more efficient IT administration systems, for example, to track when health and safety or CRB checks are due, to record supervision, etc.

There has been a vacancy for a permanent manager for a year, despite attempts to recruit a suitable candidate. A temporary manager, familiar with the service, was in place at the time of the inspection. The inspector was advised that the service has been given additional resources to actively seek out a suitable, permanent manager.

Although information is held on people working for the service and children fostered, this has not yet been collated into the form of registers.

A sample of children's records was checked. These are better organised and monitored to check for missing information. However, some essential information was missing on some children's files. Carers reported that LAC forms and medical consent forms are not always completed for the children they care for, which has caused them and the young people difficulties.

Examination of records and discussion with staff showed that people working for the agency are experienced and qualified to do their jobs. The assessment process examines a prospective carer's qualities and competences to foster.

Staff recruitment has been undertaken this year but staff still feel stretched to carry out their roles. Staff report that further carers are urgently needed and more resources are needed to assess prospective carers.

It was the overwhelming view of carers that staff provided good support to them, but were overstretched, with the situation exacerbated when a member of staff became sick or resigned. A carer wrote: 'I think they do the best they can considering the case loads and frequent changes of personnel.'

Some staff appointed recently were asked about their induction process. They had not found their induction particularly useful and thought time for reading policies and procedures and shadowing experienced colleagues would have been beneficial. Management pointed out that a new induction programme has been developed for staff employed in the future. Staff thought their handbook was very useful.

Staff said they need more administrative support; supervising social workers felt having to type letters and do filing was a waste of their time and skills.

Whilst it is policy to explore the possibility of kinship care when a child needs a placement, lack of trained staff to assess potential carers has limited this as a possibility. At the time of inspection, fourteen children were in kinship placements, a small increase on the numbers reported last year. Staff spoken to were not aware of any kinship assessments taking place.

The service reported trying to address a backlog of applications. Support for kinship carers living out of the Southend area is something that still needs to be addressed.

Varied training programmes have been offered to carers and staff this year. In questionnaires, carers generally described the training as good and relevant to the work they do. The agency reports that the take up of training by some carers is poor and this is a challenge to be dealt with if carers are to progress in the service they can offer young people.

Carers praised the support they get from the agency, naming individuals who they considered outstanding in their work. Some reported frustration at the change of supervising social workers they had experienced.

The agency reported that some carers are unallocated but are communicated with by telephone. Some carers confirmed that supervising social workers had made unannounced visits but some carers said they had not received unannounced visits.

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 **2** Standard Almost Met (Commendable) (Minor Shortfalls)

e) **3** Standard Met

d Met (No 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			CONOMIC
Standard No Score		WELLBE	ING
12	3	Standard No	Score
		14	2
STAYIN	G SAFE	29	2
Standard No	Score		
3	2	MANAGE	MENT
6	3	Standard No	Score
8	2	1	3
9	3	2	Х
15	2	4	Х
30	2	5	2
		16	2
ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING		17	2
Standard No	Score	18	Х
7	3	19	2
13	2	20	Х
31	2	21	3
		22	2
MAKING A POSITIVE		23	Х
CONTRIBUTION		24	2
Standard No	Score	25	2
10	3	26	3
11	3	27	Х
		28	Х
		32	2

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	FS1	3 (2)(c)	The children's guide is produced in a suitable format for all children using the agency. Timescale of 01/07/05 partly met That all children receive a copy of the children's guide. Timescale of 01/07/05 not met	01/08/06
2	FS3	20(3)(d)(i) Schedule1	That details of all recruitment checks are recorded. Timescale of 01/06/05 not met	01/07/06
3	FS5	6(1)(3)	Appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency. Advise the Commission of the name of a person appointed and the date they are to commence.	01/11/06
4	FS15	5,7,20Schedule 1	That all staff have a CRB check before starting employment and two references from different organisations/individuals. References must be signed. That there is positive proof of identity, such as copies of marriage certificates to prove	01/07/06

5	FS17	27(2)(a)	change of name (if applicable), passport and a recent photograph. Provide all employees with a job description. Further staff and carers must be recruited. Timescale of 01/08/05 not	01/12/06
6	FS24	34(3)Schedule 6	met That medical consent is given by a person able to do so. Timescale of 01/06/06 not met That all required information is available on children's case files and when relevant, available to carers, e.g. LAC forms and consent forms.	01/08/06
7	FS25	22 Sch.2	Keep registers for children and staff as listed in Schedule 2.	01/07/06
8	FS31	27(1)	Further staff and carers must be recruited (This is in relation to providing a shared care service). Previous timescale of 01/08/05 not met	01/12/06
9	FS32	27(1)	Kinship carers to be supported by the provision of appropriate assessments within acceptable timescales. Previous timescale of 01/08/05 partly met	01/10/06

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	Good Practice Recommendations
	Standard	
1	FS1	The children's guide should be suitable for all children
		fostered though the service.
2	FS8	That placements are made only within a carer's terms of
		approval. That consideration is given to the practicality of

		often quite restrictive renge of ages used in terms of		
		often quite restrictive range of ages used in terms of		
2	5010	approval.		
3	FS13	That children have Personal Education Plans.		
4	FS14	That each young person preparing to move towards		
		independent or semi-independent living has a Pathway		
		Plan.		
5	FS16	Provide efficient systems of administrative support. That		
		children's social workers work effectively with the fostering		
		service social workers. There are clear systems of		
		communication between staff and management.		
7	FS19	That the effectiveness of induction is reviewed and		
		updated.		
8	FS22	Each carer is supervised by a named social worker. Some		
		visits to carers are made unannounced (at least once a		
		year).		
9	FS24	That all required information is kept on children's case files		
		and provided to carers when necessary. This refers to LAC		
		forms and medical consent forms.		
10	FS26	That efficient IT administrative systems are introduced to		
		meet the needs of staff.		
11	FS29	That allowances are paid in a timely manner, that the		
		system of payments and allowances is clear to carers.		
12	FS30	That independent members of panel include, as far as		
		possible, expertise in education and in health. That		
		consideration is given to recruiting people whose		
		backgrounds are culturally and ethnically diverse. That		
		consideration is given to asking people who have appeared		
		before panel for their views on the process to improve the		
		quality assurance function of panel.		
13	FS32	That greater action should be taken to increase the option		
		of kinship carers as part of the fostering service and		
		training provided to enable more social workers to assess		
		potential carers. Training and support to meet the needs of		
		kinship carers should be developed.		
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Commission for Social Care Inspection

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